

MATA NUI'S DIARY

ENTRY ONE

Once, I ruled a universe.

You might not believe me, for I look much like any other warrior on this world. You would have been even less likely to believe me a few short days ago, when I first arrived on this strange planet of Bara Magna. But it is the truth ... as cold and painful a truth as ever there was in any world.

I could tell you a great deal about the universe that once was mine, about its people, its heroes, and the threats to its peace. But none of that matters very much now. It is enough to say that my rule was stolen from me, because I was not wise enough to keep it safe. The thief was a being of darkness and fear, whose terrible plans for my people I can only imagine. He trapped me inside an object, a Mask of Life, and hurled me from my universe into the blackness of space. He believed I was gone forever, no longer

a threat to him in any way. He believed he was safe from me at last.

I intend to prove him wrong.

I would be lying if I said I had any idea how I would do that as my prison soared through space. I felt shock, rage, and yes, fear, more for my people than myself. As the pull of Bara Magna's gravity latched onto the mask in which my spirit was trapped, I wondered if this was how my 100,000 year existence would end - burned up in the atmosphere of an alien world.

But that was not to be my fate. Rocketing down like a blazing star, the Mask of Life struck the sands of Bara Magna, scorching a deep trench in the floor of the desert. It came to rest, smoke still rising from its surface. And then the power buried deep in the mask exerted itself, and began to create a living body from the sand and the earth.

And when it was done, I, Mata Nui, stood on the surface of a new world.

MATA NUI'S DIARY

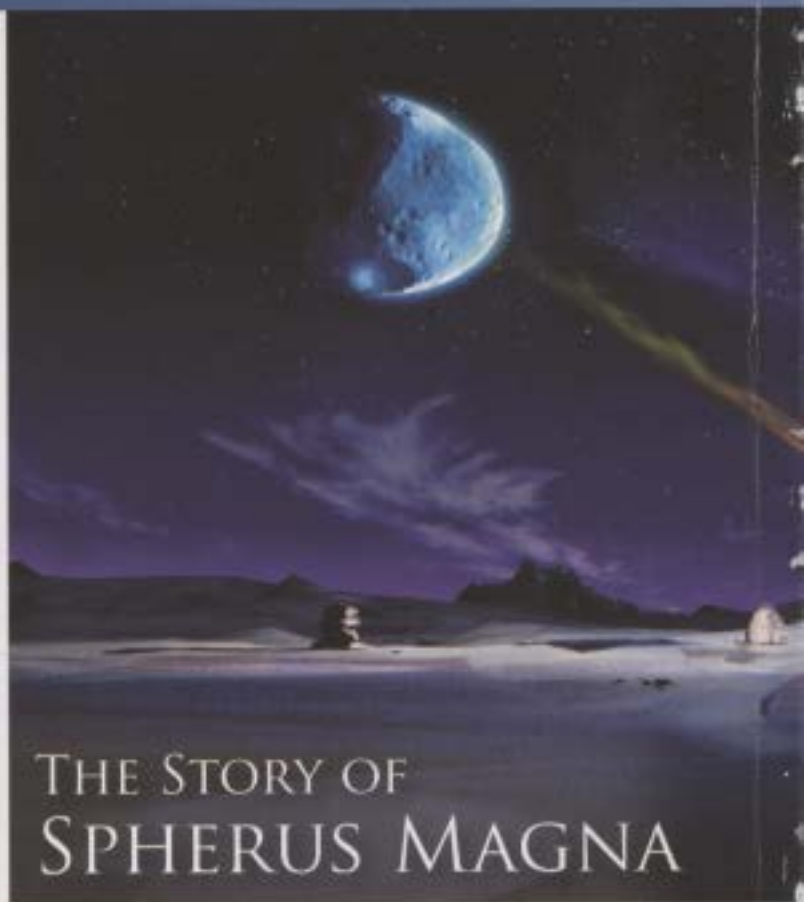
ENTRY TWO

I did not have very long to grow accustomed to my new body or my new "home." My first encounter was with a curious beetle, who dared come close enough to touch my mask with its pincers. The power of the mask transformed him in an instant into a shield. No sooner had I recovered from that shock than I was attacked by an armored creature.

The beast was savage, wild, and determined to kill me. I had never fought before, or ever needed to, and I wasn't used to this new body yet. But, somehow, I drove the creature off. This first fight taught me a great deal. This was not the peaceful universe I had once watched over. It was a dangerous place full of unknown menaces, and if I wasn't very careful, I would die here.

I thought about the Great Beings, the wise men and women who had created me and my universe so many thousands of years ago. Could they ever have imagined all that had happened since? What would they think if they knew that their creation no longer towered above worlds, no longer had the power to split planets or travel between worlds at will. Now I was simply a being carrying a shield and a crude sword, with no real idea how to use either, surrounded by miles of desert and far, far from home.

Someone else might have wept or screamed in frustration or even given up right there and perished. But I didn't have the right to do any of those things, not while my people were in danger. Like it or not, I would have to explore this harsh world on my own, and hope I could somehow find a way to achieve my destiny.



THE STORY OF SPHERUS MAGNA

Once, tens of thousands of years ago, there was a lush, green world known as Spherus Magna. From its great ocean to its sun-bleached desert and its vast forests, jungles and mountain ranges, it was a wonder to behold. Six tribes of Agori lived on this world, in peace and plenty.

The world of Spherus Magna was ruled by a collection of men and women called the "Great Beings." They were wise and just, and for an age, their creations helped to make life better for everyone who lived on this planet. But over time, the Great Beings wearied of the day to day rigor of running a world. They wished to be free to invent and experiment. And so they made a fateful decision that would one day lead to doom for an entire planet and its people.

Using their vast knowledge, the Great Beings created six powerful entities they called Element Lords. Each Element Lord controlled the power of one of nature's forces – Fire, Ice, Sand, Rock, Water and Jungle. Each was given an Agori tribe to watch over, the tribe whose choice of territory matched their element. The Element Lords were to protect the Agori from threats, guide them through crises, and take on the responsibilities of rule so the Great Beings could live as they wished.

For a long time, this new system worked. Although the Element Lords were never particularly fond of each other, they had no reason to fight. The tribes continued to thrive.

Everything changed more than 100,000 years ago, when a small group of Agori discovered a





strange liquid leaking from the ground. It was silvery in color and unlike anything they had seen before. Curious, one reached down to touch it and was instantly disintegrated. Terrified, the rest fled.

Word quickly spread of this frightening discovery. Since it was first discovered in the region of the ice tribe, the Element Lord of Ice claimed ownership of it. But the other rulers insisted that the liquid was obviously flowing from deep inside the planet, and they all had claim to the planet – therefore, it should belong to all of them. The ice leader's response to this was to post warriors at his borders and around the site of the spring, forbidding all members of other tribes from approaching.

This proved to be the spark that ignited all the old jealousies and hatreds between the Element Lords. Each mustered an army of warriors, with the initial plan to seize control of the ice tribe's lands. But any thoughts of an alliance quickly shattered as each Element Lord made clear that he or she intended to control the spring when the fighting was over. Once that became known, a six-way civil war on Spherus Magna was inevitable.

Since the liquid they fought over was presumed to be coming from the core of the planet, the conflict would come to be known as the "Core War." Battles raged in every corner of Spherus Magna, as ancient cities crumbled and the land itself was torn apart by warriors and war machines. The ice tribe was driven from their

strongholds, but no side seemed able to seize control of the spring and hold it for very long.

Meanwhile, the Great Beings viewed what was going on with horror. They first requested, then demanded, that the Element Lords sit down and negotiate peace. But it had been so long since the Great Beings ruled directly that they had little influence with their creations. The six rulers agreed on one thing: the Great Beings should stay out of this dispute, if they wished to remain safe and healthy.

As the war continued to spread, the Great Beings sent Agori to collect a sample of the liquid for their study. What they learned was shocking – the substance was so powerful and so unstable that efforts to drain it from the planet itself would cause an explosion that would shatter Spherus Magna. If one of the Element Lords should hold the spring long enough to try to collect the liquid, it would mean the end for the world itself. Armed with this information, the Great Beings again tried to persuade the Element Lords to cease fighting, but it was in vain.

In desperation, the Great Beings decided on a new strategy. They revived an old experiment that had failed years before, the construction of a massive robotic space vessel capable of exploring other worlds. (A prototype of this had been tested in Bara Magna's desert long before, but it had exploded and its parts still littered the desert. Its original power source was still housed in a vast fortress complex, located in a valley to the north of the Black Spike Mountains.) At the same time, they began building a "doomsday weapon" – a small army of shapeshifting mechanical beings programmed to seek out and eliminate any armed warrior. With these, the Great Beings hoped to force a halt to the war by wiping out the opposing armies before it was too late.

By the time they unleashed their legion of machines (who would later come to be called "battera"), the planet was in dire danger. The Element Lord of Fire had conquered the ice region and was about to tap the spring. The Great Beings had to act quickly.

Even as the battera began cutting into the ranks of the various armies, the Great Beings saw to the construction of an impenetrable maze around their fortress complex. (This was intended to prevent the Element Lords from seizing the power source within, and led to this area being named the "Valley of the Maze" by the Agori.) They rapidly finished work on their new robot vehicle, which they called Mata Nui, a living colossus who towered 40 million feet

high. Inside, the body was filled with nanotech beings the Great Beings had designed to keep the vast mechanism running smoothly.

Knowing the end was imminent, the Great Beings programmed Mata Nui with a mission. It was to travel to other worlds and observe their cultures, learn from them, so that tragedies like the Core War would not happen again. Then, when the time was right, it was to return to the remains of Spherus Magna and heal the planet's wounds.

Ominous tremors could be felt in the ground as the Great Beings readied Mata Nui for launch. As the mammoth mechanical being rocketed into space, the actions of the Element Lords brought final disaster. A chain reaction began in the core of the world which built in strength until the planet could not contain its force. An explosion tore Spherus Magna into three pieces, an event that is still referred to as "the Shattering."

Thousands died in the disaster and the chaos that followed. Those warriors and Agori who survived found themselves trapped whichever chunk of the planet they were on when the Shattering struck. For some, like many of the residents of Bara Magna, this meant adjusting to a new climate, new terrain, and a devastating shortage of resources.

The Element Lords are believed to have survived the disaster. With the liquid they sought dissipated in space, they turned their attention to the maze and the power it protected. But none of them have been able to solve the Great Beings' last riddle.

The whereabouts of the Great Beings themselves remains a mystery. But they could not foresee the fate of Mata Nui – his overthrow by one of the beings created to serve him, the trapping of his spirit inside a Mask of Power, and the subsequent expulsion of that mask into outer space. Nor could they have ever dreamed that one day Mata Nui, robbed of his original body and his great power, would return to Bara Magna.



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The world of Bara Magna consists largely of a vast desert, bounded on the north by mountains. Its sole sources of water are scattered oases and run-off from the snow-capped peaks. It is home to six tribes of Agori living in five villages and the wastelands.

The Great Volcano

This huge volcano is at the center of the Valley of the Maze. While it has not erupted in living memory, those Agori who have ventured close to the valley say that smoke and ash can be seen from its mouth.

Some believe that the volcano may be more than it seems, possibly even concealing some secret of the Great Beings. Many have tried to penetrate the maze to investigate over the years. None have ever returned.

Black Spike Mountains

A chain of forbidding peaks, the Black Spikes are home to the Skrall. Sparse vegetation allows some wildlife to thrive there, and it is also believed that baterra may stalk in these mountains. Few ever go there by choice, for the Skrall regard any who enter the mountains to be trespassers.

The mountains are honeycombed with concealed tunnels used by the Great Beings for unknown purposes. Most of these remain undiscovered.

White Quartz Mountains

Crystalline mountain peaks and the site of the village of Iconox. To the north, the mountains are home to dangerous, bio-mechanical iron wolves who serve a wounded ice warrior named Surel.

The White Quartz Mountains are the only viable route to the north, due to the Skrall domination of the Black Spikes. But the harsh winter weather and the presence of the ice Element Lord makes it a difficult and dangerous trip.

The Skrall River

Flowing south from the Black Spikes all the way to the city of Atero, the Skrall River is only water for a short span at its start.

Fed by melting snows from the mountains, the water runs over the Dark Falls and down into the desert, only to be evaporated by the incredible heat. By the time the river reaches the lands of the bone hunters, it is nothing but sand.

Dunes of Treason

Located northeast of the village of Tajun, the Dunes of Treason are frequently traveled by traders and others moving between Vulcanus, Tajun and Tesara.

The area got its name by being a prime hunting ground for the Vorox. Innocent looking sand dunes often turn out to conceal the savage beasts, making it impossible to trust one's eyes here.

Sea of Liquid Sand

A large area of quicksand located southwest of Vulcanus. Any creature foolish enough to wander into the region quickly finds itself sinking into the mire, never to be seen again.

The Mask of Life impacted Bara Magna just north of this area. Had it crashed in the Sea, it would have sunk without a trace, taking Mata Nui's mind and spirit with it.

DESERT OF BARA MAGNA

North: *The Great Volcano*

Black Spike Mountains

White Quartz Mountains

Jordan Village

Skull Mountain

Roman Village
The Skral Arena

Elbow Peak

Gatherer's Ridge

Hot Springs

Gatherer's Hideout
In a cave under the Dark Falls

The Dark Falls

Tears Area

Bone Hunters Stronghold

Tears, the twin villages

Arms House

Dunes of Treason

Skrall River

Creep Canyon

Knee Island

Underground Lab
Of The Great Beings

Tears Village

Sandrine Canyon

Volcano Lava Flow

Iron Canyon

Volcano Village

Sea of Liquid Sand

Impact spot of Pheonix





VULCANUS

Vulcanus is home of the fire tribe and one of the oldest villages on Bara Magna. It is located in one of the most dangerous and inaccessible regions of the desert. Despite this, it is home to the second largest population of settled Agori on Bara Magna, behind only the rock tribe. (While some believe the sand tribe may be the largest, their nomadic and hostile nature makes it impossible to get anything like an accurate count of their number.)

To the east of the village is Iron Canyon, site of a devastating Core War battle, a maze of rock that is an ideal site for ambushes and traps. A lava flow travels from the outskirts of the canyon into Vulcanus, providing heat for the cold desert nights. To the south is the dreaded Sea of Liquid Sand, a mire of quicksand. While there are safe paths through the Sea, they are few in number and difficult to spot. Virtually anyone or anything that enters this region never emerges again. North of the village is territory frequented by the bone hunters, and so very risky to travel through.

The village consists of one massive shelter and a number of smaller ones. These smaller buildings are made from volcanic rock whenever possible, although materials acquired in trade from other villages are also used. Like all villages, one of its major features is an arena for Glatorian matches.

The fire Agori are well known as crafters,

particularly in the field of metalworking. The heat from the lava flow allows them to melt ore and reshape it, or repair existing weapons or tools. Glatorian fortunate enough to obtain some exsidian (see "Iconox" on page 10) bring it here to have it melted down and used as plating for their weapons. The fire Agori often trade their services for goods from other villages, especially water from Tajun.

Vulcanus was recently the site of a major skirmish in the conflict on Bara Magna. Shortly after the Skrall attack on Atero, the Iconox warrior Gelu stumbled on information that the fire village was going to be the target of a raid by bone hunters. Bringing this information to Vulcanus, Gelu suggested that the village hire Glatorian to defend it. Discovering that the bone hunters planned to attack through Iron Canyon, the Glatorian and Agori set up traps, which decimated the bone hunter force. Although the bone hunters retreated temporarily, they struck again from the south. Aided by the sudden arrival of Glatorian from Tesara and Tajun, the bone hunters were defeated.

Prime Glatorian of Vulcanus is Ackar, a veteran fighter who some feel may be past his prime. Second Glatorian was Malum, but his recent disgrace and exile from the village has left Vulcanus short a fighter. Two of their most promising trainees were recently slain in the desert by bone hunters.

RAANU

Raanu is the leader of the village of Vulcanus as well as the chairman of the Council of Elders, a body made up of the rulers of the various villages of Bara Magna. It is a position of great power and he is the first modern Vulcanus elder to hold that title.

Prior to the Shattering, Raanu was employed in the fortress of the Element Lord of Fire. After the war broke out, Raanu was horrified to see the scale of destruction. When an emissary of the Great Beings approached him with a request that he provide a service to his world, Raanu agreed. He and another Agori were sent out into the world to collect a sample of energized protodermis. After many adventures, the two Agori were successful. This sample was later used as part of the construction of the original Mata Nui robot.

Raanu later served as support staff for the Fire army during the Battle of Iron Canyon. When

the Shattering happened, he was left on Bara Magna and came to live in Vulcanus. At the time, it was a village in turmoil. Many of its residents had fled into the desert, while others were hiding in what was left of their homes in fear. Raanu helped to organize efforts to rebuild the village and suggested ways the heat of the lava flow could be used to repair metal tools and weapons.

When the Glatorian Certavus first proposed a system of arena matches to settle disputes, Raanu stood up and declared his support for the idea. This, plus his other services to the village, led to his being named elder after the death of the previous ruler (slain by Vorox).

As a leader, Raanu is fiercely devoted to the welfare of his people. This often puts him in a difficult position, torn between wanting to fight to protect Vulcanus and wanting to keep his Agori safe. When the bone hunters threatened the village, Raanu had to be talked into hiring Glatorian to protect the place rather than simply evacuating the Agori to safety.

Raanu's relationship with the Glatorian is a conflicted one. Although he understands their importance and respects their skill, he also remembers the damage they did in the war. If they are not needed for a match, he prefers they not be in the village, particularly if they are not Fire Glatorian. Deep in his heart, Raanu fears the Glatorian. He knows that at any time they could storm the villages, take what they want, and kill any Agori who got in their way. It's precisely for that reason he has encouraged Agori like Crotesium to master vehicle combat, so there will be some defense against Glatorian if one is ever needed.

When Malum violated the rules of the arena, it was Raanu's decision to exile him from Vulcanus. He has so far not been successful in finding a new Second Glatorian, despite efforts to recruit Mata Nui.





TAJUN

Once one of the wealthiest villages on Bara Magna, Tajun has suffered terribly in the war with the Skrall. If the water tribe somehow survives the conflict, they will have a long period of rebuilding ahead of them.

Located to the southwest, Tajun is built around the largest oasis in the desert. Its shelters are largely wood and plant fibre received in trade from Tesara, although some are made of stone as well. The presence of the oasis means Tajun Agori are never without water, but they do lack for other resources – most notably, metal ore, wood, and even food (most of the plants that grow by this particular oasis are not edible). This means they have to trade with other villages or win resources in Glatorian matches to keep their village thriving.

As a result, most water Agori are very skilled traders, even better at it than the ice tribe members. A popular saying is that water Agori are “sharper than a rock steed’s tooth” when it comes to making a deal. Unfortunately, the Tajun dependence on trade also made them vulnerable.

Prior to the Skrall attack on Atero, bone hunters attacks on trade caravans going to and from Tajun had increased significantly. Some in Tajun began to suspect that a traitor was selling information to the bone hunters, with a few believing Berix might be responsible. Regardless of the reason, the raids were

devastating to Tajun – within a matter of weeks, all trade was cut off and the water tribe was beginning to starve. (In fact, someone was betraying information to the Skrall, who were feeding it in turn to the bone hunters. In this way, the bone hunters could be used as pawns against the other villages, while the true aims of the Skrall remained hidden.)

With trade not an option, Tajun was forced to challenge in the arena for whatever it needed. Their Glatorian were forced to fight many additional matches, exhausting them. Meanwhile, the bone hunter raids continued after war broke out between the villages and the Skrall. At one point, when both Glatorian were away from the village, a mixed force of bone hunters and Skrall attacked and burned Tajun. The water Agori escaped and hid in the desert, but their village was largely destroyed.

The fall of Tajun struck fear into the hearts of other Agori even more than the sacking of Atero had, and led them to focus more on their own defense. But Mata Nui and the Glatorian convinced them that it was necessary to fight back, and Tajun became a rallying cry for the resistance to Skrall attacks.

Prime Glatorian of Tajun is Tarix, an experienced fighter and one of the creators of the Glatorian system. He is the current overall champion among Glatorian. Second Glatorian is Kiina.

BERIX

Berix is a member of Water tribe and was a resident of Tajun before its fall. A skilled scavenger, Berix spends much of his time in the wastelands, searching through ruins for scrap he can use to modify or repair something else.

Unfortunately, his frequent disappearances and vast collection of items (some valuable, some not) led many in Tajun to believe he was a thief. Kiina, Second Glatorian for the village, was particularly hostile to Berix. This was made worse when Berix discovered a hidden cavern near the village which had previously been a secret refuge for Kiina.

Berix has a unique mix of skills. In addition to knowing how to patch and repair weapons, armor and vehicles, he has also picked up a knowledge of herbal healing from friends in Tesara. When Gresh was badly injured during the Skrall-bone hunter raid on Tajun, it was Berix who treated him.



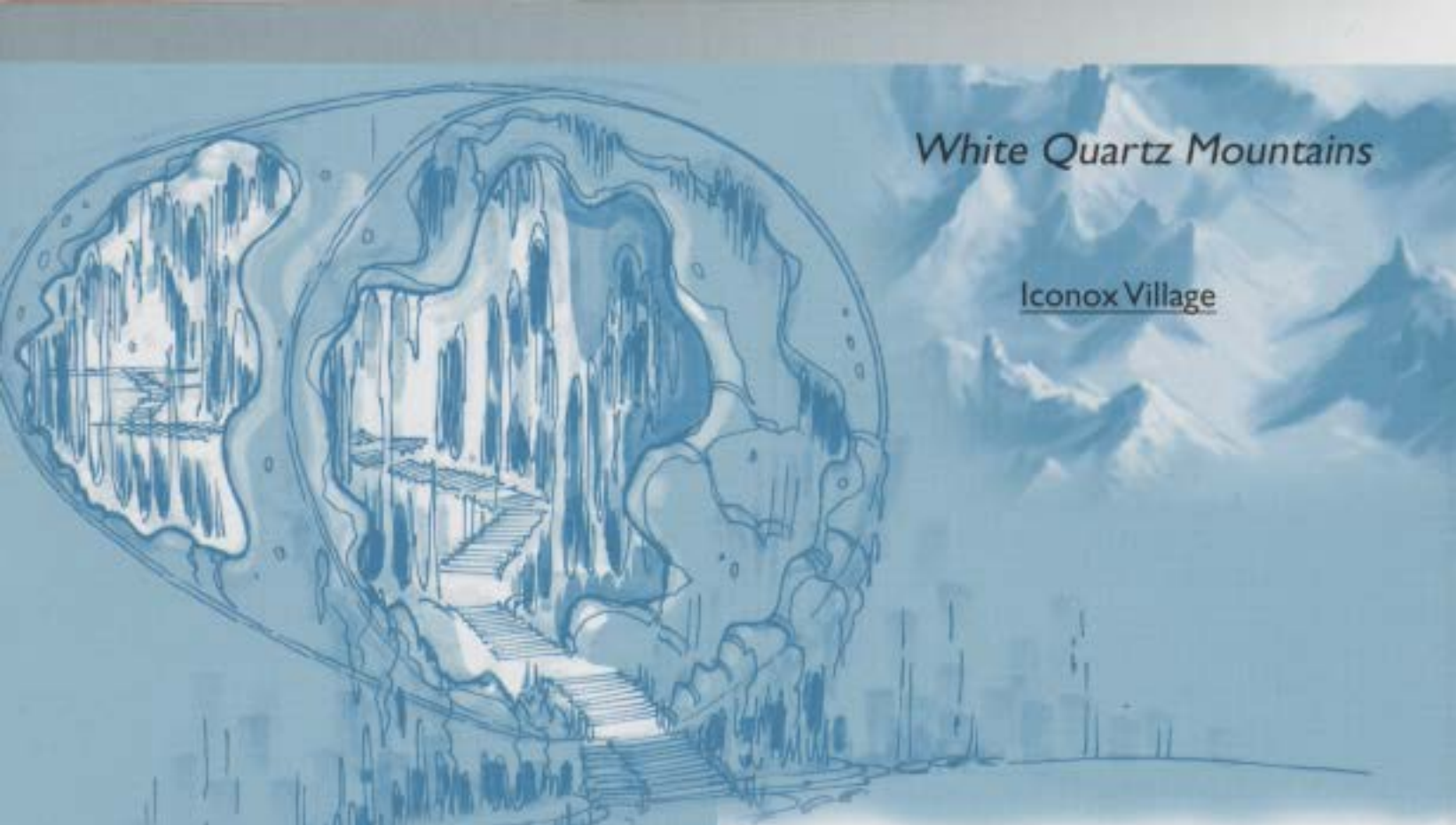
Despite all this, Berix has long felt unappreciated. While Agori and Glatorian will come to him for repairs, no one really treats him like a valuable member of the community. As a result, Berix can be very defensive and sensitive about his activities. "I'm not a thief," he insists. "I'm a collector."

