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Table of Contents

Editorial: All Good Things

Well, as many of you know, this starship we affectionately call Action Check online magazine started out in June of 2000. Since that time we rocketed to a full twelve months worth of issues, one right after the other, and we generally released them on time. Then we decided to throttle back to a more controlled bimonthly publishing rate in order to focus on quality and leave ourselves more room to work on a few other creative ideas we had for our own personal gaming interests. Jeff, Jim, and I have a lot of other projects on our minds and of course we needed that extra time to do a quality-job on them as well.

Now the time has come for us to land this baby, and we all want to do it while we're at our best rather than waiting for the thing to fall apart and result in a crash and burn episode. All of us have fond memories of Action Check. We're especially proud to have delivered a number of the reprint articles from Dragon and Dungeon magazines to the Alternity community. Personally, I'm very happy that Action Check gave me the opportunity to get organized and get off my butt to start writing and sharing some of the ideas that popped into my head. And, I think I speak for all of the AC staff when I say that we're most satisfied with having provided a creative outlet for every fan of Alternity to share his or her work with the rest of us, and keep the flame alive that much longer.

Ultimately, we still expect Alternity to live. The very generous folks at Alternity.net and TequilaStarrise.net are dedicated to making sure the game doesn't disappear anytime soon. The Action Check staff would like to direct your continued support in their direction now. They'll be the ones that keep things flying. And who knows? Jeff, Jim, and I might pop in every now and then with something new for Alternity Star*Drive, Dark*Matter, Gamma*World, etc. from time to time. We still have a love for the game, after all. But it's time for us to go. And we'd like to bid you a fond farewell.

-- **Neil Spicer, Action Check Coordinator**

A lot of folks think that editing is a thankless job. And to be honest, there were times that I felt that way too. But most of the time, seeing the inventiveness and passion of our contributors made it all worthwhile. Knowing that we were supplying Alternity fandom with a free product that not only had a coolness factor of 10, but also had the high quality of a for-profit publication was more than reward enough for us. The feeling of putting each issue to bed and getting it out there for all of you, despite some of the headaches it could cause…well, there was nothing like it.

I'd like to thank each and every one of our contributing writers and artists for their time and effort. There's a few of you that could seriously make a go of game writing, I think. Hopefully, you'll keep up the good work, and send to Alternity.net what you used to send to us. I hope we gave you something to look forward to every issue, and made your games run just a little more smoothly. So long, and thanks for all the fish.

-- **Jim Sharkey, Action Check Editor**

Neil couldn't have said it better from my point of view. In particular the word "pride" comes to mind. I remember starting Action Check and discovering within the month that it had two or three copycat publications that lasted…one issue? J I was proud to see it lasted long after others had quit (or prophesized its demise). I was proud to have the backing of so many great folks at WotC, and our relations with Dragon and Dungeon magazines. I'm proud to have offered so many great articles from so many talented folks.

As it stands there are a number of valid, solid reasons that Neil, Jim and I decided to quit while we're ahead. At times it could be viewed like a party. You want to leave with your head high, everyone missing you and with a good feeling, as opposed to crawling out the door with your friends wishing you'd left hours ago (and you feel the same). We won't be the next X-Files. It's been hectic and frustrating, but overall it was fun and rewarding. Thanks for all your support.

-- **Jeff Ibach, Action Check Publisher**

EDITORIAL

"Letters from Our Readers"

Tell us what you think of this issue's articles, or even a previous issue or publication from Action Check. We appreciate any and all feedback. Your comments go a long way toward providing encouragement for our contributors as well as an indication of what the Alternity community looks for in a support publication.

ERRATA FROM AC#15

First of all congratulations on another excellent issue! Just a minor correction. On page 15, in the footer, the URL for TequilaStarrise. Net is listed as http://www.tequilastarrise. com when it should be http://www. tequilastarrise.net. Other than that thumbs up people! Excellent work! - Vassilis

You're quite right! We inserted a small advertisement graphic on page 15 that does contain an erroneous URL. At least we managed to get the address correct on pg. 24 in our "Gridsites" column, though. Regardless, you have our sincere apologies…as well as our very first "retraction" in Action Check history…though it's probably not the first time we needed to do one.

REPRINTS REVISITED

I was reading Action Check #15 and noticed the list of articles awaiting publication. One section was titled "Still in Hiding." Does that mean you don't have scans of those articles? If that is the case then I may be able to help out, as I possess copies of all articles listed, apart from the one in Dungeon #68. - Gary

I have and I am in the process of scanning in all of the issues/articles you listed as "Still in Hiding," except for Dragon #249, Dragon # 267 and Dungeon #68. You can expect to get the first of them right after the holidays are over, sometime in early January. I just wanted you to know what you can plan on getting. Happy Holidays! - David

Since we've decided to discontinue future Action Check publications, folks might wonder about our plans for the reprint material they've already sent to us. In the last issue (AC#15), we published a list of all the articles we were still missing and the ones we had on hand. In the interests of making sure the ones we've already received still get out there for the Alternity community to use, we'll be posting them as straight MS Word or rich-text documents to www.alternity.net for everyone to download. Hopefully, someone will find them useful and inspiring.

OUR WINTER CONTEST

By Action Check Staff

Following up on our Winter Contest (announced in AC#15), we proudly present the winners as chosen by our esteemed judges…the Action Check Staff. Heh. Actually, our decision was quite easy. We only received two submissions for the contest, a Gamma World mutant plant by Derek Holland and more dangerous flora from Darthwho. Congratulations to Derek for having the entry that most articulated the "winter" theme!

Winterkill Weed
by Derek M. Holland

STR	14 (2d4+10)	INT	1
DEX	10 (d4+8)	WIL	8 (d4+6)
CON	12 (d6+8)	PER	1
Durability:	15/12/6/6		
Action Check:	12+/11/5/2		
Movement:	0	# of Actions:	2

Reaction Score: Ordinary/2
Mutations: Improved Durability, Improved Immunity, Hot Vines (unique), Cold Vines (unique)
Drawbacks: Toxin Intolerance

Attacks:
Heated Vines (4)   14/7/3 d4+4s/d6w/d8+1w LI/O
Other Vines (6-10) 16/8/4 d6+2s/d4w/d4+2w LI/O

Defenses:
Armor   d6-3 (LI), d6-4 (HI), d4-1 (En)
+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
Immunity to cold (effective to -20 degrees C)

Skills:
Unarmed Attack [14]-brawl [16]; Stealth [10]-hide [22]; Awareness [8]-perception [16].

Description:
The Winterkill Weed is mutated from the curly-leaf pondweed. Its ancestor was very unusual as it lived under the ice in both Europe, where it was native, and North America, where it was introduced. The 'kill' weed's seeds germinate in late September and it takes two to six weeks for the plant to grow to full size, depending on the soil fertility. A full-sized plant has six to ten 6-meter long vines that are dark green and four 2-meter long vines that have a slight reddish tinge. The former vines absorb the heat of the surrounding water and keep the ice solid. The latter vines always emit heat, but usually at a low level. If dug out, the root system is made up of hundreds of small rootlets. The summer crawlers look like .2-meter long pinecones with legs. These are another legacy of their ancestors, as they reproduced with seeds and cone-like structures called turions that floated away as the plant died.

Encounter:
The 'kill' weed is always found under the ice of ponds, lakes and very slow rivers. It keeps the long vines embedded in the ice, near the surface as to allow the greatest amount of photosynthesis. With the small vines, the plant keeps a small area of the water open as bait. When any animal dips its head, or a limb, into the open water, the long vines shatter the ice, dunking the prey. Then the plant uses the long vines to grapple the animal and attempt to drown it. If the prey fights back and harms the plant (i.e., half of its wounds lost or half of its long vines severed), it heats up its small vines and attempts to fry the prey to death. If the small vines are severed (each vine takes 4 or 6 wound points to do so), the plant loses all of its stun points and stops fighting. If left alone, the plant can regrow all of its lost vines at a rate of one small vine per four days and one long vine per two weeks. If it has all four small vines, and at least six long vines, the plant starts hunting again. If the plant does kill its prey, it drags the carcass to its side and lets it rot. The nutrients from the body will sink into the soil and there the plant absorbs them.

