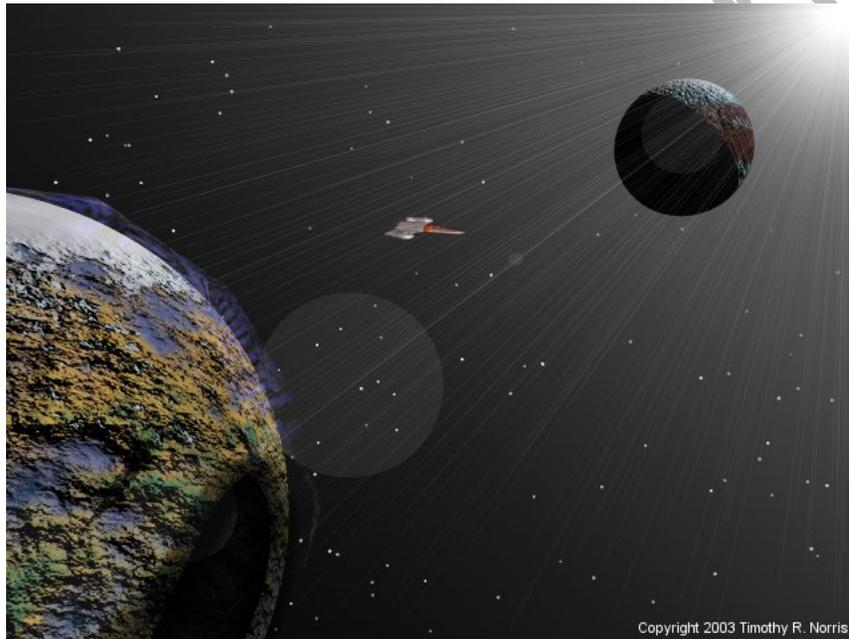


The Adventures of a Ranger

Short Stories about Zane M. Cole
Ranger for the WolfeBane Development Corporation



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A Story by Timothy R. Norris



Chapter 1 The Awakening

The sun, as yellow as honey while it is being poured straight from a bottle, began peeking over the ridgeline. The rays so beautiful one became mesmerized, forgetting everything and everyone around them. Time seemed to stand still as the body of light inched its way higher and higher above the horizon. The size of the object grew larger with each passing moment. The evening sky became lighter and various silhouettes started to become more defined as the wondrous rays of light fell upon them from behind.

“Oh, Zane!” a seductive and beautiful female voice breaks the silence. “Isn’t it beautiful?”

No reply could be heard as the sunlight rose even higher into the morning sky. “Zane?” she continued. The female voice changes now into a deeper more masculine tone as intensity adds to its reflection. “Zane!” The sky begins to grow dark rapidly as the voice continues with urgency. “Commander Cole!” Reality begins to set in as a foggy haze replaces the darkness.

“Commander, you are needed on the bridge!”

“What is it?”

“Commander, WolfeBane Alpha is under attack, sir!” The voice seems familiar now and the sense of emergency takes over his grogginess as his body snaps into action well before his vision focuses completely. A Ranger’s training takes years, and this is one of those moments when all those drills as a younger lad pay off. The body reacts and takes over, forcing itself out of the hard bunk as one’s hands automatically reach down to pull on the boots that had been haphazardly kicked to the floor earlier.

“On my way, Bram!” Zane replies as his vision finally returns after a much needed nap. What was not needed was the dream he started having. He has no time for such wasteful sleep. His years of Ranger training taught his body to take as little time as needed to recharge his body until a restful sleep could be taken. A luxury he simple did not have; would not have any time soon with the current situation.

Scrambling through the corridors, Zane knew he would be on the bridge in a matter of seconds. He slowed down and gathered himself, running his fingers down the seams of his uniform verifying all the fasteners were closed. He already had an embarrassing moment with the dream; he did not want another one as he stepped through the bridge doorway.

As Zane approached the bridge door, it opened automatically with a well-known “swoosh” sound as the ship’s computer sounded off, “Welcome to the bridge, Commander Cole.”



"Where is the Captain," Zane called out.

"He is indisposed, Commander," replies Lieutenant Rasczak. 'Ah!' Zane thought to himself. 'The Captain had one too many prior to taking his sleep-eye, and now when the shit hits the fan, they call on me instead.'

"What is the current situation, Lieutenant?" Zane called out loud enough that she could hear him within him needing to turn to face her.