One of the things Berix collected in his travels was a piece of parchment that appeared to be from the legendary Book of Certavus. This volume, written by the legendary Iconox Glatorian, detailed all the fighting moves that made him an arena champion year after year. He was certain the rest of the book was somewhere in ruins to the west of Tajun, but the area was too dangerous to visit on his own. He approached the visiting Gresh and asked him to come along, and the Glatorian agreed.

The two did indeed find the ruins, but not before the Vorox found them. Trapped inside the rubble-strewn remains of a training arena, surrounded by the beasts, it seemed that neither Berix nor Gresh would ever escape. Then the two came up with an idea. They gathered the old training dummies scattered around the arena, put pieces of armor and weapons on them, and made it look as if the ruins were guarded by an army of Glatorian. The Vorox, frightened, fled, giving Gresh and Berix the chance to escape. Berix found the book just as they were leaving, but when Gresh didn't want it, Berix kept it.

Unwilling to part with his collection of items, Berix was the only Water tribe Agori to stay in Tajun during the Skrall-bone hunter attack. He hid in the cavern he had discovered until stumbled upon by Mata Nui and a team of Glatorian. Berix later traveled with them to Tesara.

Berix carries a water sword and shield. Although he has occasionally dreamed of fighting alongside Tarix in the arena, he knows he doesn't have what it takes to be a Glatorian. Still, he is more likely to rush into a fight than run away from one.



White Quartz Mountains

Iconox Village

ICONOX

The western-most village in Bara Magna, Iconox is home to the ice tribe. Its location in the White Quartz Mountains range means the climate is colder here than in any other Agori village. Iconox was the first of the new villages founded on Bara Magna during the Core War, as the ice Agori moved south to find refuge from the conflict and wound up stranded there after the Shattering.

As with other villages, Iconox consists of a single large structure which serves as an overall shelter, an assortment of smaller, cruder shelters, and a Glatorian arena. Here, the Agori shelters are made from slabs of crystal cut from the surrounding mountains. These are then supported with pillars of crystal and the roof and walls fitted together so they do not collapse on their inhabitants.

The key to Iconox's ability to thrive as a village is the metal ore called exsidian. An especially durable metal, exsidian suffers much less rust and erosion from exposure to the desert climate than other metals do. Due to that property, it is highly prized by Glatorian and Agori alike as plating for their weaponry or tools. It gives Iconox a valuable item for trade, as well as to stake on Glatorian matches. (Recently, two Glatorian and two Agori undertook the dangerous task of trying to find a new route from Iconox to Vulcanus to deliver exsidian won by the fire tribe in a match.)

The Agori of the ice tribe are skilled miners (by necessity), as well as traders and merchants. They have also made a name for themselves as Glatorian trainers and match promoters, with Metus being the most successful of these. A popular joke is that an ice Agori would trade his best friend, then make a quick deal to get him back, then plate him in exsidian and swap him again for 100 gallons of Tajun water.

The Prime Glatorian of Iconox at its founding was Certavus, whose skill and incredible record in the arena has made his name a legend. Certavus was one of the founders of the Glatorian system and the author of the famed Book of Certavus, which contains a record of his fighting moves and strategies. This book was hidden in the ruins of an old arena in the desert and later found by Gresh and Berix. (The Skrall also sought the book, and their failure to find it resulted in a Skrall patrol being fed to hungry Spikit.)

Certavus perished of natural causes some years ago, leaving Strakk as the new Prime Glatorian and Gelu as Second Glatorian. Gelu's recent retirement from the arena has left Iconox short-handed, and Metus is actively trying to recruit a new Second Glatorian.

METUS

Metus is a fight promoter and a trainer of Glatorian, based in the village of Iconox. Although the ice village is his home, he is rarely there. Metus spends most of his time traveling between villages, setting up Glatorian matches and recruiting new fighters. Metus has been everywhere and seen it all, and very little can surprise him anymore.

An Agori of the ice tribe, he was with the last group that migrated south to the present site of Iconox. While others in his tribe worked on building the new village and making it habitable, Metus concentrated on making deals with other villages. The discovery of exsidian made that job a lot easier, as other villages needed it. But Metus did his work a little too well, getting places like Vulcanus and Tajun so anxious to have the metal that they were willing to go to war for it. It was this which prompted Certavus (along with Tarix and Ackar) to come

up with the idea of the Glatorian system to settle disputes.

This new plan proved to be a money-maker for Metus. During part of the Core War, he had worked in an ice tribe training camp, helping to prepare warriors for battle. Teaching Glatorian to fight would be easy after that. He worked closely with Certavus mastering the sort of basic moves that would be needed for arena matches, then taught them to other Glatorian like Strakk and Gelu. A string of early victories by Iconox Glatorian convinced other villages that fighters trained by Metus were better than any others.

From training fighters, it was a natural next step to arranging matches. The Glatorian system is complicated. Villages had to make sure that they didn't wear their fighters out by scheduling matches too close to each other, along with making sure they matched their best fighter up with the opposing village's best fighter. That kind of coordination took a lot of work and time, and most Agori did not have it to spare. More and more, they started turning to Metus to set up matches as needed. While there were other Agori who did this work – just about every village had someone – none were as good at it as Metus. He was sharp, persistent, but fair and generally honest. He made no secret of the fact that he was trying to make the best deal he could for his village, and others respected him for that.

Metus became one of the few Agori who worked for villages other than his own. If Vulcanus needed a new Glatorian, they would turn to him. If Tesara felt Gresh needed more training, Metus would step in to help out. He was on a journey to Vulcanus to meet with Raanu about Malum's exile when he encountered Mata Nui, newly arrived on Bara Magna. Metus brought Mata Nui to Vulcanus with him, and later tried (unsuccessfully) to recruit the newcomer to fight in the arena.

Metus carries an ice axe and shield.





Tesara the twin village

TESARA

The “twin villages” of Tesara sit in the middle of a rare area of jungle on Bara Magna. Once there was a vast, green area here, but the climate changes caused by the Shattering led to much of the plant life dying off. Only the heartiest trees and shrubs survived, living on the trickles of water that come down from the peaks of the Black Spike Mountains.

Tesara got its nickname shortly after its founding. The jungle tribe had been deeply divided over the Core War, with some supporting it and some opposed to it. When a large number of them became stranded on Bara Magna after the Shattering, they did not want to live together. Realizing that unity among the tribe was important, but rivalry could be put to immediate use, the village elders issued a challenge – whichever part of the tribe built the best settlement the fastest would be allowed to live in the jungle. The losers would have to relocate south to the desert. Both sides worked hard and long constructing their villages. But the elders had purposely arranged things so that neither side had everything they needed to get the job done. The two factions had to turn to each other for help, and by the time the building was done, the rifts in the tribe had healed. Later, the Tesara arena was constructed in between the two settlements.

The Agori of Tesara spend much of their time up in the trees, gathering plant life for food or for herbal remedies. As a result, their limbs have altered over time to be better suited to climbing. This sometimes causes them to look awkward when walking on the ground. They are known as skilled healers, treasure hunters, and historians. Their primary export is food and they trade with Tajun for water, Vulcanus for tools, and Iconox for exsidian.

The Prime Glatorian of Tesara is Vastus, with Gresh as Second Glatorian. Although Vastus is still the better fighter, Gresh does many of the matches that take place outside of Tesara. Vastus prefers to stay close to home so that he will be there in case the village needs defending from bone hunters or Vorox.

After the Skrall attack on Tajun, Tesara was their next target. Mata Nui, Ackar, Kiina and Gresh were able to convince the jungle Agori to suspend Glatorian matches due to the crisis. When the Glatorian later decided to leave Tesara and take the fight to Roxtus, the Agori protested, claiming they were being left undefended. In the end, Mata Nui decided to go on his own to Roxtus, leaving the other Glatorian to defend the village against the expected attack.

TARDUK

An adventurous and brave Agori from Tesara, Tarduk is a treasure-hunter and historian. He has a passion for knowledge and will go almost anywhere to learn something new, particularly if it is about Bara Magna's past. This has resulted in some amazing discoveries, but has also put Tarduk's life at risk more than once.

Like the rest of the Tesara Agori, Tarduk uses his forelimbs as an extra pair of legs and is extremely agile and a great climber. He has also proven himself to be quite intelligent and determined and a good leader in a crisis.

Prior to the Skrall attack on Atero, Tarduk was working there helping to prepare the arena for the tournament. Bored, he started digging and uncovered a scrap of metal with strange symbols and a diagram on it featuring what looked like a red star. Determined to figure out what it all meant, he persuaded two other Agori, Crotelius and Kirbold, to accompany him on an expedition north.

The journey proved to be extremely dangerous. The group survived being stalked by iron wolves and an encounter with a veteran ice warrior named Surel, who warned them of the presence of the Element Lords in the area. Resuming their journey, they traveled through the Forest of Blades, evaded capture by the Element Lord of Water, and finally wound up at a gateway that promised to take them to the "place of their heart's desire." Weary and seemingly no closer to solving the mystery of the metal fragment, it turned out the secret heart's desire of all three was to go home. The gateway obligingly teleported them there, much to Tarduk's frustration. His abrupt arrival frightened some of his fellow villagers, who thought perhaps he had been transported by some new Skrall weapon. It took him some time to reassure them that wasn't the case, but he never told them what really did happen, convinced they would not believe him.


Not long after, Tarduk was reunited with Kirbold on an expedition to transport exsidian from Iconox to Vulcanus. Joined by Gresh and Strakk, they braved Skrall, bone hunters and Vorox along the way. At one point, they discovered a hidden tunnel whose symbols matched those on the fragment Tarduk had found earlier. This increased his desire to solve the mystery of that artifact.

After safely delivering the exsidian, Tarduk attended the tournament in Atero. He was there when the Skrall attacked and fled with the other Agori. Later, he was part of the makeshift Glatorian-Agori army that confronted the Skrall.

Tarduk hopes to make one more journey north. He is convinced the red star symbol is some vital clue to a mystery that could change things on Bara Magna forever. He has heard rumors of a "Valley of the Maze" beyond the Black Spikes and has reason to believe the symbol refers to the center of that maze.

Tarduk uses the claws on his hands and feet to defend himself, and also has blades mounted on his armor.





Roxtus Village

ROXTUS

Long before the Skrall came to inhabit this city, Roxtus was already a name shrouded in mystery and fear. No one knows who first inhabited this place, or why they disappeared. Some Agori will tell you the inhabitants of Roxtus headed north during the Core War, for reasons unclear, and were stranded on another chunk of the planet after the Shattering. Others say the residents of Roxtus were slain by Vorox or some other desert menace. And still others say they never left, that Roxtus is home to evil desert spirits who delight in the misery of others.

Whatever the truth, Roxtus was empty when the Skrall first arrived with the rock Agori. The Skrall had been dwelling in fortresses to the north, but they were driven out by shapeshifting mechanical beings they named "battera" (a Skrall term meaning "silent death"). The Skrall and Agori rapidly went to work building new walls and better fortifying the city. Shortly after this, Tuma, leader of the Skrall, banned inhabitants of other villages from visiting Roxtus unless specifically invited.

This self-imposed seclusion sparked a whole new series of rumors among the other Agori. Tales grew of Agori villagers being kidnapped from other villages and forced to work as slave labor; of Vorox captured and forced to undergo brutal training as attack animals; of Glatorian stolen from the desert and made to fight Skrall warriors in the Roxtus arena, to the death.

The most frightening part of all this is that all these tales are true.

On any given day, Roxtus is a hive of activity. Skrall patrols enter and leave the city, heading both north and south. Bone hunters arrive to sell captive Agori and Glatorian for the best price they can get. The air is filled with the mournful cries of caged Vorox. And everywhere there is Tuma, watching over his troops and planning new strategies.

As well-defended as Roxtus is, it is not impossible to break into the city – or out of it. Gresh and Strakk snuck in with a supply caravan to steal a sword belonging to Ackar, and then broke out again. Later, a captured Malum escaped the Skrall by freeing some of the imprisoned Skrall, setting off chaos in the city. When Mata Nui wished to enter the city, though, he just walked right up to the gate and demanded entrance.

Roxtus is located on the southern edge of the Black Spike Mountains, not far from the headwaters of the Skrall River. The area to the north is mainly mountains and valleys, but the Skrall only travel there now on scouting expeditions to search for signs of battera. The Skrall claim the southern mountains as their territory and will not hesitate to capture or kill anyone who trespasses there.

ATAKUS

Atakus is an Agori of the rock tribe. A brutal, nasty sort, he takes pleasure in mocking Agori from other tribes and pushing them around. He is disliked by just about everyone outside of Roxtus. The saying on Bara Magna is, "If you don't hate Atakus, you must never have met him."

He holds a number of different jobs in the tribe. Atakus has served as an assistant to Skrall Glatorian, most recently accompanying one for a match in Vulcanus against Gresh. He has also been a gate guard for the city of Roxtus, and was posted there when Gresh and Strakk successfully raided the place. He also often serves as Tuma's spokesman to Agori from other tribes. When an Agori approached him about hiring a Skrall to help defend Vulcanus against bone hunters, Atakus demanded a large bribe of Thor-nax before allowing the Agori to move on and talk to a Skrall warrior.

Prior to the Skrall arrival in Roxtus, Atakus

worked at the last remaining fortress in the northern Black Spikes. He was one of the gate guards who allowed the admittance of a Skrall supply wagon loaded with tree trunks for the fortress fires. Too late, he realized that the wood was not wood, but rather shapeshifted baterra warriors. After the battle that followed, Atakus organized the surviving rock tribe Agori and led them in an escape from the baterra. They followed the trail of the defeated Skrall army south, eventually settling in Roxtus with them.

If Atakus can be said to have a hero, it is Stronius, one of the Skrall elite warriors (see page 66). When not on duty, Atakus stays close to Stronius, hoping to pick up combat techniques or other tips. Stronius, for his part, doesn't have much use for Atakus but can't be bothered discouraging him, either. If he gets bored, Stronius will sometimes have Atakus torment the caged Vorox for his amusement.

One fact that is not known to anyone other than Tuma is that it was Atakus who first made contact with the traitor who betrayed the other villages to the Skrall. Tuma was initially very suspicious of the idea that any Agori who help the Skrall to victory, and tasked Atakus with testing the information the informant gave. If Atakus ended up recommending the Skrall work with the traitor, and it proved to be a trick, Tuma made clear Atakus would be executed. The tests ranged from getting information on Glatorian training schedules and new combat moves to details on water levels in various villages and Tajun water shipments.

Atakus carries twin swords, both of which glow with an unearthly light. These were found in a weapons cache near what the Skrall believed to be a baterra encampment. Since Skrall traditionally care more about what a weapon does than how it does it, no one in the rock tribe knows how to make more of these swords or how to repair them. Atakus wields them with great pride and loves to threaten other Agori with them.





THE WASTELAND

The desert area between the villages is collectively known as “the wasteland.” It is a desolate and dangerous place, home to natural hazards and vicious creatures. Despite this, Glatorian and Agori cross the wasteland every day, by sand stalker or by wagon, for they have no choice.

Any traveler across the desert must first deal with a few basic challenges. There is precious little plant life and virtually no water among the dunes, so anything needed must be carried along. (Some desert dwellers, like the bone hunters and Vorox, have learned to make do with native plants others might find inedible.) During the day, the temperature soars to extreme heights, then plunges at night to bone-chilling levels. Daytime travel is safer, for one can see threats before they get too close, but it also makes it easier for the traveler to be spotted by bandits.

Each geographic area also has its own hazards. Travelers who cross the Dunes of Treason risk running into Vorox colonies, known for killing anyone who comes into their territory. Go too far south of Vulcanus and one ends up in the Sea of Liquid Sand, a massive bed of quicksand few ever escape. The northern desert, close to the Black Spike Mountains, is home to bone hunters and Skrall patrols.

Dangerous creatures can also be found all over the wastelands. Some of these include:

Sand bats: Large, winged serpents, sand bats live underground due to their dislike of direct sunlight. They erupt out of the sand to attack prey, then dive back under again. Mata Nui drove a sand bat off by forcing it to stay aboveground, and another that attacked Gresh was devoured by scarabax beetles.

Dune snakes: Another underground-dwelling serpent, dune snakes live in nests beneath the sand and respond to any vibration above. They can quickly surround even a large animal and kill it with multiple bites.

Rock steeds: With sharp jaws and stinger tails, these reptilian beasts are good ones to stay away from. But bone hunters and sometimes Skrall often use them as mounts, due to their toughness, loyalty to their rider, and fierce combat skills. Rock steeds have enhanced senses of vision, hearing and smell, making them able to detect enemies from miles away. Mata Nui and Ackar battled a rock steed on the way to Tajun.

Skopio: A huge, crab-like creature that dwells underground, at least one of these creatures was fitted by the Great Beings at some point with mounted blasters. Even without them, its size and sheer power makes it the most feared creature in the desert. Mata Nui, Kiina and Ackar fought a Skopio on the way to Tajun and barely survived. The Skopio vehicle driven by Telluris is modeled after this beast.

ZESK

Zesk were once members of Spherus Magna's sand tribe, native to the desert region (Bara Magna) of that planet. Nomadic by nature, they stayed close to the more powerful Vorox, who protected them against most dangers. In return, the Zesk gathered food and water for the Vorox. (In many ways, this was similar to the Agori-Glatorian relationship that exists now.)

After the Shattering, the climate of Bara Magna changed and food and water became harder to find. Since they already had a less sophisticated social structure than many other tribes, the Zesk regressed over time to being more wild and brutal. They became bestial and other tribes started avoiding them. The Zesk eventually lost most of their command of the Agori language and began resembling packs of desert creatures.

Their relationship with the Vorox survived unchanged, however. To this day, the powerful Vorox still protect the Zesk and the Zesk see to

the Vorox's needs as best as possible. Both groups live in extensive colonies underground, emerging only to hunt whoever passes through their territory.

Zesk do not live an easy life. Hated and feared by other tribes, they prefer to be left alone. Both the Skrall and the bone hunters have been known to hunt Zesk for sport. They are also valued for their ability to find Thornax plants, even in the most remote regions, so traders will often follow them across the sands hoping to find the valuable fruit.

These beings have a number of unusual features. They still wear their old armor and helmets (the design of which makes it seem like they have four eyes). Their senses of sight and smell are enhanced. Their saliva has a musky odor, a scent the Vorox recognize as belonging to a friendly being. Anyone doused in that fluid can pass through a legion of Vorox in complete safety.

Although not individually all that strong, Zesk almost never fight one-on-one. When dealing with a larger foe, Zesk rely on their sheer numbers. They mass and surround the enemy, chattering and shrieking. If the target is on foot, they will pile on. If mounted, they try to frighten the mount into rearing and tossing its rider. It's for this reason that traders, Glatorian, and even bone hunters have learned to watch the sands for the holes that are telltale signs of Vorox/Zesk presence.

Zesk did not have much of a role in the war between the Agori and the Skrall. Although Malum led the Vorox on some raids against the Skrall and their bone hunter allies, they were done more in revenge for actions the Skrall had taken against the sand tribe. Neither Malum, the Vorox, or the Zesk felt the war was theirs to fight.

The Zesk normally do not carry weapons. Their lone natural tool is their stinger tail, with which they are extraordinarily fast. Some believe the Great Beings tampered with the evolution of the Zesk, which is why they have that tail. Zesk normally walk on all fours.



ARENA MAGNA



Arena Magna is one of the oldest single structures on Bara Magna, and part of the city of Atero. It was originally built long before the Shattering as a site for sports matches and other public events. After the disaster that struck Spherus Magna, it was abandoned for some time. When the Glatorian system came into being, it was decided to use Arena Magna as the site for an annual tournament.

Atero is the only “free city” on Bara Magna, meaning Agori from any village can visit or even live there if they choose. Despite this, its year-round population is extremely small, largely because of its location – the entire area is plagued by bone hunters, who don’t hesitate to raid Atero if they know it’s inhabited.

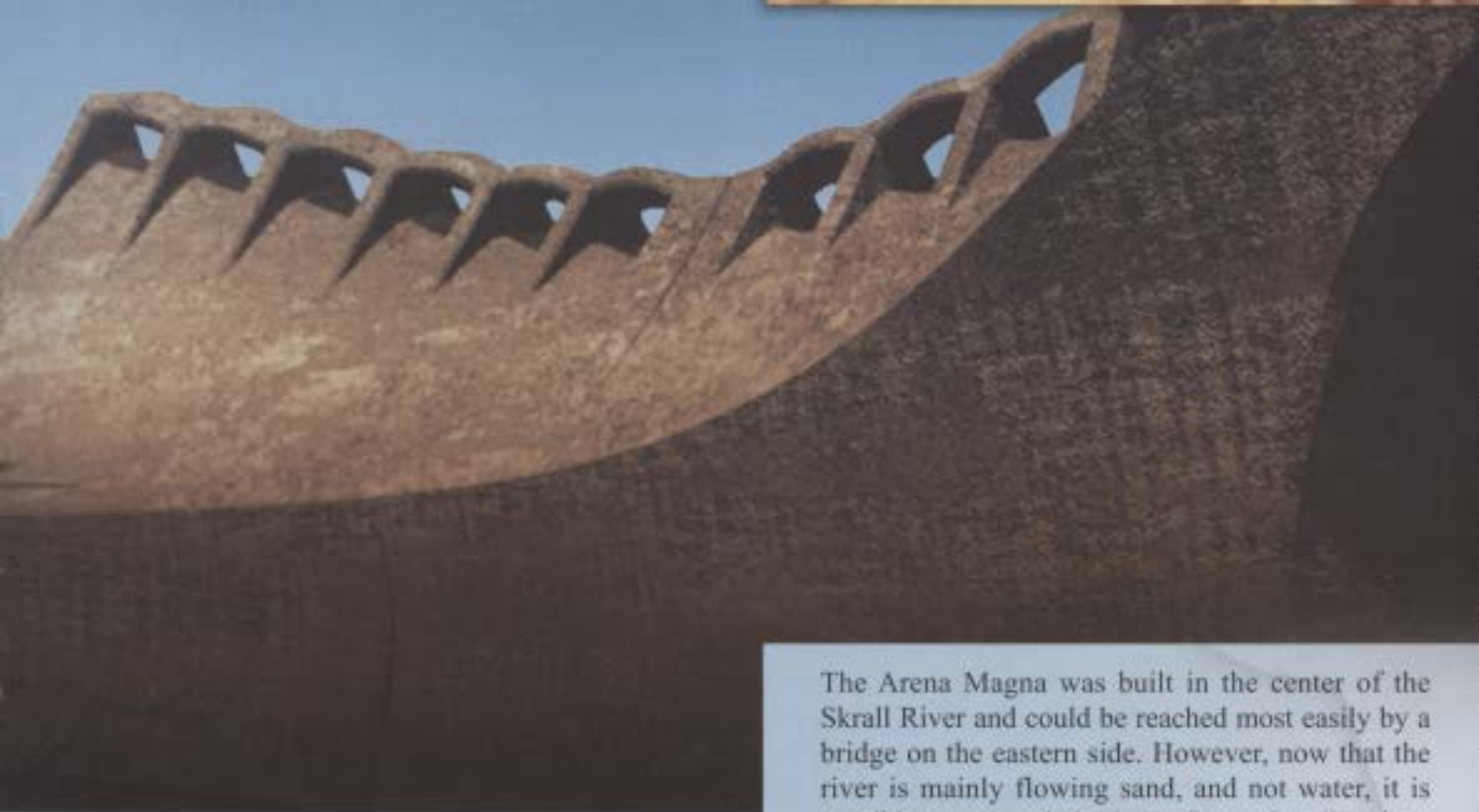
The city is busiest just before the tournament, when Agori from various villages arrive to prepare Arena Magna for use. It’s important work, but not always terribly exciting. Prior to the most recent tournament, three of the Agori assigned to work there – Tarduk, Crotelius, and Kirbold – left to explore the northern regions of Bara Magna and barely made it back in time for the tournament. But most Agori will do their duty, knowing the reward is front-row seats for all the matches. Emotions run high at the tournament, with each village wanting its Glatorian to win, and fights between Agori have been known to break out in the stands.