Winterkill Weed by Derek M. Holland. He can be reached at dmh100@juno.com

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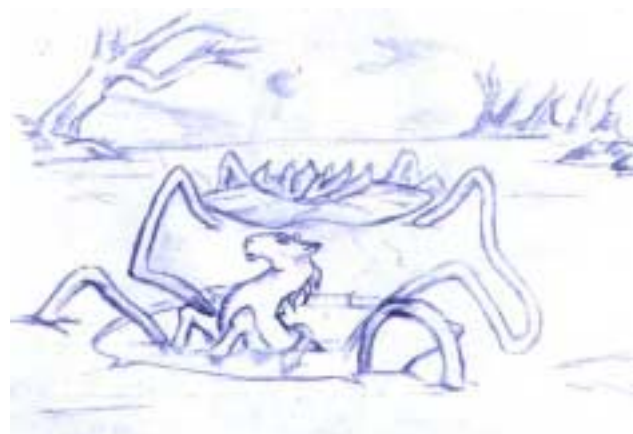
The summer crawlers leave the plant as it dies and crawl out of the water during a rainstorm at night. Each will crawl up to one kilometer in a straight line and if it encounters fresh water, the crawler will burrow in to the muddy bottom and wait for the water to cool.

Habitat:
The winterkill weed is only found in Europe and North America where the temperature dips below freezing for most of the months between October and April.

Society:
The 'kill' weed germinates in September and dies off in mid-July. Between April and July, the plant converts all of its food into seeds and summer crawlers. Each plant produces 10,000 or so seeds and 3-30 crawlers. Some societies of Gamma Terra think of the crawlers as a delicacy. To encourage their numbers, the people will feed the plants – usually diseased livestock, but bandits will do just as well.

Ecological Data:
Biome	Cold freshwater
Encounter Chance	Unlikely
Group Size	1-10 (in a square kilometer area)
Organization	Solitary
Niche	Carnivore
IQ	Non-intelligent

(Derek wishes to thank BrutorzBill (aka William Wood) for the name suggestion of Winterkill Weed.)

Sun Slasher
by Darthwho

STR	8 (d4+6)	INT	0
DEX	12 (2d6+4)	WIL	0
CON	4 (d4+2)	PER	0
Durability:	4/4/2/2		
Action Check:	12+/11/5/2		
Movement:	0	# of Actions:	2
Reaction Score:	Ordinary/2		

Attacks:
Slash (x3 to 6)   10/5/2   d3s/d3w/d4+1w   LI/O
Plus poison (see Text)

Defenses:
-2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
-1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor   d4 (LI) d4-2 (HI) d4-3 (EN)

Skills:
Unarmed Attack [8]-brawl [10]; Stealth [12]-hide [14].

The Sun Slasher is a photosynthetic plant, with its leaves following the course of the sun. Growing out of a base 45-centimeter high are 3-6 long ropy branches that flex and swivel in the wind always keeping the 30-centimeter fronds pointing towards the sun.

Description:
The Sun Slasher is closely related to the Sun Chaser and as such is very similar in appearance. A Life Science-*botany* skill check is required to tell the plants apart, and to make matters worse the Sun Slasher will usually be found in the company of Sun Chasers. Both plants have

a base or trunk of 45-centimeters in height and half that in width. Growing from the base are 3 to 6 rope-like branches ending in a 30-centimeter long leaf. The branches vary in length between 4 and 6 meters. They are also flexible and strong enough to be used as rope once they dry out, which takes between 2 to 5 days after they have been cut. They will hold approximately 150 Kilograms. The leaves at the end of the branches act as natural solar panels absorbing the suns rays and transferring heat to the base and the plants root system. The leaves are approximately 15-centimeters across and rectangular in appearance. The leaves are both hard and sharp and in the case of the Sun Slasher, lined with 2-centimeter long spikes.

Encounter:

The Sun Slasher normally feeds on small herbivores encountered near the coastline. Due to them being non-intelligent plants, they will lash out at any heat source that enters into their range. They can be easily avoided if you know what to look for. To the unwary or unlucky they can be dangerous, since its rope-like branches will attack anyone entering the Sun Slasher's range. On a successful hit that inflicts even stun damage, the plant also injects a paralytic poison (insinuative, -1 bonus, onset time 1 minute, duration depends on the victim's Constitution feat check, see page 60 GMG) which renders the victim unconscious.

Habitat/Society:

Sun Slashers are non-intelligent plants with no mobility. Its victims are simply attacked and left to rot where they fall. The rotting victim is absorbed by the plant's root system as nutrients. The carcass is left in plain sight so other scavengers or potential victims will be drawn into the Sun Slasher's reach. The Sun Slasher will usually be found among a grove of Sun Chaser plants using them to hide its true nature. Even when more than one Sun Slasher exists in the same grove, the plants all act individually. It is believed that the Sun Slasher and Sun Chaser can cross-pollinate but as yet scientists have not determined what causes one to grow instead of the other.

Ecological Data:

Biochemistry:	Series I
Environment:	Class 2
Graph:	G2/R3/A2/P2/A1
Biome:	Equatorial Coasts
Group Size:	1-4
Organization:	Grove
Niche:	Tracheophyta
Intelligence:	None

DARK MATTER

Transmission: ARCTIC FIRE

By Neil Spicer with artwork by Dragon Ciric

ANCHORAGE OBSERVER   APRIL 17, 2002

VOLCANIC ACTIVITY THREATENS COMMERCE IN ALEUTIANS

Adak, AK [AP} – Residents of the western Aleutian Islands were awakened early Sunday morning by a strong earthquake measuring 4.7 on the Richter scale. Authorities attributed the effects to recent volcanic activity on Great Sitkin Island in the Andreanof chain. The island was originally formed from the lava flows of the Great Sitkin volcano sometime during the Pleistocene era, but remained dormant until as recently as last year.

Researchers from the former Naval Air Station on nearby Adak Island have dispatched a team to investigate the site, hoping to learn more about the nature of the seismic activity and assess the threat it represents to commercial fishing and airline industries in the area. Since the United States military closed down the naval airbase on Adak in 1998, a number of profitable fishing and refueling industries have settled there. In addition, the Aleutian corridor represents one of the most widely traveled regions by commercial airlines and may become threatened by the outpouring of ash and hot gases from the Great Sitkin…

Gamemaster Hints

The tremors in the Aleutian Isles aren't what they appear. The Hoffmann Institute might ask the heroes to investigate the occurrence on their behalf, or any other agency affiliated with volcanic research or protecting the civilian interests of Adak Island could seek their assistance. Either way, they will want to find out what's really happening. The following are simply a few of the possibilities, many of which could be combined to make an even more complicated plot:

The rise of Dark Matter has ripped open a new dimensional portal in the heart of the Great Sitkin volcano. Bering demons have already made their first tentative forays into the new territory and plot to secure an even stronger presence in our world.

The Kinori are responsible. They were driven deep underground during the Pleistocene era when glaciers destroyed their warmer climate. Since then, the devious lizards have worked tirelessly to increase the volcanic activity throughout the Aleutian Islands and Pacific Rim territories in an effort to force global warming and return Earth to a climate that will make it easier for them to conquer mankind.

The Greys are behind the strange eruptions. They are using the Great Sitkin volcano and the remote island in the Aleutians to station one of their starships. Perhaps they are investigating some new source of Dark Matter, the remains of another, older, extraterrestrial visitor to Earth, or just spying upon the commercial airline traffic in preparation of abducting people for experimentation.

The United States government disturbed the volcano. Recent analysis of military documents from the former Naval Air Station has led them to conduct research beneath the icy waters of the Bering Sea involving explosives that managed to disturb the fault line running beneath Great Sitkin Island. The CIA or NSA could be searching for a potential weapon or piece of information to use in defending the United States against the Greys, the Kinori, or any number of other manifestations brought on by the rising tides of Dark Matter.

