

# Project Steel

[\[The Day After Ragnarok\]](#)

Cleveland? Why did it have to be *Cleveland*?

Well, that's easy to answer: it's because of the Aircraft Engine Research Laboratory. Never heard of it? Good. AERL was never particularly supposed to be noteworthy.

Neither was Project Steel, an experimental mechanical program headed up by Doctor Henry Heywood (Cmdr, USNR). Project Steel's purpose was to develop cutting-edge alloys for the war effort; Heywood hoped to create flexible, light-weight parts that could cut turbine weight while not sacrificing strength or durability.

As far as anybody knew, Commander Heywood's project did not survive the Serpentfall. The last transmission from AERL was in late 1945, reporting a sudden ambush before being abruptly cut off. Heywood himself was presumed to be one more dead hero in the Poisoned Lands... up until last week, when a transmission was picked up by an OSS forward listening station in Omaha Field. The message came from Heywood -- at least, that's what the code identification phrases indicated -- and reported the 'final success' of Project Steel.

Whatever that *is*, it was enough to justify the emergency insertion of an OSS field team from the West Coast.

- 1st Lieutenant Kurt Schaffenberger, Army (seconded to OSS). Specialities: partisan liaison, field investigation, technical drawing.
- Sgt. Jerome Siegel, USAAF. Specialities: aircraft mechanic, inorganic chemistry, photography. Sgt. Siegel is also a Cleveland native.
- Jolan Kovacs, civilian. Specialities: welding, metallurgy, forensic accounting. Miss Kovacs is also a Cleveland native.

The three agents work well together (Siegel and Kovacs have a mutual romantic attraction), but none of them are combat experts. A suitable combat team will therefore be assembled at Omaha Field, and sent overland to Cleveland to assist the OSS in extracting either Commander Heywood, his critical research data, or (hopefully) both.

Complications? Well, to begin with, it's going to be one hell of a drive. 800 miles as the crow flies, assuming that a crow was stupid to fly over the Iowa Soviet, at least three warzones, the Mayorality of Chicago, and any number of monster lairs, Serpent Cult strongholds, and bandit territories. The fact that the OSS is going to make the

overland trip anyway should suggest just how valuable Project Steel is.

Also: [Cleveland](#) is quasi-enemy territory. Governor Frank Lausche took control of the city after the fall of Columbus, and seems more intent in reconquering Ohio for himself than in bringing it back into the United States.

Theoretically, the governor should be willing to assist the OSS; but he'll seek to acquire the super-alloys for himself, the moment he hears about the existence of them. It would be wise if Governor Lausche did not. Or anybody else, including the Iowa Soviet and the Mayoralty of Chicago.

Finally, there's Commander Heywood himself. The ambush and sabotage, while unsuccessful, did gravely injure him. He was only able to survive through a number of emergency surgeries, using the fruits of Project Steel to reinforce his explosive- and toxin-weakened bones. Even then he was almost bedridden, until the recent appearance of a shadowy figure from the East Coast who called himself 'Dick Occult.' He was obviously altered by the Serpentfall, and won't give any details about what happened to him -- but, Snakebit or not, he has a good heart. His magnetic therapy has gotten Heywood back on his feet, and ready to send his research west. It'll be tough to manage, but *America needs* Project Steel.

Perhaps even more than it knows.

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