One of the most famous spots in Arena Magna is the Wall of Champions. Here the images and names of past tournament winners are carved. Among the many names included here are Certavus (the very first tournament champion), Ackar, Tarix and Vastus. Every Glatorian wishes to see their name inscribed on



this wall and some, like Strakk, are willing to do just about anything to win. (A tournament winner can ask for better rewards from his village, or from another village if his current one does not want to pay. Since it is considered a great honor to have a champion working for your village, Agori will generally find some way to keep a tournament winner happy.)

This year’s tournament was highly anticipated. Although Tarix would normally be expected to repeat as champion, this would be the first tournament in which the Skrall would participate (they were not living near to the desert at the time of the last tournament, and so were not involved). With no Skrall having lost an arena match so far, it was believed Tarix would face a real challenge.



Strangely, the Skrall did not participate in any of the pre-tournament matches in Atero. Even as the tournament got underway, there was no sign of them. Agori who left the arena to watch for them were startled to see an entire army of Skrall warriors marching on Atero. They attacked in force, and despite valiant efforts by Glatorian to fight them off, they succeeded in wrecking both Arena Magna and the city of Atero. This was the opening battle in the war between the Skrall and the rest of Bara Magna.

Whether or not Atero or Arena Magna will ever be rebuilt remains to be seen. There has also been talk of building a memorial there to honor the Glatorian and Agori who died fighting the Skrall.

The Arena Magna was built in the center of the Skrall River and could be reached most easily by a bridge on the eastern side. However, now that the river is mainly flowing sand, and not water, it is possible to approach the Arena from other directions as well.

The stands in the arena are large enough to accommodate more than 1000 Agori. It is normal for every resident of Tajun, Iconox, Vulcanus, and Tesara to attend at least part of the tournament. The Zesk of the sand tribe are not welcome at the arena and wouldn't come anyway.

Arena Magna is built entirely of stone, with the exception of the tournament floor, which is sand. Entry is gained through two large gates on the eastern side, although smaller entrances were added later to allow Agori easier access and exit during the tournament.

MATA NUI'S DIARY

ENTRY THREE

Shortly after my battle with the Vorox in the desert, I encountered a villager who introduced himself as Metus. He talked very quickly and offered me a ride to the nearest village, Vulcanus. Although I was hesitant, the thought of walking across a hostile desert was not very appealing, so I agreed. The trip was not without incident, as we wound up in combat with a creature he called a sand bat along the way.

My first reaction to Vulcanus was one of utter shock. Right in the center of the village, a crowd was watching two warriors fight in an arena. Was this the sort of barbaric society I had stumbled into, where battle was a sport? Even after Metus explained to me this was how arguments were settled here, in order to avoid wars, I was still troubled by it – where I came from, warriors fought for justice, not to decide who owned a strip of land or a wagon load of metal.

Still, in any society, there is right and there is wrong. I watched as the red-armored warrior, Ackar, defeated the white-armored one, called Strakk. I heard Strakk concede defeat, and then saw him reach for his weapon as soon as Ackar's back was turned. No one was else was willing to do anything ... but I could not stand by and see someone attacked from behind. I ran into the arena and tackled Strakk, making his shot go wild.

Of course, now I was the one in trouble. He was a trained fighter, and I had only been in this body for an hour or so. He drove me across the arena and then down into the sand, ready to kill me ... when a strange thing happened. The piece of Vorox stinger I carried as a crude weapon touched the mask I wore – and transformed instantly into a sword! The sight startled Strakk so much I was able to knock him off his feet. This time, when he surrendered, I made sure he meant it. I didn't realize it then, but that short fight would change my entire future here on Bara Magna.



THE GLATORIAN SYSTEM

The social structure of Bara Magna depends upon the system of Glatorian matches, invented by Certavus, Tarix and Ackar a little less than 100,000 years ago. The scattered villages of the desert had limited resources, and it was natural that conflicts would arise between them. But in the wake of the Core War, no one wanted more battles that could wipe out entire populations. So the idea was born that disputes between villages would be settled by arena battles between warriors called Glatorian.

Most Glatorian are veterans of the Core War. In return for fighting for a village, they are provided with food, shelter, medical care, equipment, and other goods. Given that the alternative is life as a bandit in the wastelands, or worse, most warriors are happy to take the job. Each village maintains two fighters, a Prime and Second Glatorian, along with a number of trainees. The reason for having only two main fighters is that most villages cannot afford the cost of keeping more than that.

Whenever a disagreement occurs between two villages over, for example, a water source, a piece of land, or some other resource, each village sends a Glatorian to fight for it. The winner's village gets to claim the resource, while the loser's gets nothing. While Agori do attend these matches as a source of entertainment, they are much more than that – the survival of an entire village may depend on the outcome of a match.

Most matches are fought in one of the five villages. Once a year, Glatorian from all over gather in the Arena Magna in Atero for a

tournament to determine the overall champion. Tarix of Tajun is currently the reigning champ.

Glatorian matches follow strict rules:

- 1) All Glatorian must fight to the best of their ability. Accepting bribes to lose a match or in any way trying to affect the outcome unfairly is prohibited.
- 2) Matches end when one fighter is incapacitated or surrenders. Matches to the death are forbidden.
- 3) Striking an opponent after he has surrendered is forbidden. A Glatorian who has conceded a match is also prohibited from attacking once he has surrendered.
- 4) Weapons allowed to be used are determined before the match by the villages involved in the fight. The type of match – Glatorian vs. Glatorian, vehicle vs. vehicle, or Glatorian and Agori vs. Glatorian and Agori – is also decided before the match.
- 5) A village that loses a fight must hand over the disputed item or resource within a reasonable time, or be considered to have forfeited all future matches.
- 6) Violation of match rules by a Glatorian can be punished by suspension, exile, or a lifetime ban from the arena.

Of the six tribes, only the sand tribe does not send Glatorian to the arena. Vorox are sometimes kidnapped by Skrall to fight in matches in the city of Rixtus for entertainment, but that is the only time they can be found in the arena.

Two villages are currently short a main fighter – Vulcanus, due to the exile of Malum, and Iconox, due to the retirement from the arena of Gelu. Both are seeking to recruit new Glatorian.



THORNAX PLANT

The Thornax is a variety of fruit which grows wild in the desert of Bara Magna. It consists of a soft center surrounded by a spiked shell. When unripe, the Thornax can be softened by boiling and made into a stew. This is done mainly by bone hunters and Vorox, as no one else can stand the smell of it. It's said that one can smell a batch of Thornax stew from miles away.

When they ripen, the shells of a Thornax turn rock-hard. Then the fruit is harvested for use as ammunition in the Thornax launchers carried by Glatorian, Skrall, bone hunters and others. The spikes of a ripe Thornax are hard and sharp enough to do damage to Glatorian armor. Thornax are harvested by Agori traders and sold to each village.

When allowed to become over-ripe, Thornax become explosive. While use of explosive ammunition is allowed in arenas only in special cases, Glatorian who need to travel the desert often carry a supply for protection. The Thornax is safe to use as long as the shell is not ruptured. Once it is launched and strikes an object, it explodes with a force powerful enough to shatter rock.



THORNAX LAUNCHER

A light, simple weapon, the Thornax launcher has been in existence for more than 100,000 years. Originally, it was thought a crude device and mainly used by members of the sand tribe. After the Shattering, and the subsequent steep drop in the technological level of society, the Thornax launcher became one of the more sophisticated mechanisms in use on Bara Magna.

The launcher consists of two metal rods constructed parallel to each other, which grip the Thornax fruit. A trigger mechanism squeezes the rods together, forcing the Thornax out at high velocity. The launcher is specially designed so that its use will not crack the shell of the fruit, which could cause it to explode prematurely.

Thornax launchers are given to a Glatorian when a village hires him or her, for use in the arena. They are also carried by Skrall warriors, bone hunters, Vorox, and some Agori traders. Reliable and easy to keep in repair, they are the only ranged weapon in use in the desert.



MATA NUI'S DIARY

ENTRY FOUR

It soon became obvious that this world had its own share of problems. In addition to a lack of resources and a harsh climate, they were menaced by roving bands of bone hunters, savage Vorox like the one I fought, and a violent invasion by a race called the Skrall. It sounded all too familiar.

As I listened to the Glatorian tell me of these things, I struggled with myself. I had not come to Bara Magna of my own free will – I had been exiled here. The problems of these people were not mine. My own universe was in danger, because of my failings, and it was my responsibility to save it. Could I afford to get myself embroiled in the crises of another world?

The simple answer was no. What if the struggle here on Bara Magna took years? What if I was wounded or killed, who would there be to save my own universe? These Glatorian seem smart and capable, surely they could handle things here. And what help could I be? Stripped of my great powers, was I even the equal of Ackar or Strakk or any of the others? They had years of experience here ... I had been here less than a day.

And yet ... I turned away once before. I paid so much attention to the worlds I was visiting and the mission I had to carry out for the Great Beings that I ignored what was going on inside my own universe. Too late, I realized that there were hostile forces arrayed against me. It was because I was so oblivious that evil was able to take root in the place I was supposed to protect. Could I walk away again? Could I really turn my back on these people who had welcomed me into their midst? By doing nothing, would I not be allowing evil to triumph here as well?

This was something I would need to think long and hard about. The decision I made might change the course of two worlds. And I could not help but think – if the only way I could save my home was to leave this place to its doom, would I be able to do it?





DUEL IN THE DESERT

Fero reined Skirmix to a halt and scanned the horizon. Little was moving on the sands of Bara Magna this day. Here and there, a Zesk could be seen crawling out of the sand in search of a meal. Scavenger birds wheeled in the sky, waiting for something down below to drop from the heat. The emptiness of the desert was no surprise. It was high sun, and only lunatics and fools would be out in this heat.

But the armored warrior was neither mad nor stupid. He had a job to do, and it didn't grant him the luxury of lounging in the rare patch of shade. Any rider or caravan forced to travel at this time of day would be moving slowly – too slowly to evade a determined hunter.

He checked his weaponry. His blade was scored by sand and carried the scars of hundreds of battles, but was still razor sharp. He had found it in the ruins of a Glatorian training arena a long time back. It had become almost a part of him now, an extension of his warrior spirit and skill. With luck, today it would bring him another successful hunt.

His rock steed growled. It didn't like to stand still. Its body was designed to be self-cooling, but only if it kept on the move. Fero was about to spur his mount on when Skirmix began shaking its head and snapping its jaws together. The animal sensed prey.

Like all bone hunters, Fero had a second set of eyelids which shielded his eyes from the sun. He closed them now, their polarizing effect making it easier for him to see. Yes, there was something out there, far to the west. It was a lone transport driven by Agori

villagers from Iconox. Riding alongside was a single Glatorian who Fero recognized instantly.

Gelu, the hunter said to himself. Then this one is business and pleasure.

The Glatorian named Gelu was feeling pleased with himself this day. Even the extreme heat and the stench of the sand stalker he rode could not ruin his mood. He was, after all, on his way to becoming a very rich individual.

For most of Bara Magna, the past few days had been nightmarish. For many years, the southern villages had enjoyed an uneasy peace with the Skrall city to the north. Skrall warriors dominated the Glatorian battles in the arenas, but in general, they followed the rules and respected the rights of other villages. Now all that had changed.

It began in small ways. Skrall started challenging places like Tajun and Vulcanus to matches over everything, from caches of arms and equipment to oases and trade routes. Since the peoples of Bara Magna relied on Glatorian fights to settle their disputes, rejecting a Skrall challenge was impossible. The results of the battles were always the same: the Skrall would win and take what they wanted, leaving the villages that much poorer.

Then the Skrall got impatient. They started claiming land and resources without bothering to fight in the arena for them. When they



did fight, they sometimes killed their opponents, later claiming the Glatorian deaths were just "unfortunate accidents." Meanwhile, Glatorian fighters traveling between villages started disappearing. True, the wastelands were always dangerous, but too many were vanishing for it to be coincidence.

Things came to a climax during the annual Glatorian tournament in the village of Atero. Everyone wondered what was going on when no Skrall fighters arrived to participate. They found out why when an army of Skrall descended on the village, destroying the great arena and killing scores of Glatorian. Their days of pretending to be part of Bara Magna society were over. The Skrall had declared war.

Disaster for some, though, meant opportunity for others. Gelu now hired himself out as a bodyguard for Agori trade caravans and other travelers. He pledged to defend them against Skrall raiding parties, hungry Vorox, bone hunters, and any other threats. He also made sure he got paid up front.

The sand stalker snorted and reared. Gelu could see why. There were signs of a battle having been fought here. Broken weapons and shattered armor were scattered in the sand. The stalker could smell death and it didn't like the scent.

The villagers, for their part, were paler than their white armor. They were carrying badly needed goods to Tajun. Caravans to that village had become a prime target for bone hunters. The last three that went without Glatorian protection had never arrived.

"Relax," said Gelu. "I've done this route a

dozen times in the last two weeks. Outside of a few Zesk scavengers, I haven't run into a thing worth fighting."

The driver nodded.

"Tell that to the traders who vanished out here."


"Sand seas," offered Gelu. "Storms. Maybe rockslides, if they went through the mountains. Lots of natural dangers out here — not everything is Skrall or bone hunters."

This, of course, was only half true. There were plenty of threats in the wastelands, from weather to wildlife. But Tajun-bound traders were being picked off by bone hunters, and everyone knew it. Still, it wouldn't do to bring it up — might frighten the customers, and frightened customers turn back and want their payment returned.

The Spikit pulling the wagon gave a menacing hiss. It was a two-headed reptilian creature, not too fast, but tough and aggressive. As long as it was well-fed, it would defend a wagon to the death. Rumor was it considered anything it pulled to be its property, so hands off. Let it get hungry, though, and it would eat your trade goods, your wagon, and you, not necessarily in that order. Growling from a Spikit meant one of two things: it sensed danger, or it had missed a meal.

Gelu scanned the sands. His eye caught a glint of sunlight on dull metal. He didn't need a lens to know he was looking at a bone hunter. The good news was there was only one. The bad news was that one was more than enough to make serious trouble.

The Glatorian spoke in a calm, steady voice, without turning to look at the Agori.



"When I give the word, take off as fast as two-head can pull you. There's a sandstorm building to the west. If need be, you can lose yourselves in it. I'll be along soon."

"What is it?" asked one of the villagers. "Are we in danger?"

"Agori, you've been in danger since before Bara Magna had moons. Now do as I say."

The bone hunter was on the move now, riding down from the high dunes. Gelu gave a yell and the Agori started their transport moving. Gelu waited a few seconds to make sure they were well on their way before riding up to meet the hunter.

By the time he reached Fero, he wore a bitter smile of recognition. The two of them had clashed a number of times over the last few weeks. Sometimes Fero succeeded in smashing the caravan and stealing or destroying the goods. Other times, Gelu got his clients away clean. He had learned the hard way about having the Agori stand and fight. Better to let them risk the sands than face Fero.

"They'll be long gone by the time you finish with me," said Gelu.

"How do you know there aren't more bone hunters waiting to ambush them?" Fero replied.

Gelu laughed. "They're carrying a small fortune in food, spare parts, and whatever else Tajun could trade for – and you don't like to share."

Fero suddenly swung his blade. Gelu ducked just before it took his head off. Skirmix snapped its jaws, trying to get at the sand stalker, but the stalker backed away and

kicked. Its hoof struck Skirmix in the left knee and the creature lurched.

Fero had to drop his guard in order to grab onto the reins or get spilled out of the saddle. Gelu hit him in the side with the flat of his ice blade, sending him tumbling off Skirmix. But Fero rolled on impact and came up on his feet, Thornax launcher aimed right at Gelu.

"Get down," Fero snarled.

Gelu slipped down to the sand and faced Fero.

"Now toss your launcher far away," said the bone hunter, his own launcher never wavering.

Not seeing any other choice, Gelu hurled his weapon to the side. He still had his ice blade. To his surprise, Fero did the same. The two faced each other armed only with swords.

Fero struck first and struck fast, driving Gelu back with a series of hard strikes. The Glatorian parried as best he could, but a few of the blows got through, damaging his armor. He cursed under his breath. Armor was expensive to repair and the cracked piece was one he had won from another fighter in a match.

After only a few minutes of fighting, Gelu's arms were starting to feel like they were made of rock. The heat was getting to him. He had to finish this blade fight fast or he wasn't going to finish it at all.

Sensing his opponent's weakness, Fero bored in. He wasn't going to give his opponent time to recover. He forced the Glatorian back, back ...



Then Gelu unexpectedly dropped to the ground and kicked his legs up. He caught Fero in the midsection and propelled him into the air. Fero landed face first in a dune while Gelu scrambled to his feet. He glanced to the side, to see the sand stalker was managing to keep Skirmix out of the battle.

The bone hunter was starting to get up. Gelu took a few quick steps and kicked Fero's sword away from him. That was when he spotted something else on the sand. It was a piece of parchment with what looked like a map drawn on it. Keeping his blade close enough to strike the bone hunter if he made a move, he picked it up.

A swift scan showed it was a detailed map of the village of Vulcanus. There were a series of dates down the side with a number beside each.

"What is this?" asked Gelu.

"Go to the sand bog," Fero spat. "I'm not telling you anything."

Gelu snatched up his Thornax launcher and aimed it toward Skirmix.

"Want to walk home?"

Fero looked at his mount, then back at Gelu. His expression was cold as Iconox ice. "If I have to."

Gelu frowned. It was said bone hunters jaws could clamp shut tighter than a rock dragon's on a meal. If Fero didn't want to talk, he wasn't going to. Gelu wondered if he should kill the bone hunter, but decided against it. It would only paint a target on his back for every other member of Fero's tribe. Plus, in a weird way, he found he almost enjoyed this rivalry.

Gelu got back on his sand stalker. He fired a Thornax above Skirmix's head and one right in front of his nose. The beast backed off a half dozen paces. Then Gelu urged his mount forward. The sand stalker stepped on Fero's launcher, producing a very satisfying crunch.

"You might want to start learning to share," said Gelu, as he rode away.

By the time he caught up to the transport, it was in pretty bad shape. A small band of Zesk had appeared out of the sand and raided the contents, making off with more than half of it before the Agori villagers scared them off. They grumbled about being left to defend themselves. Gelu reminded them that bone hunters don't scare as easily as Zesk. Fero wouldn't have left them anything, including their lives.

The remaining ride to Tajun was uneventful and gave Gelu time to study the map he had taken from Fero. Now that he looked at it more closely, it seemed strange. For one thing, bone hunters usually wrote in their own language, which was based on Agori but also very different. Without practice, it would be almost impossible to read for an outsider. Maybe once or twice he had seen a hunter carrying something with Skrall markings on it, since they spent a lot of time riding around the northern wastes near Roptus. Bone hunters wouldn't be stupid enough to attack the fierce Skrall warriors, but weren't above looting dead ones.



The notes scrawled on this map, however, were in perfect Agori. It wasn't just a standard map of how to get to and from Vulcanus, either. Every outer wall was marked, along with any other defenses the village had in place. Gelu had been to the village a week before and there were things on this chart that hadn't been there then. This was a brand new document. But what was it doing in the hands of a bone hunter? And who had handed it over?

Gelu was still pondering these questions as he walked the streets of Tajun. The village consisted of a single massive structure beneath which were a series of small, crudely made shelters. The Agori who lived here had no idea where the oddly shaped structure had come from – it had simply always been there, as far as they knew.

Tajun was located on top of an oasis, so water was never an issue for the residents. For about everything else, they relied on trade. With the bone hunters starving that in recent months, the villagers were hurting. Even the small amount of goods in the Iconox transport was welcome.

Gelu spotted Metus, an Agori from his village. Metus was a Glatorian trainer and promoter. He traveled Bara Magna looking for good fighters and setting up matches between villages. For him, Tajun was now the place to be.

"Never saw anything like it," he said to Gelu. "These people need everything – food,

tools, spare parts, you name it – and they're willing to challenge for it. Tarix and Kiina have had six matches in the last week. They're both starting to wear out."

Gelu could understand that. The two Glatorian were both veteran fighters, but at that pace, and with so much riding on each match, anyone would run down.

"Hey," said Metus, eyeing Gelu as if he had just seen him for the first time. "You're pretty good in the arena. Tajun will give you double what Iconox does if you win a few for them."


Gelu shook his head. "Sorry, Metus, I'm out of that game ... for now. I like doing escort work. Keeps me on the move."

"Got it," Metus replied, forcing a look of disappointment off his features. "Well, if you change your mind ... So far, all I've managed to recruit is a kid named Gresh from Tesara. Not bad, still needs training, but not bad. We're headed to Vulcanus for a match today."

Gelu remembered the map in his bag. Someone in Vulcanus would probably be very interested in seeing it. And Gelu had to admit that he was intrigued by the mystery of the chart himself.

"Lot of bone hunters between here and there," he said. "You could use an extra sword. Mind if I tag along?"

Beyond a brief greeting when he and Gelu were introduced, Gresh didn't say much the first part of the journey. Normally,



Gelu would have written this off as nerves. Young Glatorian did one of two things around veterans: asked questions non-stop, or shut up completely, afraid to sound stupid if they opened their mouths.

But Gresh wasn't a typical newcomer to the game. He had won all but one of his matches for Tesara, and the one he lost was to a Skrall warrior. There was no shame in that. Back in the days when Roxtus sent fighters to the arena, no one ever beat a Skrall, not even the old pros.

Gelu found himself liking the kid. Too many young fighters thought being a Glatorian was all about profit or personal glory. But the best of the breed knew it was a lot more than that.

"Who are you fighting?" he asked Gresh.

Before Gresh could answer, Metus did it for him. "He's fighting Aekar. You know they kicked out Malum, right? He killed an opponent who had already surrendered. So they're down to Aekar and a couple of kids so new they don't know which end of the sword to hold."

"Up ahead," Gresh broke in. "Looks like trouble."

The kid had good eyes. Far off in the distance, an Agori transport had lost a wheel. The two drivers, both from Vulcanus, were struggling to get it back on while trying not to get too close to their hungry Spikit. As the Glatorian approached, one of the Agori looked up at Gelu. Then he looked away, shaking his head in disgust.

"Another one from Iconox," the villager said. "He won't help. Keep working."

"You don't think too highly of the ice village, I'm guessing?" said Gelu.

"We broke down two hours ago," said the other Agori. "Not long after, a Glatorian from your village comes by. He offers to patch the transport and get us to Vulcanus, but says he's pretty sure the pass ahead is full of Vorox. So his price is half the goods we're carrying. So we said no."

Gelu glanced toward the eastern pass, the shortest route to the village of fire. If there were Vorox there, they wouldn't stay there long. As soon as it got dark, they would emerge to hunt. These villagers and their goods would be top of the menu.

"Maybe 'yes' would have been a better option," he said.

