

ALTERNITY

ACTION CHECK

ONLINE + MAGAZINE

PRESENTS

The Kindness of Strangers



A Dark Matter Adventure Reprint
From the Pages of Dragon Magazine

Copyright 2001 Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

Action Check Disclaimers

Action Check is an on-line magazine dedicated to the Alternity Science Fiction Role-playing Game.

This work is offered free of charge to all interested parties and is not to be sold in any form. It may be printed if distributed free of charge.

This work supports the Alternity roleplaying line, specifically the Alternity Players Handbook and Gamemaster Guide. In addition it supports the Campaign Settings Star*Drive, Gamma World, Dark*Matter, and Tangents by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Alternity is a registered trademark of Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

The Action Check staff is not associated with Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

Wizards of the Coast, Inc.:
<http://www.wizards.com>

STAFF

Publisher/Layout: Jeff Ibach
 Editor: Jim Sharkey
 Cartography and
 Coordinator: Neil Spicer
 Artwork:: Dragan Ciric
 Cover Design: Daryl Blasi

BACK ISSUES

www.alternity.net

Wizards of the Coast has granted us permission to reprint selected Alternity Dragon, Dungeon, and Amazing Stories articles on a strictly non-profit basis.

Copyright Wizards of the Coast, 2001. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

Table of Contents

"The Kindness of Strangers" - Dragon Annual #4 D*M adventure by Chris Perkins

Text Scan Contributed by Darren Millar
 (dmys08977@blueyonder.co.uk)

Accompanying Artwork: "Lurking" by Dragan Ciric

Accompanying Map: "Keller House - First Floor" by Neil Spicer

Accompanying Map: "Keller House - Second Floor" by Neil Spicer

Accompanying Map: "Cargo Plane Fuselage" by Neil Spicer

Special Thanks to Johnny Wilson, WotC Group Publisher; Dave Gross Editor of Star Wars Gamer and Jim Butler formerly of WotC with-out whom this wouldn't have been possible.

Special thanks to www.alternity.net, our gracious host.

Visit Dragon Magazine online:

<http://www.wizards.com/dragon/article.asp?welcome,3>

Visit Dungeon Adventures Magazine online:

<http://www.wizards.com/dungeon/>

Visit Star Wars Gamer online:

<http://www.wizards.com/starwars/article.asp?x=gamer,3&c=gamer>



The Kindness Of Strangers

By Chris Perkins

This adventure was clearly inspired by the film *Deliverance* and too many episodes of *The X-Files*. The adventure works best with eerie music playing in the background maybe even a little banjo music.

“The Kindness of Strangers” is an adventure designed for the ALTERNITY Science Fiction Roleplaying Game and set in the DARK*MATTER Campaign Setting. The adventure is best played with 4-8 heroes of beginning levels. All heroes must be human, although a combination of professions (Combat Spec, Diplomat, Free Agent, Tech Op) is suggested, with at least one hero possessing mindwalking skills. The adventure assumes that the heroes are either field agents of the Hoffmann Institute or freelancers hired by the Institute.

Several of the careers presented in the “Heroes” chapter of the DARK*MATTER Campaign Setting are appropriate for this mission. Suggested careers include the soldier of fortune (for Combat-Specs), the dilettante and military officer (for Diplomats), the field agent and psi agent (for Free Agents), and the field guide and hacker (for Tech Ops).

The Hoffmann Institute

The Hoffmann Institute, formed in 1917, is an organization dedicated to investigating the paranormal, including aliens, arcane magic, and secret societies. The Institute is aware of several extraterrestrial species with earthbound agendas but has no reliable contact with most of them. The Institute also shares a common vision with the United Nations as a defender against extraterrestrial threats. However, the Institute is autonomous, answering only to its Board of Directors.

The Institute tries to keep its agenda well informed, but for every secret revealed there are many more hidden. In general, agents are given just enough information to complete their assignments. Given the nature of their work however, many agents uncover truths beyond what they were meant to learn. For more information on the Institute and its divisions, refer to the “Secret History” and “The Institute” chapters the DARK*MATTER Campaign Setting.

The Vanishing Scientist

Two years ago, the Hoffmann Institute hired Vena Sanchevandez, an American (Bolivian-born) scientist, to develop treatments for patients suffering from severe radiation exposure. Professor Sanchevandez was moved to Chicago, given a laboratory, and assigned a pre-selected research staff. Her endeavors were closely monitored by the Institute’s Intelligence Division, and her reports were classified. She quickly became aware of an impetus for results. Professor Sanchevandez’s research was not advancing quickly enough for her superiors. Aware of the Intelligence Division’s growing impatience, she began corresponding with Professor Eriq Ricardo, a luminary radiation specialist and colleague residing in Albuquerque, New Mexico. However, efforts to bring Ricardo “into the fold” were thwarted by his mysterious disappearance. Several weeks later, Sanchevandez received a cryptic letter from Professor Ricardo asking her to meet him in Venezuela, where he had found something pertinent to their research. Sanchevandez informed her superiors of Ricardo’s letter. Determined to uncover Ricardo’s secret without arousing his suspicion, the Institute fabricated a cover story for Sanchevandez, making it seem as though she were returning to Bolivia to attend her father’s funeral. Upon arriving in Bolivia, Sanchevandez chartered a private flight to Caracas to meet Ricardo secretly.

Shortly after her arrival, Professor Sanchevandez was identified and taken to a remote factory in the hills outside Caracas by a group of strange men (called sandmen) working for an étoile, an intelligent xeniform resembling a tangled mesh of living wires. The sandmen brought Sanchevandez and Ricardo together and put them to work enhancing a cyberorganic implant designed to render its host impervious to various forms of radiation. Created by the étoile to protect the sandmen from radiation, the symbiotic implant resembles a small but peculiar conglomeration of wires and alloys. It attaches to its host’s spine by digging its tendrils through the host’s lower back.

Three Institute operatives assigned to shadow Sanchevandez broke into the étoile’s secret facility, killing several of the sandmen before freeing the captured scientists. However, during their escape, the shadow operatives were killed by various security systems. Ricardo and Sanchevandez fled the complex but were hunted down by the étoile’s remaining sandmen. Ricardo was exterminated, but not before giving the anti-radiation implant to Professor Sanchevandez and delaying the sandmen long enough for her to escape. Sanchevandez immediately alerted the Hoffmann Institute and went into hiding. Once apprised of the situation, the Institute made preparations to remove Sanchevandez and the implant from Caracas and return them safely to the United States.

To conceal the true nature of the implant, the Intelligence Division (working with the “special ops” division of Blue Section) has devised a false cover story suggesting that Sanchevandez took advantage of an opportunity to sell her research to a South American company for profit, portraying her as a rogue

Intelligence operative. The Division has selected a group of field agents to travel to Caracas and escort Sanchevandez to Washington D.C. for "questioning." The agents are told nothing of the implant, the étoile, the sandmen, or Professor's Sanchevandez's true loyalty to the Hoffmann Institute.

Professor Vena Sanchevandez

Level 6 human female Tech Op

STR 8 INT 13 [+2]
DEX 11 [+1] WIL 10
CON 9 PER 9

Durability: 9/9/5/5

Move: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4, easy swim 2, swim 4

Reaction score: Ordinary/2

Action check: 15+/14/7/3

Actions: 2

Last Resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed* 5/2/1 d4s/d4+1 s/d4+2s LI/O

* +d4 base situation die

Defenses

+1 DEX modifier vs. ranged attacks

+2 INT modifier vs. encounter skills

-4 step bonus to CON feat checks vs. poison and radiation (due to implant; see "Equipment" below)

Skills

Athletics [8]; Modern Ranged Weapons [11]-*pistol* [12]; Vehicle Operation [11]; Stamina [9]; Computer Science [13]; Knowledge [13]-*English* [15], *Spanish* [16]; Life Science [13]-*biology* [18], *genetics* [16], *zoology* [14]; Physical Science [13]-*chemistry* [17]; Technical Science [13]; Awareness [10]; Creativity [10]-*academic writing* [11]; Investigate [10]-*research* [13]; Teach [10]; Interaction [9].

Equipment

The professor has an implant attached to the base of her spine. The implant was created by an alien race called the étoile and is composed of extraterrestrial alloys. It is designed to protect the host from poison and intense levels of radiation. The implant is a 10 cm-long, 6 cm-wide metal "slug" with wiry tendrils embedded in the host's flesh. These tendrils are nearly 1 meter long and connected to nerve clusters in the host's body. The implant has many safeguards: Removing it without killing the host requires a Medical Science-*surgery* complex skill check (5 successes).