"Commander," she started, and paused momentarily as if waiting for Zane to turn around and face her as would be the proper protocol. Zane ignores the fact that Lieutenant seemed to forget that Commanders outrank Lieutenants within the Ranger ranks. Seeing that Zane insisted on staring at the main viewer, she continued. "Commander, there seems to be an unknown ship type within range of the planet's outer defense systems."

"Destroyer I take it," Zane replied.

"We cannot confirm that, Commander," the lieutenant states with a hint of annoyance within her voice. "The ship is just outside our long-range scanners." After a brief pause and a muffled voice from an ensign overlooking their terminal, she finished her sentence. "We will be within scanning range in 30 seconds."

"Do we have radio contact with Outposts 1 and 2," Zane asked.

"We do, Commander," replies the Rad-Com ensign.

"Find out their statuses and if they can hold out for another 23 seconds."

"WolfeBaneAlpha1, WolfeBaneAlpha2, this is Ranger 1 Bravo, how do you copy, over."

"Ranger 1 Bravo this is WolfeBaneAlpha1. Loud and clear. Over."

"R1B, this is WolfeBaneAlpha2. We sure could use your help down here. Over" Zane instantly recognized the voice on the other end as Lieutenant Brenda Matthews.

"Tell her ... them ... that we will be there within the next 4 minutes if we run at full speed," Zane calls out to the Rad-Com ensign.

"WolfeBaneAlpha2. Ranger 1 Bravo. We are en route to your location. ETA 4 minutes. How do you copy. Over."

"R1B, you tell Commander Cole that this will all be over in 4 minutes, and there won't be anyone left for you to rescue," replies Lieutenant Matthews. Zane picked up on the sense of urgency as he also heard large Laser Cannon and smaller Laser Batteries firing in the background during her last message.

"Commander?" questions the Rad-Com ensign.

"Lieutenant," replies Zane. "I do believe it is time to wake your sleeping Captain as protocol deems necessary prior to me making my next decision."

"Understood, Commander," replies Lieutenant Rasczak as she was already heading towards the Captains crew quarters' doorway. The Captain's Quarters are always adjacent to the Bridge for arising situations such as this.



Chapter 2 The Inner Conflict

"Helm," Zane calls out. "Set course to WolfeBaneAlpha2 and set engines to maximum."

"Belay that order, Helmsman." The new voice came from a half-asleep, half-dressed man entering the bridge.

"Captain," Zane starts but is interrupted.

"COMMANDER," the Captain says firmly as he runs his hand through his hair as if to put it all back in place. 'His uniform needs it more than his hair,' thinks Zane to himself as he turns around and sees the Captain's attempt to beautify himself in vain.

Zane waits for the rest of the sentence to be completed by the Captain who apparently also forgot to pull on his own boots during the Lieutenant's rousing. 'Ah, Command at its best,' Zane thinks to himself again.

"Commander, we have orders to continue on to Zeta Command." The Captain obviously slept way too deep and had no clue as to what was going on down below.

"30 seconds, Commander," the helmsman replies. "Starting slow-down in three ... two ... one. Slow-down commencing."

"Commander, er uh, I mean, Captain," the Rad-Com ensign breaks in urgently.

"What is it, Ensign?" Both Zane and the Captain call out at the same instance.

"Sirs, I think you had better here this." The Rad-Com ensign puts the radio chatter on loudspeaker.

"I repeat, this is WolfeBaneAlpha2, to all vessels within radio contact. Our outpost is under attack from an unknown Destroyer within our own orbit. Both my commander and acting commander have been KIA. I am assuming command." Small arms fire of some sort can be heard overbearing Lieutenant Matthews' voice. "We are heading for the Evac Tunnels at this time, taking what casualties we can. Commander Cole, if you can hear me, RA7 Alpha. I repeat RA7 Alpha."

"The channel has gone dead, Commander." The Rad-Com ensign says with a saddened look on her face.

"Captain," Zane calls out with a monotone voice backed with authority. "Under Galactic Law, 15-Delta-5, Subsection 3-Bravo, Article 2-Alpha, I hereby commandeer this vessel and its crew and act upon the rights of those under attack on WolfeBaneAlpha2 and hereby enact a Rescue Operation."

As the Captain started to open his mouth to muster out some sort of objection, Zane continued.