To Gelu's surprise, Gresh dismounted from his sand stalker.

"We'll help," the kid said.

The Agori put his hands on his hips, a look of defiance in his eyes.

"We can't afford you. Move on and let us get back to work."

"No one wants your goods," Gresh answered. "Stay here and you'll be dead before another sunrise. Now let's get to work."

SKRALL



The fiercest and most feared warriors in all of Bara Magna, Skrall are bred from birth to be merciless fighters. A combination of rigorous training in all the combat arts, harsh discipline, and natural skill combines to make the Skrall seem virtually unbeatable.



Skrall society is broken into three distinct classes:

Warriors make up the vast majority of the Skrall army. Tough and resourceful, Skrall warriors value obedience, courage, and loyalty. Their social system encourages these traits, as warriors who disobey orders or run in battle are immediately executed. The Skrall way of life is built around conquest, with no room for compassion or other “soft” emotions. Skrall warriors are normally armed with swords, razor-edged shields and Thornax launchers. When mounted for battle, they ride either sand stalkers or rock steeds. All Skrall Glatorian come from the warrior class.

Elite Warriors are the top fighters in the Skrall military, born stronger and faster than standard warriors. Elites are often sent on special missions, either to spy on the enemy or to cause destruction in opposing camps or villages. Their high status means they get to choose the best items from any loot that is seized to keep for themselves, as well as their choice of weapons. Stronius is a veteran Elite.

Leaders are destined from birth to be the superior class. A leader Skrall is taller and stronger than either Warriors or Elite Warriors, and has the responsibility for taking charge of a legion. Unfortunately, all the leader-class Skrall were killed by baterra, with the exception of Tuma.

Skrall served as the army for the Element Lord of Stone during the Core War. They were the largest and most powerful force in that conflict, and by its last days, had largely scattered the opposing armies. The forces unleashed in their final battle to seize control of Spherus

Magna’s energized protodermis caused the planet to shatter.

Skrall were regarded with suspicion and even hostility by other villages after their arrival in the desert. Surprisingly, they actually helped out in a few instances, the most obvious being providing the village of Vulcanus with bone hunter battle plans. What no one knew at the time was that the Skrall had manipulated the bone hunters into raiding Vulcanus as a test, and by leaking their plans, were simply trying to make the test more challenging for their pawns.

During the first year of their presence in Bara Magna, the Skrall sent warriors to serve as Glatorian in village matches. In that time, no Skrall ever lost a match, defeating even veteran fighters like Ackar and Tarix. It was expected that a Skrall would be named champion at the end of the Great Tournament in Atero, but that event was interrupted by the Skrall attack and the destruction of the Arena Magna.

Among the many strange things about the Skrall is the fact that very few of them have names. A Skrall warrior is just called “warrior,” unless he does something particularly brave or heroic in battle. Then he may be rewarded by Tuma with a name of his own. Getting a name is considered a great honor by Skrall and warriors will take great risks in order to be considered worthy of one.

One of the mysteries about the Skrall is the apparent absence of any females in their city of Roptus. The truth is that when the Skrall migrated south to Bara Magna’s desert, they left an enclave of females behind in their former territory. Skrall females are, if anything, more vicious, treacherous and lethal than the males. They are more than willing to kill male Skrall to insure that they get the best food and water supplies for themselves. Tuma made the decision to abandon them to the baterra, but no one truly knows what their fate may have been.



MALUM



Malum was once the Second Glatorian in the village of Vulcanus. Tall and strong, he won most of his matches, although sometimes his methods struck even Raanu and the villagers as too violent. More than once, Malum dealt potentially crippling injuries to other Glatorian in the arena. Since other villages could not prove Malum did it intentionally, they could not call for him to be punished.

It was inevitable that Malum's behavior would go too far one day. During a hard-fought match with Strakk, Malum was driven into a rage by the Iconox Glatorian's dirty fighting. He downed his foe and Strakk officially conceded the match. But that wasn't enough for Malum, who continued to attack and tried to kill Strakk. It took Gresh to pull Malum off his opponent. Iconox filed a formal protest with Vulcanus, and Raanu had no choice but to exile Malum from the village.

The life of an exiled Glatorian is brutal and usually short. If they aren't killed by desert creatures or bone hunters, and if they don't starve or die of thirst, they usually wind up as bandits, or worse, go mad. It seemed that Malum was destined for a bad end when he ran into a pack of Vorox in the desert.

If the Vorox expected an easy victim, though, they were mistaken. Malum was a fighter all his life, first with the army of the Element Lord of Fire, later as a Glatorian. He challenged the strongest male Vorox and defeated him. Seeing this, the other Vorox in that tribe transferred their loyalty to Malum. He had found a new home among the desert savages.

*The Vorox found me,
sheltered me, and made
me part of their tribe.*



Setting himself up as a king, Malum devoted himself to guiding and protecting his new tribe. He had no interest in taking revenge on Vulcanus, nor was he very interested in helping the Agori. His major concerns were the bone hunters, who competed with the Vorox for resources and killed many of them, and the Skrall, who kidnapped Vorox for unknown purposes.

When Ackar came seeking aid against the bone hunters, Malum at first refused him. In the end, after much persuasion, he agreed to lead a pack of Vorox against a bone hunter camp. The attack was successful, but it sparked more bone hunter killings of Vorox later on.

Malum was later captured by the Skrall, who hoped to use his knowledge to allow them to tame Vorox for their use. Instead, he freed some of the beasts and escaped back into the desert. Keeping a close eye on the Skrall after that, he spotted them marching toward Atero and tried to warn Gresh. But the young Glatorian did not trust him and so the warning went unheeded.

Since the outbreak of war, Malum has led some Vorox raids on Skrall supply caravans and clashed with Skrall patrols. But he has not allowed his Vorox to ally again with the Glatorian and Agori, since he does not believe the villages are all that much better than the Skrall when it comes to their treatment of Vorox.

Malum carries a Thornax launcher and wears spiked "fire claw" gauntlets on his hands. He briefly wielded a sword made for Ackar, but it was stolen from him by the Skrall.



GRESH



The youngest Second Glatorian in the history of Bara Magna, Gresh is unusually talented for a fighter of his age. As a trainee, he surprised the Agori of Tesara by beating Kiina in a pre-tournament match. He went on to win three matches in a row in Atero before losing to Gelu. Since then, he has worked at honing his skills until he is almost as good as Prime Glatorian Vastus.

Where some Glatorian would pass right by an Agori in trouble if he couldn't pay, Gresh believes that anyone with strength and skill has an obligation to defend those who are weaker. His knowledge of tactics was put to the test on a mission to deliver exsidian ore from Iconox to Vulcanus, during which he battled Skrall and Vorox and barely escaped with his life.



Gresh ran off a string of victories in the past year before losing a match to a Skrall warrior in Vulcanus. Shortly after that, he participated in the Battle of Atero, which ended when the Skrall legions overran the Arena Magna and destroyed it. Later, Gresh aided Ackar, Kiina, and Strakk in defending Vulcanus from a bone hunter raid.

Although young and exuberant by nature, Gresh believes that he needs to appear very dedicated and serious all the time. Kiina has tried to get him to enjoy life a little more and show his feelings, with some success. She believes he feels a little intimidated around famous veteran Glatorian like Tarix and Ackar.

Gresh is known for having a unique approach to preparing for matches. Where most Glatorian will practice in the arena before a

fight, Gresh prefers to go off on his own. His explanation for this is that veteran Glatorian know lots of moves and can change their strategy in a split second. Being newer to the profession, Gresh feels he needs every advantage he can get, and keeping his tactics secret until the last possible moment gives him an edge.

Another way in which Gresh differs from other Glatorian is that he is actually welcome to train in other villages besides his own. Normally, this is, at best, frowned upon, and in some places even forbidden. But because Gresh has so often aided Agori from Tajun and elsewhere, the village elders are willing to make an exception for him. He can often be found in Tajun, training with Kiina.

Gresh's attitude toward other villages has sometimes put him at odds with other Glatorian. He and Strakk do not get along at all, although they have worked together more than once. He has also argued with Vastus, who feels strongly that Glatorian should defend their own villages and not worry about others.

Given more time and experience, some believe that Gresh could one day rival Ackar, Tarix, perhaps even Certavus himself in the ranks of great Glatorian. But it remains to be seen whether the Skrall invasion will allow anyone the luxury of time to train and learn.

Gresh carries a Thomax launcher and a shield, which he can split in half to form two bladed weapons. His shield was shattered by a Skrall warrior during an arena match, but later repaired by Agori in Vulcanus in return for food from Tesara.



*We don't charge
to save a life ...*

TARIX



Prime Glatorian of the water village of Tajun, Tarix has a long and legendary history on Bara Magna. He is credited as one of the founders of the Glatorian system and is still among the top fighters ever, currently holding the title of champion.

Many thousands of years ago, Tarix was a skilled warrior in the Core War. He led an entire battalion in the service of the Element Lord of Water, and in fact once clashed with Ackar and his fire troops in Spherus Magna's Field of Mist. He was honored for almost single-handedly seizing control of an ice fortress and led the charge at Lein's Drift.

Just before the Shattering, Tarix led a patrol into the desert of Bara Magna. When the planet split apart, he and his troops found themselves trapped there. Most died on the journey to find refuge, but Tarix, Kiina and a few others made it as far as the village of Tajun.



As time passed, it became apparent that some method of resolving conflicts had to be found. Another war would lead to the extinction of the Agori on Bara Magna and the destruction of their villages. Tarix worked with Certavus, Ackar, and Vastus to create the basics of what we know as the Glatorian system today.

In doing so, Tarix and his allies had to overcome reluctance on the part of some warriors. Having recently been fighting to the death with each other, the idea of fighting in an arena, following rules, and stopping short of killing your opponent did not sit well with them. To

answer this, Tarix wrote the Glatorian Creed, which explained not only how matches would



be fought, but why the system was needed. It is still referred to by Glatorian to this day.

(While Tarix dealt with reluctant fighters, Ackar took on the job of convincing the Agori the system would work. He often said Tarix got the easier job, since at least if a warrior complained too much, Tarix could hit him. Dealing with Agori required a lot more patience and tact.)

From the start, Tarix was one of the top four Glatorian, although he did not win any championships in the first few thousand years. Following the death of Certavus, the field became more competitive, with Tarix, Ackar and Vastus usually battling right to the end for the title in Arena Magna. Tarix would go on to set a record, winning the tournament 93 times in a row.

Tarix has trained Kiina and worked with Gresh, and always makes time to work with newer Glatorian. Unlike some veteran warriors, he does not see newer fighters as rivals, but rather as the future of the Glatorian system.

Tarix wields twin water blades and carried a spiked Thornax launcher. Most recently, he fought alongside Ackar against the bone hunters in Vulcanus and aided the escape of refugees from the fall of Atero. His most recent match,

against Vastus, was interrupted by the arrival of Mata Nui. Tarix's support was key to getting the Agori to listen to the newcomer.

We sure could use some help – the kind of help that carries a sword.

STRAKK



One of the most controversial Prime Glatorian on Bara Magna, Strakk is disliked by just about every other fighter. But the village of Iconox cannot argue with his results, which include impressive wins over Vastus and Kiina in recent matches. With second Glatorian Gelu having retired, Iconox is depending more and more on Strakk for victories.

An ambitious fighter, Strakk is determined to become the champion Glatorian on Bara Magna ... and he doesn't really care how he has to do it. He is a master at cheating without being caught, doing everything from throwing sand in an opponent's eyes to reflecting the sun off his ice axe to temporarily blind a foe. It's generally accepted among other Glatorian that there isn't anything Strakk won't do, and most fighters take a special pleasure in beating him in the arena when they can.



If you ask him, Strakk will tell he is the most honest Glatorian out there. He doesn't claim to be fighting for the good of Iconox or peace on Bara Magna. Instead, he proudly admits that he does it for personal profit. In fact, Strakk has been known to ride right past Agori in trouble if they have no way to pay for his services.

Strakk teamed with Gresh and two Agori to transport a shipment of valuable exsidian metal from Iconox to Vulcanus. The quest brought them into contact with bone hunters, Vorox and Skrall, and Strakk protested that it would have made more sense to fake a theft of the ore and then come back later to divide it up. Strakk's use of a Thornax launcher to try to drive off a Skrall patrol almost resulted in the entire party being buried in a rockslide.

Making it back home, he journeyed with Gresh and Tarix to Atero for the Great Tournament. He fought in the battle against the Skrall there, but was quick to realize there was no way to win and advise abandoning the Arena Magna. Reluctantly, the other Glatorian had to agree

with him. Strakk later argued against staging any kind of an organized resistance to the Skrall, insisting that it would anger the invaders and prompt more attacks. The brief attempt to coordinate a multi-village defense against the Skrall crumbled shortly after.

Although they are as different as two Glatorian can be, Gresh seems to best understand how to handle Strakk. If he wants to get Strakk to go somewhere or do something, he tells him about the riches available in return (even if they don't really exist). If he needs Strakk to keep going when the ice Glatorian wants to turn back, he makes it clear that there is a spiked Thornax just waiting to be fired at him if he tries to leave. This is an argument Strakk usually finds very persuasive.

Strakk fought against the bone hunters to defend Vulcanus, along with Ackar, Kiina and Gresh. Most of those present believe that he actually tried to sneak out of the village before the battle started, but the presence of bone hunters all around the area made it impossible for him to get back to Iconox and he had to turn back.

In Strakk's most recent match, he battled Ackar in Vulcanus. Beaten and having officially conceded, Strakk then tried to attack Ackar from behind in a violation of arena rules. His dirty tactic would have succeeded if not for the actions of the newly arrived Mata Nui, who tackled Strakk. In the fight that followed, Mata Nui was lucky enough to beat the Iconox Glatorian and force him to surrender. Iconox was still debating how to punish Strakk for his actions when the Skrall attacked Tajun, forcing the village elders to put the subject aside for now.

Strakk carries a Thornax launcher and an ice axe. Although he is reluctant to follow Mata Nui's lead, if the other Glatorian were to unite behind him, Strakk would feel forced to go along.



VOROX



Vorox are some of the most dangerous and most tragic beings on Bara Magna. Although they are disliked and feared by virtually all Agori and Glatorian, it is hard not to feel pity for them. Every tribe knows that, had things gone another way, any of them might have wound up like the Vorox.

Once they were warriors of the Elemental Lord of Sand, fighting in the Core War. Native to the Bara Magna desert, they were known even then for their wild, unpredictable, and often primitive behavior in battle. Their natural stinger tails made them seem like some sort of strange creature of the sands. Looking back, it now seems obvious that the Vorox were always on the edge, walking a line between civilization and savagery.



It would have seemed that the Vorox would be the best equipped to thrive in Bara Magna after the Shattering. After all, they knew the secrets of survival in the desert already. But life is not predictable, and as the Agori say, "Sometimes the tallest mountain is the first to crumble." As the climate in Bara Magna grew even more harsh, and resources even more scarce, the Vorox began to regress to barbarism. While Tesara, Tajun, Iconox and Vulcanus were establishing the Glatorian system to settle disputes, the Vorox and the Zesk were living in the ruins and in underground tunnels they dug in the sand.

Foraging for food or stealing it from villages, attacking anyone who came into what they considered their territory, the Vorox rapidly gained a reputation as dangerous brutes. They were barred from entry into any village, driven off by force any time they appeared, and seen as just more dangerous desert creatures. After long enough of being treated as animals, they became animals.

Protected by the armor they once wore as warriors, and carrying the swords and launchers they used in the war, the Vorox remain a menace

to any who cross the desert. Like a sandstorm, it is almost impossible to predict where they will strike, and little is left standing after they do. Unlike bone hunters, they have no real interest in valuable items like exsidian ore, but will attack caravans carrying food or water. Sometimes, it seems they strike just out of pure savagery, wrecking wagons and wounding or killing the drivers but leaving the cargo behind.

Vorox are particularly disliked by bone hunters. Both groups are nomads, and both survive by robbing from others, so they are in competition. Bone hunters look down on Vorox as stupid beasts and will go out of their way to kill them. Vorox see bone hunters as invaders in their territory and ambush the bandits any chance they get.

In recent months, Vorox have also had their troubles with Skrall. Convinced the Vorox could be of use as attack animals, the Skrall took to kidnapping them and penning them up. All efforts to train the Vorox have so far failed. Skrall also used the Vorox to try to detect the presence of baterra. They would drive small herds of Vorox north into the mountains, and if the Vorox started dying, they would know baterra must be nearby.

Although to an outsider they seem like little more than beasts, Vorox are not animals. Many still retain enough intelligence to be able to speak the language of the Agori. They do have a social system, founded on packs led by the strongest male. They also show great loyalty to their leaders and to their pack, sometimes even sacrificing themselves to save the weaker mem-



bers of their group from attack. Though frightened by things like lightning or flame, they have the heightened senses of born hunters and are fierce opponents in a fight.

The only non-Zesk or Vorox known to associate with them is Malum, who now leads a pack. How long it will be before another Vorox male challenges Malum for leadership remains to be seen.



CAPTURED!

Tuma woke with a start. Sleep had been welcome, but the dreams it had brought had done nothing to soothe his spirit. Now he sat up in his darkened chamber, staring out the window at the starlit sky of Bara Magna.

He had never been one for deep thoughts, doubts, or reflection. His class within Skrall society – those intended by nature to be leaders and the fiercest of warriors – did not place great value on looking inward or backward. Life was simple: move ahead, conquer, secure what you have taken, and then move on. It was this which had made the Skrall such feared warriors in the great war, and which helped them to survive as a tribe after the Shattering.

Cut off from their homeland after that global disaster, the Skrall resolved to tame the lands in which they found themselves – the volcanic, unstable, and dangerous territory north of the Black Spike Mountains. Although some parts of it remained too treacherous even for them to explore even after tens of thousands of years, they became the undisputed masters of their empire.

Then everything changed. A new breed of warriors appeared, silent, lethal shapeshifters who struck from thin air and then vanished again. Skrall warriors died by the score, as did the other members of Tuma's class until only he remained to lead the tribe. Although it went against his nature, Tuma finally assembled the Skrall army and the rock Agori and led them south through the Black Spikes to new territories and safety.

He had learned many things during those last battles, when fighting raged from the Maze Valley to the very heart of the Skrall

camp. His people could never hold too much territory, be too well defended, or hesitate even a moment in their march of conquest. Although the desert had little to offer in terms of resources, it did grant its owner one thing every leader wanted – space in which to fight. And one day they would fight again, Tuma was certain ... one day, the things that stalked the northern mountains would follow them here.

For now, though, he could focus his attentions to the south. The villages of Bara Magna were scattered, their relations with each other ranging from indifferent to tense. It was doubtful they would be able to mount much resistance if the Skrall attacked now, but "doubtful" was not good enough. Tuma was not going to risk a two-front war, with the Glatorian and Agori in front of him and his other enemies behind. When the Skrall were ready to strike, Bara Magna must be ready to fall.

The leader of a Skrall patrol appeared before him. Tuma eyed him for a moment, noting the damage to his sword and shield. The warrior had seen combat this night.

"Report," snapped Tuma.

"Bone hunter attacks have isolated Tajun," said the Skrall. "Your representative has met with the hunters to argue against their plans for a raid on Vulcanus."

Tuma smiled. "And so guarantees the bone hunters will go ahead with it. Very good. And have their plans been drawn up?"

The Skrall nodded and produced a roll of parchment from his pack. He handed it to Tuma, who unrolled it and scanned its contents. After a moment, he looked back at the warrior.

"The bone hunters do not know we have this copy?"

"No, leader," said the Skrall.

"You realize, if I find out you are lying ... or even mistaken ... your head will decorate the walls of Roxtus?"

"Yes, leader."

"Who did you battle tonight?" asked Tuma.

"A Glatorian from the fire village and a pack of Vorox, leader," reported the Skrall. "We had paused our rock steeds north of the Skrall River when we were attacked."

"You killed them all, of course," Tuma replied.

The Skrall did not answer.

Tuma's eyes narrowed.

"Why not?"

"They vanished into the sand."

Tuma leaned in close. "Glatorian do not vanish into desert dunes, warrior. Why do I not see the crimson one's armor and sword among your gear?"

The Skrall said nothing. He didn't have to. Tuma knew who he had encountered in the desert - Malum, exiled from the village of Vulcanus, now afflicted with desert madness and living with the Vorox. Malum was the most dangerous kind of warrior - one who did not fear death, for it would seem a comfort compared to the life he lived now. He could be a fierce enemy ... which meant he could also be a valuable ally.

"Get fresh rock steeds," Tuma ordered, "and a dozen warriors. I want Malum brought here to me. Do not return without him ... I am sure you remember the fate of the last patrol that failed me."

The Skrall nodded. The patrol assigned to retrieve the book of Certavus had returned empty-handed. They had been reassigned to punishment duty, feeding the two-headed Spikit in their pens. Spikit being the way they were, the feeders inevitably wound up being the food.

"It will be done," said the Skrall warrior.

The patrol moved out at dawn. Their target, Malum, was living with the bestial Vorox now, and everyone knew Vorox was night hunters. During the day, they would be sleeping beneath the sand and prime targets for an ambush.

Despite this, there was a grim silence among the members of the unit. Of all the tribes on Bara Magna, only the Vorox showed no fear of Skrall. Maybe it was because their savage brains were too dull to know fear. Or maybe it was because, living their lives in the wasteland as they did, the prospect of death simply held no terror for them.

The leader of the Skrall patrol spotted something up ahead. It looked like roughly a dozen tunnels had been made in a patch of sand beneath an outcropping. It was hard to tell how recent they were, as the rock would have protected them some from the wind, but it was the first sign the Skrall had seen. Even more interesting, there was a natural cave in the slope nearby. Shelter for Malum, perhaps, during the heat of the day?

The patrol leader held up a hand to stop the march. He gestured for half the troop to surround the tunnel entrances, and the others to stay back with him. It was time to set the trap.

Half a dozen Skrall rode up to the outcropping. Once they were there, they kept



moving, pacing their rock steeds back and forth across the sand. If there were Vorox down there, they would sense the vibrations in the ground. Regardless of whether they thought what they heard was a potential meal or the presence of an enemy – often the same thing – they would come up to investigate.

Naturally, they would not come up the same way they went down. They would spring out of the sand behind the intruders and try to take them by surprise. That was why half the patrol had hung back, keeping their mounts perfectly still. Two could play at the ambush game.

The Skrall waited.

Five minutes.

Ten.

Twenty.

Some of the warriors were starting to wonder if the Vorox were long gone from this place.

They got their answer, but not in the way they had expected. The ground suddenly opened up beneath the reserve Skrall, sending them and their mounts tumbling down into a pit. The Skrall near the outcropping turned and rode toward their comrades, just as two dozen Vorox emerged from their original tunnels. Howling, they hurled crude swords and spear at the backs of the Skrall riders. One spear found its mark in the side of a rock steed, sending mount and rider tumbling down into the sand. The Vorox were on the unfortunate warrior before he could rise, insuring that he never would again.

Malum appeared at the entrance to the cave, watching the carnage with a smile on his face. After the events of the night before,

only a fool wouldn't have expected Skrall retaliation. He'd had the Vorox leave just enough traces to lure the patrol in, without making it so obvious that they would suspect a trap.

The Skrall patrol leader and his warriors had managed to scramble out of the pit, leaving their rock steeds behind. Dropping to one knee, they took aim with their Thornax launchers and fired. The explosive, spiked spheres sailed into the ranks of the Vorox, felling a number of the beasts. The still mounted Skrall turned in the saddle and fired a volley of their own, scattering their attackers.

Regrouping, the Skrall made ready to charge. That was when they heard a chorus of growls coming from behind. At least fifty Vorox had sprung out of the sand some five hundred yards behind them. The patrol leader wasted no time, ordering the Skrall on foot to join their comrades on their rock steeds. Then they charged, leaving the small army of Vorox in the dust and headed right for the battered first wave and Malum.

"Aim high!" the patrol leader yelled.