The United States military discovered a new species or civilization living deep beneath the ocean similar to long-ago Atlantis. They could be waging a secret war against them, resulting in explosions and destruction that has disturbed the volcano. Or, the ancient civilization could be on the verge of collapse after damaging their own environment and the U.S. is attempting to gain them as an ally by rescuing them from the disaster.

Any number of Illuminati groups could have played a role in the volcanic activity, either by guiding and/or manipulating the power groups listed above, or independently as a means to seize some opportunity to advance their cause. One of their enemies may have attempted to drive them from the region by intentionally invoking the wrath of the volcano. Or, perhaps they are performing some dark rite to harness the volcano's energy.

Aleutian Islands

BERING SEA

Great Sitkin
Island

Great Sitkin
Volcano

Adak

Adak Island

PACIFIC OCEAN
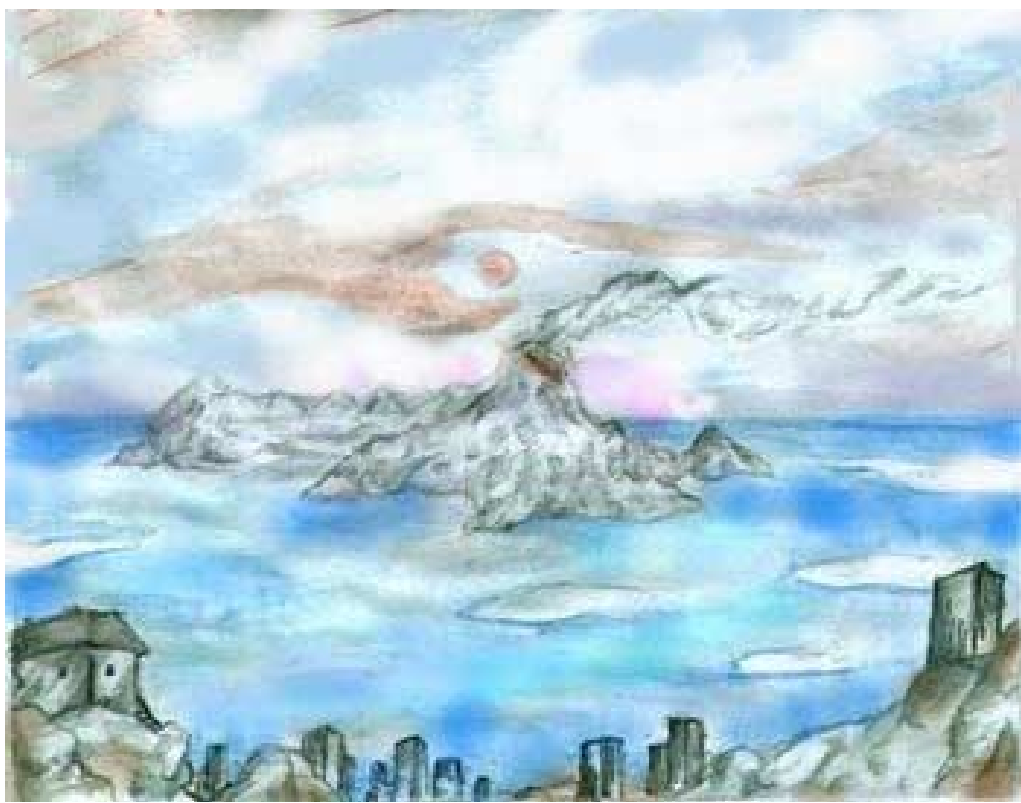
Creature Feature: EKIMMAL

By Darren Millar!

The Ekimmal are an infant form of the Ekimmu. An infant Ekimmal once successfully integrated with a host eventually develops (after about ten years) into the entity known as the Ekimmu.

Description: The typical Ekimmal appears as a large arachnid or even a squid with a body about the size of an adult's fist, and legs about 8" long ending in flat 'feet'. The creature moves about on its six rear legs. The front legs are approximately 1.5 times longer than the others and end in sharp points. These points are hollow and the Ekimmal uses them to 'inject' itself into a host. The Ekimmal is white or pale yellow in colour and has a very soft rubbery skin.

Encounter: Depending upon the success of an Ekimmal infestation, expect to encounter anything from a couple to dozens of infected hosts. Ekimmal will only be encountered underground or at night, as their delicate skin is highly vulnerable to sunlight. The fluid innards of an Ekimmal will oxidise upon

contact with air; therefore piercing the exoskeleton of the creature will result in its death.

Ekimmal are parasites and as such are only capable of attacking sleeping or unconscious prey, typically humans. They attack their prey by stabbing the two front appendages into the victim's spine. The Ekimmal then injects itself into the target's circulatory system and eventually migrates into the brain.

An infected host must make a CON feat check with a +2 penalty offset by his WIL resistance modifier as a bonus; this represents the physical and mental assault inflicted by the Ekimmal parasite:

Amazing success: The invading Ekimmal fails in the infection attempt and dies; the fluid residue is processed by the host's body and expelled over the next few days.

Good Success: Host rolls another CON feat check at a -2 bonus. If another Good success is achieved the modifier is cumulative until an amazing success is obtained. Any other outcome on these repeated checks refers to the corresponding result on this table.

Ordinary Success: Host must attempt another CON feat check at +2 penalty. As with a Good result this is cumulative if an Ordinary success is rolled again. Any other outcome on these repeated checks refers to the corresponding result on this table.

Failure: Ekimmal successfully invades the host. Another CON feat check at +1 penalty is required to determine the Ekimmal's success:

A *Good* or *Amazing* result indicates that the Ekimmal has gained complete control over the host's body and mental capabilities, much the same as an Ekimmu possession without the increase in characteristics.

An *Ordinary* result indicates only physical control; the host/Ekimmal acts as a primitive creature that is usually used to guard an Ekimmal lair. For a typical Guard use the Ordinary brawler SCM (GMG p97). A Guard is required to eat the flesh of a creature of the same species in order to supply the Ekimmal fluid with various proteins and enzymes. Failure to obtain this nutrition results in the Ekimmal feeding from the host, which will result in the host's eventual death. (1 STR/day)

Failure results in the Ekimmal fluid breaking down the host's body matter and reproducing itself as 3 new Ekimmal parasites. Reproduction takes 8 days. The new Ekimmal appears first as blisters on the torso of the host and then rapidly grows into fully developed Ekimmal parasite, which eventually splits from the host, leaving be-

hind an atrophied shell. If the Ekimmal blisters are pierced up to the 3rd day, the host will recover over several months. After the third day the host slowly dies over the remaining 5 days. Destruction of the Ekimmal at this time results in the host's instant death from massive shock.
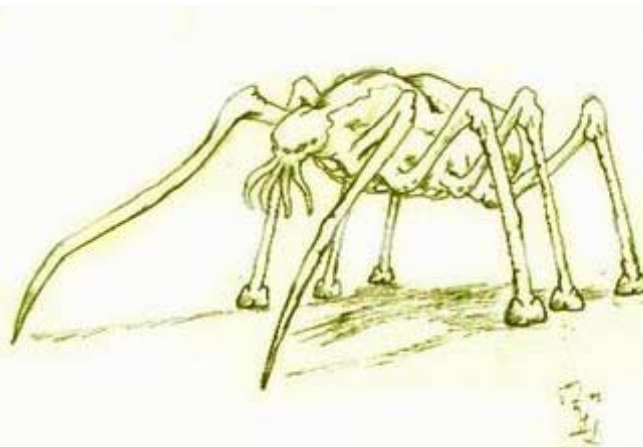
Critical Failure results in the death of both host and Ekimmal.

If an Ekimmal successfully takes over a host its original body can still be seen attached to the spine. The exoskeleton appears as loose flap of skin easily concealed by clothing. The discarded exoskeleton remains attached to the host for approximately six weeks while various nutrients are absorbed to aid in the development of the Ekimmal parasite.

Habitat/Society: The original Ekimmal reached the Earth through a doorway over 3000 years ago. These creatures eventually evolved into the Ekimmu of today. Until recently the Ekimmal were extinct on this planet. In 2001, a doorway opened in England and 23 Ekimmal came through. In the 12 months since their arrival, the original creatures have evolved thus: 3 completely controlled hosts, 8 Guards, and 30 Ekimmal. It is obvious that these creatures reproduce very slowly.