Background

Vena is a petite woman with brown eyes, curly brown hair, and olive complexion. She was born in Cochabamba, Bolivia in 1969, emigrated to the United States in 1978, and attended the University of Massachusetts in 1982, where she studied chemistry and biology. She has written several papers on biogenetics and is considered an expert in her field. She is currently employed by the Hoffmann Institute, helping to devise radiation treatments.

Mission Set-up

The adventure assumes that the heroes have already arrived in Caracas, made contact with Professor Sanchevandez, and escorted her safely to a secret airfield outside the city (thus avoiding airport security and metal detectors). The adventure begins aboard a Hoffmann Institute jet equipped with state-of-the-art technology and an ablative fuselage that renders it invisible to radar. The trip from Venezuela to the Institute's private landing strip outside of Washington D.C. is expected to take 3 hours.

Having narrowly escaped extermination by the Institute's shadow agents, the étoile has already relocated its base of operations. It employs its international network of sandmen to track the stolen radiation implant in Sanchevandez's possession. Unable to detect the plane, they manage to home in on a small yet powerful alien transmitter built into the implant itself.

The sandmen do what they must to keep the étoile's technology from falling into enemy hands. Commandeering an American government satellite, sandmen hackers use an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) to disable the Hoffmann jet in mid-flight, 10 kilometers above the Caribbean Sea and 75 kilometers from the Florida panhandle. The pulse fries the plane's communication and navigation systems, polarizes the aircraft's compass, knocks out the engines, and kills the pilot and co-pilot. The EMP also disables the heroes' cellular phones, computers, comm gear, and watches.

After a harrowing descent, the heroes land the disabled plane safely and find themselves stranded in a remote Florida bayou with only their gear and wits to help them. Deprived of electronic hardware and communication devices, they must somehow contact the Institute and insure Sanchevandez's safe return to

Washington.

Flight 000

The heroes begin the mission with whatever equipment the Gamemaster deems appropriate. Given that their mission is to safely escort Vena Sanchezvandez back to the United States, the heroes are probably armed with handguns and spare ammunition. Heavier weaponry should be discouraged.

Heroes can select whatever communication and surveillance gear they like; however, given the “shoot in and out” nature of their assignment, they should be traveling light.

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the adventure:

Hoffman Institute Flight 000 June 15, 5:32 P.M.

You left Venezuela just over two hours ago with Professor Sanchezvandez in custody. She has not spoken to you since boarding the plane, and from her ghostly pallor you guess that she doesn't like to travel. The plane is flying in stealth mode, its engines whispering quietly above the clouds, its ablative fuselage deflecting radar signals. The pilot reports that the plane is flying at an altitude of 10 kilometers and is approximately 150 kilometers southwest of the Florida panhandle. At your present speed, the plane should land in Washington D.C. within one hour.

The jet is equipped with all of the amenities: reclining chairs, a private bar, television screens, cellular phones, and laptop computers. You've already informed the Institute of your ETA. A team of agents is waiting for you at Dulles International Airport. They are preparing to debrief Sanchezvandez upon her arrival.

You know only that the professor supposedly left the United States to attend her father's funeral in Bolivia. How she ended up in Venezuela is the Institute's concern. From her file, you know that Professor Sanchezvandez has been working for the Intelligence Division developing gene therapies to counteract radiation sickness, but there is speculation that she and a colleague were trying to sell their research abroad. According to the Intelligence Division, Sanchezvandez's colleague, Professor Eriq Ricardo, was experimenting with radiation treatments at the Institute's Treatment Center in Albuquerque. The two scientists had been corresponding via the Internet and agreed to meet one another in Caracas, where Professor Ricardo had allegedly found some private investors interested in procuring their research.

Your mission isn't to interrogate Professor Sanchezvandez. The Institute has made it clear that no one is to question the professor before she is taken into custody by the agents in Washington. You know only that Professor Eriq Ricardo is dead, killed by unknown operatives in Caracas. Sanchezvandez has declined to shed light on her colleague's murder.

Heroes might take this opportunity to question Sanchezvandez. Although she knows all of the information in “The Vanishing Scientist” section, her superiors in the Intelligence Division have instructed her not to divulge any information about her experience in Caracas or the fate of Professor Ricardo. Any hero making a successful Interaction-*charm* or Interaction-*intimidate* skill check at a +2 step penalty can learn one of the following pieces of information on an Ordinary success, two on a Good success, and three on an Amazing success. Note that the hero must ask the right questions before she provides these answers:

- She did not head to South America to attend her father's funeral. Her father is still alive and living in Bolivia.
- She did not kill Professor Ricardo. The two scientists were friends, and she is saddened by his death.
- She expects to be debriefed by her superiors upon her return to the United States. She plans to tell them everything.
- Ricardo had gone missing. When he finally contacted her and asked her to meet him in Caracas, she agreed. She believed that Ricardo had made a discovery pertinent to their research.
- Before she left the country, she was creating radiation sickness treatments for the Institute. She does not know what the Institute plans to do with her gene therapy research or the treatments.

If the heroes are abusive Professor Sanchezvandez provides them with no pertinent information. She does not defend herself, biding her time until her safe return to Washington, whereupon she reports the heroes' misconduct to her superiors.

The Unfriendly Skies

Once the sandmen home in on the transmitter in Sanchezvandez's implant, they commandeer a satellite and use its EMP to disable the plane. Regardless of what the heroes are doing, once the plane is 75

kilometers from the Florida panhandle, read or paraphrase the following:

An intense burst of light engulfs the plane, pouring through the cabin windows. The cabin temperature rises quickly, and you can hear a crackling noise throughout the fuselage. The light vanishes, and through the cabin's windows you can see arcs of electricity on the wings. Suddenly, every computer and cellular phone within the cabin explodes and dies. The plastic casements that line the interior of the plane begin to melt, and smoke pours through seams in the fuselage.

The intense light and crackling noises abate. You can no longer hear the engines hum, and the plane seems to be descending ... rapidly.

Any heroes seated in the cockpit bear witness to the horrible deaths of the pilot and copilot as the EMP sends thousands of amps of current through their bodies. Nothing remains of them except burnt corpses with smoke rising from their eye sockets. The EMP destroys all electronic equipment aboard the aircraft. Cellular phones melt and become useless; laptop computers explode with spectacular sparks. Digital watches are frozen, and all comm gear is rendered useless.

Professor Sanchevandez is unharmed by the EMP. Her implant was designed to withstand electromagnetic pulses and is the only piece of hardware to survive the "attack." (The étoile who created the implant expects it to be destroyed in the plane crash.) The EMP does have one minor residual effect on the implant, leaving the professor feeling ill and weak. Heroes who make a successful *Awareness-perception* check can see that the professor is not well, although they might dismiss this as airsickness.

The powerless jet plummets from the darkening sky. Heroes have 4 rounds of action before the plane crashes, during which time they can attempt any of the following feats:

- **Jump from the plane.** Although the aircraft is equipped with parachutes, the EMP has welded shut all exits. Even if the heroes could "blow" their way out, the sudden depressurisation coupled with the plane's rapid descent would likely destroy the plane and kill everyone aboard.
- **Send a distress signal.** The EMP destroys all onboard communication systems. The heroes have no way of communicating with the outside world. Despite the heroes' best attempts, the equipment cannot be repaired. Heroes attempting to do so waste a full round of actions.
- **Crash land the plane.** This would seem to be the only viable option. Although navigation and guidance systems are inoperable (and unrepairable), the plane can be controlled manually with a great deal of effort and luck. Any hero who takes control of the airplane must make a successful *Dexterity* feat check at a +3 step penalty or *Vehicle Operation-air* skill check at a +2 step penalty to stabilize the plane's descent. The hero can attempt a new roll during each phase he or she is entitled to an action. If another hero assists by taking over the co-pilot's position, the penalty is reduced by one step. The roll must succeed before the plane crashes. A successful check indicates a controlled crash landing. The plane remains largely intact, and injuries are minor. Everyone aboard the aircraft must make *Constitution* feat check. Damage from impact varies with the degree of success: no damage on an Amazing success, d4+1s on a Good success, 2d4s on an Ordinary success, d4+1w on a Failure, and d6+1w on a Critical Failure. A failed *Vehicle Operation-air* skill check indicates an uncontrolled landing. The plane is torn to pieces, leading to severe and possibly fatal injuries. Everyone aboard the plane must make a *Constitution* feat check. Damage from impact varies with the degree of success: d4w on an Amazing success, d4+1w on a Good success, 2d4w on an Ordinary success, d4m on a Failure, and 2d4m on a Critical Failure.