The Skrall rode into the midst of the Vorox, striking at them with their blades. The Skrall mounted behind fired their launchers at the rocks above Malum's cave. Their shots brought down a rockslide on the ex-Glatorian, pinning him beneath a pile of stone. Behind them, the mob of Vorox was closing in.

The Skrall upon whose rock steed the patrol leader rode slumped over and fell from the mount, a Vorox sword having struck him down. The leader grabbed the reins and urged the steed up into the rocks. Reaching the

point where Malum was trapped, he coolly dismounted and aimed his launcher at the Glatorian's head.

"Back to your holes," he shouted at the Vorox, "or he dies."

The beasts might or might not have understood the words – the Skrall weren't sure. But they knew what they were seeing and they comprehended the tone. The Vorox didn't retreat, but they didn't keep attacking, either. They simply stopped and waited.

"We strike now," said one of the Skrall warriors. "Make them pay for what they have done."

"They are vermin, no better than scarabax beetles," said another. "Exterminate them all."

The patrol leader agreed. He hated Vorox. They were too unpredictable and too dangerous to leave alive. But he had his orders: bring Malum back to the city of Roptus, alive. There would be time enough later to satisfy the need for vengeance and wipe out the Vorox.

"Enough," he commanded. Reaching down, he grabbed the unconscious Malum by the throat and hauled him out from under the pile of rubble. "We have what we came for. Malum will face Tuma's justice ... and so will all these beasts, in time."

Throwing Malum's body over his rock steed, the patrol leader mounted up. Once they realized what was happening, some of the Vorox moved to attack, only to cut down by Skrall Thornax. The rest backed away. Was it sadness in their eyes as they saw the Skrall riding away with their leader? Could beasts of the desert feel such an emotion?

Or was it dread of the day the Skrall would return, for all of them?

No one ... perhaps not even the Vorox themselves ... could say.

The first thing Malum saw when he opened his eyes was a pair of Vorox. His first thought was that all of it – the attack by the Skrall, his capture – had been a bad dream. He had certainly had plenty of those lately.

But, no – these Vorox were in chains. Being desert dwellers, the Vorox hated any kind of confinement. It was sheer torture for them. Malum had no doubt that a Vorox penned in too long would simply lose the will to live. Rage grew in his heart for whoever had shackled these "beasts," and he already knew who that was: the Skrall.

He looked up to see two of that hated species standing over him. One was a warrior, like those who had attacked his camp. The other was much taller, clad in green and black armor, and obviously in command.

"I am Tuma," said the leader. "And you are Malum, disgraced Glatorian and friend to ... the animals."

"You are the trash of the desert," Malum growled. "And I am the one who will celebrate at your grave."

The Skrall warrior walked over to where Malum lay and kicked him in the side.

"That's no way to talk," said Tuma. "I brought you here to have a conversation."

Malum got painfully to his feet. His wrists and ankles were surprisingly not shackled.



Tuma had a great deal of confidence, it seemed.

"You brought me here for revenge," said the ex-Glatorian. "My people bloodied yours and you can't stand that."

The warrior moved to strike Malum again, but Tuma stopped him.

"Stand down. You are ... half-right, Malum. Your Vorox have proven to be an annoyance lately. But killing you, though no doubt a great deal of fun, would not change that. Believe me, if I wanted you dead, even your pets would be unable to find all the pieces."

Malum looked around. He was in the city of Roptus, filled with rock Agori and Skrall troops. The place was notorious for welcoming Glatorian inside and then never letting them leave. He could see Agori guards all along the walls and Skrall patrols entering and leaving at a constant pace. It was not a spot one dropped by for a visit.

"Then why am I here?"

"You control the Vorox," said Tuma, gesturing to the pathetic, chained creatures. "They do what you command. That makes you a threat ... or a potentially valuable ally. But before we could make any arrangement with you, we would have to see proof that you really can make these beasts do what you say."

"And if I refuse?" asked Malum, already sure of the answer.

Tuma smiled. On him, it was an ugly expression.

"Then we send you back to your friends, of course ... so they can have a funeral, or whatever ritual they do to honor the dead."

"That's what I thought," Malum replied.


The Skrall had it all wrong, of course. They assumed he had some mysterious power to control the Vorox, but he did not. He had won dominance of the pack by defeating its previous leader in single combat. As long as he led them to food and water and kept them away from unnecessary danger – in other words, as long as he was an effective pack leader – they would follow him. But they did it as free beings, not as slaves. The Skrall, he knew, did not want allies – they wanted soldiers they could sacrifice without hesitation.

"Take him to the arena," Tuma ordered.

The Skrall warrior grabbed Malum roughly by the arm and dragged him to the Glatorian arena in the center of the large settlement. Chained against the far wall were two more Vorox, both members of Malum's own pack. A plan began to form in his mind, but it would depend on a great many unknown factors. How hungry and desperate were the Vorox? Too far gone to remember him? Would they understand what he was trying to do?

A half dozen Skrall warriors appeared, ringing the sides of the arena. A seventh took a position in a box behind the Vorox. At Tuma's signal, he released the chains that held the beasts prisoner.

The two Vorox charged toward Malum. He could tell even from a distance they had been mistreated. They were eager for prey, and might not care who or what it would be. But he stood his ground, making direct eye contact with first one Vorox, then the other. Then he raised his right arm and brought



it down slowly, all the while giving a low whistle.

The Vorox slowed, then stopped completely. They sank down to all fours and looked up at Malum, expectantly. To the Skrall watching, it looked like a miracle: two savage beasts tamed in an instant.

"It's really quite easy, once you gain their respect," Malum said, never taking his eyes off the Vorox. "Judging from their wounds, I would say they at least respect your capacity to inflict punishment."

"My warriors could be trained to do this?" asked Tuma. The Vorox had been a problem ever since the Skrall started capturing them. Now and then, they broke loose and did a lot of damage before they could be subdued or killed.

"They have seen me do it," Malum answered. "I am sure they could do it themselves now."

The six Skrall warriors advanced on the beasts, who remained motionless at their approach. "Let them go," Tuma said to Malum.

Malum gave a short, sharp whistle. The Vorox sprang to life, wild again. The Skrall grabbed them immediately and dragged them back to the other end of the arena, struggling to hold them still. Tuma ordered the Skrall who had kicked Malum forward. He would be the lucky one to show his newfound mastery of the Vorox.

At Tuma's signal, the other warriors released their bestial captives. The Vorox charged toward the lone warrior who waited for them. In a perfect imitation of Malum's action, the Skrall raised and lowered his arm while whistling in just the same tone as he

had heard. The effect was stunning, at least to him.

The Vorox didn't stop. They didn't even slow down. They struck the Skrall like twin avalanches, and once he was down, headed for Tuma. Malum took advantage of the confusion to snatch up the fallen warrior's weapon. He sprang out of the arena and shattered the chains holding another pair of Vorox with one swing.

"This way, brothers!" he yelled, charging for the gate.

The Vorox fell back and started after him, the Skrall in pursuit. The Agori at the gate, seeing a crazed Malum and four Vorox headed for them, wisely dove out of the way. A Thornax blast took out one of the Vorox, and another blast wounded a second. But Malum and the surviving two made it through the gate and out into the desert.

Tuma angrily got to his feet, ignoring the wounds inflicted by the Vorox.

"After them! Drag them back here!" he shouted.

The Skrall would dutifully fan out into the desert in search of the escapees, but they would not find them. The Vorox network of tunnels extended even here, and Malum and his two pack mates had found refuge underground. When night fell, they would emerge and start the long trek back home.

The desert is a place of extremes, Malum said to himself. Blazing heat, chilling cold, fierce loyalty ... and deep hatred. The Skrall won't forget this day ... and to their bitter regret, neither will I.

ACKAR



Ackar is the Prime Glatorian of the village of Vulcanus, a former tournament champion, and a Core War veteran. The oldest active Glatorian, he is a little slower in the arena now but still a fighter worthy of respect.

If Ackar had been fighting on a normal schedule, it is likely that his record would be better than it is. But with the exile of Malum and no Second Glatorian to take his place, Ackar has had to fight twice as many matches and fatigue has hurt his performance. For a while, there was even talk of retiring him to a job as a trainer.



Although a skilled fighter, Ackar's biggest enemy in recent years has been himself. Convinced his age was eroding his skills, he worried about letting Vulcanus down. He also did not want to be one of those Glatorian who keeps trying to fight long past the point he should stop. But with Malum's exile and some of the best trainees slain by the bone hunters, he saw himself as having little choice but to keep fighting.

Despite this, Ackar remains a great strategist and a brave warrior. When bone hunters threatened Vulcanus, Ackar was ready to do whatever he had to in order to defend his village. He traveled into the wastelands at great personal risk to meet with Malum and secure the temporary aid of the Vorox against the raiders. He also masterminded the defense of the village, setting up traps and ambushes throughout Iron Canyon to snare the bone hunters.

Later, he joined with Kiina on a rescue mission to save Gresh, Strakk, Tarduk and Kirbold, who were being pursued by Skrall. When the group was trapped between Skrall and Vorox armies, it was Ackar who came up with the idea that saved all their lives and allowed them to make it safely back to Vulcanus.

Ackar's next match was with Strakk in Vulcanus. During the match, Metus brought a newcomer named Mata Nui to watch the fight. Although Ackar won the match fairly, Strakk tried to attack him from behind. Mata Nui saved Ackar and the two formed a friendship. During a journey to the village of Tajun, Ackar taught Mata Nui some tips on fighting, including the importance of observing an opponent closely to be able to predict his moves.

Following the discovery of the Skrall attack on Tajun, Ackar traveled to Tesara with Mata Nui and others to warn that village. Ackar's presence helped convince Tarix and Vastus of the seriousness of the threat. When Mata Nui left to confront the Skrall in Roxtus, Ackar took charge of the defense of Tesara.

While he is close to Tarix and Vastus, Ackar's best friend among the Glatorian is Kiina. She reminds him of himself when he was younger – brash, bold, and always ready for a fight. He does his best to keep her impulsive nature and her hot temper in check, but in battle, there is no one else he wants fighting beside him. Although he knows her dream is to leave Bara Magna, he hopes that day never comes.

Ackar carries a Thornax launcher and a flame sword. His original blade was stolen some time ago, but retrieved for him by Gresh and Strakk in a raid on Roxtus.



VASTUS



Vastus is the Prime Glatorian of Tesara, an experienced fighter with a hidden past. He is, if anything, over-protective of his village and its people, reluctant to leave the place undefended and often sending Gresh to fight in matches in other villages.

As a warrior in the Core War, Vastus was an enthusiastic soldier. He firmly believed that the jungle tribe had the right to own the incredible substance seeping from inside the planet, and he fought bravely and even savagely in battle. Vastus led an elite unit sent to infiltrate enemy villages and perform acts of sabotage.

During one mission, his team was to sneak into the ice village and trigger an avalanche to block the main road off the mountain. An error led to a much larger slide than anticipated,

village. He made clear that a Glatorian's first responsibility is to his own village and he would not leave Tesara undefended. He later had a change of heart and joined with Tarix and others in an attack which drove the bone hunters off.

Vastus fought in the Battle of Atero. He was in Tesara, in a match with Tarix, when Mata Nui, Ackar, Kiina and Gresh arrived with news of the Skrall attack on Tajun. The presence of Ackar led Vastus to demand that others pay attention to the news. Vastus' support was key in the decision to suspend Glatorian matches until the Skrall threat was dealt with. Vastus was later part of the Glatorian attack on Roxtus.

A little-known fact about Vastus is that his training goes beyond merely physical practice. During the Core War, he stumbled upon records

of ancient meditation techniques practiced by ancestors of the Agori. Using these, he learned how to enhance his senses in combat. Although his helmet hides it, Vastus sometimes closes his eyes in battle, allowing his hearing to guide his blows! Incidents like Strakk's cowardly attack on Ackar from behind never happen to Vastus, as he is able to sense the air movement that accompanies an attack, even if he can't see the attack happening. Agori traders from Tesara have practically begged Vastus to ride with them,

since it is said he can't be ambushed. Vastus has only agreed to do this in special cases.

Vastus is armed with a Thornax launcher and a paralyzing venom spear, but is skilled with just about any weapon.



which wrecked half the village and killed hundreds. Most of the dead were Agori who were not active in the war. The incident made Vastus re-examine his life and he began to feel guilty about the things he had done. Shortly after this, the Shattering brought an abrupt end to the war.

Stranded on Bara Magna, Vastus was determined that there would be no more wars. He worked with Certavus and other veterans to create the Glatorian system, which would make conflict between armies unnecessary. Although Vastus has been a very successful Glatorian, and a champion more than once, victories matter less to him than the fact that Agori are not having to march into war over resources.

During the bone hunter attack on Vulcanus, Vastus at first rejected Gresh's plea for aid for that



ΚΙΙΠΛΑ



Kiina is the Second Glatorian of the village of Tajun, and the best-known and most successful female Glatorian on Bara Magna.

Hot-tempered and impetuous, Kiina can sometimes be a trial to be around. But, as Ackar has said, "I don't always agree with her methods ... but I would trust her with my life." She is fiercely loyal to her friends and relentless against her enemies.

The most striking thing about Kiina is her intense dislike of Bara Magna. She is not native to the region, originally living north, near the Dormus River. She was in the desert fighting a battle during the Core War when the Shattering took place. Although she could have returned to

some reluctance, she stayed to fight in the defense of the village. (Although she believed that trying to fight off a horde of bone hunters was suicidal, she remained out of loyalty to Ackar.)

Later, Kiina and Ackar helped save Gresh, Strakk and two Agori out of a difficult situation. The party was bringing a wagon-load of exsidian to Vulcanus, but while fleeing from Vorox, the wagon and its contents were lost in the Skrall River. Kiina came up with the daring idea of tricking the Skrall into salvaging the precious metal, then stealing it away from them. Amazingly, the plan worked.

Kiina fought in the Battle of Atero and later returned to Tajun. Shortly after that, she traveled to Vulcanus for a match. She was there when

Mata Nui first arrived, and spied on his conversation with Ackar. Upon learning Mata Nui was from another world, she burst out, excited. She told Mata Nui that she knew of a strange cavern near Tajun full of ancient carvings and mysterious technology. Suggesting there might be some connection between that and his mission to return home, she offered to take him there on one condition: that he take her with him when he left Bara Magna.

She, Ackar, and Mata Nui headed to Tajun, only to find it largely destroyed by Skrall and bone hunters. Kiina led her friends and a wounded Gresh to the cave, surprised and angry to find Berix already inside. She made it clear she considered the Agori to be a thief, but in the end, had to allow him to treat Gresh's wounds and accompany them to Tesara.

Kiina wields a Thornax launcher and a dual-headed vapor trident.



the river, the presence of water tribe Agori convinced her to stay and defend them against threats. Her fondest wish, since then, has been to get off this planet. She is convinced that Spherus Magna was not the only inhabited world in the galaxy and that someday she would find a way to reach another one. Other Glatorian have laughed at her about this and even made wagers with her about the notion of other populated worlds existing. (The revelation that Mata Nui was from another world led her to say he had "won a lot of bets" for her.)

When bone hunters planned a raid on Vulcanus, Kiina and Tarix discovered the bodies of two dead Glatorian trainees from that village in the desert. Determining they were killed by bone hunters, Kiina rode on to Vulcanus to warn them. With



GELU



Gelu is the former Second Glatorian of the ice village of Iconox. Prior to the Shattering, he was a reluctant warrior in the Core War. Gelu saw what the conflict was doing to the land and its people and decided he wanted no part of it. He deserted and headed south into the White Quartz Mountains, only to have the war follow him there. During a major battle, his best friend, Surel, was badly wounded and believed to be dead. Although Gelu searched for him, he never learned that Surel had in fact survived.)

Gelu received arena fighter training from the legendary Certavus. As a Glatorian, Gelu was skillful and effective, but he saw it as just a job. He wanted to win, but he had no real interest in becoming a tournament champion or going



down in history as a great fighter. All he wanted was to serve his village and live comfortably as a result. If he had been more ambitious, he probably would have become Prime Glatorian in place of Strakk at some point in recent years. Shortly before this year's tournament, he lost a fight to Ackar, forcing Iconox to ship a load of exsidian to Vulcanus via a dangerous new route.

Following the Skrall attack on Atero, Gelu saw a need for armed guards to escort Agori traders across the hostile desert. He retired from being a Glatorian and started his own business as a guard for hire. It was a much more dangerous job than being a Glatorian – unlike the arena, fights in the desert were often to the death – but it was also much more profitable.

You've been in danger since before Bara Magna had moons.



He quickly acquired a reputation for dedication to his job, always putting the lives and safety of his clients before his own.

During one job to protect an Agori trader and his wagon, Gelu clashed with Fero, a bone hunter. During the fight, Fero dropped a chart which showed plans for a bone hunter attack on the village of Vulcanus. Gelu brought the chart to Raanu, who at first felt that the Agori should just evacuate the village. Gelu persuaded him that hiring Glatorian to defend Vulcanus would be a better idea.

(It should be noted that what Gelu hoped to do was make some money by going out and finding Glatorian for Raanu, rather than fighting himself. But when Ackar agreed with his idea and assumed he would stay for the battle, he found himself stuck. He did fight bravely in defense of the village.)

Later, another job would lead to Gelu being pinned down by Skrall warriors firing Thornax launchers. It seemed like he was doomed, until a bright flash of light overhead distracted the Skrall. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Gelu made his escape. He never learned that the light was in fact the Mask of Life headed for a crash landing in the desert.

Gelu fought with the Glatorian army at Roxtus. During that battle, Gelu was wounded by the elite Skrall warrior Stronius. Despite this, he pursued Stronius into the mountains, determined to finish the fight. His current whereabouts remain unknown.

Gelu carries a Thornax launcher and an ice slicer.

MATA NUI'S DIARY

ENTRY FIVE

Ackar is a most unusual being. Despite his own troubles – his fears that his fighting skills are eroding, his concern that he may be forced into retirement – he has offered to aid me in my quest to return home. He says he owes me for saving his life in the arena in Vulcanus, but I sense there is something more to it. Perhaps he wants ... or needs ... to feel he is part of something greater than himself.


He reminds me of someone I knew of in my own universe – a hero named Onua. He was tremendously strong, but his power was always tempered with wisdom. Like Ackar, he was a strategist ... and also like the Glatorian who rides with me now, he was respected by all who knew him. I can tell from the way Kiina speaks with Ackar that both his word and his approval are things that she values.

Ackar has pointed out, correctly, that I have a lot to learn about fighting. He has offered to teach me. Of course, his way of doing it is a bit strange. Rather than teach me maneuvers, he has me watching birds in flight. I am to follow their movements and try to predict if they will turn right or left. It is frustrating work and I do not seem to be very good at it.

Later, Ackar takes me up into the rocks and shows me a creature he calls a rock steed. It is a vicious, reptilian beast, and Ackar says it must be fought before it can be tamed. When he tries to do just that, the rock steed strikes him down. I challenge it ... and find that I can do what Ackar taught, predict its movements from the smallest signs. I fight it and I drive it off, only to learn that Ackar was not so badly hurt – he simply believed that I would learn best if I believed his life depended upon it. And he was right – seeing him in danger crystallized his lessons in my mind. I had no time to think about what I was to do, only time to do it.

A wise being, indeed.





AMBUSH AT SKRALL RIVER

After a few hours of riding, Ackar abruptly cut to the west across the riverbed. The sun was just beginning to rise behind them as they traveled over the dunes. Gelu could see the tell-tale marks in the sand that indicated Vorox had been through here. The further they went, the more numerous the signs. Vorox tunnels left a very unique pattern in the sand and the two riders were surrounded by them now. Gelu moved his hand close to his launcher.

Ackar pointed to a rise up ahead, dominated by a small mountain chain. Gelu could see a cave opening about halfway up the central peak.

"That's where we're going," said Ackar.

Gelu suddenly had a very bad feeling he knew who this "friend" of Ackar's would turn out to be. But what was with all the Vorox traces? At first, he couldn't see any connection – then he decided he really didn't want to see one.

They were about 500 yards from the rocks when the Vorox appeared, erupting out of the sand all around them. Zesk, the smaller versions of the Vorox, were scattered about too, chattering and making threatening gestures toward the two Glatorian. Gelu went for his launcher, but Ackar grabbed his wrist and kept him from reaching it.

"Do you really think you could shoot your way out of this?" Ackar said quietly. "If things go really bad, we'll charge for the cave – it's easier to defend. Until then, let me handle this." Ackar paused, then said, "Scared?"

Seconds ticked by.

"Sure," Gelu answered.

"Good. That means you aren't crazy. I don't like having crazy people watching my back."

Ackar turned toward the cave. He shouted, "Malum! I need to talk to you."

The assembled Vorox murmured among themselves and drew a little closer. One reached out to paw Gelu's sand stalker. Gelu restrained himself from taking a swipe with his blade, but the look he gave the Vorox was enough to make the savage back off.

"Malum!" Ackar called again. "Show yourself!"


The exiled Glatorian appeared in the mouth of the cave. His scarlet armor was cracked in places and caked with sand in others. Malum had always been bigger and stronger than Ackar and his time in the wastelands hadn't changed that. But Gelu was certain many other things were different now – living out in the sands would do that to a being.

"Ackar," Malum said. His voice was almost too quiet to hear.

Malum barked a command in a language Gelu didn't understand. Instantly, the Vorox backed away three steps, but they did not put their weapons away.

"What brings you to my ... empire?" Malum asked Ackar. He gestured to the sea of sand that stretched out in every direction. "If you are seeking hospitality, I have none to offer. Food? Water? Whatever I have goes to feed my people."

"Your people?" Gelu said. "You mean the Vorox? They aren't anyone's 'people.' They're just this side of sand bats."



"You're right," said Malum. "But civilized society said it had no place for me. The Vorox found me, sheltered me, and made me part of their tribe. We want nothing to do with your world anymore, Ackar. But out of the friendship we once shared, I will allow you and your friend to depart with your lives ... if you leave now."

Gelu thought that sounded like a great idea. He was no coward – far from it, he would take on anyone in a fight, from a Skrall on down. But this place reminded him a little too much of the "settlements" for Agori who had spent too much time in the sun and sand and lost their minds.

"Need your help," said Ackar. "Vulcanus is in trouble."

Malum made a disgusted sound and turned back for the cave. "Go home, Ackar. Go home, while you still can."

"Vulcanus sheltered you, Malum. It fed you, supplied you with arms and armor, and treated you like a king," Ackar said, his tone blunt, but not cruel. "You owe it something."

Malum wheeled around, pointing at Ackar. His features were contorted with rage. "I owe them nothing! Look at me. Look at what I am reduced to. A 'king,' yes, until they drove me out ... until they said I wasn't worthy of fighting and dying for them."

"Maybe they were right," said Ackar. "Maybe you're not."

Dead silence. The Vorox edged closer. Gelu's hand returned to his launcher. Sure, he wouldn't stand a chance, but at least he would take some of the beasts with him when he went.

"You have a stake in this too," Ackar continued. "It's bone hunters."

Gelu thought he saw Malum flinch a little. Bone hunters were long-standing enemies of the Vorox. Where the hunters might steal from, or even kill, Agori or Glatorian for food or supplies, they would go after Vorox for pure sport. Although wild and brutal, the Vorox weren't smart enough to avoid bone hunter traps or fast enough to outrun their rock steeds. The best they could do was dive back underground, but the hunters were willing to wait for them to come back to the surface. Bone hunters were nothing if not patient.

"Tell me," said Malum.

Ackar laid out everything they knew, which wasn't much. He finished by saying there was a bone hunter camp to the east, most likely a place for them to prepare their attack on Vulcanus. "They're getting bolder," he said. "And if they can take out a village today, they can take out your 'kingdom' tomorrow."

Malum climbed down the mountainside in silence. As he approached the Glatorian, the Vorox parted to let him pass. "I care nothing about Vulcanus. Let it burn. But I would see the bone hunters burn with it. What would you have us do?"