In a typical Ekimmal community, any controlled hosts will integrate with the local human population to 'recruit' new hosts, usually from the homeless vagabonds that are unlikely to be missed. The 'Guards' watch over the Ekimmal lair protecting any incubating hosts. As Guards must feed upon others of their host species in order to survive, in a human community this usually takes the form of grave robbing to obtain 'nearly' fresh meat. Five Guards could live off one human corpse for one week. Controlled hosts will try and maintain the secrecy of a community at all costs; however if the community is unexpectedly discovered, the individual Ekimmal will scatter and allow themselves to develop into Ekimmu.

Plot Hook:
The Institute sends the Agents to investigate the discovery of the discarded skin of an unknown creature. Upon arriving at the designated town the skin is examined and found to contain human cells! Further investigation learns that a number of hard drug users have gone missing in the area. The team investigates and is eventually attacked by crazed drug abusers!

Unknown to the Agents, what has previously transpired is that an Ekimmal successfully infected a local drug pusher while he was high. Using large amounts of free heroin, the Ekimmal/pusher has now managed to create a large community of infected hosts and intends to defend his territory and easy supply of victims!

Ekimmal Parasite

STR 1	INT 9 (d8+5)
DEX 12 (d6+9)	WIL 11 (d4+9)
CON 1	PER 10 (d6+8)

Durability: 1/1/1/* (Do not fatigue)
Action check: 14+/13/6/3
Move: sprint 24 run 12 walk 2   Actions: 1
Reaction Score: Marginal/1   Last Resorts: 0

Attacks
Infest   Auto   Only possible on unconscious targets

Defenses
+4 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

Skills
Athletics [12]–*jump [14];* Acrobatics [12]–*dodge [14]*; Stealth [12]–*hide [16], sneak [16].*

The Voodoo Priestess

By Pal Wilhelmsen

A Dark*Matter adventure hook

The following requires Beyond Science: a Guide to FX, or some other source on Voodoo in a game environment.

Little Lost Girl
Charlene Debaut, a troubled teenager, show signs of psionic abilities and the Hoffmann Institute sends a team of investigators to help her. Charley lives alone with her mother Mary in a neighborhood plagued by an unsolved series of sexual assaults and random violence.
Charley has problems at school and has been arrested for shoplifting several times. The mother has a similar history, but straightened up to become a respected schoolteacher.

Thomas Hailey, a police officer who knows both Charlene and Mary, contacted the Hoffmann Institute and told them about their problems. Hailey knows both Debauts, the mother from church and the daughter from trouble at school, and wants to help. He is a bit gruff, but means well and is genuinely concerned about the Debaut's well being. Hailey can give investigators off-the-record information about the Debaut's troubles in the past, and info about the neighborhood if they need any.

Anthony Harker, a Catholic priest, also lives in the neighborhood and keeps an eye on things. He occasionally visits the Debaut women, and explains, if encountered, that he has taken an interest in the Debauts because they need guidance in their troubled situation. Harker is a well-meaning and a bit timid guy, but simply refuses to leave them alone until "they are safe" as he puts it.

Things Better Left Unspoken
The truth is that a vengeful Loa is stalking the neighborhood, looking for a chance to abduct Charlene as payment for favors given to Char-

lene's great grandmother, who dabbled with this unusually cruel Loa. The Debaut women have been voodoo priestesses for generations, and this Loa has pestered all of them since its first appearance more than a century ago. Mary is unwilling to share this fact with anyone, even her daughter. She is determined to put "the family curse" behind her, and does not realize how much trouble she and her daughter now face.

Mary knows a thing or two if forced to fight for her daughter. Her voodoo miracles are in fact the only thing that has protected the girl so far, and is why the demon has not used a more direct approach. Mary does not believe that evil literally stalks her neighborhood, but if she can be convinced of the Loa's appearance, she will prove much more cooperative. Until then, she accepts the Hoffmann Institute agents into her home, but only because Hailey requests it of her.

Harker has fallen from the true faith, and now serves as a minion of the Final Church. He keeps his position at the nearby Catholic church and school to better serve his masters. Background research on Harker will reveal no records before he obtained his current position, and he avoids personal questions if he can. He has secretly watched the Debauts to review if Charlene is a potential recruit for the Final Church, and has already taken a big step by gaining Mary's trust. Now that he's aware of the Debaut's voodoo background, Harker will kidnap Charlene if given a chance. So far his fear of the supernatural aura of the neighborhood has stopped him, but outside involvement by the Hoffmann agents may spur him into action. He will kill anyone that gets in his way.

The GM must decide what the Loa wants with Charlene if the heroes fail to protect her, and whether the girl actually is a psychic.

MUTANT ROACHES

By Derek M. Holland

Creatures of Gamma Terra

Roach

STR	8-16	INT	4-10
DEX	8-16	WIL	8-16
CON	7-15	PER	3-9

Attacks:
Unarmed attack   varies d2s/d4s/d6s (LI/O)

Defenses:
Armor   d6+2 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4 (En)

Free Broad Skills:
Unarmed Attack, Acrobatics, Stamina, Survival, Knowledge, Awareness

Mutations/Powers: Universal Digestion (see description), Disease Resistance (+2 steps), Radiation Resistance (treat R2-R3 as R1, R4 as R2, R5 as R4), Starvation Resistance (see description), Wings, Chemically Susceptible.

Description: Roaches are (obviously) intelligent cockroaches. There are 7 major races, each with its own slight differences due to its origin (each lives in a different biome). The list of races has the individual race description. They are considered "trash" or food by most other races.

Combat: Roaches do not have natural weapons and try to use grappling/stunning attacks to drive away aggressors. A few do learn to use weapons and can be quite proficient in them.

Habitat: See race list below

Society: Roaches live with a pessimistic and paranoid outlook because of their lot in life. They usually congregate to defend each other, but because of their low class, they have very little in the way of goods or wealth - just that they can find or make. The best place to find a group of roaches in a city is the dump or slum. They usually do not have trouble finding food as the only non-toxic plants they dislike are tomatoes and cucumbers. They also eat just about any organic substance (including biological waste in time of need). Only when food is scarce, do roaches turn carnivorous.

Racial Variations: (this is not comprehensive - there are many lesser races)

Tropical: This race is found in the tropical forests of southern Mexico and Central America. They are green and brown and measure 2.5 meters long. They are arboreal and normally eat

leaves and twigs. Starvation Resistance – can survive without water for d4+1 days or food for d3 weeks.

Southern Desert: This race is found in Mexico, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California. They are light brown, dun or dark brown and measure 2.7 meters long. They are nocturnal and hide from the sun during the day. Starvation Resistance – can survive without water for 3d4 weeks or food for 3d4 weeks.

Northern Desert: This race is found in all the other deserts in Meriga. They are light or dark brown and measure 2.5 meters long. They are nocturnal, hiding from the sun during the day, and break up into small groups when winter comes. Starvation Resistance – can survive without water for 2d4+2 weeks or food for 3d4 weeks.

Plains: This race is found from Oklahoma to Nebraska. They are light brown and 2 meters long. They are nocturnal and burrow to hide from the sun. Starvation Resistance – can survive without water for 2d4 weeks or food for 2d4 weeks.

Southern Temperate Forest: This race is found from Florida to North Carolina. They are several shades of green and measure 2.5 meters long. They are semi-arboreal and take to the trees in times of danger. Starvation

Resistance – can survive without water for d3 weeks or food for d4 weeks.

Northern Temperate Forest: This race is found from Virginia to Maine and west to Minnesota. They are several shades of green in the spring and summer, turning brown in the fall and white in snow (which might not be all winter). They measure up to 2 meters long. They are ground dwelling and mostly feed on the leaf litter and humus. They live in small groups all year long. Starvation Resistance – can survive without water for d4+2 weeks or food for 2d4 weeks.