The Gamemaster should make a *Constitution* feat check for Professor Sanchevandez, adding a d4 to the control die. If possible, the Gamemaster should ensure that Sanchevandez survives the crash, although she might be injured. She has one Last Resort point that can be used to reduce damage by one degree.

Down in the Bayou

The plane crashes deep within a Florida bayou. Water can be heard seeping into the plane's cargo hold, but the plane is in no danger of sinking. If the landing was controlled, both the cockpit and the passenger cabin are intact, although it's clear that the plane cannot be salvaged. Conscious heroes can escape through gashes in the fuselage near the wings and tail.

If the landing was uncontrolled, both wings have been torn from the fuselage, and the main cabin has snapped in two pieces near the tail. Heroes can exit the plane through the shattered fuselage.

The heroes have no way to determine their precise location, and their ability to communicate with the outside world has been lost. Once they abandon the aircraft, read or paraphrase the following:

You've survived the crash, but the plane's ablative hull makes it unlikely that anyone knows where you

are. Your electronic equipment is dead, and there's nothing around except swamp and swarming insects. You've crashed in the middle of nowhere, and night is encroaching.

The heroes can salvage four first aid kits, a rescue pack, a pair of binoculars, and two toolkits from the airplane. (These items are fully detailed in Chapter 9 of the *Player's Handbook*.) There are also two four-man inflatable rafts, a flare gun, six flares, and a pair of imaging goggles stored in the sunken cargo hold; recovering these items requires a successful Movement-*swim* skill check with a -2 step bonus. All other equipment aboard the plane has been destroyed or rendered inoperable by the EMP.

The sun is just beginning to set, and the heroes have less than an hour before nightfall.

Heroes who explore the area around the plane can make an Awareness-*perception* skill check with a -1 step bonus. Those who succeed quickly realize they are not alone. The lakes and swampy embankments are home to several alligators that watch all interlopers with keen interest. The alligators are slow to attack. Only heroes who stray too far from the airplane are attacked; those who remain inside or near the plane are not bothered for several hours. In the event of an alligator attack, use the "Crocodile" statistics presented in the *Gamemaster Guide* (page 233).

Regardless of whether they choose to remain near the plane or head out in a random direction, the heroes soon encounter more of the local "wildlife." Proceed with the following encounter.

The Swamprat

This encounter takes place in the swamp or near the crashed plane. Read or paraphrase the following to the players:

The noises of the swamp are dulled by a constant drone that grows louder as the seconds pass.

To the west, lit by the dying sun, is a flat-bottomed skiff propelled across the swamp by a huge fan mounted to its stern. Rising from the skiff are four tall, metal struts supporting a chair, upon which sits the driver. At the front of the skiff stands another figure with a rifle tucked under one arm.

The boat swerves around several swampy embankments but is clearly headed in your general direction.

The flat-bottomed skiff, better known as a "swamprat", is moving quickly toward the crash site. Heroes can use binoculars to get a closer look at the approaching boat, or they can wait until it draws nearer. Once the boat and its occupants become more visible to the heroes, read or paraphrase the following:

The two men in the skiff bear more than a passing resemblance to one another. You would guess that they are brothers or perhaps cousins.

The man standing on the bow of the rig looks a few years older than the driver, and his clean-shaven face cannot quite conceal a crooked smile.

The slack-jawed driver pulls back on the throttle, silencing the incessant hum and allowing the skiff to glide to a stop.

The men are dressed in stained fatigues and have guns tucked under their arms. You also notice that both men wear bandoliers, hanging from which are several grenades. Dragging in the water along each side of the skiff is a dead alligator with a steel hook buried deep in its lower jaw.

The man standing on the bow of the swamprat is John Keller. He carries a .44 lever rifle under his arm and has two grenades dangling from his bandolier. The skiff's driver is Thomas Keller, John's younger brother. Thomas has a shotgun tucked under his arm, a .45 revolver bolstered to his thigh, and four grenades hanging from his bandolier. The Keller boys are alligator hunters; they use the grenades (and sometimes dynamite) to blast gators out of the water, and then use firearms to finish off their stunned prey.

The Keller boys appear to be in their mid- to late-twenties. (John is 29, and Thomas is 24.) They are simple men with no formal education; they speak slowly and in short sentences, and their words are punctuated with a thick southern drawl.

Any hero who makes a successful Awareness-*perception* check at a +1 step penalty notices something odd about the Kellers. Unlike the heroes, who are constantly pestered by swarms of insects, the Kellers are not. The swarms seem to avoid them. If brought to his attention John claims, "Must be the gasoline." Indeed, heroes can smell a faint odor of gasoline rising from the skiff; however the insects' aversion points to something far more sinister.

The Kellers are not entirely human. They are the result of genetic experiments combining human and water moccasin DNA. Their reptilian DNA makes them incredibly strong, devious and sadistic. They are also extremely cunning, particularly when it comes to setting traps and ambushes.

The Kellers give the heroes hungry looks but offer to take them to their house "just up the river." If the heroes attack them, the Kellers retaliate with all the force they can muster. In melee combat, they rely on their brute strength and venomous fangs to overcome their prey. If they are not provoked, they seem agreeable if peculiar.

Brothers and Arms

John handles most of the speaking, as Thomas doesn't possess much of a vocabulary. If the heroes confront the Kellers in a non-hostile manner, they can glean the following information by asking the proper questions:

- The brothers live in a house on the bayou, several miles west of the crash site. They saw the plane go down from across the bayou and decided to investigate.
- John and Thomas have four more brothers named Bill, Dwight, Jimmy, and Ron respectively. All of them are gator hunters. According to John, the other brothers are "out huntin'." The brothers live alone in the house.
- The brothers have a working radio in their house. They are willing to take the heroes aboard the swamprat, transport them to the house, and let them use the radio to signal for help.
- The Kellers have a truck that they use when "headin' to town." The nearest town is "at least an hour's drive" from the house.
- The Kellers' house does not have a phone or direct power, although the boys claim to own a gasoline generator.

While the heroes speak with John, Thomas fiddles with one of his grenades, pulling out the pin and putting it back in repeatedly. Heroes who make a successful *Awareness-perception* skill check realize what Thomas is doing. If the heroes seem distressed, Thomas slides the pin back into the grenade and sits patiently and quietly in the driver's chair, eyeing the heroes closely.

Heroes in close contact with either brother have the chance to notice a few more peculiarities. Each discovery requires a separate *Awareness-perception* check at a +2 step penalty:

- The Kellers do not blink very often, and when they do, the blinking is unnaturally slow. Observant heroes within 1 meter notice that the Kellers have a second set of eyelids, more like a milky, translucent film, under their normal human eyelids.
- Despite the warmth and humidity, the Kellers sweat very little. They also have no unpleasant body odor, despite having been in the swamp "for hours."
- Except for the hair on their heads, the Kellers are without facial hair. Their skin feels clammy to the touch and is almost completely hairless.

If the heroes defeat the brothers, they can commandeer the skiff and head west until they reach the Kellers' house. Steering the skiff requires a successful *Vehicle Operation-water* skill check. A failed check indicates that the swamprat has stalled, run aground, or (in the case of a Critical Failure) overturned. If the skiff runs aground, everyone in the rig must make a *Dexterity* feat check (or *Acrobatics* check, if the player prefers) to remain in the boat. A failed roll indicates d6s damage as the hero is thrown from the rig. Heroes thrown from an overturned skiff suffer no damage but must make a successful *Movement-swim* check to reach shore. Anyone who fails three *swim* checks in a row is attacked by a water moccasin; use the "Snake, Venomous" statistics presented on page 235 of the *Gamemaster Guide*.

A skiff that runs aground can be maneuvered back into the water with a successful *Vehicle Operation-water* skill check or a good push from the shore. An overturned skiff cannot be salvaged, forcing the heroes to make their way westward on foot. (In this case, the Gamemaster should plan at least one encounter with a hungry alligator or water moccasin.)

If the heroes "befriend" the Kellers, they are invited aboard the skiff and taken to the Kellers' house. The trip from the downed plane to the Kellers' house takes 30 minutes. During that time, the heroes can ask questions or engage in idle discourse. The brothers do not speak unless spoken to, and their responses are curt and without emotion.