Gelu and Malum stood on either side of Ackar. There was no sign of any of the Vorox, but that was to be expected. Vorox did not march forth in armies. They burrowed



under the ground and relied on surprise. If you saw one too long before the attack, then the Vorox had made a mistake.

The two Glatorian had spent the day in Malum's cave, planning strategy. Now and then, Malum would start ranting again about his treatment by the villagers of Vulcanus, and Gelu would give Ackar a look that said, "Are we sure about this guy?" He didn't really need or expect an answer – he already knew it was, "No."

Ackar crouched down and eyed the bone hunter camp. It was a cold night, even for Bara Magna, and the wind cut through his armor like a rusty blade. The long, mournful howls of dune wolves could be heard in the distance. The sounds were a summons to the pack, a signal that the hunt was about to begin.

"Everyone remember the plan?" said Ackar, rising. "We move fast and we take out as many of them as we can."

Malum looked up sharply. "My first week in the wastes, the bone hunters fell upon me. They took my food, my water, and would have taken me if I had not been skilled with a blade. Any plan that involves their deaths is one I can easily remember."

"Umm, good," Ackar said. "If we can drive off some of their rock steeds, great. But the point is to make them cautious, wary, worried about more attacks later. A cautious bone hunter moves slow, and that buys Vulcanus time."

At Ackar's signal, the three Glatorian moved off to take up their positions. Ten

seconds later, there was a shrill whistle and the desert exploded with violence.

Vorox burrowed up out of the ground around and in the bone hunter camp. Rock steeds reared, their scorpion tails flashing, as the bestial warriors appeared in their midst. Caught by surprise, the bone hunters struggled to mount a defense against the ferocious attack. The Vorox took down half a dozen hunters in as many seconds, but the rest formed a line and fired their Thornax launchers. The spiked missiles tore through the ranks of the Vorox, killing some and wounding many more. But the only effect was to make the attackers bellow with rage and surge forward again.

A few of the wiser hunters made it to their steeds and rode out of the camp. Ackar heard one of them yell and knew he must have ridden right to where Malum was waiting in ambush. To his right, Gelu was locked in combat with a couple more hunters who were trying to escape the Vorox attack on foot.

Ackar mounted his sand stalker and charged the line of bone hunter marksmen. He smashed into them from behind, scattering them like grains of sand in a storm, then wheeled around and did it again. This time, the hunters were ready. A slash from a sword almost unseated Ackar, but he held on to the reins until he was clear of the camp.

When he turned his mount around, he saw one of the bone hunters darting toward the camp fire and throwing something in. The next moment, the small fire erupted, turning into a white-hot blaze twenty times its original size. Under the cover of the flames,



the bone hunters counterattacked. This time, the Vorox broke, fleeing into the desert or trying to retreat back into their tunnels. The bone hunters pursued, cutting them down as they fled. Malum rode in to defend his followers, fighting hard to cover their retreat.

Deciding they had done what they could here, Ackar rode to where Gelu was still struggling with two hunters. He charged into the fray, knocking both hunters to the ground, then scooped Gelu onto the back of his mount. Together, they rode from the burning campsite. Gelu leapt from Ackar's sand stalker to his own and they headed back for Malum's cave.

Malum was already there when they arrived, surrounded by the remnants of his force. Many Vorox had been lost in the fight, many more wounded, but Malum seemed satisfied. "We have dealt them a blow," he said, pride in his tone. "They will not lightly pass through our region again. Now they know the claws of a Vorox bite deep!"

The battered Vorox raised their weapons in the air and roared. Ackar and Gelu both felt chills run through them at the sound.

"The hunters will almost certainly come looking for revenge," said Ackar. "Maybe not now, but they won't let this go unpunished. Watch your back, Malum."

"They will not find us," the exiled Glatorian replied. "We can disappear like a single grain of sand in a vast desert."

"You're sure you won't help us defend Vulcanus?" asked Ackar. "We could use your sword."

Malum shook his head. "Those days are past. But I wish you strength in the battle to come."

"Thank you," said Ackar.


Malum turned to Gelu, reaching out to grasp the Glatorian's sword arm. "Die well, warrior."

"Right. Sure," Gelu answered, gently pulling away. "Likewise."

Ackar and Gelu rode from the camp as dawn broke over Bara Magna. Both were tired and sore, with the real fight still ahead of them. But this first skirmish had been won.

Raanu watched as Agori villagers placed rocks atop a makeshift wall along the western edge of Vulcanus. Since the discovery of the map, he had ordered all other work to be stopped and every resident to start constructing walls both inside and outside the village. What had existed up to now was enough to keep desert creatures away, but wouldn't have even slowed down a bone hunter raiding party or a Skrall attack.

He glanced at the map again. Yes, he decided, his strategy made perfect sense. The bone hunters would be attacking from the north and west. They could never make it through the sea of sand to the south, and Iron Canyon to the east was treacherous in its own right. No sane military expedition would choose to go through its dark and



winding pathways when open desert beckoned to the west.

A cry went up from one of the villagers. Raanu looked up to see a blue-armored Glatorian riding in. He recognized Kiina immediately and went to greet her.

"You got our message, then?" he said. His smile faded at the look in her eyes.

"No," Kiina replied. She reached into her pack and tossed him a few fragments of broken weaponry. "I got your messengers. Or, rather, the bone hunters did. What were you thinking, sending them out in the middle of the night?"

Raanu flinched at the angry tone in her voice. Still, her reaction was no surprise. Kiina was fiercely protective of her fellow Glatorian. Villages that put them in danger due to recklessness, or worse, didn't pay on time could always expect to hear from her. And she did have a point, he conceded. Being a Glatorian wasn't an easy job and there weren't many who could do it. Those who could shouldn't be wasted.

He hurriedly explained the situation. As he did, her expression changed from furious to concerned to grim. She dismounted and walked over to him.

"You need to leave Vulcanus. Now," she said, keeping her voice just above a whisper. "No one respects Ackar more than I do, but he's wrong. A handful of Glatorian won't stop a bone hunter raid. They'll just add to the body count."

Raanu turned away. Deep down, he knew she was probably right. But Gelu and Ackar had given him hope that the village could be

defended and he didn't want to let that go. It wasn't just the loss of homes or resources he worried about. If they started running now, where would it stop?

"I've thought about that," he said, his voice flat. "But what happens when we run out of desert to hide in? The bone hunters will track and kill us all, and all we will have bought ourselves is a few extra weeks or months to live like cowards. I'd rather fight and die, here and now, than die by inches on the run."

"And your people? What about them?" asked Kiina, her words cracking like a whip. "What if they would prefer a chance at life, rather than certain death? Who are you to make this decision for them?"

Raanu turned to face her, his body almost shaking with barely contained rage.

"I am the leader of this village! These people have placed their trust in me, and I will do what I think is best. I owe it to them to let them fight and die standing straight and tall like Agori, not slinking away into the night like rock jackals. If you don't want to help, get back on your animal and leave our village."

Before Kiina could answer, the muffled sound of sand stalker hoofbeats came from behind her. She drew her weapon and spun, ready for a bone hunter attack. To her relief, it was just Ackar and Gelu riding in. Both they and their mounts looked exhausted.

"We slowed them down," Gelu reported, "with a little help from Malum."

"Malum?" Raanu said. There was both surprise and contempt in his voice.



"Yeah," Gelu said, leaping down from his beast. "He's a little weird ... make that, a lot weird ... but he came through for you when it counted."

"It's good to see you, Kiina," said Ackar. He dismounted and handed his sand stalker off to an Agori, who would give it food and water.

"I wish I could say the same," she answered. "Why are you telling these people they can save their village? You know what bone hunters can do."

"Yes, I do," said Ackar. "But if we run from them, what do we do when the Skrall come? We might as well all lay down our weapons now, kneel down, and wait for them to take our heads off."

Ackar reached out and took her hand. "I know you don't think much of Bara Magna," he said, a little more gently. "But it's the only world we have. I'm not going to let scum like the bone hunters have it without a fight."

"And the fight's coming," Gelu added. "They're maybe a day's ride away, more if they're worried enough about more Vorox attacks. They were moving pretty slow when we started back."

"They have no need to rush," Ackar observed. "Vulcanus isn't going anywhere."

"Well, if we want to keep it that way, we'd better get to work," said Gelu.

Hours passed as the Glatorian helped the Agori strengthen the village's defenses. After standing aside and watching for a while, Kiina finally shrugged her shoulders and pitched in. When Ackar thanked her, she said, "Save it. I'm only doing this because maybe

the fight here will cut down the bone hunter numbers enough that they'll leave Tajun alone for a while. Not because I think we have any hope of winning."

"Your optimism is a joy to behold," muttered Gelu.

"Riders!" shouted an Agori guard.

The three Glatorian rushed to the western walls. Gresh was on his way in, riding alongside an Iconox Glatorian named Strakk and a few others from Tesara that no one recognized. Ackar guessed they were apprentices.

Gelu pulled Gresh aside as soon as he was off his stalker. "You got Strakk to come? How did you manage that?"

"I told him Vulcanus is sitting on top of a fortune in high quality exsidian," Gresh whispered. "And that we get to divvy it up among ourselves if we beat the bone hunters."

"What? They haven't had exsidian in Vulcanus in 15,000 years at least," Gelu said. "Everyone knows that."

"Everyone but Strakk," Gresh smiled. "You know him, he won't pick up a sword unless there's a reward involved. So I let him think there was one."

"What happens when he finds out Vulcanus is sitting on top of nothing but sand and rock?"

Gresh ran a finger along the edge of his shield, testing its sharpness. When he was satisfied, he looked at Gelu and said, "If we live long enough for that to happen ... I'll worry about it then."



MATA NUI'S DIARY

ENTRY SIX

My first view of the "work" of the Skrall was when Ackar, Kiina and I arrived in Tajun. I have seen entire worlds devastated by war before, but this was something different. The Agori did not choose this fight. It was forced upon them by the greed and ambition of Skrall and bone hunters. And ... perhaps it makes a difference to see a battle from in the midst of it, rather than from the great distances I have known before. I saw the young Glatorian, Gresh, badly wounded; saw the shelters burning; and realized that the water tribes had just had their lives shattered as surely as their planet once had been.

I have experienced many new emotions since coming to Bara Magna. Oh, the Great Beings gave me the capacity to feel when they created me, but I was always so far removed from everything around me that I had no reason to experience emotion. Now I have known fear, facing the Vorox ... friendship, with Ackar and Kiina ... and now, anger and hatred at the senseless violence I see all about me.

The Skrall do not realize it, but in a strange way, they have done me a favor. I have wrestled with the choice before me – whether to leave Bara Magna as quickly as possible to go and save my universe, or to stay and help these people. Now I know what I must do. What the Skrall did today must be avenged.

Kiina pointed out Tuma, leader of the Skrall, to me as he walked amid the carnage. He is tall, strong, and obviously filled with enormous confidence. He shows no sign of regret for what his soldiers have done here, only pride and satisfaction. He reminds me of someone else I have known, an enemy I still must bring down. I think I will enjoy bringing this Tuma to face Agori justice one day.

In the meantime, there is work to be done. Kiina says there is a place we can go to where Gresh will be safe. It is the same cavern she spoke of, filled with ancient technology and strange inscriptions. I have a hunch that I am about to discover I am not so very far from home as I thought.

TUMU



Tuma is the leader of the Skrall in Roxtus and the would-be conqueror of Bara Magna. He is a member of the Leader class of the Skrall race, the highest of the four strata in that society. As such, he is taller and stronger than a normal Skrall warrior and has spent virtually his entire life as a ruler.

Arrogant, cunning, and extremely powerful, Tuma appears to outsiders like just a brute. But he is actually a skilled strategist who is willing to take the time to assess an enemy and the battlefield before committing his legions. He knows he is the last of the Leader-class Skrall still alive on Bara Magna, and takes the responsibility for guiding his people to conquest very seriously.

Following the Shattering, Tuma led a large troop of warriors and rock tribe Agori into the Black Spike Mountains. There, they built a series of fortresses and created an empire of their own. They thrived there for many thousands of years, until the coming of the baterra. These shapeshifting machines struck at the Skrall again and again, eventually cutting them off from sources of supply. While planning a last-ditch defense, Tuma was stunned to see a Skrall wagon carrying a load of wood into the fortress. The "wood" turned out to be disguised baterra, and the garrison promptly found itself under attack.

The battle went badly for the Skrall. They were forced to desert their fortress along with some rock tribe Agori and travel south. They arrived at the border of the Bara Magna desert and found the abandoned city of Roxtus. Tuma ordered the city to be occupied and fortified.

I am sure you remember the fate of the last patrol that failed me.



Even with this new base, he was not content. He knew the baterra would come again, and Tuma was determined to be prepared for them. He believed that the best strategy would be to seize as much of the desert as possible and force the baterra to move across a vast territory with no cover. This would allow the Skrall armies room to maneuver and trap their enemies. Tuma immediately began laying plans for an attack on the other Agori villages.

The Skrall spent a year learning the strengths and weaknesses of their future foes. Tuma's plans were aided by the arrival of a traitor from one of the villages, who sold him information on caravan routes. Later, the traitor indicated that he had knowledge of how to kill baterra, and offered that in exchange for an equal partnership with Tuma. The traitor also served as a negotiator between the Skrall and the bone hunters, helping to forge an alliance between those two groups.

Upon learning the baterra were closing in on Roxtus, Tuma launched an attack on Atero, followed by another on Tajun. His plan was to sweep north, seize Tesara and Iconox, and then force Vulcanus to surrender (since all food and water supplies to the village would then be cut off). His plans were frustrated, however, when he was defeated in single combat by Mata Nui. Roxtus was then hit by the surprise attack of a Glatorian army, which shattered the Skrall legions and forced them to flee into the desert. The final fate of Tuma remains unknown.

Tuma wears spiked armor and carries a huge sword.





STRONIUS

Stronius is an elite Skrall warrior, one of the select few members of the legions to have a name, and right-hand man to Tuma. He is brutal, violent, and lacks the patience his leader has. The period of inactivity while waiting to attack the villages of Bara Magna annoyed him, to the point that he began wandering the desert, attacking and robbing any Glatorian he ran across.

He earned his favored status during the Core War. As the commander of a Skrall patrol, he ambushed a much larger force of jungle tribe warriors and wiped them out. Later, at the head of a legion, he routed the ice tribe's forces from the Black Spike Mountains. This had the unintended consequence of giving the fire forces a chance to smash the ice tribe's northern flank and seize control of the spring. Shortly after that, efforts by the Element Lord of Fire to tap the power of the spring led to the Shattering.

Following that, Stronius spearheaded efforts by the Skrall to carve out a new realm in the Black Spikes. He drove the more dangerous wildlife away and captured stragglers from other tribes and forced them to labor on the construction of fortresses. He also handled any disciplinary problems within the legions without mercy. (It was Stronius who first came up with the idea of "Spikit feeding duty" as a punishment for failure.)

Since the Skrall moved south and inhabited Roxtus, Stronius was frustrated by what he saw as excessive caution on the part of Tuma. He advocated striking quickly and seizing all the villages at once. But following the disastrous defeat by the baterra, Tuma was determined to



be certain what he was facing before ordering an attack. Most importantly, he wanted to see if the villages would be able to form a united defense or not.

Wishing to move things along, Stronius led his own squad out into the desert for purposes of sabotage. He ordered the theft of resources and the sabotage of equipment, always careful to leave clues pointing to another village. All of this was intended to promote distrust among the Agori, and to an extent, it worked. But the

memories of the Core War were so strong that the Agori resisted actually going to war with each other. When Tuma found out what Stronius was doing, he ordered him punished in a particu-

larly painful and nasty way. Tuma's reasoning was simple: his plan called for a surprise attack, and Stronius had put that at risk by using Skrall for sabotage.

By the time of the attack on Atero, Stronius had returned to Tuma's good favor. But the two did clash over the use of the traitor's information. Stronius felt that anyone who would betray his own people could not be trusted.

Tiring of Stronius' constant complaints about the situation, Tuma did not share with him the "partnership" formed with the traitor. This would prove to be a mistake, as the later revelation would shock the Skrall at the worst possible time.

Stronius' whereabouts after the battle of Roxtus remain unknown. Some believe he may have escaped with Tuma and be hiding in the Black Spikes, plotting revenge on Mata Nui and the Glatorian.

Stronius carries a club studded with metallic thorns and a Thornax launcher.

*Your service to Roxtus
will be remembered forever
... on your memorial stone.*





FERO & SKIRTMIX

Fero is a bone hunter, one of many who stalk the sands of Bara Magna. Skirmix is his fierce rock steed. Together, they are a fearsome force of the desert.

Bone hunters are related to the rock tribe Agori, but broke off from them many thousands of years ago. Where the rock tribe lives in villages or cities, bone hunters are nomads with no fixed settlements. They prefer not to be a part of any social system, and live as thieves and raiders in the wastelands. Their lack of organization and unwillingness to form alliances has been the only thing that has kept them from being a truly major threat in the past.

That changed in recent months, when a traitor to the Agori made contact with Fero's band about an alliance with the Skrall. After some hesitation, the bone hunters agreed. Their first act was to increase their trade in kidnapped Agori, Glatorian and Vorox, capturing any they could find and selling them to the Skrall. They also launched raids against Tajun trade caravans and Vulcanus based on information provided to them by the traitor and the Skrall.

Fero led the raid on Vulcanus, but was also responsible in large part for its failure. During a fight with Gelu in the desert, Fero lost the chart that showed the bone hunters' target. Forewarned, the Glatorian prepared a defense. The Skrall then leaked the bone hunter plans to attack through Iron Canyon as a way to test both the Glatorian defenses and the bone hunters' skills. The Glatorian ambushed the bone hunters



in the canyon, but the bone hunters slipped away and attacked again through the Sea of Liquid Sand. They were again defeated, losing a number of warriors in the battle.

Despite this setback, the Skrall made use of Fero and the bone hunters in their attack on Tajun. The bone hunters did not stay long at the battle of Roxtus, seeing that the tide had turned against the Skrall and preferring to keep out of the conflict. Fero and the others returned to the wastelands, where they remain, living much as they had before. Ackar is planning an organized Glatorian expedition to drive them from the desert.

While Fero is only one bone hunter, he is a good example of the race. To him, what he does is a matter of both survival and sport. He enjoys pitting his skills against opponents and looks forward to rematches with Glatorian or Agori who have escaped him before. He is a master tactician, perfectly willing to use tricks and ambushes to win. He also understands the need to be at least equal in power to an opposing force, and preferably to outnumber them, before attacking. A lone Agori or Glatorian in the desert is, as far as Fero is concerned, too stupid to be allowed to live – after all, anyone with any sense knows the desert is full of bone hunters just looking for new victims.

Bone hunters carry a variety of weapons, but the most common are swords and Thornax launchers. While they can ride sand stalkers, they prefer rock steeds, which are better in combat.

Hunt's over. You lose.





SKOPIO ATTACK

"I don't like this," said Ackar. "It's the perfect place for an ambush."

The dune chariot had reached the mouth of the canyon. Places like this made the red-armored Glatorian wary. It hadn't been that long ago that he had helped set up an intricate series of traps in Iron Canyon for a bone hunter raiding party. All the skill of the bandits had helped them not at all in a place where they were stuck on a narrow path, being picked off by Glatorian hidden among the rocks above.

"Please," said Kiina. "Even bone hunters aren't stupid enough to take on three Glatorian."

This, of course, was a lie, and she knew it. Give them the element of surprise on their side and bone hunters would dare pretty much anything. But she didn't want Mata Nui to get nervous and decide he wanted off this ride.

Ackar knew exactly what she was doing, and he wasn't planning to let her get away with it. He owed Mata Nui. If they were going to expose him to danger, he had a right to know what kind and how nasty things were likely to get.

"They're getting bolder," he said to Kiina. There was an edge in his voice that said, Watch it, I'm on to you. "Skrall, too. In the past few months, they've seemed to know our every move before we make it."

"True," Kiina conceded. "But don't worry. It's not like we've got much worth stealing. Well ... maybe Mata Nui does."

The scarabax beetle sitting on Mata Nui's shoulder clicked its pincers in enthusiastic agreement.

"I was talking about his blade, bug face," Kiina snapped at the beetle. Then, as if suddenly realizing the situation, she shook her head, saying, "I can't believe I'm talking to an insect."

Mata Nui did not crack a smile. His mind was on Ackar's last words. "In my experience, when an enemy knows too much, it can only mean one thing ... you have a traitor on your hands."

Ackar nodded. "I was thinking the same thing. But who?"

A low rumbling sound filled the air. The ground beneath the chariot began to shake violently. Then the rumbling became a roar as, up ahead, the earth buckled and heaved.

"I think we have a bigger problem!" Kiina yelled.

The ground exploded. A massive crimson creature rose up on four great legs and let out an ear-splitting roar. Mata Nui had never seen anything like it. It was at least 40 feet tall, part organic and part machine. Its legs sported massive treads and ended in vicious claws. Sharp pincers extended from both sides of its jagged mouth. When it took a step, the earth shook – and the chariot was headed straight for it.

"Skopio!" shouted Ackar. He had seen this creature once before, from a distance. Getting this close to one was something he could have lived without.

"We should turn back," said Mata Nui.

"Can't," Ackar said, pointing behind the chariot. "They're even deadlier."

Mata Nui turned. A group of black-armored riders mounted on reptilian creatures were riding across the sands in pursuit of the



chariot. Each held a sword aloft in the air and shouted war cries as they rode.

"What are they?" asked Mata Nui.

"Bone hunters," Ackar answered, "and a lot of them."

"My village – there's another Glatorian there," said Kiina, leaning forward in the driver's seat. "We just have to make it through!"

Kiina turned the wheel and aimed the chariot at a narrow gap between the Skopio's left foreleg and the canyon wall. The creature's eyes narrowed and it whipped its leg to the side, blocking the vehicle. Kiina yanked on the wheel, sending the chariot into skid right in front of the beast.

"Hang on tight!" yelled Kiina.

The Skopio slammed its right foreleg into the sand, just missing the chariot. Kiina drove it up the side of the canyon wall, heading away from the monster and toward the bone hunters. The beast swung again and missed. Kiina vaulted the chariot off the wall and over a dune. But she wasn't quite fast enough. The Skopio landed a glancing blow, sending the chariot tumbling end over end and hurling the three occupants onto the sand.

Ackar and Mata Nui were on their feet first, weapons drawn, facing the oncoming bone hunters. "Help Kiina," Mata Nui said to Ackar. "I'll draw the beast away from you."

"Good luck," said Ackar, dropping into a crouch to await the first attacker.

Mata Nui glanced down at Click. "Are you ready?"

The beetle snapped its pincers together in response. Then there was a bright flash as it transformed once more into a mighty shield.

Mata Nui charged toward the Skopio.

Behind him, Ackar and Kiina were locked in battle. Kiina parried a mounted bone hunter's sword with her staff, looking for an opening. When she saw the hunter drop his guard, she struck, landing a solid blow with her weapon and hurling him from his rock steed. Two more bone hunters closed in then. Kiina moved like quicksilver, blocking strikes and using sweeping kicks to keep her enemies off-balance.

Nearby, Ackar was having no easier time of it. *Fighting mounted warriors on foot is a losing game*, he thought. *So it's time to even the odds a little.*

A bone hunter rode down on him, sword flashing in the sunlight. Ackar blocked the hunter's blade with his own. As the bone hunter drew back to strike again, Ackar launched himself into the air and landed a solid kick, knocking the bone hunter out of the saddle. The Glatorian landed atop the rock steed and urged it forward.

Up ahead, Kiina was hard pressed in a fight against a bigger, stronger bone hunter. Ackar rode toward her, battling two hunters who were flanking him as he went. As soon as he drew close to the canyon wall, he hurled himself from the saddle, somersaulting in the air once, twice, three times. He came out of the move feet first, slamming into Kiina's opponent and knocking him senseless. Now Kiina and Ackar stood back to back as the bone hunters closed in.