Taiga: This race is found in the conifer forests of Canada. They are dark green and 1.3 meters long. They are arboreal and live in very small groups (2-6 individuals). Starvation Resistance – can survive without water for d4 weeks or food for d6 weeks.

|	
Biome	All Terrestrial
Encounter Chance	Probable
Group size	4d3-8d6
Organization	Swarm
Niche	Medium Level Omnivore
IQ	Sentient

Assault on Pree'nith

By Achilles

A Star*Drive Adventure Hook

The heroes are traveling aboard the passenger liner *Pree'nith* (either docked to make use of its longer stardrive capability or as passengers). Read or paraphrase the following scenario to trigger the adventure:

While waiting for the ship's stardrive to recharge so you can make starfall to your final destination, the Captain of the Pree'nith invites you to dine with him. He has heard about some of your previous adventures and would like to hear more about them. As dessert is about to be served, you notice two destroyers approaching through the large Duraplast windows in the main dining hall. At that same moment, the Captain is called to the bridge. After a short exchange of fire the Pree'nith's power plant is knocked offline. One of

the destroyers then moves to dock with your ship, apparently intent on boarding the passenger liner. As a safety precaution, all of your firearms were stored in the ship's safe and you are currently dressed in formal attire rather than personal body armor. What do you do?

These destroyers are government-sponsored privateers intent on capturing and ransoming back the passengers. There should be a very large boarding party <I had 150 people broken into teams of 5> going room to room to roundup all the passengers and take them to the main dinning hall. The bridge, engineering, and main dining hall sections should have a security team of at least twice the size of the roaming groups. The commander of the boarding party should be a Combat Spec of at least 3 levels higher than the rest of the heroes.
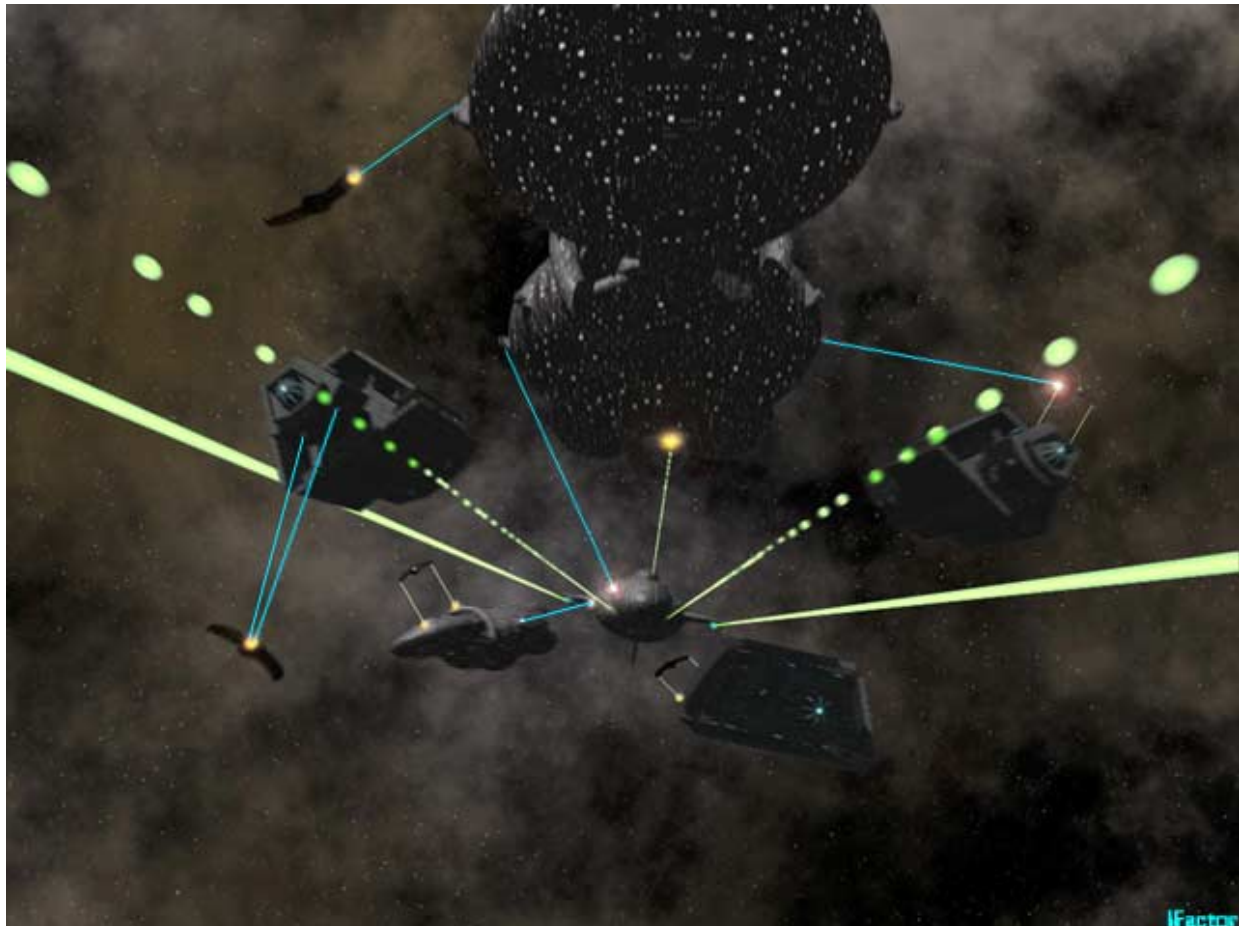
Artwork: "Fleet Action" by Janne Savolainen, who can be reached at vtx@dlc.fi

Needed to Play:
Destroyer's Captain (SCM template, see below)
1st & 2nd officers (SCM templates)
Destroyer Crewmen (SCM templates, see below)
Deck plans for the passenger liner *Pree'nith*
Deck plans for the Destroyers

Destroyer's Captain
Level 8 Human male Diplomat (Tech-Op)
STR 9   INT 13 [+2]
DEX 10   WIL 10
CON 9   PER 11
Durability: 10/9/5/5
Action Check Score: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4   #Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary / 2   Last Resorts: 2
Perks: Vigor (stun)

Attacks:
Unarmed Attack 10/5/2   d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O
G12 Plasma Pistol   11/5/2
          2d4w/2d4+1w/2d4+2w En/O

Defenses:
CF Softsuit   d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)
+2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Skills:
Athletics [9]-throw [10]; Unarmed [9]-brawl [10];
Acrobatics [10]-zero-g [13]; Modern [10]-pistol
[11]; Vehicle [10]-space [16]; Stamina [9]-endurance [10]; Knowledge [13]-computer ops [14], system (specific) [14]; Navigation [13]-drivespace [15], system [18]; System Operation [13]-communications [15], defenses [14], engineering [14], sensors [15], weapons [16]; Tactics [13]-space [15]; Awareness [10]-perception [11]; Deception [11]-

bluff [13]; Interaction [11]-intimidate [12]; Leadership [11]-command [13].

Destroyer Crewmen
Level 2 Human male Combat Specs
STR 12 [+1]   INT 9
DEX 12 [+1]   WIL 8
CON 12   PER 7
Durability: 12/12/6/6
Action Check Score: 14+/13/6/3
Move: sprint 24, run 16, walk 6   #Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary / 2   Last Resorts: 0

Attacks:
Unarmed Attack 14/7/3 d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s
          LI/O
Combat Knife   13/6/3   d4+2w/d4+3w/d4+4w
          LI/O
11mm Pistol, chg.   14/7/3 d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m
          HI/O
11mm Rifle, chg.   14/7/3 d6+1w/d6+3w/d6+1m
          HI/O

Defenses:
Scout 230 AET Assault Gear   d6 (LI), d8 (HI),
d6-1 (En)
+1 resistance modifier against melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier against ranged attacks

Skills:
Armor Operations [12]-combat [13]; Athletics [12]-climb [13], throw [13]; Melee [12]-blade [13]; Unarmed [12]-brawl [14]; Modern [12]-pistol [14], rifle [14]; Vehicle [12]; Stamina [12]-endurance [13]; Knowledge [9]; Awareness [8]-perception [9]; Resolve [8]-physical [9]; Interaction [7].