As night falls, the river darkens. While Thomas guides the boat through swampy channels, John picks up a portable flashlight lying on the floor of the skiff and lights the way. If the heroes have dispatched the brothers and claimed the skiff, they can use the flashlight in a similar fashion to ensure safe passage through the swamp. The flashlight's battery lasts for 1 hour.

Home Sweet Home

Whether the heroes deliberately set out for the Kellers' house or blindly head off into the bayou, their journey through the night invariably brings them here. Read or paraphrase the following text as the heroes near the house:

Jutting from the nearby shore is a ramshackle wooden pier. The pier is illuminated by a gas lantern hanging from a wooden pole lashed to the end of the dock. Another swamprat is tied off on one side of the

dock, but the nearer side is free.

North of the dock, about 10 meters from the shore and set upon a grassy embankment, is a dark, two-story wooden house with a sagging roof. Its black windows glare empty, and from the house you hear a soft, almost rhythmic clatter.

Tied to the dock is another swamprat identical to the one used by John and Thomas. Heroes who search the docked swamprat find two empty gasoline cans, several spent shotgun shells, and one loose stick of dynamite.

If the heroes think to ask John where the other Keller brothers might be, the presence of the second swamprat suggests that Bill and Dwight must have come home. John declines to reveal the possible whereabouts of Jimmy and Ron, however, saying only that “they weren’t aboard the skiffs when they left this mornin’.” (In fact, Jimmy and Ron spent the day running errands for the “master” and repairing a damaged rotor on the helicopter—see “Behind the House” for details.)

The Kellers’ house is desolate and eerie. The structure is two stories high with a porch on the south side, facing the dock. The wood is unpainted and rotten, and many of the windows are either broken or splattered with mud. The porch and interior are adorned with skeletal alligator remains, mostly jawbones. This is the source of the “rhythmic clatter” heard down by the dock.

The Keller Brothers (“Moccasin Men”)

Level 6 mutant (human) male Combat Specs

STR 14 (2d6+8) [+2] INT 10 (2d4+5)
DEX 13 (2d4+8) [+2] WIL 6 (d6+3) [-1]
CON 14 (2d4+9) PER 5 (d4+3)

Durability: 14/14/7/7

Move: sprint 26, run 16, walk 6, easy swim 3, swim 6

Reaction score: Ordinary/2

Action check: 15+/14/7/3

Actions: 2

Last Resorts: 0

Mutations/Drawbacks

Mutations: Enhanced STR (incl.), Enhanced CON (incl.), Natural Attack (bite), Poison Attack; Drawbacks: Toxin Intolerance, Minor Physical Change

Melee Attacks

Unarmed- <i>brawl</i>	15/7/5 d4+2s/d4+3s/d4+4s	LI/O
Bite*	14/7/3 1w/d4w/d4+1w	LI/O

Ranged Attacks

Shotgun	15/7/3 d4w/d6w/d4m	HI/O
.45 Revolver	15/7/3 d4+1w/d4+2w/d6m	HI/O
.44 Lever Rifle	15/7/3 d6w/d8+1 w/d6m	HI/O
Grenade, Frag**	15/7/3 d4w/d4+2w/d6+2w	HI/G

* Bite injects neurotoxic venom only if the victim suffers primary damage. Resisting the venom requires a CON feat check with a +1 step penalty (onset time 1 minute; attack duration 4 hours). Damage from the poison depends on the feat check result: Critical Failure, d6+1m; Failure, d4+1m; Ordinary, d8+1w; Good, d6+1w; Amazing, d6+1s.

** Consult the *Player's Handbook*, page 180, for explosives rules.

Defenses

+2 STR modifier vs. melee attacks

+2 DEX modifier vs. ranged attacks

-1 WIL modifier vs. encounter skills

Flak jacket: d6-2 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d6-3 (En)

Skills

Athletics [14]-*climb* [15], *jump* [15], *throw* [15]; Unarmed Attack [14]-*brawl* [15]; Modern Ranged Weapons [13]-*pistol* [14], *rifle* [14]; Stealth 13]-*hide* [14], *sneak* [14]; Vehicle Operation [13]-*air* [14], *land* [14], *water* [14]; Movement [14]-*swim* [16]; Stamina [14]-*endurance* [15]; Knowledge [10]-*English language* [11]; Technical Science [10]-*repair* [12]; Awareness [6]; Investigate [6]-*track* [7]; Interaction [5].

Equipment

John Keller: .44 lever rifle, two frag grenades.

Thomas Keller: 12-gauge shotgun, .45 revolver, four frag grenades.

William (Bill) Keller: .44 lever rifle, .45 revolver, two frag grenades.

Dwight Keller: .44 lever rifle, three frag grenades.

James (Jimmy) Keller: .45 revolver, two frag grenades.

Ronald (Ron) Keller: 12-gauge shotgun, .45 revolver, two frag grenades

Background

The Keller brothers are mutants with human and water moccasin DNA. They were created by a Grey (a xeniform) named Jaagrel, whom the “boys” refer to as “the master” or sometimes as “our father.” Inspired by an article on the Internet, Jaagrel named the Keller boys after American presidents. The boys exist to protect and serve Jaagrel. See “Behind the House” for details.

Den of Serpents

Lurking in the swamp are four more members of the Keller clan, all moccasin men. They automatically hear the sound of John’s and Thomas’s approaching swamprat. Bill and Dwight are concealed amid the trees and foliage about 10 meters from the house on the west and east sides, respectively, using their *Stealth-hide* skill to remain unseen. The remaining brothers, Jimmy and Ron, are lurking in the swampy field north of the house. They are more fully detailed in the “Behind the House” section.

If John and Thomas are still with the heroes, they lash their skiff to the dock and escort the heroes up to the house. The brothers keep their firearms handy as they lead the heroes to the front room (area 1) where

the radio is located. Once the heroes are led inside. Bill creeps around to the back door of the house (leading into the kitchen, area 3) while Dwight crawls up onto the porch and prepares to ambush anyone coming through the front door or “pick off” any heroes by the dock. Heroes who remain near the dock who specifically watch the house must make an Awareness-*perception* skill check with a +2 step penalty to spot Dwight on the porch. (Dwight and his brothers are skilled at camouflage and know how to conceal themselves in dark shadows.)

If the heroes keep a sentry on the porch, Dwight changes tactics, instead crawling under the house and entering through the hole in the floor of the den (area 4). Crawling under the house undetected requires a successful Stealth-*sneak* skill check.

The brothers wait until most or all of the heroes are inside the house before striking. As the heroes get the radio up and running, John and Thomas leap upon the two nearest heroes and attempt to bite them with their fangs. At the first sound of trouble, Bill bursts through the back door into the kitchen and begins hunting intruders with his .44 lever rifle. Dwight waits out on the porch, ready to take down any hero who flees the house or any hero positioned near the dock.

Professor Sanchezvandez stays close to the heroes. However, her implant has an unexpected effect: When she comes within 2 meters of the radio in area 1, the implant disrupts the radio signal, creating so much static that the heroes cannot clearly send or receive messages. When she moves away from the radio, the static clears. Vena claims to have no explanation for this minor phenomenon.

Ground Floor

Heroes exploring the ground floor of the house notice several shotgun holes punched through the interior walls. The holes create crawl spaces between the walls where the Keller boys reside when they want a cool, dark place to sleep. These holes also serve as excellent hiding places when the boys wish to ambush unwanted visitors.

1. Main Room. This area is a jumble of furniture haphazardly placed about the room. Mold and cobwebs cover the chairs and other furniture, and the windows are splattered with mud. Hanging from the ceiling, stacked upon tables, and strewn about the floor are hundreds of alligator bones that clatter and crunch as the heroes make their way into room. A creaky staircase leads up to second floor hallway (area 5).

Pressed against the wall between mud-splattered windows is a table with an old airplane radio sitting on it. The radio is powered by a rusted portable generator located on the floor beneath the table. The generator is temperamental and requires a successful Technical Science-*repair* skill check with a -1 step bonus to start. Operating the radio requires a successful Systems Operation-*communications* skill check at a -2 step bonus.