Mata Nui was having problems of his own with the Skopio. Its attention was now fully focused on him, which was what he wanted.

Its blows were coming dangerously close to landing, though, and one thing Mata Nui had learned about his new body was that it did grow tired. If he slowed down even a step, the Skopio would finish him.

The great beast, meanwhile, was growing impatient to crush this golden-armored pest. The Skopio concentrated, mentally triggering the mechanical Thornax launcher built into it ages ago. With a hiss of hydraulics and a metallic hum, the launcher rose from the creature's back and locked into place. Taking aim at Mata Nui, the Skopio fired.

Mata Nui couldn't believe his eyes for an instant. That delay almost cost him his life, as he just barely got his shield up in time to take the brunt of the blast. Even with that protection, he was still knocked off his feet. The Skopio advanced, lifting a clawed leg into the air, ready to crush him. Mata Nui scrambled to his feet. He leapt aside to dodge the blow, wheeling in the air and landing on his feet.

He turned at the sound of Kiina's voice. "Ackar!" she said. "We're finished unless we can make it to my village."

"Try and get to the chariot," Mata Nui yelled to the two Glatorian. "I have an idea."

This time, when the Skopio swung a leg at him, Mata Nui didn't try to move aside. Instead, he jumped into the air and grabbed onto the leg. As the Skopio drew its limb back, Mata Nui was pulled high into the air. When he was at the same level as the monster's head, Mata Nui flipped off the leg and landed on the Skopio's back.

It took Mata Nui only a moment to figure out the controls for the mounted Thornax

launcher. Aiming at the bone hunters menacing Ackar and Kiina, he fired. The blast scattered the hunters like grains of sand before a fierce wind. Ackar and Kiina took advantage of the opening to run for the chariot. Bone hunters who pursued them were met by another devastating Thornax blast, courtesy of Mata Nui.

Angered by its unwanted rider, the Skopio whipped its stinger tail forward, knocking Mata Nui off his perch. He twisted in mid-air and managed to land on his feet on a high ledge. Down below, Ackar and Kiina had reached the vehicle and were speeding toward the Skopio, hoping to slip underneath the creature. Mounted bone hunters were galloping close behind.

Mata Nui drew his sword and plunged it into the rock on which he stood. The power of the blade split the stone, with half of it tumbling down the mountainside. It struck other boulders, sending them careening down in a huge rockslide.

Kiina heard the sound of the avalanche and saw the first rocks strike the sand up ahead. "This is going to be close!" she yelled to Ackar, as she pushed the chariot to full speed. The metal frame of the vehicle shook violently, bolts snapping off and flying in every direction. She gripped the wheel so tight it felt like she would pulverize it.

Spotting a gap barely large enough for the chariot, Kiina aimed right for it. The vehicle shot through it and onto open sand just as the rain of rock brought the Skopio down with a tremendous crash. The bone hunters weren't so lucky – they were under the creature as it fell, buried beneath its body and a ton of rock.



As they neared the mouth of the canyon, Kiina allowed herself a relieved sigh. Then she suddenly realized someone was missing. "Hey, where -?"

Ackar pointed off the east. "There!"

Kiina saw him now, too. Mata Nui was surfing down the side of a mountain on his shield, vaulting over outcroppings as if he had been doing this all his life. Then he was in the air, spinning and somersaulting, before landing on the hood of the chariot.

Ackar laughed. "Gutsiest move I've ever seen."

"Woo-hoo! Those bone hunters are going to be eating Skopio belly for weeks," Kiina said, smiling broadly. "Not bad, other worlder."

Ackar's grin abruptly vanished from his face. He laid a hand on Kiina's arm, as if to steady her against a shock. She glanced at him, then up ahead - and that's when she saw it.

A plume of black smoke rose from the nearby oasis. Through that cloud of ash and soot, fires could be seen raging beyond. Kiina could hear the sound of shelters collapsing, sand stalkers screeching in fear and pain, and something even more chilling: the war cries of Skrall.

Tajun was burning.

By the time the trio reached the village, it was too late. The once proud village of Tajun was a pile of ashes, or soon would be. Kiina stood in the middle of the chaos, looking around desperately, stricken with grief.

"Looks like the Agori got away," said Ackar. "A daylight raid ... one of their sentries must have spotted the attackers in time."

"The village ... our homes ... this is my fault! I should have been here to help. Where's Tarix? And Gresh? We had a training session scheduled for today. He's just a rookie. He wouldn't be prepared for -"

Gresh was a young Glatorian from the jungle village of Tesara. Although new to the sport, he was highly skilled and had been fast gaining a reputation as a potential champion. But not even a veteran Glatorian could win against a Skrall war party.

"There!" yelled Ackar, pointing to the western side of the village.

Gresh staggered out of the smoke, clutching his shoulder. His armor was battered and one arm hung limply at his side.

"He's hurt!" said Kiina. She, Ackar and Mata Nui rushed to his side.

"Easy, son," said Ackar, reaching out to support him.

Gresh pushed them away. "I'm fine. I'll be fine," he said, his voice weak. Then his face contorted and he grabbed at his injured shoulder. His knees buckled and only fast action by Ackar and Mata Nui kept him from collapsing.

"Just shut up and let us help you," growled Ackar.

"We need to get him out of sight," said Mata Nui. "Kiina, your cavern -"

"Right," said Kiina. "The entrance is this way."

The party made its way through the thick smoke, moving as quickly as they could

with the injured Gresh in tow. The young Glatorian, gasping for breath, was still trying to talk.

"Stay quiet," said Mata Nui. "We will have you to a place of safety soon."

"No," Gresh answered. "You don't understand ... Skrall and bone hunters ... they're working together."

"Impossible," replied Ackar. "They're rival tribes. Neither allies with anyone, least of all each other."

Gresh grabbed Ackar's arm. "No! I watched them destroy our village ... I ..." His eyes went wide for an instant, then suddenly closed. He sagged in Ackar's arms.

"Gresh!" said Kiina. "He isn't ...?"

"Still alive," Ackar reassured her.

"But not for long, if that savage sees us," Mata Nui said.

The others turned at his words. Moving through the smoke was a giant of a being, a warrior clad in black and green armor and carrying a huge sword. Kiina had seen him only once before, but it was impossible to forget the sight.

"Tuma," she breathed. "Leader of the Skrall."

Now more figures appeared behind him, a combination of Skrall warriors on foot and mounted bone hunters. Kiina felt sick. This was every Agori's worst nightmare, coming true before her eyes.

"The boy was telling the truth," said Ackar quietly. "The bone hunters have joined forces with the Skrall."

Kiina pushed on a jutting piece of stone and a portion of the rock wall slid open. The

group rushed inside and she shut it behind them. "They won't find us in here."

She led her friends down a gently sloping tunnel. The stone walls were marked with strange glyphs and symbols, carved with care in some ancient time. Mata Nui found that, despite the urgency of their situation, he could not take his eyes off them.

"Wait," he said. "These glyphs ... I ..."

"Later," snapped Kiina. "First we have to take care of Gresh. The cavern is just ahead."

The tunnel opened onto a massive cave. The first thing that was obvious to all was that this was no natural formation. Huge, opaque marble obelisks dominated the center of the space, illuminating a central area. Six entrances opened on to what looked like miniature ecosystems.

It looks like a ... place of creation, thought Mata Nui. A lab, perhaps? But why create six environments in this place? For what purpose? If it was some test ... what were they testing?

As they moved further in, Mata Nui saw more evidence of his theory. Tables made of stone were scattered about, covered with tools and machine parts. Someone had been working here, and perhaps not so long ago – he noted the disturbances in the ancient dust.

Kiina gestured to one of the tables. "Lay him down over here."

Ackar and Mata lay the still form of Gresh on the table. His breathing was steady, but one arm was badly injured. Mata Nui felt helpless. He knew nothing about how to care for another being. He wasn't even certain how serious the damage to Gresh might be –



would he die from this wound? Or was this the kind of injury Glatorian received in the arena all the time? He guessed not, given how worried Kiina appeared to be.

The keen ears of Ackar picked up a sound from the shadows. He drew his sword in a flash, saying, "Show yourself. Now!"

There was a long moment of stillness and silence. Then a villager clad in blue armor stepped into the light. He was short and his body seemed to be in constant nervous motion. He held his hands out defensively, looking from Ackar to Kiina and back again.

"Okay, okay, relax," the Agori villager said. "Everything's okay. It's just me – Berix."

Now Kiina had her trident in hand, pointing at Berix. Her features were tight with anger. "You filthy little thief! I told you if I ever caught you down here again, I'd –"

Berix ducked behind Mata Nui's legs. "This place doesn't belong to you. And I'm no thief – I'm a collector." He glanced up at Mata Nui then, noticing his "protector" for the first time. "Ooh ... like your mask. Can I have it?"

The villager reached up to touch the Mask of Life. But before his fingers could make contact, Berix spotted Kiina rushing toward him. He withdrew his hand quickly, as if the mask might bite him.

"Come here, you!" snapped Kiina.

Berix sidestepped, keeping Mata Nui between him and the enraged Glatorian. "I have a right to collect anything I want. It's just so much junk anyway."

"Then why do you want it?" asked Kiina.

"'Cause I like fixing things, and I'm real good at it too," said Berix. He gestured at the

lights on the ceiling. "Who do you think got those lights working?"

"I was wondering about that ..." Kiina grumbled.

Berix looked up at Mata Nui again. Spotting the scarabax perched on the warrior's shoulder, he took a step back. "Hey, you've got a –"

"He knows!" Kiina and Ackar said in unison.

There was too much anger in this chamber, Mata Nui decided. It wasn't helping Gresh or anyone else. "Berix, have you ever fixed an injured Glatorian?"

"Oh, no," Kiina said immediately. "No way. He's not touching Gresh."

"The boy needs help, Kiina," Ackar said quietly.

Kiina started to say something, then stopped. Slowly, the tension left her body. Ackar was right, she knew. Gresh was in a bad shape and it was beyond her abilities to heal him.

Berix gestured to his own battered armor. "Well, I've had to patch myself up a few times."

"Right," said Kiina. "Like every time you've been pounded on for stealing."

Berix moved to the table to take a look at Gresh, but couldn't resist snapping back. "Collecting. Maybe you should let me work on your ears next, Kiina."

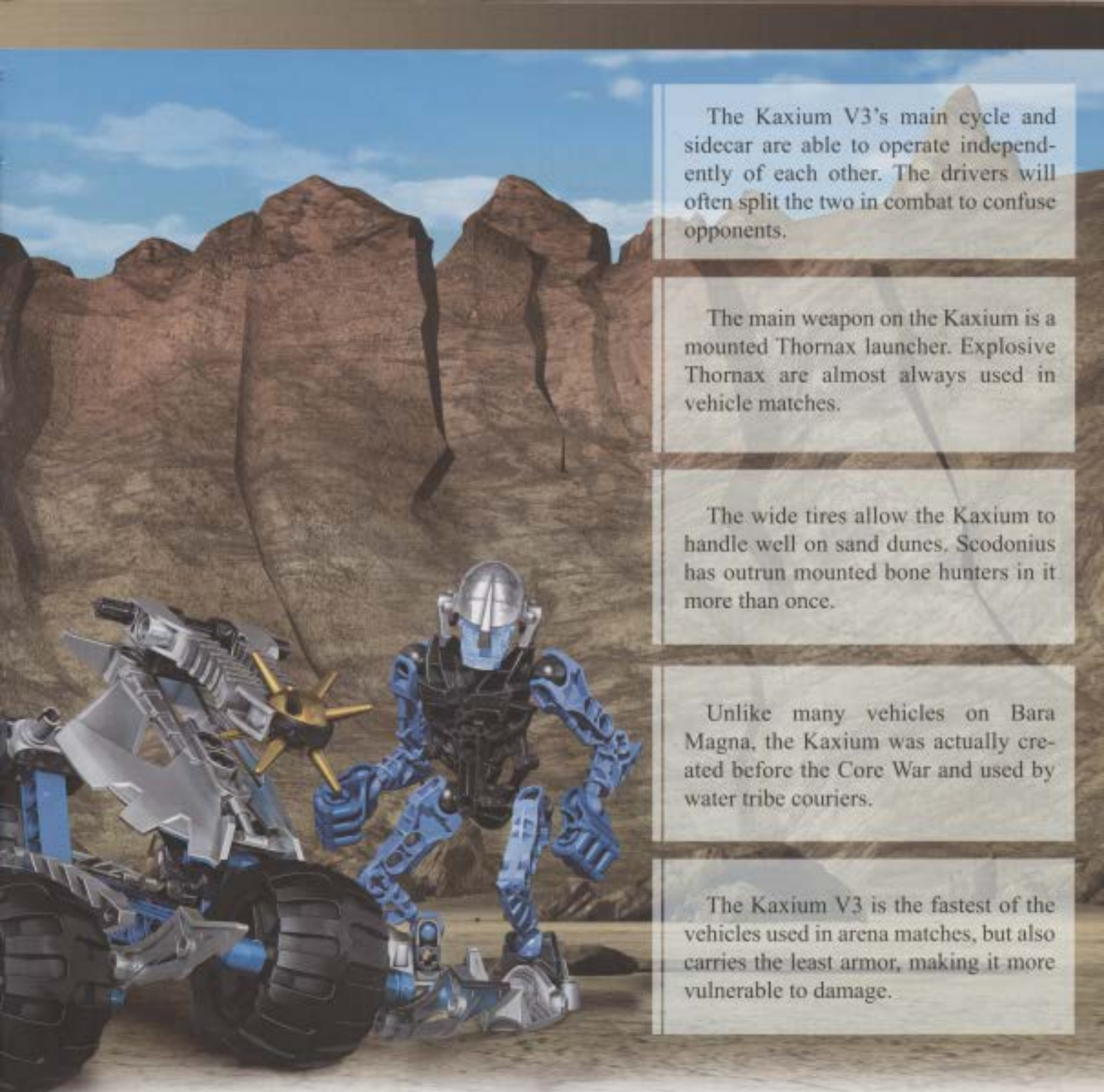


SCODONIUS AND KIRBRAZ

Scodonius and Kirbraz are two Agori of the water tribe, best known as the drivers of the Kaxium V3. Their success in the arena has led to both of them becoming arrogant, and neither is very popular in other villages.

When Kirbraz was injured a few months ago, Berix offered to take his place. Scodonius agreed, though only as a joke, and made things so difficult for the Agori scavenger that Berix quit.

When Tarduk was mounting his expedition to the north in search of the secrets of the Great Beings, he briefly considered asking Scodonius to come along. He almost immediately dismissed Scodonius as a "creep," and decided to go without him. Scodonius and Kirbraz later narrowly escaped capture by the Skrall while training in the desert outside of Tajun.



The Kaxium V3's main cycle and sidecar are able to operate independently of each other. The drivers will often split the two in combat to confuse opponents.

The main weapon on the Kaxium is a mounted Thornax launcher. Explosive Thornax are almost always used in vehicle matches.

The wide tires allow the Kaxium to handle well on sand dunes. Scodonius has outrun mounted bone hunters in it more than once.

Unlike many vehicles on Bara Magna, the Kaxium was actually created before the Core War and used by water tribe couriers.

The Kaxium V3 is the fastest of the vehicles used in arena matches, but also carries the least armor, making it more vulnerable to damage.

KAXIUM V3

A powerful cycle equipped with sidecar, the Kaxium V3 played a crucial role for Tajun in the Core War. With enemy armies all around and vast expanses of desert to cover, the water tribe needed a vehicle that could be used for rapid scouting. They adapted a courier vehicle, the Kaxium V2, adding weaponry and thin armor, and christened it the Kaxium V3.

Designed for speed more than power, the Kaxium has still managed to win more than its share of matches in the arena. Its major asset is

maneuverability. Other arena vehicles simply can't stop or turn fast enough to keep up with the cycle. While they are trying to get into position, Thornax launched from the Kaxium have damaged the opposing vehicle.

Scodonius and Kirbraz escaped Tajun with the Kaxium V3 during the Skrall attack. They later piloted the vehicle in the attack on Roxtus, using it to drive retreating Skrall back into the Black Spikes. After the battle, Berix did some badly needed repair work on it and Scodonius apologized for his earlier treatment. Berix is now considered the third member of the Kaxium V3 team.

The front blades of the Cendox V1 are plated with exsidian, to enable them to resist corrosion. In addition to allowing for smooth running through sand, they are sharpened and can tear great gashes in opposing vehicles.

The Cendox is equipped with powerful boosters that can provide short bursts of great speed. These are Crotesius' favorite feature, because they help him outdistance pursuit in the desert.

The mounted Thornax launcher is usually used for non-explosive Thornax. Crotesius prefers to damage an opposing vehicle and slow it down without disabling it, then finish it off with the blades.



CROTESIUS

This fire tribe Agori from Vulcanus is known for being headstrong, bold, and daring, both in and out of the arena. He is a champion vehicle driver and intends to hold on to that title, and so is always looking for new weapons or sources of power for his Cendox V1.

When Tarduk discovered a fragment of a map with a mysterious red star image inscribed upon it, he hinted to Crotesius there might be something valuable to the north. Crotesius, intrigued, offered to trade for the map. Tarduk agreed, asking in return that Crotesius go with him on a

journey into the Black Spike Mountains in search of the "red star." Crotesius agreed, providing Tarduk recruit more Agori and keep them in the dark about why they were going.

On the journey, Crotesius proved his worth more than once. He talked Tarduk out of charging into a pack of iron wolves and led the fight to escape the Forest of Blades. By the time the group reached the arch on the River Dormus, though, Crotesius had had enough and wanted to go back to Vulcanus. The arch granted his wish and he found himself back home. He did not accompany Tarduk on his second expedition.



Rear tracks make it easy for the Cendox to operate in all kinds of terrain. These were badly damaged when the vehicle was first recovered and repaired by Berix, then later damaged again by a Kaxium V3 Thornax.

Crotesius and the Cendox V1 won in the vehicle division in last year's Arena Magna tournament in Atero, and was favored to repeat before the Skrall destroyed the arena.

"Cendox" is an Agori word, meaning "serpent strike." The original name of the vehicle, if it had one, is unknown. Crotesius gave it the name it has now.

CENDOX V1

Crotesius discovered the Cendox V1 half-buried in sand near some ruins to the north of Vulcanus. Reluctant to share his find with anyone else in the fire tribe, he hired a water Agori, Berix, to help him dig it up and repair it. Amazingly, it still worked, though Crotesius never has figured out what powers the vehicle.

The Cendox V1 is armed with front blades and a Thornax launcher. While not as fast as the Kaxium V3, it is more heavily armored. It was originally built by the fire tribe during the Core War, and was one of many. Most of these were

lost in battle prior to the Shattering. It is possible there are others buried deep in the sand in the same area where Crotesius found this one.

The Cendox is powerful for its size, but its attacks depend on facing an opponent head-on. In battle, Crotesius uses the boosters to accelerate in turns, so that the sides of the Cendox are not exposed to enemy attack any longer than necessary. One of Crotesius' favorite tricks in the arena is to hook an opposing vehicle with the front blades, then pull back on the stick, kick in the boosters, and hurl the other vehicle through the air.

Although heavily armored, the Baranus V7 has the distinction of being virtually weaponless, a unique situation on Bara Magna. It does have mounted blades, but does not carry a Thornax launcher.

Sahmad is armed with a whip and a Thornax launcher. He prefers to fight up close, using his whip to entangle opponents and the threat of his launcher to make them surrender.



SAHMAD

Sahmad is an Agori spoken of with dread in every village of Bara Magna. He is not a member of one of the six tribes present in the desert, but rather of a “lost tribe” from the time before the Shattering. Virtually all of Sahmad’s tribe was wiped out by a plague 103,000 years ago, and the few survivors found themselves ostracized (other villages believed they might be disease carriers and refused them admittance). As a result, those who had escaped the plague made new lives in the wilderness and nursed a terrible hatred of all other Agori.

In the case of Sahmad, he salvaged a Baranus battle wagon left over from the Core War and became a desert bandit. He did this for many millennia, until the coming of the Skrall. Since Sahmad operated mainly in the northern regions now claimed as Skrall territory, he needed to move or find a new line of work. He chose to give up being a thief and become a slaver, capturing Agori in the desert and selling them to the Skrall. Now and then, for fun, he would ride into a village and challenge a Glatorian in the arena – if the Glatorian won, the village would get his latest captives back.

The two-headed Spikit are used as work animals in many villages, due to their size and strength. As long as they are kept well fed, Spikit are reliable, but when hungry, they become extremely dangerous.

Sahmad is normally found between the Black Spike Mountains and the Vulcanus region. Exactly where in the desert he lives remains unknown, although some believe he finds shelter in Roptus.

One of Sahmad's most bitter enemies is Fero. Since both he and the bone hunters capture Agori in the desert, Sahmad has had a number of clashes with the roving bandits.

The village of Leonox has a reward for 100 pounds of exsidian for the capture of Sahmad. Strakk made an attempt to earn it, but was not able to track the Agori down.



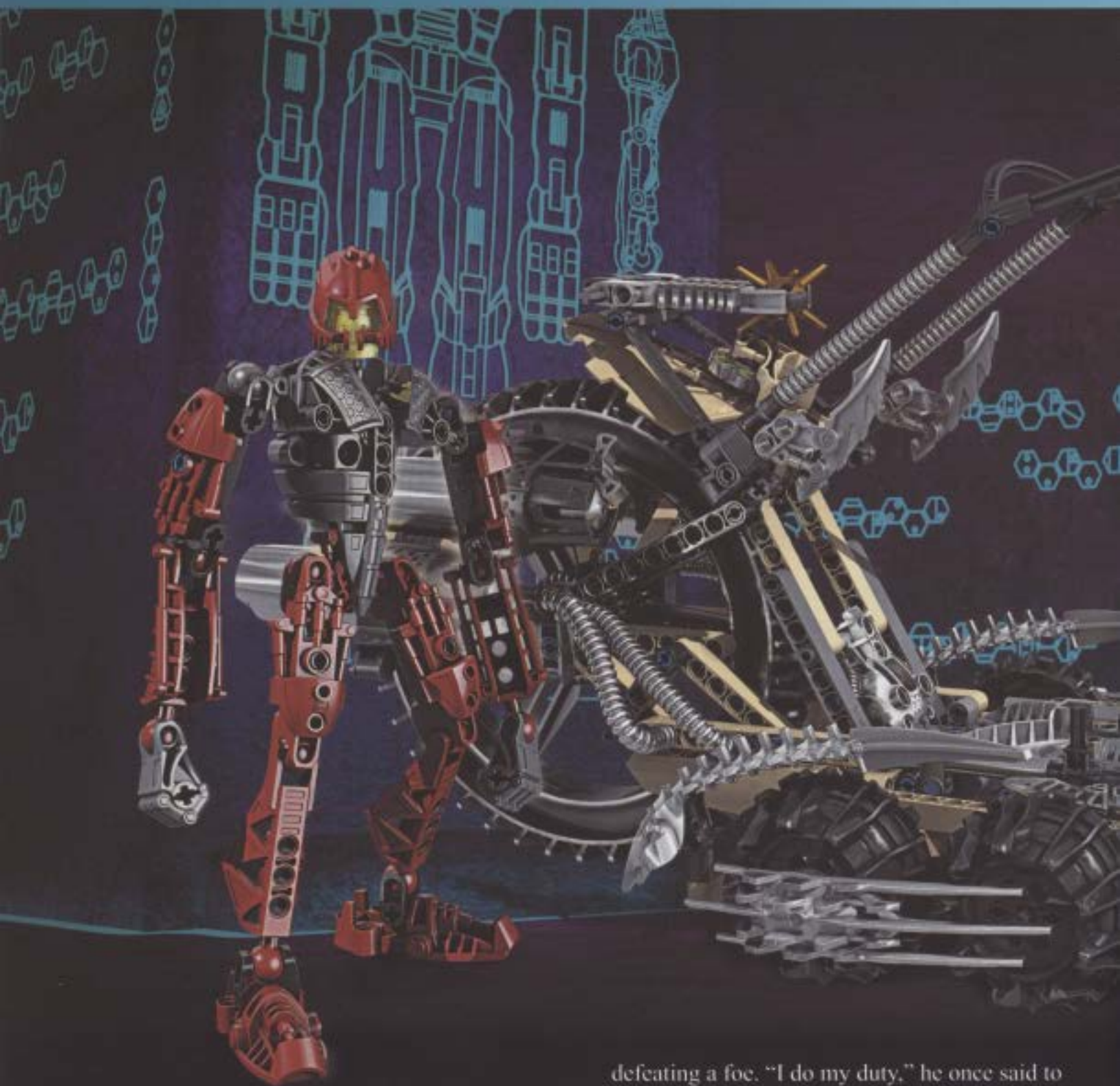
BARANUS V7

The Baranus wagon was built during the Core War by rock Agori and used to transport weapons and supplies to the front lines of battle. Being unarmed, many of the wagons did not make it back in one piece. Most of the ones that survived in the Bara Magna region were destroyed by the baterra during their battles with the Skrall legions. Sahmad's is one of the few still in use in the desert.