"Before you state your objection, Captain, need I remind you that this vessel was built and commissioned by the WolfeBane Development Corporation? The WDC Rangers are the acting security regulatory team for all vessels commissioned by the WDC, and have full authority and jurisdiction over any emergencies which arise within the WolfeBane Star System," Zane completes and turns towards the Weapons Engineers.



“Beamer, Gyro, you folks are about to earn your pay. I need full systems statuses with available salvo. Helmsman, I need the ship stopped within firing range of that Destroyer. Park her at a five degree angle to our starboard side, mark zero degrees,” Zane commands without hesitation.

“Aye, aye, Commander,” Zane hears all whom he just gave instructions to reply at once.

Zane straightens up his back, and takes a deep breath. ‘Ok, Brenda, you just hold on. We will get you out of there within the next ninety seconds,’ Zane says to himself under his breath wishing he was a Mentalist and could project his thoughts to her directly.

“All Energy Weapons online and fully charged, Commander,” calls out the Energy Weapons Engineer.

“All Rocket Weapon Systems are a go, Commander. Full salvo of sixteen each type weapon loaded and ready,” the Rocket Weapons Engineer responds. Zane knows that this ship contains a Laser Canon, two laser batteries, two rocket batteries as well as two torpedo bays.

“Coming to full stop in three ... two ... one. Full stop,” calls out the helmsman. Zane notices everyone whether standing or sitting swayed with the sudden stop of the ship.

“Well done everyone,” Zane states without emotion. Zane understands that everyone knows their respective jobs, and no “kudos” are needed to be given. However, he also understands the current situation, and if his guess is correct as to whom the enemy is, there will be great loss of life on this day. Morale needs to be as high as possible during the next twenty four hours, and if giving out a simple “Thank You” to the team is all that is needed to accomplish this, it is something fast and easy that he can handle without wasting too much precious time or brain cells in thinking about what to say otherwise.



Chapter 3 And So It Begins

Heading for “the tunnels”, Lieutenant Matthews scrambles to assist as many personnel en route as possible. Whether injured or not, all personnel need to evacuate; and they need to do so as expeditiously as possible. No further lives need to be lost. If only they can make it to the tunnels.

“Lieutenant,” an injured ensign calls out as Lt. Matthews runs past a section of rubble which had collapsed during the last barrage.

Turning around just prior to fully stopping nearly causes Lt. Matthews to lose her balance. She grabs ahold of the piece of pipe hanging down at an angle just within her reach to keep her from tumbling to the ground. ‘Get ahold of yourself, Bren!’ She yells at herself without saying an audible word.

“Ensign!” Lt. Matthews recognizes the ensign now as one of the new recruits recently added to the team of medical engineers. “Let me help you out of there,” Lt. Matthews says solemnly as she starts to dig the ensign’s legs out from under the rubble.

“Don’t worry about me, Lieutenant,” replies the ensign. Lt. Matthews sees that the ensign’s eyes are glazed over and realizes the ensign is in shock. She then realizes in the low light just how pale the ensign is and realizes that there must be something seriously wrong with her.

“Don’t talk like that, Tasha,” she calls her by her first name. This is generally not standard protocol; however, the situation seems to warrant a soothing voice to ease her pain. “You’ll be just fine, just let me get this off your legs so we can get you out of here.” As the Lieutenant attempts to lift the fallen rubble from the ensign’s legs, she realizes just how overly heavy it is. The ensign screams a blood curling yell which startles the Lieutenant and causes her to lose her grip, dropping the rubble the few millimeters she was able to lift it.

“I’m sorry, Tasha!” she exclaims trying to hold herself together.

“Please, LT, you need to get yourself out of here. I won’t be making it this time,” she answers. Her eyes are barely able to focus on the Lieutenant’s face. “I need for you to do one thing for me.” Lt. Matthews knows what is coming and braces herself mentally for it as she lightly strokes the ensign’s face to wipe the blood and hair away.

“LT, can you please tell my mother that I love her? Tell her I did pass my test and was assigned to the unit I have wanted to join my entire career; as short as it was.” Lieutenant Matthews no longer hears her surroundings. She no longer hears the explosions, the cannon or rocket fire from the enemy ship in orbit. She only hears the ensign’s voice now as she watches her life slowly drain from her face.

“I will, Tasha,” the Lieutenant replies. “Anything else?”