The range of the radio is limited; the only response within range comes from a lonely restauranteuse named Vicki-Lynn Richmond, who works at a roadside dive called the Alligator Cafe. The cafe is located 33 kilometers from the Kellers’ house on a dirt road. Although she tries to be helpful, Vicki-Lynn isn’t very bright. She has met the Keller boys a few times and doesn’t consider them dangerous. She has no clue where the Alligator Cafe is in relation to Kellers’ house. A hero making a successful Interaction skill check (either to *bargain*, *bluff*, *charm*, or *intimidate*) can convince Vicki-Lynn to contact the local authorities. However, unless the hero specifically instructs her to contact the police via radio, she actually closes the restaurant and drives to the nearest police station! After an hour’s drive and several minutes spent asking for directions to the station, she alerts the police. Three cruisers (six officers) sent to investigate the Keller homestead take over 3 hours to arrive. (Finding the road leading to the Kellers’ property proves quite difficult.) Once Vicki-Lynn leaves the radio, the heroes have no one else to contact for the next 3 hours.

2. Dining Room. A battered table with six rickety chairs dominates this mold cobweb-filled chamber. A window peers out onto the wetlands behind the house; the window pane is smashed and draped with clattering alligator bones.

The dining table is bare except for a worn, yellow-paged Merriam Webster dictionary (Tenth Edition) that lies open to page 816 and 817. (The first word on the page is “opportunistic.” The last is “orbit.”) The dictionary was given to the Kellers by their master. (See “Behind the house” for details.) The boys have learned to enhance their vocabulary by reading this book, although they still find it difficult to string together the words they have learned.

Hanging on the wall near the opening to the kitchen (area 3) is a gas-powered lantern on a hook. There is enough fuel in the lantern to sustain it for 2 hours.

3. Kitchen. Foul odors permeate this ill-kept kitchen. Wooden cupboards and shelves line the walls. The shelves are cluttered with cracked dishes, rusty hooks and knives, and dirty empty jars. A shattered window draped with alligator bones looks out toward the wetlands north of the house. Below the window is a sink layered with scum. Living in the cabinet under the sink is a venomous snake. (See page 235 of the *Gamemaster Guide* for statistics.) It lashes out once at anyone opening the cabinet door before recoiling into the dark recesses of the cabinet.

Hanging on the wall near the back door are the keys to a stolen 1999 Dodge pick-up. (The keychain is shaped like a small, rubber tire with the words “Made in the Good Ol’ U.S.A.” stamped on it.) The truck is parked 250 meters north and is not visible from the house. See the “Behind the House” section for details. The door in the south corner of the kitchen leads to a pantry. Stuffed in this cubicle amid bare shelves are three putrefied human corpses crawling with maggots. These are the remains of a boater and two tourists who blundered into the Kellers’ bayou over a week ago. Heroes who fail a Stamina skill check are sickened by the stench and the display and spend a full round retching uncontrollably, during which time all actions suffer a +2 step penalty. Any hero making a successful Medical Science-*forensics* skill check at a -2 bonus (or a Knowledge-*deduce* skill check with no modifier) can determine that one man was killed by a rifle shot between the eyes, while the other two were each killed by a shotgun blast to the torso. The Keller boys hurled the victims’ wallets into the swamp and sunk the boat after pillaging it.

Any hero who opens the door leading outside – or any hero circling the house to enter through the back door – should make an Awareness-*perception* skill check (with a -2 step bonus if they have a light source). A successful roll reveals a well-worn path leading from the back door into the swampy fields north of the house. Heroes making a successful Investigate-*track* skill check (with a -2 bonus if they have a light source) can follow the trail for 250 meters to its destination. In this event, proceed with the “Behind the House” section.

4. Den. This is where the Kellers skin their prey and strip the bones. The room is dark and full of shadows, and the air is filled with the odor of lime emanating from a barrel of the substance stashed in the corner near the door to the kitchen. The windows are covered with dry mud.

Nailed to the walls of this room are sixteen alligator hides. Arranged in arc around the fireplace are three leather-padded chairs with an alligator hide thrown over the back of each. Stools covered with alligator hide are positioned at the foot of each chair. The fireplace is filled with burnt wood and bones, and mounted above the mantel is a large alligator’s head and two .30 bolt rifles. The rifles are loaded and ready to fire.

Against the south wall rests a tarred cedar chest. The lid is closed but not locked. Inside are 27 sticks of dynamite in a box, 36 shells for the .30 bolt rifles, 65 shells for the .44 lever-action rifles, 70 shells for a 12-gauge shotgun, and a box containing several hundred .45 caliber rounds. In addition to the ammunition the chest contains a box of batteries, two bowie knives (use the statistics for “short sword” as presented in the *Players Handbook*), and two steel hooks used for dragging gator carcasses.

In the southwest corner of the room hidden beneath an alligator skin rug, is a 65-cm hole in the floor leading under the house. The Keller brothers use this hole for sneaking into and out of the house.

Second Floor

5. Upstairs Hallway. The stairs leading up to this hallway creak ominously, but heroes can traverse the hall quietly by making a successful Stealth-*sneak* skill check. The hallway is bare and unremarkable. A window, jagged shards of glass still lodged in the frame, looks out onto the wetlands north of the house.

6. Bedrooms. Each of these rooms contains three uncomfortable cots with dirt-stained mattresses as well as numerous alligator trophies mounted to the wall or suspended from the ceiling by wires. Each room also contains a simple wooden chair and dresser. Placed under leaks in the roof are metal buckets to catch the water. The window in each room is cracked but otherwise intact.

If the heroes barricade themselves in either room, the Kellers can break down the door by making a

successful Strength feat check. (The Gamemaster should roll once, with a -1 step bonus for each brother who assists the first and a +1 step penalty for each hero trying to hold the door closed.) If the brothers fail to open the barricaded door after one attempt, they blast open the door with a grenade or stick of dynamite on their next available action. Alternatively, one of the brothers might try to climb the outside walls of the house (requiring a successful Athletics-*climb* skill check) and smash through the window.

7. Bathroom. A porcelain bathtub occupies the far end of this dark room. The tub and surrounding floor have been claimed by mildew. A shattered sink, its pipes fully exposed, stands against the north wall. Above the sink is a cracked mirror, and between the sink and the tub rests a clogged toilet filled with scummy water. The window is smashed, although bits of jagged glass are still clutched in the frame.

8. Bedroom. Rain leaking through the roof has ruined or destroyed the contents of this dank chamber. A large bed rests in the northeast corner, its stained mattress harboring several unpleasant odors. Pushed against the south wall, across from the cracked 'window, is a rotted and sagging couch with mildew-covered cushions. In front of the couch is a stained oval table, atop which rests an old Polaroid camera. The camera flash still works and can take up to four pictures. Next to the camera are three badly focused snapshots:

The first picture was taken in front of the Keller's house. The picture shows one of the brothers (Bill) holding up a dead gator on a steel hook.

The second picture is a snapshot of the dead bodies stuffed in the kitchen pantry (area 3). The picture was taken prior to the bodies' putrefaction and would allow police to better identify the victims.

The third picture was taken behind the house, although this is not clearly evident. It shows the silver fuselage of a downed cargo plane. The aircraft looks quite old, has no wings, and is draped with camouflage nets. Heroes who study the picture closely see what looks like a small satellite dish jutting from the top of the plane, about midway along the fuselage. For details, see the "Behind the House" section below.

The floor around the table and bed is rotted and weak. Any hero attempting to walk across the floor to reach the table or bed causes the floor to collapse. A successful Dexterity feat check or an Acrobatics-*fall* check (with a +2 step penalty if the hero took no precautions) allows the hero to either grab hold of the floor's edge and prevent a fall or land on the floor below safely; otherwise, the hero crashes into area 4, suffers d4w damage, and is unable to act until the Marginal phase of the following round.

Behind the House

Many surprises and terrors lurk in the swampy fields behind the Keller house. It is here that heroes can uncover the mysterious origins of the Keller brothers and discover a secret that has remained hidden in the bayou for the past 52 years.

In 1949, a privately owned cargo plane was transporting "scientific equipment" from New Mexico to North Carolina when it inexplicably veered off course and crashed in a Florida bayou. The owners of the downed aircraft were immersed in some illicit government affair and could not conduct a search for the missing aircraft without drawing undue attention to themselves, so they considered the plane "lost." The sole survivor of the crash was a xenofom captive, better known as a "Grey" to certain government agencies and Hoffmann Institute operatives. Using the equipment salvaged from the cargo plane, the Grey attempted to construct a transmitter to contact his people. When this endeavor failed, the Grey devoted his time and energy to other, more familiar pursuits.

The Grey, Jaagrel, modified the scientific equipment aboard the aircraft to extract DNA from the dead crewmen. He then combined the humans' DNA with DNA taken from the indigenous wildlife. After decades of genetic tampering, Jaagrel created the first human-snake hybrid, or "moccasin man." The proto-creature died unexpectedly—poisoned by toxins in its own blood. The Grey spent the next several months perfecting an antitoxin, which he now administers in regular doses to keep his moccasin men alive.