These wagons were originally not intended to be pulled by the unpredictable Spikit. They were built to be used with sand stalkers, which are

much faster than Spikit. But as time passed, the more powerful creatures were chosen to replace the sand stalkers, as the Spikit's fierce nature made it an excellent means of defense. Sahmad's Spikit is experienced at battling rock steeds, making it of great use during his battles with bone hunters.

The Baranus is large enough to carry only a driver. In the past, cargo sleds were attached to the back to carry supplies. Sahmad occasionally uses these to haul captured Agori back to his hidden base.




PERDITUS

A former Second Glatorian in Vulcanus, Perditus gave up that prestigious position to return to his roots as a vehicle pilot. During the Core War, Perditus designed the heavily armed Thornatus V9 and rode it into battle. He became something of a legend among his foes, using his vehicle to shatter lines of troops.

Unlike many Glatorian, Perditus does not boast or brag about his victories in the war or in the arena. He seems to take little pleasure in

defeating a foe. "I do my duty," he once said to Ackar, "and I do it the best I can. That doesn't mean I have to enjoy it." He fights out of a sense of responsibility and obligation to his village, and if he does take pride in his creation or his record, he rarely shows it.

After Malum's exile, Raanu pleaded with Perditus to take on the role of Second Glatorian again. Some believe Perditus said no because he suspected the Skrall might be planning an attack and that he would be of more use to Vulcanus piloting the Thornatus if that happened. As it turned out, he was right, and Perditus played a key role in smashing a Skrall advance on Vulcanus.



The Thornatus V9 is the most heavily armed vehicle in use in any of the Agori villages. Four blasters are mounted at the rear of the vehicle, along with a top-mounted Thornax launcher.

The wheels of the Thornatus are protected by razor-sharp metal armor, to frustrate attempts to damage them in combat. Perditus chose wheels over tracks because tracks are more vulnerable.

Perditus was able to combine fairly heavy armor on the Thornatus without sacrificing too much speed. While it is not as fast as the Kaxium or Cendox, it is much faster and more maneuverable than opponents expect.

The forward blades are plated with exsidian. The center section features a pure exsidian ram.

The Thornatus lost to the Kaxium in last year's tournament, but Perditus spent several months afterwards practicing maneuvers to counter the cycle.



THORNATUS V9

Fast, powerful, and heavily armored, the Thornatus V9 was originally built using technology cast off by the Great Beings. Perditus held a high rank in the army of the Element Lord of Fire and so had access to caches of equipment, much of which was left over from past experiments. Inspired by some old plans he found along with the gear, Perditus built his vehicle.

One of the most important additions he made to the finished Thornatus was the four mounted force blasters. These are the only non-Thornax

ranged weapons in Bara Magna now. Since they draw on the same power source as the engines, Perditus has to slow down to use them.

After Perditus designed the Thornatus, a number of inferior copies were made based on his work. These are still in use in various places in Bara Magna, though only for transport, not arena combat. The biggest difference between the copies and the original are the force blasters (absent on the copies) and the heavier armor on Perditus' vehicle. Among those who use a modified Thornatus is Kiina, who took Ackar and Mata Nui to Tajun in one.



TELLURIS

A member of the same tribe as Sahmad, Telluris is a deranged but brilliant warrior. Were he a more rational and practical being, he probably would have conquered much of Bara Magna by now with his Skopio XV1 vehicle. But his insanity limits the harm he has done, and fortunately for the Agori, the appearances of the Telluris and his awesome machine are rare.

Prior to the Core War, Telluris had managed to find a sort of acceptance among those Agori who liked tinkering with machines. Berix was

one of the first to try to make friends with Telluris, and he still credits Telluris with some of the techniques he knows for repairing gadgets. At first, Telluris welcomed the attention after so many years. But later, he became convinced the other Agori were out to steal his ideas and he drove them away.

Believing that the villages intended to kill him and take his designs and equipment, Telluris threw himself into building a vehicle so powerful that no one could defeat it. The result was the Skopio XV1, born of a combination of genius and madness.

The Skopio XV1 is the largest land vehicle in all of Bara Magna. Like the creature it is named for, it is capable of moving underground, allowing it to stay hidden until Telluris is ready to strike.

The retractable treads of the Skopio XV1 allow it to roll through the desert or walk on four legs. When riding on the treads, the vehicle is capable of surprising speed for something so large.

The XV1 is armed with modified force blasters, a Thornax launcher, and moving pincers that can seize and crush enemy vehicles.



SKOPIO XV1

The Skopio XV1 is a massive battle vehicle modeled after the real Skopio creature that stalks Bara Magna. Incredibly powerful and heavily armed, the Skopio XV1 is considered to be virtually unstoppable.

A masterpiece of engineering, the Skopio XV1 was built using parts from other damaged vehicles, along with scrap from wrecked shelters. Telluris has added to it over the years until it is now a colossus. Kept hidden underground most of the time, it bursts out of the ground and attacks whenever Telluris feels threatened. It is

rare that his target survives to “threaten” him a second time.

The Skopio’s combat style follows a set pattern. First, Telluris has it smash its way up through rock and sand (the appearance of the vehicle is usually followed by earth tremors, in the same way that they herald the arrival of a real Skopio). If the target tries to flee, Telluris uses the force blasters or Thornax launcher to block their escape. The battle is finished using the working pincers on the Skopio.

Berix believes the only truly vulnerable spot on the Skopio XV1 is the pilot’s post, where the controls for the machine are located. So far, no one has been able to make it past the weaponry of the vehicle to test his theory.



THE EVE OF BATTLE

Dawn brought a return of stifling heat to the desert. The group had been spending the days under whatever shelter they could find, but this morning there was no need to hunt for a cave or a rock outcropping. As they came over a rise, they could see two villages in a large patch of jungle. Great trees dominated the landscape, with vines trailing everywhere. A Glatorian arena sat in the center, separating the villages, but it did not look at all like the one Mata Nui had seen in Vulcanus. This arena was constructed of wood and vines, which formed a latticework roof over the fighting area.

"Where are we?" asked Mata Nui.

"The twin villages of Tesara," said Ackar. "Gresh's home."

The sound of cheering drifted up from the villages. "Sounds like a match is about to start," said Gresh. "Vastus must be fighting today."

"Not if I can help it," said Ackar.

The others looked at him, surprised both by his words and the fierce tone in which he said them. The Vulcanus Glatorian ignored them and started marching toward Tesara. After a moment, the rest of the group followed along behind.

In the arena, Metus sat with Raanu and other Agori in the stands, watching as the Glatorian were announced. The main match for the day pitted the very experienced Vastus of Tesara vs. the reigning champion of all Glatorian, Tarix of Tajun. Had the great tournament in Atero taken place this year, it was possible Tarix would have been

robbed of his title by someone else, most likely a Skrall Glatorian. But the Skrall attack on the arena had brought the tournament to a violent halt, so Tarix remained the official champion.

Following the main match, there would be training matches between some of the newer Glatorian Metus was managing. That had brought Raanu here, in hopes of finding a new fighter for Vulcanus.

Ackar and his team had reached the outskirts of the village by now. Berix lagged behind, glancing uneasily from side to side.

"Why so jumpy, thief?" asked Kiina. "Rip someone off around here? Or just looking for a Skrall to tell our plans to?"

"I'm not a traitor or a thief," Berix answered. Then he added nervously, "But I have done a little ... collecting ... around here, so best to lay low." His eyes chanced upon an axe hanging from a nearby doorway and he reached for it, saying, "Oh, I like that ..."

Kiina slapped his hand away. "This is not the time, Berix. Got that?"

Metus spotted Ackar, Gresh and Mata Nui approaching. He rose from his seat, smiling broadly. "What a surprise! Welcome, friends. Isn't this great? A sold-out crowd. I knew pitting Vastus against Tarix would pack them in. Mata Nui, I hope your appearance means you're ready to ..."

Ackar cut him off. "It's over."

"Over?" said Raanu, confused. He turned to Metus. "What is he talking about?"

Metus shrugged. "Who knows, with him?"



He might still be upset about that match with Strakk ... or maybe he's been out in the sun too long. I'll talk to him."

The fight promoter walked over to Ackar. "Uh, listen, Ackar. With all due respect, you don't have any authority here – this is a match between Tesara and Tajun. And you're too late anyway."

Metus gestured toward the arena. The match had indeed already started. Tarix had fired his Thornax launcher, but Vastus dove aside before the explosive sphere could strike him. It slammed into the ground and went off, sending a spray of shattered rock into the air. He hit the ground and rolled, ending up on his feet and firing his own launcher at Tarix.

The Tajun Glatorian saw the Thornax coming at him, but too late to move aside. He brought up his weapon to block it, but the explosive impact still sent him reeling.

Ackar had seen more than enough. He stepped up to the railing, even as Metus tried to block his way.

"Wait, what are you doing?" asked Metus, his tone a little frantic.

Ackar might have already seen his best days, but Metus knew he was still a Glatorian that others listened to. If he spoke out against the Glatorian system, who knew what might happen?

Gresh, Kiina and Mata Nui moved to Ackar's side, pushing Metus out of the way. Ackar leaned over the rail, his eyes scanning the crowd of Agori and the two Glatorian fighters.

"Listen to me," Ackar said. "All fighting between Glatorian must stop. Our real enemy is out there, in the desert, massing as we speak."

The response of the villagers was shouts of, "Sit down, you fool!" and "Mind your own business!" As serious as Glatorian matches were, they were also one of the few sources of entertainment for Agori. People who spent each day just trying to scrape together enough resources to survive needed whatever distraction they could get, and weren't in any hurry to give it up.

It was the voice of Tarix that silenced the shouting.

"Quiet," said the Glatorian. "Let him talk."

Vastus moved to stand beside Tarix. "I agree. Speak, Ackar."

"Thank you, Vastus. And you, Tarix," Ackar said. "Now listen to me, everyone. The bone hunters and the Skrall have formed an alliance."

This provoked a chorus of disbelief from the crowd. Some threw their hands up into the air and turned away. One Agori could be heard saying, "Why are they making us listen to some old loser's fantasies? Get on with the match!"

"It's true," said Kiina. "Tarix ... our village has been destroyed. I saw it with my own eyes. We got there too late. The Agori who were there escaped, probably out into the sands, but ... it's gone ... all of it."

"Impossible ..." Tarix whispered. "I should have been there. I told Metus this match was a bad idea, especially when you



would be in Vulcanus, but Tajun needs the food that was at stake here. And now, you say there is no more Tajun.”

“Kiina speaks the truth,” said Gresh. “Tajun is gone, and it’s just the beginning.”

“We must unite, not fight each other,” said Ackar. “Time is running out.”

As soon as he said it, Ackar knew he had made a mistake. From being an angry and skeptical crowd, they Agori had now become a fearful mob. Who could blame them? Many of them had seen firsthand the aftermath of bone hunter raids, or the Skrall destruction of Atero. They had witnessed Glatorian running before the might of the Skrall army. Why should they believe Glatorian could save them now that their two worst enemies had joined together?

Raanu chose that moment to step forward. He held his hands out to the crowd, gesturing for them to sit down and be silent.

“Calm yourselves,” he said. “Your village leaders will know what is best for you. We will do as we always have.”

Mata Nui could no longer stay quiet. He knew all too well the dangers of underestimating an enemy or expecting that the old methods of dealing with a problem would always work. It was thinking like that which had cost him a universe.

“Your old ways will not work,” Mata Nui told the crowd. “You are facing a unified army now. I have seen this before. They will not stop until your people are destroyed.”

“This is crazy,” said Metus. “Let’s everyone just think for a minute. It can’t be as bad

as all that. Maybe ... maybe the Skrall and the bone hunters just happened to hit Tajun at the same time. There might not be any alliance at all. We could be getting all upset over nothing.”

“Nothing?” said Tarix, outraged. “You call the destruction of my village nothing? Be glad you are not a Glatorian, Metus, or I would have your head for that.”

Raanu turned to Ackar, his voice a harsh whisper. “We have no weapons, Ackar, not that can stop the Skrall. You know that. How can we fight back?”

“Enough!” yelled Ackar, as he thrust his weapon up into the air. Fire erupted from the blade, lancing high into the morning sky. As one, the crowd gasped and started to back away.

“Yeah, we kinda thought that would get your attention,” said Kiina.

“Toa Mata Nui has offered to help us build up our defenses,” said Ackar. “With him at our side, I know we can prevail.”

Raanu snorted in disbelief. “Toa Mata Nui? Why should we trust this stranger?”

The crowd echoed Raanu’s sentiments. Mata Nui understood how they felt. After all, he was not one of them. From what he had seen, the Agori lived a hard life. Most likely, trust would not come easy to them in the best of circumstances.

“Tarix, give Mata Nui your weapon,” Ackar said.

The Tajun Glatorian stepped forward reluctantly and handed Mata Nui his crude sword. “What is he going to do with it?”



"Show you the power you already possess," said Ackar.

Mata Nui brought Tarix's weapon to his brow. As soon as the weapon touched the Mask of Life, it transformed, becoming a far more ornate and powerful looking sword. Tarix and the Agori looked on, stunned.

"I don't believe," Tarix said, as Mata Nui handed him his new weapon. "It's ... incredible."

Ackar turned back to the crowd of villagers. "What more proof do you need? The time to unite the villages has come. If we stand together, we will win."

The Agori burst into cheers, all but Raanu. He still looked unconvinced. Gesturing once more for silence and receiving it, he looked up at Ackar.

"If we agree, do you Glatorian and this Mata Nui swear to stay and protect us?"

Kiina, Gresh, Ackar, Tarix and Vastus nodded their assent. Then all eyes turned to Mata Nui.

"You do not have to ask for the allegiance of the Glatorian. You know where our loyalties lie," Ackar replied to Raanu. Then he turned to Mata Nui. "But we cannot speak for you. I will not pretend I have anything left to teach you. But I'll ask, as friend ... will you help us?"

Mata Nui reached out and locked arms with Ackar. "Then, as a friend ... I will stay."

The five Glatorian formed a circle around their new ally. Raising their weapons in the air, filled with the hope of victory, they cried out, "We fight together!"

Their shout echoed across the desert, ringing from the mountains and riding the wind across the dunes. Somewhere, a bone hunter's rock steed cocked its head, wondering at the noise. The beast pawed the ground, every sense alert, eager to charge. For though it could not understand the words the Glatorian had spoken, it knew well the meaning of the tone.

It was a cry of battle.

Ackar knew there was no time to waste. He and the other Glatorian immediately began organizing the defenses of Tesara. With the aid of Mata Nui and the Agori, they erected crude stone walls, mounted Thornax launchers, and dug pit traps in the sand. Kiina worked with the Agori, teaching them how best to use their weapons against mounted foes.

"What makes you so certain the Skrall will strike here next?" Mata Nui asked Ackar as they worked.

"It's the only thing that makes sense," Ackar replied. "As soon as we saw the bone hunters are working with them, a lot of things began to make sense."

"Like what?"

"Not long ago, the bone hunters started targeting Kiina's village, Tajun," Ackar explained. "Raiding trade caravans, killing Agori, doing everything they could to cut the village off from the rest of Bara Magna. Since Tajun sits on an oasis, you hurt them, you hurt everyone, because they run the water trade."



"That does make sense," Mata Nui agreed.

"After Tajun, what village has the most valuable resource? Iconox, to the north – they have a huge deposit of exsidian, a metal that resists wear even in the worst sandstorms. It's much prized for use in weapons. If the Skrall want to eliminate our ability to fight back, that's the most logical place to strike."

"And Tesara?"

"Lies right between the two villages," said Ackar. "The combined Skrall-bone hunter legion hit Tajun, and they'll want Iconox. But they can't afford to leave Tesara sitting behind their lines. They'll be out to destroy it before they move on Iconox."

Mata Nui heard a cheer coming from the other Glatorian. He turned to see that the walls were complete and the pits concealed.

"Well done," said Tarix. "We did it."

"The Skrall will never know what hit them," said Gresh.

I truly hope not, thought Mata Nui. But are the Skrall somewhere even now, saying the same thing about us?

That night was a quiet one. Kiina stood guard with a group of hand-picked Agori, watching for any movement in the desert. The other Glatorian and villagers tried to rest, though sleep proved elusive for most. Bone hunters were known for making night attacks, often traveling without torches or any other means of illumination. It was often the

case that by the time a village knew they were coming, it was too late to do anything about it.

Kiina was standing watch on the eastern edge of the village when she heard a sound. It was the barely audible noise of armored feet treading through sand, but it was not coming from beyond Tesara. No, it was from off to her right. Someone was slipping out of the village and into the desert.

The traitor, she said to herself. Now I've got you.

She readied her trident and moved off in the direction of the sound. In the pale glow of the village torches, she caught sight of an Agori walking swiftly away from Tesara. Doing her best to stay silent, she followed.

Kiina caught up to the Agori just as he reached the Tesara hot springs. Seizing him from behind, she spun him around. In the moonlight, she could see clearly who it was, and she was not a bit surprised.

"I have to admit, I was hoping I was wrong," Kiina said. "Don't move, traitor."

Berix looked up at her, panic in his eyes. "What? No! You've got it all wrong. I was following ..."

A soft voice came from behind the Glatorian. "He was following me."

Berix and Kiina both turned at the sound. "You?!" said Kiina in surprise.

The shadows around them began to move. The next instant, a dozen Skrall and bone hunters closed in on them, weapons primed and ready.

"... and this is how you block a Certavus double-strike," Ackar said, showing off a defensive move it had taken him years to master. Tarix, Vastus, Gresh and Mata Nui looked on, suitably impressed. Of the lot, only Tarix was agile enough to duplicate the maneuver, and even he doubted he could do it without lots of practice.

The demonstration was interrupted by Metus. "Ackar! Mata Nui!" he shouted. "The Skrall have kidnapped Berix and Kiina!"

"What? How?" said Ackar.

Now Raanu rushed up to the group. "I saw them too," he said. "They were being dragged away through the hot springs."

"We must go after them," said Mata Nui, before they get too far. We cannot leave them to the mercies of the Skrall."

"Agreed," said Ackar.

"I'm going with you," said Gresh. "My wound has healed. I'm ready."

By now, the whole village was aroused. The Agori crowded around the Glatorian. Some wondered aloud what was going on, while those who knew looked at the Glatorian with worry on their faces.

"No," said Raanu. "You can't just leave us. Don't you see, this is just what the bone hunters and the Skrall want. They'll lead you away, then wipe us out just like Tajun."

"He's right," an Agori villager shouted.

"You have to stay!" said another. The cry was picked up by the rest of the crowd, born of panic and unreasoning fear.

"I understand your feelings," Mata Nui said to the assembled Agori. "But we cannot

turn our backs on our friends."

"Kiina is just one Glatorian," Raanu answered. "And Berix is a worthless thief, everyone knows that."

"No one is worth sacrificing, no matter how small," said Mata Nui. "We stand together, as a team."

"So you'd leave us defenseless?" demanded Raanu. "A fine thing! We trusted you with our lives and you repay us with betrayal."

Mata Nui looked at Ackar and Gresh, then back at Raanu. "I was once forced to abandon my own people. I will not do so again. The Glatorian will remain here. I will go after Berix and Kiina ... alone."

"No!" said Gresh. "You can't!"

"One being alone, even you, Mata Nui, against a horde of Skrall and bone hunters?" said Ackar. "It would be suicide, my friend, and it would help Berix and Kiina not at all."

Mata Nui held up his hand to silence them. "We will see each other again. I promise you this." Then he turned and started walking out of the village.

"Let me go with him," Gresh said to Ackar. "He doesn't stand a chance alone."

Ackar watched his friend disappear into the darkness. The last glint of moonlight reflected off the shell of Click, perched on its master's shoulder.

"He's not alone," the Glatorian said.

MATA NUI'S DIARY

ENTRY SEVEN

In the universe I came from, there was only one true source of evil. If he could be defeated, life, light and hope would return to my people. As I traveled to the city of Roxtus to rescue the kidnapped Kiina and Berix, I believed the same would be true here. If I could defeat Tuma, leader of the Skrall, then the danger that threatened Bara Magna would vanish.

Defeat him, I did, although it took every lesson I had learned from Ackar to do it. But the menace to Bara Magna did not end with him. Upon his fall, Metus appeared, revealing himself to be a traitor to the Agori. He had somehow gained influence over the Skrall, perhaps by offering knowledge to Tuma in exchange for power. Whatever the reason, the Skrall attacked on his command. Badly outnumbered, it seemed my first major battle would prove to be my last.

Salvation, as it often does, came from an unexpected source. Despite my insisting they remain in Tesara, the other Glatorian – my friends, a word I still marvel at – charged Roxtus. They fought with heart, spirit, and pride, and those were three weapons the Skrall could not hope to stand against. The rock tribe and its warriors broke. I spotted Metus attempting to get away, but the power of the Mask of Life had a surprise for that traitorous murderer of his own people. In his heart, he was a serpent; the Mask of Life saw to it that his body would match his true match. I watched him slither away into the desert and felt no regrets.

This experience had taught the Agori a lesson about unity. Now willing to work together, they brought all their scattered shelters together to form one great mega-city. It was only when the work was done that I realized what they had unwittingly constructed: a new robot body, much like my old one. With it, I knew I could challenge my ancient enemy and save my universe.

But before I could do that, there were new dangers to be faced.





MATA NUI'S DIARY

ENTRY EIGHT

The robot body was intact. I could only guess that it was a prototype for my own lost form, perhaps something that failed its initial test here in the desert of Bara Magna. I could will my mind into it, but that would not help any, for the body had no power source. Without energy, it was just a metal shell.

It was then that events took an unexpected turn. Berix produced a coin he had found in the cavern of the Great Beings which had a maze pattern on it. Then we found that the pattern on the Skrall shields matched that of the coin. Finally, Vastus told me of one of his tribe's Agori, Tarduk, who was telling wild tales about a "Valley of the Maze" to the north.

I wanted to seek out this Tarduk and question him. But it turned out that he had left Tesara on an expedition of his own to find the maze and solve its secrets. Accompanied by Kiina and

Gresh, I followed. Had I not, well, I doubt Tarduk would have lived to return and tell us what he had found.

The maze was a last riddle left behind by the Great Beings. Designed to keep intruders out, it concealed a source of great power. Once unleashed, that power fused the parts of the huge robot body together and powered it. Then I had only to send my spirit from the Mask of Life into the body to once more have the strength to challenge my foe.

The final battle approaches even now. I have no doubt my enemy knows what has happened and will seek me out. I may destroy him, or he may destroy me, but I fear that our fight will inevitably rain destruction down on those below. I have warned Ackar and the others to get themselves and the Agori to a place of safety. They have helped me, saved me, and shown me a world I did not know existed – but this was not their fight. It was mine ... and it was one I should have fought many centuries before.