“No, ma’am. It was a pleasure to serve with you!” the ensign exclaims softly as her breathes become short and shallow.



“Alright, Tasha,” the Lieutenant replies. “I will stay here with you then until I need to leave if that is OK with you.”

“Y-Y-Yes, m-ma-ma’am. Tha’ suits me j-just fine,” the ensign says, barely able to speak now.

As the lieutenant continues to stroke the ensign’s cheek and hair, she now starts to hear her surroundings come back to her. The wall section from where she had come from prior to stopping to assist the ensign collapsed and smoke has started filling the corridor. The lieutenant starts to realize her time is limited, and that she needs to think about moving on to the tunnels as soon as possible. ‘You aren’t going anywhere, Bren! Not until Tasha is at peace!’ she yells at herself within her own mind. She starts to feel sorry for the thought she previously had of needing to move along when all of a sudden the ensign’s hand reaches up and cups her own and holds it against her cheek. A tear rolls down the ensign’s face as the life leaves her body. The ensign’s facial expressions change and for the first time since she stopped to assist, Lieutenant Matthews sees that the Tasha Thomas, Ensign 1st Class, has finally made her peace and no longer feels any pain.

The lieutenant allows a few tears to roll down her own face now, as she closes the ensign’s eyes and lays her head down softly. “Goodbye, Tasha. May your next life prove to be filled with happiness.” With that, the lieutenant stands, wipes her face with the back of her hands. She realizes there is blood covering her hands and wipes them onto her uniform pants, trying her best to get them as clean as possible.

The lieutenant then turns and resumes her initial route towards the tunnels. As she rounds the next corner, she hears an explosion behind her. Fearful of turning back for confirmation, she knows that where she was just kneeling over the ensign no longer exists, and is now a burning mass of material.



Chapter 4 Battle Stations!

"Commander, you are going to want to see this, sir." The Rad-Com ensign calls out. Before Zane can reply, he hears a troublesome report come out over the VidCom.

Sources indicate that a hostile take-over attempt is currently underway of the once very secretive WolfeBane Development Corporation.

Brought to you via CommLinks from Dixon's Star, we bring you the only images allowed out of the WolfeBane Alpha sector.

No one knows who or why the attack was pressed. We have no other information at this time except that the secretive special operations team known as the Rangers are on full alert and have sealed off all the surrounding space to WolfeBane Alpha with TracerMines and Beacons to warn off all approaching ships that they will be attacked if they enter the protected area.

Sebastian Rennelear (the current CEO of the WDC) says that he cannot comment as to whom made the attack, but did comment that the Space Station which they destroyed was that of 'Educational and Training Purposes.'

"The whole WDC Family Sector has had one major loss. The children seem to be the only ones happy that their school was destroyed."

When asked if they will press charges against the person(s) or company that posed the attack, Mr. Rennelear replied, "The WDC and its Rangers will find who did this and there will be paybacks, yes."

We asked if he thought that maybe it was the PGC, a well-known enemy of the WDC, and if there would be yet another corporate war between the two. His reply, "No comment."

Another reporter, from our sister station at Truane's Star, has told us that he has seen a full-fledged alert with the Rangers all on Condition Red.

"We expect a full retaliation by the Rangers very soon. I hope for the sakes of the innocents that the Rangers keep to their track record so no one gets hurt," he stated. We hope he meant no innocents. Stay Tuned for more as this sad event takes its place in our current peaceful timeline.

This is Cynthia Walker reporting to you from WolfeBane Alpha StarBase 1.



Zane bows his head and shakes it from side to side. "Idiots!" he exclaims. "They have no clue as to what is happening out there, do they?" he questioned; not to anyone in particular, but to more of an outward proclamation to vent off a bit of steam.

"Sir?" Lieutenant Raszak asks.

"Nothing, Lieutenant," snaps Zane in reply. "Captain," he continues after a moment of thought, "put your ship on Condition Red. Battlestations. This is not a drill." His order was calm, cool and collected. The entire bridge began to scramble.

The Captain turned towards the Rad-Com ensign and relays the Commander's last order, "Condition Red, Battlestations, Rad-Com."

"Aye, Captain," she replies; already pushing buttons to activate every intercom unit throughout the ship. "Attention Crew. Attention Crew. Condition Red. Battlestations. Condition Red. Battlestations. This is not a drill. Repeat. Condition Red. Battlestations. This is not a drill."