Over the years, the Grey has refined his techniques, prolonging the lifespans of his moccasin men while using them to run errands and gather new equipment. In 1994, Jaagrel discovered the Internet. Since then he's been using online services to order supplies, deflecting the costs to other people's credit cards. The supplies are delivered to a post office box in a nearby town, where the Keller boys can fetch the equipment without arousing too much suspicion.

Jaagrel keeps his "boys" on a tight leash. Once the Grey becomes aware of the heroes, he does not allow them to leave the bayou alive. (The xenofom doesn't want his research to fall into the "wrong hands.") If necessary, Jaagrel uses his telepathy to transmit instructions to the Keller brothers.

Jaagrel's lair isn't difficult to find. The crashed cargo plane is located 250 meters north of the Keller

house. Camouflage netting and dense foliage help to conceal the plane, which cannot be seen from the house; however, heroes who follow the path leading from the back door of the house spot the plane's silver fuselage at 50 meters away. Read or paraphrase the following once the heroes find the plane:

The silver gleam of a large object catches the moonlight. You estimate that the object is at least 50 meters away. Moving cautiously through the tall, wet grass, you see that the object appears to be the broken fuselage of an old cargo plane, its cockpit angled slightly in your direction. The wings of the aircraft are nowhere in sight, and the fuselage is covered by a net of vines and leaves.

Parked on a muddy trail that runs alongside the fuselage and disappears into the dark foliage is a pick-up truck. Although it is covered with mud, the truck is otherwise in good condition.

Lurking in the tall grass on either side of the path leading to the airplane are Jimmy and Ron Keller. They use their *Stealth-hide* skill to remain unseen and do not reveal themselves until the heroes come within 20 meters of the plane fuselage or the pick-up truck. If the heroes get too close to the plane or the truck, the brothers open fire with their guns. They do not hurl grenades so long as there's a chance of damaging the cargo plane, but they are not afraid to lob grenades at heroes who steer clear of the fuselage.

Those heroes who make a successful *Awareness-perception* check spot a small satellite dish atop the fuselage, midway between the cockpit and the tail. The dish, like much of the aircraft, is partially hidden by camouflage netting. Heroes specifically looking for the dish receive a -3 step bonus to their skill check. The only door leading into the cargo plane is on the south side, facing the heroes. There are no windows in the plane except the cockpit windows, which have been shattered. The interior of the cargo plane is fully detailed in the next section.

The 1999 Dodge Ram is a stolen vehicle, and the keys are hanging on the wall in the Kellers' kitchen. Any hero can hotwire the truck by making a successful *Technical Science-juryrig* skill check. The truck's front cab seats four comfortably, five in a crunch. Stored in the back of the truck are four plastic cans of gasoline. If the gasoline cans are ignited while in the back of the truck, the explosion not only destroys the truck but also inflicts d6+2m damage to anyone inside or on the truck at the time (regardless of the number of gas cans present). Heroes who use their action to throw themselves clear of the exploding truck (requiring a successful *Athletics-jump* or *Acrobatics-dodge* skill check at a +1 step penalty) reduce or negate damage depending on the result: Failure, full damage; Ordinary, d6+2w; Good d6+2s; Amazing, d4-ls.

Heroes who circle the cargo plane discover something hidden in a clearing on the north side of the fuselage:

On the north side of the fuselage, less than 10 meters from the plane, is a small clearing. Resting in the middle of this clearing, covered with another camouflage net, is a small two-man helicopter.

The helicopter looks like it was built from scratch by someone with questionable engineering expertise. The open-cockpit vehicle essentially consists of two chairs secured to a heavy engine surmounted by a pair of 6-meter rotor blades. The landing struts and tail of the helicopter are composed of lightweight aluminum.

The Keller brothers built this helicopter from scratch. The Kellers often use the vehicle to survey the bayou and help their brothers locate gators and unwelcome tourists. The makeshift chopper can only support the weight of two people, and flying it requires a successful *Vehicle Operation-air* skill check. Those unfamiliar with the design suffer a +1 step penalty to their skill checks.

The helicopter is fully fueled and has a range of 200 km. If the heroes make their escape aboard one of the skiffs or in the stolen pick-up, two of the Kellers pull the net off of the helicopter and follow the heroes in the air, dropping grenades onto the fleeing vehicle to prevent the heroes' escape. Rules governing *Vehicle Combat* are given in Chapter 12 of the *Player's Handbook*. Statistics for the pickup truck are listed on page 194. Use the "Speedboat" statistics for the swamprats, but increase their durability to 8/8/4. For the Kellers' chopper, use the statistics for "Helicopter," but reduce the vehicle's durability to 6/6/3.

The Cargo Plane

The configuration of this plane is unremarkable, and the cause of the crash cannot be ascertained readily. The plane went down after Jaagrel, who had been sedated, regained consciousness in mid-flight. He telepathically compelled a guard to undo his restraints before *mind blasting* the pilot and co-pilot.

The wings of the aircraft were torn from the fuselage during the crash. The wings were later recovered and dismantled by the Kellers; the brothers used the parts to build the swamprats and the makeshift helicopter.

There are two clear points of entry: the silver metal door on the south side of the fuselage (leading to area 2) and the narrow windows in the cockpit (area 1). Heroes cannot open the side door without alerting the plane's occupant, as the door is badly corroded and squeals painfully when moved. Climbing up through the cockpit windows requires a successful *Athletics-climb* skill check; doing so quietly requires a successful *Stealth-sneak* skill check as well.

Disabling the satellite dish atop the fuselage can be accomplished with any successful hit. This effectively disables Jaagrel's Internet access and television reception, and it also alerts the xeniform to the

presence of trouble.

1. Cockpit. The windows of the cockpit have been smashed inward. Bits of glass cover the controls; throttle assembly, and the skeletons of the pilot and co-pilot, both of whom are still strapped to their chairs. Heroes inspecting the corpses can clearly see that both the pilot and co-pilot wear tattered, unmarked uniforms and empty gun holsters.

Two more chairs at the rear of the cockpit once held the remains of the navigator and communications officer. Their bodies were removed by Jaagrel and subjected to countless genetic experiments before the remains were discarded.

None of the equipment in the cockpit works. Jaagrel and the Kellers have torn out the “guts” of the controls and used the parts for various projects. The radio was removed, repaired, taken back to the Kellers’ house, and put to good use.

Heroes conducting a thorough search of the cockpit can make an Investigate-*search* skill check. A successful search locates a loaded .45 revolver beneath the navigator’s seat. The weapon, removed from the pilot’s holster, was hidden by Jaagrel for emergency use.

2. Passenger Cabin. The passenger seats have been torn out of the floor of this cabin and removed to make space for Jaagrel’s equipment. The room contains a large rectangular aquarium, three metal tables, four opened boxes, and a waste paper basket. A curtain made from alligator hide and bones covers the open doorway leading to area 3.

The aquarium measures 3 meters long, 1 meter wide, and 2 meters deep. The glass walls are 3 cm thick. The tank is filled with swamp water and contains a live, adult water moccasin. This specimen is used in Jaagrel’s genetic research and is the “mother” of the Keller boys. The snake is harmless while contained in the tank but makes threatening “jabs” at the walls of her tank as warm-blooded heroes approach. The Kellers feed the snake daily with live prey captured in the swamp.

The table nearest the door is covered with dirty beakers and flasks, as well as other miscellaneous lab equipment. The table standing nearest the aquarium is covered with trays of syringes, most of which have been used at least once and contain traces of a bluish fluid. Small, unmarked bottles of this fluid rest atop the third table. There is enough blue serum in these bottles for several dozen injections.

Analyzing the liquid requires proper equipment (like the microscope in Jaagrel’s lab, area 3) and a successful Physical Science-*chemistry* skill check. Analysis reveals that the serum is a potent antitoxin that counteracts venom in the bloodstream. Another successful skill check, made after 2d8+8 minutes of further research, reveals that the serum was designed specifically to counteract water moccasin venom (and the Keller brothers’ venomous bite). If the heroes lack the skill to make this diagnosis, Professor Sanchezvandez offers to assist. Once the analysis is complete, a successful Medical Science-*medical knowledge* skill check reveals that a single injection will protect a person against the harmful effects of the venom for up to 24 hours.

If the heroes destroy all vials of the antitoxin and prevent Jaagrel from creating more serum, the Keller boys are slain by their own lethal physiology in 12 hours.