BABYSITTING

By Achilles

A Star*Drive Adventure Hook

Read or paraphrase the following to begin the adventure:

The son and daughter of a star system governor have been kidnapped and are being held on a nearby planet. He has asked you to help retrieve the kids on his behalf and, because of the diplomatic nature of this mission a member of the system defense forces will join you as well. She clearly seeks the safe return of the children and can provide you with more information about the kidnappers, since the situation involves a disgruntled former employee of the governor's security force. For safety reasons they cannot put a military ship in orbit as the kidnappers would certainly look for such a move and immediately threaten the children. So you will need to use a tramp freighter or your own ship, something that won't arouse suspicion. The Governor would like the ringleader returned to stand trial if at all possible, however the safe return of his children remains the top priority. If you are unable to stop all the kidnappers from escaping there will be a Concord Destroyer group patrolling the outer system.

If the heroes don't have their own ship, rent one to them for one-third the normal price. The Governor will pick up the rest of the amount if the operation goes well.

Area layout: The heroes will need to set their ship down in a small spaceport about an hour's travel from their destination in the city. It is a medium sized township (pop. ~ 20,000) with a thriving criminal element. The kidnappers can be tracked through word on the street about the hiring of 8 to 12 thugs to act as guards at a ranch house just outside of town. Basically, there's talk at one of the local bars of an outsider group coming in and hiring for good money, short time, and little work. The house sits near a large communications array that the kidnappers rented and used to tap into the Grid to send their ransom demands.

Needed to play:

Gina, the governor's representative <SCM ally, see below>

Kidnapper leader <SCM adversary, see below>

6 kidnappers <should be Level 1 Combat Spec or Free Agent SCMs>

8-12 Thugs <Non-professional thugs from *Gamemaster's Guide* armed with above-average equipment>

Kidnapped children <can be any age, but offer little help to the PC's, possibly having been locked in a room and drugged into submission>

Floor plans of the ranch house

Kidnappers' ship <should be a small, fast, yacht-class vessel>

Gina
Level 3 Mechalus female Free Agent
STR 10 [+1]   INT 11 [+1]
DEX 11 [+1]   WIL 10
CON 10   PER 8
Durability: 10/10/5/5
Action Check Score: 14+/13/6/3
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4
        #Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary / 2 Last Resorts: 1
Flaws: Obsessed (finding the kids), Phobia (harm to the kids)

Attacks:
Unarmed Attack 12/6/3 d6s/d6+2s/d4w LI/O
CLR-19 Laser Rifle   14/7/3   d6+1w/d6+3w/d4+1m   En/O

Defenses:
Milano GX Bodysuit   d8-1 (LI), d8-1 (HI), d6

(En)
+1 resistance modifier against melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier against ranged attacks
+1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Skills:
Athletics [10]-climb [11], throw [11]; Unarmed [10]-power [12]; Modern [11]-pistol [12], rifle [14]; Stealth [11]-hide [12], sneak [12]; Vehicle [11]-land [12]; Stamina [10]-endurance [11]; Computer Science [11]-hacking [12]; Knowledge [11]; Security [11]-protection protocols [13]; Awareness [10]-perception [11]; Investigate [10]; Street Smart [10].

Cybertech:
Nanocomputer (good), reflex (good), NIJack (good), external neural 3D dataslot x 2 (good)

Kidnapper Leader
Level 9 Human male Diplomat (Free Agent)
STR 10
INT 11 [+1]
DEX 11 [+1]
WIL 10
CON 10
PER 11
Durability: 10/11/6/6

Action Check Score:
13+/12/6/3
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary / 2   Last Resorts: 2
Perks: Vigor (wound), Vigor (mortal)
Flaws: Infamy, Powerful Enemy, Temper

Attacks:
Unarmed Attack   13/6/3   d6s/d6+2s/d4w LI/O
Combat Knife 14/7/3 d4+1w/d4+2w/d4+3w LI/O
Laser Pistol   14/7/3 d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m En/O

Defenses:
Bodyguard Ballistic Vest d6-1 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-2 (En)
Haramkai 200 CF Long Coat d4 (LI), d4 (HI), d6-2 (En)
+1 resistance modifier against ranged attacks
+1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Skills:
Athletics [10]-throw [11]; Melee [10]-blade [14]; Unarmed [10]-power [13]; Modern [11]-pistol [14]; Vehicle [11]-space [13]; Stamina [10]-endurance [11]; Business [11]-illicit [14]; Knowledge [11]-computer [14]; System Operation [11]-communications [12], defenses [12]; Awareness [10]-intuition [13], perception [11]; Street Smart [10]-criminal elements [14]; Deception [11]-bluff [14], bribe [12]; Interaction [11]-bargain [13], intimidate [14], taunt [12]; Leadership [11]-command [13].

Cybertech:
Nanocomputer (good), subdermal NIJack (good), external neural 3D dataslot (good), cyberoptics (good), gunsight (ordinary), biowatch (amazing).

Finders Keepers

By Dragan Ciric with artwork by You-Know-Who

Salvage Expert
Free Agent or Tech Op career

"*Laws of space are simple: if you find it – it's yours...*"

Salvage expert lives by salvaging space junk, equipment from wrecked spaceships or ships from ancient civilizations left in space for a purpose unknown, and selling it to the highest bidder.

He starts with *zero-g training* skill for maneuvering in open space, *demolitions* and *technical science* for removal of useless components from space junk. Skills that can be useful to salvage expert at later date include *Interaction-bargain* for getting better prices for salvaged things, *Knowledge-first aid* in case of accidents and more specialized *Demolition* and *Technical* skills.

Skills: *Acrobatics - zero g training, Vehicle op-Space vehicle, Knowledge - computer operation; deduce, Demolitions, Navigation, Technical Science – juryrig*

Skill cost: Tech Op 37, Free Agent 42

Signaure equipment: hard e-suit, zero-g web, comm gear, demolition pack, toolkit, beat up salvage ship (and a huge loan for it)

Vehicle Accessories

By Tilaurin

Vehicles can be one of the integral parts of any sci-fi game. From the bike Arnie rode in Terminator 2, to the flying cars of the wild back to the future series, and back further in our own fiction to the cartoons of the Transformers, and GI Joe, what our hero's park their rear ends in can really bring a feel to their personality. Nightrider? Need I say more!

AI Controls
Not unlike the remote console system of PL6, this system grants control of the vehicle to a source other than a standard pilot - although in this case it is an AI. It includes an Amazing quality Memory Harness, a Good quality microcomputer, and wiring/control devices to link the computers, and thus the AI (purchased separately), to the vehicle. Note that appropriate programs must be loaded into the AI's memory, as per the rules in Chapter 10 of the *Player's Handbook*, "Computers." The microcomputer and its memory slots are typically installed near the controls of the vehicle so a character can easily take over from the AI whenever he wishes. The mem-

System	PL	Dur	Avail	Cost
AI Controls	7	1	Res	50,000
AI Controls, Enhanced	8	1	Res	250,000
Concealed Armor	6	0	Mil	150% Armor
Concealed Weaponry*	6	1	Mil	50% Base
Deployable Armor	7	1	Res	500% Armor
Dual Propulsion	7	2	Com	300% Base
Durability Upgrade I	6	0	Mil	500% Base
Durability Upgrade II	7	0	Mil	1000% Base
Durability Upgrade III	8	0	Res	2000% Base
Eagle-Eye Targeting System	6	1	Mil	100,000
Eagle-Eye MK II Independent Targeting System	7	2	Con	250,000
Engine Technology Upgrade I	6	1	Com	500% Base
Engine Technology Upgrade II	7	1	Com	500% Base
Engine Technology Upgrade III	8	1	Con	1000% Base
Engine Technology Upgrade IV	9	1	Con	1000% Base
External Ammo Mounts*	5	0	Mil	2,000
Independent Turret/System	6	1	Mil	200% Base
Internal Seating Downgrade*	6	-1	Com	5,000
Re-entry Module	7	1	Com	15,000
Single Shot Weaponry Downgrade*	6	-1	Mil	10,000
Transformation Matrix	7	2 (per 5)	Res	1500% Base
TM Powered Armor Modification	7	1	Res	300% TM
TM Weaponry Modification	7	1	Res	200% total Weapons
Ultra-Ammo Modification*	6	3	Mil	50,000

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ory harness itself, however, remains deep in the recesses of the vehicle, and cannot be removed without a fully geared workshop

AI Controls, Enhanced
Designed as a PL8 replacement for the memory harness/microcomputer combination of PL7, this allows an AI to control twice as many systems as it normally could (3 according to the *Player's Handbook*), and also doubles the available memory. The enhanced controls also allow the AI to be inserted "on the fly."