Zane has another one of his inner mind moments. 'Leave it to the Ensigns to keep it together during a crisis,' he thinks to himself.

"Beamer? Gyro? You ready to rock somebody's world?" Zane asks out loud.

"Aye, Commander!" they reply in unison.

"Then let's let them know we are here, shall we?" he asks in return. "I need a full barrage split between that ship and the WDC HQ at coordinates as follows," Zane continues in his peaceful style of giving orders. He understands that during a heated battle is not the time to lose your cool. Your subordinates are expecting you to know what you are doing, and they will follow you if you at least act like you do, as well as keep control of your fear and emotions while doing so. "Twenty one degrees, fifteen minutes, thirty seconds North latitude, eighty-five degrees, fifty-six minutes, fifteen seconds West longitude," he calls out the coordinates to the WolfeBane Development Headquarters. Normally, these coordinates are confidential at least, if not classified; however, in times of war, there needs to be certain rational times as to when something needs to be handled in a quick-like but proper manner. "Mark," Zane calls out to finalize the weapons' lock-ons.

"Ready Commander," replies the Energy Weapons Engineer. Zane knows that those types of weapons are a simple punch and enter type of command and the computer systems take over. He waits a few more seconds for the Rocket Weapons Engineer to reply as his systems take a bit longer to target the required coordinates.

Just as Zane opens his mouth to request an update from 'Gyro', the ensign responds with a quick, "Systems targeted and ready to roll, Commander."

"Understood," is the Commander's reply. "On the ready, then, at my mark ..."



Chapter 5
Meeting the Enemy

(For the purpose of the story, all language are translated to Common tongue. As details progress, the reader should begin to understand the race as well as their mannerisms.)

"Continue the attack on that bunkerrrr arrrrea, Alpha Commanderrrr Marrrtificaa of Matifaa!" growls out the Captain of the ship.

"Underrrstood, Alpha Omega Zundurrree of Zerrrinarr!" the Alpha Commander replies with great pride. *"We will make these fools feel arrrre powerrrr!"*

"Alpha Omega Zundurrree of Zerrrinarr, a human ship apprrroaches!" exclaims the second in command of the ship.

"Alpha Lieutenant Terrrgentaa of Tungatee," the Alpha Omega snarls back. *"What do you mean a human ship apprrroaches?"*

"I mean, Alpha Omega," the Alpha Lieutenant chooses his words wisely but too hastily, *"that a human ship snuck thrrrrough ourrrr sensorrrrs and has a weapons lock on ourrrr ship!"*

The Alpha Omega spins in his command chair to face the weapons officer, *"Alpha Commanderrrr! All Defenses Full Powerrrr!"*

Anticipating the command, the Alpha Commander had preemptively started raising the ship's defensive screens, and started powering up the main defensive batteries. *"Aye, Alpha Omega! All defenses online and powerrred to one hundrrred perrrrcent!"* he replies quickly.

Understanding that the weapons systems are now very limited, the ship's captain makes a snap decision which may have the entire crew. *"Alpha Lieutenant, come about thrree fourrr seven mark two!"*

"Aye, Alpha Omega!" the Alpha Lieutenant acknowledges.

"FIRE!" shouts Command Cole with a bit more volume than he had intended. However, he heard the confirming sounds of various weapons systems releasing their full power and loads.

"Commander, impact in seven ... six ... five ... the enemy ship has spun around, Commander and all defensive systems have come online," Lieutenant Raszak replies.

"Let's hope they haven't had time to fully charge, Lieutenant," the Captain interrupts.

"You under estimate their ships, Captain," Commander Cole states coldly. "Our weapons will merely be absorbed or explode without any damage."

"Commander," the Captain starts to reply, "you obviously have not been aboard a Class Three Battle---"



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"Tarrrrget and firrrre, Alpha Commander!" the enemy ship's captain equivalent commands.

"Aye, Alpha Omega!" the weapons officer acknowledges. *"Away Tigerrrr One. Away Leoparrrrd Two. Away Amurrrrs One and Two!"*

"Five seconds to impact, Alpha Omega," calls out the captain's number one.

"Underrrrstood," is all the Alpha Omega replies.

The intense situation has the unknown enemy race on edge. Wondering whose weapons will hit first.

"BRrrrACE!" roars out the Alpha Lieutenant.