The boxes once contained computer and digital hardware (a monitor, CPU, printer, fax machine, satellite dish) but now contain extension cords, plastic ‘wrappers, blocks of styrofoam padding and instruction books.

The wastepaper basket in the corner behind the aquarium holds several pairs of greasy and stained latex gloves as well as a few broken syringes and decayed rodent carcasses.

3. Cargo Compartment. As the heroes part the curtain leading into the cargo compartment, they hear strange voices and sounds emanating from within. A successful Knowledge-*deduce* skill check reveals that the source of the voices and sounds is a television located somewhere in the cabin beyond.

Should the heroes manage to surprise Jaagrel, they find the small, grey xeniform seated at a computer terminal, engaged in a chat room discussion with a dozen prominent UFOlogists, sharing words regarding the U.S. government’s use of hypnotism as a means to silence self-proclaimed alien abductees.

If Jaagrel is not surprised, he is using his *Telepathy-illusion* to make himself appear as a bald, harmless-looking, middle-aged man with a pair of plastic goggles strapped to his forehead. He tries to imprint this illusion onto all of the heroes present. For each target beyond the first, apply a +1 step penalty to Jaagrel’s skill check. As the heroes enter, Jaagrel watches them from behind his desk, his

syringe in hand but concealed by the illusion. Heroes who make an Investigate-*search* check have no trouble spotting him in the shadows.

If confronted by a single hero, Jaagrel takes a chance and uses his *mind blast*-power. If the hero is incapacitated by the *mind blast*, Jaagrel rushes up and injects the hapless hero with the syringe, then rushes to the cockpit (area 1) to grab the revolver hidden there.

If approached by several heroes at once, Jaagrel uses his Telepathy-*contact* skill to summon one or more of the Keller boys to him. He tries to delay the heroes until help arrives. Although the xeniform understands English and can relay his thoughts telepathically, he cannot speak aloud without revealing his true nature. (His voice sounds completely inhuman, and he finds the language difficult to pronounce.) Thus, he tries to remain silent for as long as possible until help arrives or until he's attacked and forced to defend himself.

Assailed by multiple foes and without the syringe to defend himself Jaagrel quickly surrenders. Any illusion sustained by the xeniform disappears once he's dead; heroes might not realize Jaagrel's true nature until it is too late.

The cargo door, located toward the rear of the compartment cannot be opened from inside or out. Placed upon the cargo door is an L-shaped desk, atop which sits the monitor and keyboard for Jaagrel's Pentium III computer. Jaagrel's important files are encrypted and deciphering them requires a Computer Science-*hacking* or Investigate-*cryptology* complex skill check (7 successes). Once the encryption code has been cracked, heroes can access any of the files with a successful Computer Science or Knowledge-*computer operation* skill check. (Tech Ops receive a -1 step bonus to their rolls.)

Stored on Jaagrel's computer are his research notes regarding the creation of "moccasin men." However, to decipher the notes, a Life Science-*genetics* skill check at a +4 step penalty is required. Successfully applying the knowledge in actual experiments would entail a complex skill check (9 successes) with a +2 step penalty to each roll.

Also stored on Jaagrel's hard drive is the chemical formula for the antitoxin to counteract the Keller boys' poison and the reasons behind its creation.

If the heroes try to use the computer to send a message to the Hoffmann Institute, proceed with the next section.

Heroes browsing Jaagrel's desktop discover a recently downloaded guide for installing home solar panels, a list of online distributors, and a list of conspiracy theory websites. Hidden inside the CD-ROM is a gold-plated CD containing a program designed by Jaagrel to identify the numbers, expiration dates, and owners of several thousand credit cards used online in the past 4 months.

Next to the computer desk is a small table with a fax machine, beside which is a table with a color printer. Also on the plane's cargo door is a gas generator with a small, portable television tuned into the Sci-Fi Channel (more precisely, a *Star Trek* original series episode in which Mr. Spock's brain is abducted by aliens). The television and computer terminal are both attached to a satellite dish affixed to the roof of the plane. Wires attached to the television and computer terminal can be seen running up through small holes in the ceiling.

Toward the front of the cabin is Jaagrel's laboratory. A swiveling stool has been placed in front of a desk cluttered with scientific paraphernalia, jars of biological cultures, small plant and animal specimens and various extracted toxins in small, unlabeled jars. Amid the clutter is a powerful and expensive microscope that Jaagrel purchased online. The desk has three drawers stuffed with syringes, numerous pairs of latex gloves, pharmaceuticals, protective masks, and plastic goggles.

The desk with the microscope rests between two operating tables. Neither table is currently in use.

To the left of the curtain, in the corner, is a brine-filled metal capsule 1.4 meters wide and 3.1 meters long. Jaagrel uses this capsule to "grow" moccasin men once they develop beyond the embryonic stage. Next to the "growth capsule" is a device that Jaagrel constructed using a hospital electrocardiogram; the device is designed to monitor the neural and cardiovascular development of whatever specimen is wired to the capsule. The capsule is currently unoccupied.

All of the electronic hardware in this cabin is powered by the gas generator. Toward the back of the cabin, amid boxes of scrap metal and broken glassware, are two boxes, each containing a solar panel that Jaagrel purchased online. The xeniform plans to offset his dependency on the worn-out generator by

installing solar panels on the fuselage roof. However he has yet to figure out how the panels are installed.

Jaagrel

Level 10 Grey (xeniform) Tech Op

STR 7 INT 14 [+2]
DEX 10 WIL 13 [+2]
CON 7 PER 9

Durability: 7/74/4

Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4, easy swim 2, swim 4

Reaction score: Ordinary/2

Psionic Energy Points: 19

Action check: 14+/13/6/3

Actions: 2

Last Resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed* 3/1/0 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

Syringe** 3/1/0 special LI/O

Mind Blast 14/7/3 d4+1s/d6+1s/d6+2s

* +d4 base situation die.

** Jaagrel is armed with a medical syringe containing a single injection of water moccasin venom. The syringe itself inflicts no measurable damage to the victim. However, resisting the neurotoxic venom requires a CON feat check with a +1 step penalty (onset time 1 minute; attack duration 4 hours). Damage from the poison depends on the feat check result: Critical Failure, d6+1m; Failure, d4+1m; Ordinary, d8+1w; Good, d6+1w; Amazing, d6+1s.

Defenses

+2 INT modifier vs. encounter skills

+2 WIL modifier vs. encounter skills

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Modern Ranged Weapons [10]; Vehicle Operation [10]; Computer Science [14]-*hacking* [17], *programming* [16]; Knowledge [14]-*computer operation* [15], *English language* [16]; Life Science [14]-*biology* [18], *genetics* [19], *xenology* [18], *zoology* [16]; Physical Science [14]-*chemistry* [19]; System Operation [14]-*communications* [15]; Awareness [13]-*intuition* [14]; Resolve [13]-*mental* [14]; Interaction [9]; Telepathy [9]-*contact* [12], *illusion* [11], *mind blast* [14].

Equipment

Jaagrel has access to anything in the cargo plane and his laboratory. If his mind blast power fails him, he lights a stick of dynamite (using a small fuel lighter) and hurls it at his opponent, far enough away to avoid being caught in the blast. He also keeps a .45 revolver hidden in the plane's cockpit.

Background

Jaagrel was one of several Greys conducting covert surveillance in New Mexico, attempting to liberate captured xeniform technology from a U.S. military installation near Roswell, New Mexico. Traveling incognito with the aid of his Telepathy-*illusion* skill, Jaagrel endeavored to gain access to the facility known as Area 51. A U.S. army colonel stationed at the base saw through Jaagrel's illusion but allowed the Grey to leave unharmed. Once outside, however, the xeniform was cornered and captured by several men in black, taken to a private airfield outside of Albuquerque, and flown to a secret facility in North Carolina for reasons that remain elusive.

Jaagrel has tried to send messages to his own people through the Internet, but to date he has not received any response. It's conceivable that the xeniforms will eventually locate Jaagrel and rescue him. Until then, Jaagrel is content to continue his experiments ...

Contacting the Institute

Provided the heroes do not destroy Jaagrel's computer or satellite dish, they can use the hardware and the xeniform's Internet access to send a priority message to the Hoffmann Institute website, which is monitored constantly.

Sending a message to the Hoffmann Institute requires a Computer Science or Knowledge-*computer operation* skill check with no modifier. Encoding the message requires a successful Computer Science-*programming* skill check.