Concealed Armor
Not unlike the armored cars of the early 20th century, this modification can only be taken during a full refit of the vehicle's shell, or during initial construction. The armor on the vehicle is undetectable with just a visual examination, although appropriate sensors can still detect it. Typically used by government or high corporate officials, armor like this is often bundled with a stealth configuration.

Concealed Weaponry
This typically takes the form of sliding panels or deployable compartments that reveal or deploy a vehicle's weaponry at the pilot or gunner's control. Weapons concealed in this way are also shielded from standard scanners. This modification effectively conceals all weapons mounted upon a vehicle.

Deployable Armor
Another armor upgrade, this one puts the armor's actual status into one of two modes - withdrawn, or deployed. When withdrawn the vehicle's armor is undetectable and obviously provides no additional protection, but once deployed covers the entire vehicle. While so protected a hero has a +2 penalty to his vehicle operation skill checks due to the armor's bulky, view-restricting nature. Sensor systems accessible by the character making these checks, however, can lower the penalty to +1 step instead.

Dual Propulsion
Made famous by the Delorien of Back to the Future, this is an upgrade typically performed on ground-based vehicles to enable flight. Only one system can be used at a time, of course, and the pilot must make Vehicle Operation checks under the appropriate specialty skills. For instance, a standard sports car upgraded to fly like a skycar requires both Vehicle Operation-*land*, and Vehicle Operation-*air*. Possible modes of propulsion include submersibles, standard powerboats, hovercraft, propeller aircraft, jet aircraft, skycar engines, ice-based tracks or skis, and at higher PL's even surface to orbit or interplanetary travel may be possible

Durability Upgrade I
This upgrade strengthens the frame of a vehicle and refines its construction somewhat, raising its mortal by 1, its wound and stun by 2 each, and thus the amount of systems it can hold.

Durability Upgrade II
Non-compatible with Durability Upgrade I or III, this does the same as Upgrade I but raises the Mortal by two, and the wound & stun by four.

Durability Upgrade III
Non-compatible with Durability Upgrade I or II, this does the same as Upgrade I but raises the Mortal by three, and the wound & stun by six.

Eagle-Eye Targeting System
This internal system combines light sensor technology and targeting hardware/software to give any System Operation-*weapons* check a -1 step bonus.

Eagle-Eye MK II Independent Targeting System
Developed to replace the Eagle Eye TS, the MK II can control any of the weapons within the vehicle at the vocal command of the pilot. They must be given specific targets, and the low grade computer can make up to two actions per round, controlling up to two weapons each phase (no penalty), with a skill check of 12/6/3, and no modifier.

Engine Technology Upgrade I
Preferable most times to the dual propulsion system, this allows a lower PL vehicle to have its engine replaced by that of PL6

Engine Technology Upgrade II
Preferable most times to the dual propulsion system, this allows a lower PL vehicle to have its engine replaced by that of PL7

Engine Technology Upgrade III
Preferable most times to the dual propulsion system, this allows a lower PL vehicle to have its engine replaced by that of PL8

Engine Technology Upgrade IV
Preferable most times to the dual propulsion system, this allows a lower PL vehicle to have its engine replaced by that of PL9

External Ammo Mounts*
Allowing a rack of ammo to be mounted externally has its benefits - the ammo takes up no durability on the vehicle - but also poses a possible target for enemies (with only a -2 penalty assessed to the attempt). Lastly, environmental conditions may affect the ammo, such as the extreme heat endured from driving through an area covered in napalm. This could

cause missiles to explode, for example. A number of external mounts may exist, taking up to half of vehicle's mortal rating at no additional durability cost.

Independent Turret/System
Adding this accessory allows someone other than the vehicle's operator to have full control over one weapon or system. Weapons are typically mounted on 360-degree rotatable turrets, while systems may have a separate command console or entire compartment.

Internal Seating Downgrade*
Removal of all internal seating except for the pilot, this gives the vehicle more room for other systems - but obviously makes it a one man vehicle. This can only be taken for vehicles with 2 or more passengers, and each 6 seats (round up to 6, but otherwise down) removed gives one additional point of durability.

Re-entry Module
This accessory includes anti-gravity thrusters and other appropriate systems to allow the vehicle to act as a re-entry capsule. Note, these thrusters do not allow the vehicle to freely travel in space. That requires a separate engine technology upgrade of the appropriate level.

Single Shot Weaponry Downgrade*
Lowering the durability cost of a weapon has its obvious benefits - more weapons, or the addition of a heavy weapon when little space is left over from other systems. The draw back? Only one shot of ammo is available. This accessory can be taken for multiple weapons, but only for appropriate weapons such as missiles, in which it is typical to have one shot of an AA missile on a light vehicle

Transformation Matrix
Costing 2 durability per 5 mortal of the vehicle (round up, so the minimum cost is 2 points), the transformation matrix is a set of systems typically taken along with dual propulsion to make the vehicle applicable to the second propulsion system. The best example is a ground vehicle that also has jet propulsion, taking a transformation matrix to grant it the wings and spoilers appropriate to flight. Another option sometimes taken in combination with an AI control is that of the vehicle turning itself into something similar to a robotic/powered suit of armor (sometimes called mecha, but not quite that big), minus the internal

room when transformed for a pilot (or pilots). Consider it of roughly the same dimensions (its horizontal length now becomes its vertical height), its mortal/stun/wound is kept the same, but any weapons available in one form are NOT available in its other form. For example one may have an AA missile on the back of a skycar, with a transformation matrix enabling a robotic form which has a separate AT missile. Transformation takes 1 phase per five durability of the vehicle. Standard biped locomotion is available only in robotic form, unless a dual propulsion system is tied into the matrix design, in which case either/all forms of propulsion are available in all modes - excluding tracked, wheeled, or other inappropriate propulsion systems.

Should a vehicle's Transformation Matrix include a robot form as above, consider its three speeds as 1/3 their normal rate (i.e. a cruise of 90 becomes 30 etc). Each time this system is installed it allows for two forms, including the vehicle's first - even if a transformation matrix is already installed.

TM Powered Armor Modification
This modification places enough systems within a vehicle fitted with a transformation matrix so that it may function as a suit of powered armor by a hero. All weapons and systems available in robotic form are at his control, and he need not enter or leave the vehicle during transformation - but anyone else in the vehicle should, lest they coat the paint of the robotic form in a nice crimson red.

TM Weaponry Modification
Taking this modification fits systems to the weapons of the vehicle so that they are available in both robotic and vehicle form.

Ultra-Ammo Modification*
This is a much larger ammunition locker than standard, fitting 5 durability points worth of ammo at only a durability cost of 3. Note the ammo must be purchased separately.

Extra Vehicles

The GM's Guide has a fair amount of vehicles in it sure, but just to finalize things off a lil, here's my own addition of the trailer - sized for a semi, or for a car.

Vehicle	PL	Skill	Drv	Acc	Cruise	Max	Type	W/S/M	Avail	Cost
Trailer (car)	5	-	0	0	0	0	O	10/10/5	Com	$2,000
Trailer (semi)	5	-	0	0	0	0	G	20/20/10	Com	$25,000

GRIDSITES

By Neil Spicer and Jeff Ibach

Official Alternity Web-Site

In our last issue (AC#15), we dedicated space to the official Star*Drive website of Tequila Starrise and thought we'd give equal billing to the other Alternity website sanctioned by Wizards of the Coast, www.alternity.net. We refer to A.net all the time and they've supported Action Check from the very beginning. You can find all of our back issues readily available for download there, as well as the various reprinted Dragon and Dungeon magazine articles and independent adventures that we have published over the past year and a half.