"BRACE!" yells out Lieutenant Rasczak. The Captain, cut off in mid-sentence, is startled when the enemy's weapons hit. His body is flung first into the air roughly one meter before it is slammed to the floor, nearly floating perfectly still for almost three full seconds in between.

'Ooommph' can be heard throughout the entire bridge as the breath is knocked from his lungs.

"Medic!" calls out Zane.

"The Medical Team is en route, Commander Cole," the ship's computer acknowledges in return. "They are also being called to decks seven alpha, eight alpha, eight bravo," the female voice starts to reply.

"Stow it, Ren!" Zane exclaims. "I don't need a full report. The ship's Captain is injured."

"Understood, Commander, re-routing th-," the computer voice replies before being cut off again.

"I-I-," the Captain tries to talk, but is still attempting to inhale to refill his empty lungs. "I'm Okaayyyy," he manages as he takes in air making his words sound fun as he draws them out.

CONTINUE



Chapter 6
Finally Safe – For the Moment

Reaching the tunnels, Lieutenant Matthews no longer hears explosions from above.

'Wow,' she says audibly aloud but only to herself, 'these walls are very sound proof!' She had not realized what had just occurred in orbit around the planet. She was relieved that she was finally safe. She starts thinking about Ensign Tasha Thomas and the ordeal she had just gone through with her. As she fights back tears from forming and running down her face, an ensign grabs her arm and pulls her back into reality.

"Come on, Lieutenant!" screams the ensign. "We have got to get out of here before the raiding parties land!"

"The wha-?" Lieutenant Matthews is barely to say.

"The raiding parties, LT! We just received radio confirmation that they are landing on the surface and have already stormed the main gates!" It is obvious to the Lieutenant that she missed much more than she had realized while comforting Tasha what had seemed like just moments ago. "You were right behind me when we ran down the hallway, LT, what kept you?" she asked. "I heard the loud explosion, and turned back to see if you were OK, but you were no longer behind me."

"I was caught up for a moment, but I'm here now," she states not wanting to get into a prolonged story, and have herself lose control of her emotions. "Let's get going," she says as she finally starts moving forward again while the ensign continues to pull on her arm. "How long until that raiding breeches central command?" she asks.

"We are not sure, LT," the ensign says as she lets go of the Lieutenant's arm and turns to walk briskly. "But," she continues while looking back every few words to make sure she does not lose the Lieutenant again, "word has it that the Rangers are putting up a pretty good fight to make sure we have enough time to seal off the tunnels and head for the escape pods."

"Escape pods?" the Lieutenant asks inquisitively.

"Yes, ma'am," the ensign replies with a 'where have you been' look on her face.

"I'm sorry, ensign," the Lieutenant replies shaking her head to attempt to refocus on the current situation, "but I'm not actually stationed here. I was only here visiting my mother before taking some R&R."

"Oh!" exclaims the ensign. "So you haven't ever been briefed on the tunnels!?"

"Not really," replies the Lieutenant. "I thought they were just venting tubes that heading out a back way and were called 'the tunnels' for that reason. Commander Cole always told me that if I ever got into trouble to head for 'the tunnels'. What are they exactly?"

"Ma'am, you are in for one heck of a treat!" the ensign says as a glowing smile overtakes her face.

As they enter through a massive doorway, Lieutenant Matthews notices the door which is used to seal off the entrance. She takes quick mental notes on its size and realizes the thing **must weigh an**



awful lot. The door is nearly six meters in diameter and nearly one meter thick! Huge rods surround the entire circumference of the door itself, and the Lieutenant realizes that these must extrude from the door itself into the walls of the tunnels making it nearly impossible to penetrate or break through.

The ensign goes on to explain the meaning and nature as well as the history of “the tunnels”. The “tunnels” are a well-built system of interconnecting subways deep beneath the planet’s crust. They were created well before the Corporation ever arrived within the system. No one really knows who made the tunnels, and archaeologists were unable to date them back far enough to understand what race may have been around prior to the current civilizations living within the realm. The tunnels interconnect various points on the planet’s system. These points are what are now known as the Rangers’ Alpha Bases, as well as the WDC HQ, and Stony Man Farm Training Center. Some time ago, they also located newer points on the surface which are also tied into these “tunnels”. The ensign describes a lost city somewhere in the desert region of the planet where a multitude of new races had been discovered. There are also amazing stories of the city being bigger than anything back on Volturnus or **MAIN PLANET!**