Assuming the message is sent properly, the Institute sends a coded reply confirming receipt of the message within d12 minutes. (The coded response can be deciphered by any hero making a successful

Computer Science-*hacking*, Knowledge-*deduce*, or Investigate-*cryptology* skill check. Agents who work for the Institute's Intelligence Division, including Professor Sanchezvandez, receive a -2 step bonus to the roll.) The response also activates a trace that allows the Institute to pinpoint the heroes' location on an electronic map with the aid of a global positioning satellite (GPS).

If the heroes report that Professor Sanchezvandez is dead, the Hoffmann Institute makes arrangements to recover her body and the étoile implant. If the heroes reveal their knowledge of the implant, the Institute instructs them to remain where they are and makes arrangements to extract them from the scene as quickly as possible. Four hours after the message is sent, a military helicopter arrives to collect Professor Sanchezvandez, the implant, and the heroes. If the heroes make good their escape, they are eventually debriefed. The Institute provides no insight into the true nature of the implant and refuses to divulge the ultimate fate of Professor Sanchezvandez. Heroes who pursue the matter on their own learn that the professor, if she is still alive, is "recovering from surgery and is scheduled to return to work in a month."

If the heroes report the presence of a xenofom, alive or dead, the Institute sends an additional military helicopter with a mobile containment facility and a host of scientists in radiation suits to safely remove the xenofom. If Jaagrel is taken alive by the Institute, his fate is not disclosed during the heroes' debriefing.

If the heroes insist that a team be sent to examine the wreckage of the Institute jet, it is quickly determined that Flight 000 was downed by an electromagnetic pulse. The Intelligence Division confirms that an American satellite "accidentally" discharged an EMP pulse, but the heroes could be assigned to investigate the matter further – a trail that would no doubt lead them into conflict with the sandmen and their étoile masters.

They're Watching You!

If the heroes neglected or failed to encode their message to the Hoffmann Institute, one of two things might happen. First, if the heroes mention either Professor Sanchezvandez or the alien implant, sandmen webwatchers track the message back to its point of origin and send a force to retrieve the implant before the Hoffmann Institute's extraction team arrives. Second, if the heroes mention the presence of a xenofom, alive or dead, their message is intercepted by an unidentified Institute Intelligence operative with secret ties to the U.S. government's Center for Xenological Studies (CXs). In quick response, the Center sends Dr. Regor Prometheus, one of their xenofom experts, to recover the Grey before the Hoffmann Institute extraction team arrives. Dr. Prometheus travels to the scene in a U.S. government helicopter, flashing a government badge; he stops at nothing to recover the xenofom and eliminates any non-military personnel (other than himself) who comes into contact with the xenofom.

Sandmen are everywhere. They have no trouble reaching the heroes before the Hoffmann Institute extraction team. Three of them arrive by black helicopter, brandish false identification, and lure Sanchezvandez aboard. Once they think they have the implant, they eliminate any troublesome opposition and make good their escape. Sanchezvandez is neither seen nor heard from again.

Meanwhile, a mole working inside the Hoffmann Institute provides Dr. Regor Prometheus with whatever information is needed to locate the xenofom. The heroes might return to the Institute's headquarters in Chicago only to realize during their debriefing that the xenofom was intercepted and "confiscated" by government agents while being transported across country in an unmarked van. They might even be assigned to recover the xenofom, placing them in direct conflict with the evil doctor.

Sandmen are detailed in Chapter 8: Xenofoms of the DARK* MATTER Campaign Setting. Dr. Prometheus and the CXs are presented in Chapter 6: Illuminati. If this scenario is used as a prelude to a DARK* MATTER Campaign, the Gamemaster might consider using the sandmen and Dr. Prometheus as recurring villains – or uneasy allies – showing up whenever the heroes least expect them.

Achievement Awards

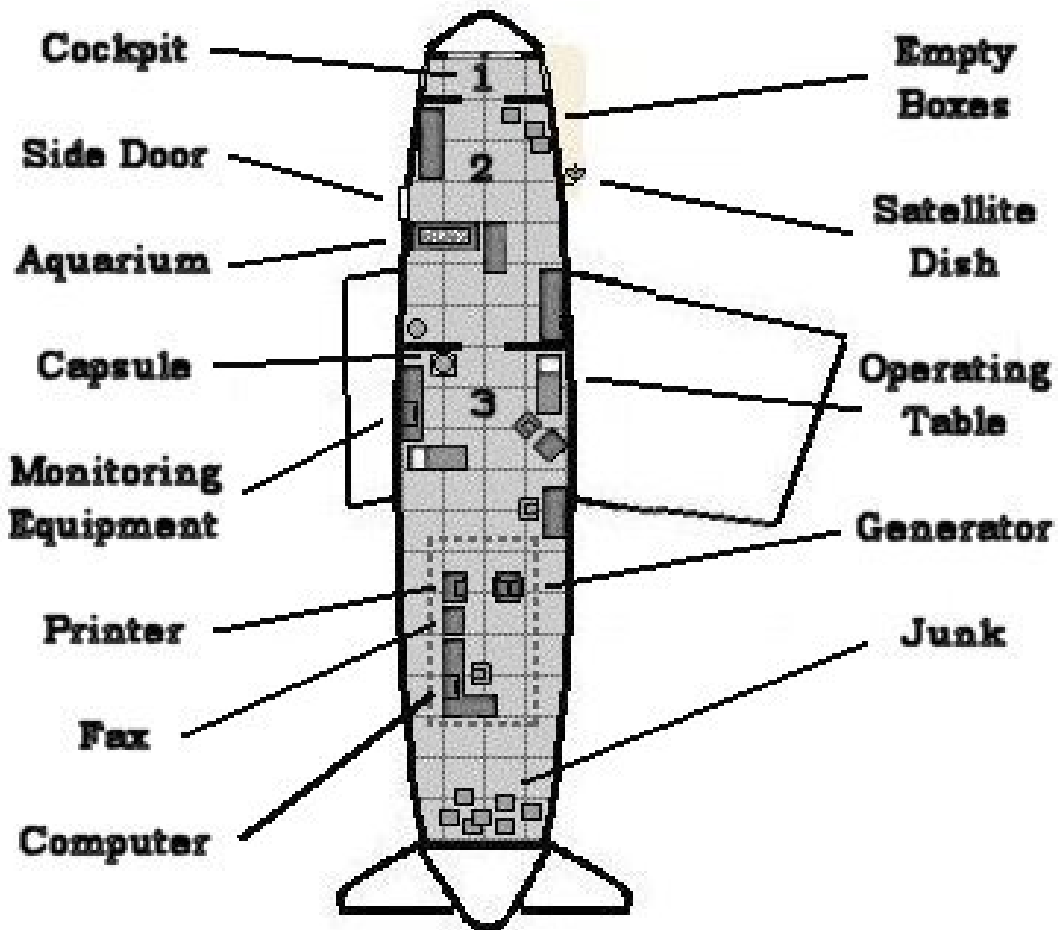
For escorting Professor Sanchezvandez safely back to the Institute, each hero should receive 2 achievement points. If Sanchezvandez is killed but the implant is successfully recovered, award each hero 1 achievement point instead.

In addition to the award for achieving their primary goal, heroes should receive 1 additional achievement point for every three moccasin men slain (up to a maximum of 2 points). Destroying Jaagrel's entire supply of antitoxin ensures the death of all six moccasin men within 12 hours.

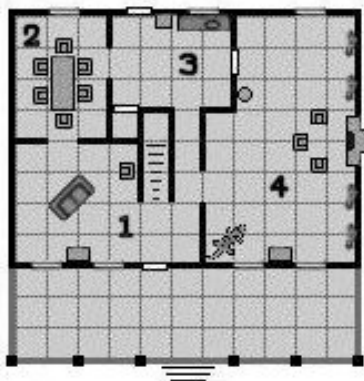
Finally, the heroes should receive 1 achievement point if Jaagrel or his remains are successfully retrieved by the Institute.

CARGO PLANE FUSELAGE

one square = 2 meters

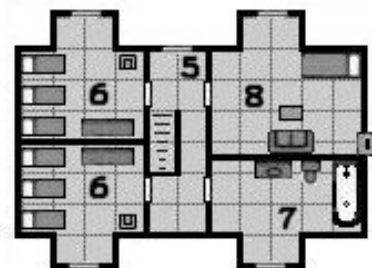


KELLER HOUSE one square = 2 meters



First Floor

KELLER HOUSE one square = 2 meters



Second Floor