In addition, A.net provides an abundance of Alternity resources made available by their membership. From new house rules and adventures to alternate campaigns, short stories, and artwork, they've got everything covered. Many of the members have even banded together to work on special Alternity-related projects, such as the Stellar Ring NetBook for Star*Drive… designed to explore the various stellar nations in more detail than the original A-team managed to do. A.net is also a good source for news, message boards, and making contact with Alternity gamers from virtually every possible timezone around the world. They've even added a feature to help bring online gamers together for Play-by-Email, IRC, and OpenRPG campaigns. If you want to know anything about Alternity or have an interest in keeping the game alive, please lend them your support.

Virtuality & 3D-Modeling

Welcome to Starbase C3! This issue's featured gridsite at http://www.cube3.com/ starbase.htm is the result of Larry Rosenthal's vision to produce the first internet-based VRML science fiction universe. Essentially an adventure and entertainment site, Starbase C3 provides 3D VRML worlds and vehicles, multiple chat areas using text-based and 3D avatar technologies, sci-fi art galleries, news, and links to sites of interest. The simming experience features the C3 Datakits TM and Dataparts that can be bought and used to create your own starships and worlds. Starbase C3 then serves as a real-time 3D environment that with which to share your creations and interact with others online. Their vision is to become the "center" of sci-fi oriented material and sims on the net.

According to the webiste, "Starbase C3; the station, exists in a future where mankind has explored both outer and virtual space. It is a hidden Starbase station with a mission to develop and design next generation starships. The Starbase is staffed by the greatest designers and engineers in the known galaxy, and "manned" by thousands of construction robots (CONBOTS) that build the ships in the construction pylons that make up most of the station." The starships themselves are some of the most detailed computer-generated models around, and they can certainly fuel the imagination when it comes to Alternity Star*Drive or any other space-oriented campaign.

Of course, to join their membership you'll need to purchase the DatakitTM and Dataparts software. These 3D-modelling tools will allow you to design avatars, starships, and even worlds to explore in their simulated universe. They can also stand alone as modeling tools on any platform (MacIntosh or PC). Check them out and see what they've got to offer.

ASK THE ORACLE

By Neil Spicer

Q: How much more damage would explosives do under water?

Presumably, you're looking to increase the amount of damage an explosive causes underwater due to the higher compression and greater conductivity of a liquid medium vs. a gas medium (i.e., air). There's no Alternity rule that really covers this concept in any detail. For your own personal campaign, a house rule of +1 or +2 to each damage category might suffice. Some might also suggest that you stand a greater chance of stunning your opponent with an underwater explosion (i.e., fishing with grenades), in which case you might dictate that all primary damage causes a like amount of secondary stun damage. In other words, if a result of d4w arrives at 3 points of wound damage, a full 3 points of stun damage could be automatically applied instead of only half the amount. GM's that favor maximum lethality might bump up the grade of damage (Ordinary to Good, Good to Amazing) or the category of damage (stuns to wounds, wounds to mortals), but it's really open to interpretation. Set your own house rule and go with that.

Q: Why don't weapons like shortbows, knives, flamethrowers and arc guns do mortal damage? Real ones (except for the arc gun of course) can kill a person in one blow.

This question really gets back to how much realism you want to inject in your game. The lethality of the Alternity system has been equally praised and feared by GM's (as well as their players). And in many ways, it's a step up from the systems of the past where weapons that would normally kill in a single blow only do a few hit points of damage, thereby allowing any sufficiently advanced hero to easily survive wounds that would normally down an elephant.

Weapons like shortbows and knives often don't kill a person in one blow in real life…unless a lucky or skilled strike happens to take place. The only rough way that this is simulated in Alternity is for a hero to consciously invoke a "called shot" to automatically improve the degree of success so as to take advantage of a higher damage rating. Still, in the case of shortbows and knives, the damage track as given in Alternity lists an Amazing result as only capable of inflicting wounds. So this still won't achieve the lethality that you're looking for in your game. A possible recommendation would be to declare the weapons as capable of inflicting Ordinary damage… and then declare a completely unarmored opponent as having Marginal "armor" so that the weapons' damage automatically upgrades from wounds to mortals. This might swing things a little too far in other direction, however. This choice is essentially yours, as the GM, to invoke a house rule if necessary.

As for the other weapons you've indicated, I believe you answered your own question with regards to the arc gun. The flamethrower, on the other hand, is a weapon that also doesn't always kill on a single strike…at least not in the initial round of combat. It's a weapon of terror that essentially sets an opponent on fire…at which point, the rules for fire hazards could easily come into play. The flames are going to consume the target in just a few short rounds (or possibly even phases, depending on the potency of the fuel-mix). Damage should be applied round-by-round (or phase-by-phase) until the target is either overcome or finds a way to put out the flames. In the interim, it's quite acceptable for a GM to also apply a serious penalty modifier to all actions while the victim suffers inside the inferno.

Q: What are some good ranges for the ballista, catapult, and cannon?

This question stems from a piece of errata in the Alternity Gamma World Campaign Setting manual on pg. 95. Under table GW44: Ranged and Heavy Weapons, the range statistics for Ballista, Cannon, and Catapult were omitted. By drawing upon the only other roleplaying source available to me at the time, I pulled out some statistics from Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition for Catapults and Ballistae. Of course, they had to be altered slightly to conform to the metric system, and the new D&D rules just provide continuous range increments…without any real limit,

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so I had to fudge a little. As for a Cannon's range, there are simply too many different kinds of weapons in that category. I figured a Gamma World equivalent would compare favorably to something out of the Civil War period. A little judicious research on the Internet uncovered some statistics that should suffice in most gaming situations. Here's what I came up with as a totally contrived set of stats:

Cannon   500 / 1000 / 1500
          compared to range of Civil War howitzers
Heavy Catapult   100* / 250 / 500
          compared to same incremental of Crossbow
Light Catapult   75* / 150 / 400
          compared to same incremental of Long Bow
Ballista   50 / 100 / 250
          slightly boosted incremental from Heavy Crossbow
* = Catapults require at least a 30-meter minimum to hit their target

Q: Why do some really large animals have smaller STR and CON ability scores than much smaller creatures (e.g. levian and cambryonyx vs. great tudd)? What is the maximum ability score a creature can have? Why do the whales and saurians (from the GMG) have good toughness, yet the similar sized levian and cambryonyx do not?

Well, the easy answer to your first question is because each of the creatures you've cited were drawn up and created by different individuals from the A-team. And, because of that, we've often seen that some of the designers weren't always in sync when it came to pairing up their creations. Call it a continuity problem, if you will.

The more drawn out explanation might also include the idea that some larger animals are simply more susceptible to damage (i.e., weaker) than some of the hardier and smaller animals. Toughness (i.e., natural armor, if you will) is also a question of interpretation. It's not like we have Hit Dice in the Alternity system. Instead, it depends upon Constitution ability scores and Armor ratings alone to determine how "tough" an opponent actually will be. And, in many respects, that's what makes Alternity so appealing to many gamers. It's what brings the lethality home.

Strength is also a relative measure of any given creature's ability to exert itself against something else…an opponent, a barrier, etc. It can be a massive display of strength spread out across an entire wall or area, that also carries more force from its momentum (which can be affected by size), or it can be a focused feat of strength that seeks to puncture only a small area. Each one has to be measured in a single number, and it's not always easy to distinguish between the two for the purposes of increasing a game's reality factor.

As for that question that you've buried somewhere in the middle up there, the one regarding maximum ability scores, there's really no set limit. Even the Alternity Player's Handbook lists 19+ on Table P2: Resistance Modifiers as being possible. Species limitations always set the maximum for a particular creature, of course, as seen on Table P3: Ability Score Limits. From a hero creation standpoint, a score of 16 is usually considered the best that can naturally occur for many races… though mutations, cybertech, perks, etc. can still boost them higher. For individual creatures that a hero might face, the numbers can be increased as far as a GM feels necessary.