

ALTERNITY

ISSUE

10

ACTION CHECK

ONLINE + MAGAZINE

STAR*DRIVE

GAMMA WORLD

DARK • MATTER



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Editorial: Action Check Goes Bimonthly

Jim and I have found it harder and harder to meet the monthly deadlines because of a huge host of RPG and real-life™ circumstances taking its toll on the time we can spend on each issue. And while we recently began talk of ceasing production of Action Check, there were a number of factors that helped us with this decision: After issue #12, our one year anniversary, Action Check will go bimonthly. Part of this is the workload. We'd rather nip it in the bud before suffering any burnout. And we'd rather support Alternity on an irregular basis than none at all. We'd like to concentrate our extra time toward increased quality control and response time with submissions and inquiries.

As for the **Reprints Issues** Jim and I are fully dedicated to ensuring that all we have permission to do **seeing print and being available through A-Net in the current Action Check design**, fear not! Our ideal goal would be to have that work finished by the end of this year. In fact the idea is that with the alternate months seeing reprints issues, you'll hardly miss us!

Jim and I are really proud of Action Check and what it accomplishes. Every month it's given us a little rush on 'release day' when we'd get to see the reaction, the discussion, and feedback from our latest issue. Thanks for all your support, your subscriptions, your letters, everything! A huge thank you to all our contributors. Without you guys in the upcoming months, we're going to get mighty thin. We urge you all to consider Action Check as the place to send your articles where they'll get a good editing and layout for the readers.

Despite Alternity.Net taking article submissions, which we think is an excellent and efficient way to reach the fans, we still feel that old-fashioned calling, that some folks want an edited, rule-checked and consistently published style of articles to print out and use at their table during game play. We get letters to this effect, and so hold it true that Action Check serves as a vital link to keeping Alternity alive and well and appearing at game tables around the world.

Now that that's said, we want to again put out the call for help. Jim and I can make it look pretty, but that takes up all our time. Continued **submissions** are what we need, and your ongoing support will help keep us alive. We look forward to hearing from you!

Enjoy this jam-packed issue!

Action Check Submissions

To submit an article to Action Check magazine, read and follow the **guidelines** laid out at:

www.thirdfloor.8m.com

And send all submissions (in txt, rtf or doc) to:

actioncheck@hotmail.com

Regular Features:

The Oracle: Ask your Alternity rules questions to our all-knowing Oracle and watch the answers appear!

Transmissions: adventure hooks, along the lines of those previously found in Dragon Magazine for the various campaign settings.

Gridsites: Alternity related Web sites that deserve recognition and serve a specific purpose.

Creature Feature: Aliens, Creatures, Xenofoms, etc. for the Alternity campaign settings.

Futuretech: Gear, equipment, vehicles, weapons, armor and other hardware for the Alternity game.

Supporting Cast: NPC stats for insertion in Alternity games. All submissions must follow the Supporting Cast Template in the Alternity GMG!

Reviews: of Alternity or related-use product.

Special FX: New FX/Psi or mutations.

Plus cartoons, details of campaign ideas, star systems, full adventures, etc.

EDITORIAL



D&D Creature Conversions

By Derek Holland

Dungeons & Dragons Conversions

Kercpa

STR d3 INT d4+8
 DEX d4+10 WIL d4+6
 CON d3 PER d6+8

Durability as CON

Action Check 15+ /14/7/3

Movement sp. 18 w. 12# of actions 3

Reaction Score G/2

Mutations: Enhanced reflexes, Increased precision, Battle sense

Defects: Severe phobia (spiders and owls)

Attacks

Bow 18/9/4 25/50/75 d4s/d4+2s/d4w (LI/O)

Sword/Spear 6/3/1 - d4s/d4+2s/d4w (LI/O)

Defenses

Armor none
 +1 vs melee
 +4 vs ranged

Skills

Athletics- *climb* 8, *jump* 8; Melee weapons; Manipulation; Ranged weapons - *primitive* -

bow 6; Stealth- *hide* 6, *shadow* 4, *sneak* 4; Stamina; Survival; Knowledge- *first aid* 3; Awareness- *perception* 6, *intuition* 4; Investigate; Culture; Interaction. [These skills are those that scouts have. Typical adults have less combat skills.]

Description

The kercpa is an intelligent mutant red squirrel. It is an extremely social creature that, with teamwork, has been able to control the forest canopy where they exist. They have not changed much in form, but now use leaves for clothing and quivers and small vines as belts.

Encounter

Kercpa are rarely seen if they don't wish to be. They are a friendly folk to those that do not hunt them or damage their forest. Occasionally they work for others as messengers, but mostly they simply try to survive in forests filled with dangerous plants and animals. If they see someone damaging their forest, the kercpa use their arrows to drive them off or kill them. They have domesticated several minor plant and animal species, and use them in combat and ranching.

Habitat

Old temperate forests in eastern Meriga. They will wander into other types of forests, but only have communities where the trees are large and crowded close together.

Society

Kercpa have fairly closed community. Within it, they are a joyful, friendly people when they are not besieged by enemies. Outsiders are met respectfully, but with a wary eye. They know they are low on the food chain, but this does not seem to affect them.

Biome Old temperate forest
 Encounter chance Possible
 Group size 5-20 (scouts) to 100-350



Organization (community)
Tribe
Niche Herbivore
IQ Sentient

Converted from the *Monstrous Compendium Annual, Volume Four*.



Giant Clam

STR d4+12 INT 0
DEX 0 WIL d4
CON d6+4 PER 0
Durability as CON
Action Check -
Movement 0 # of actions 1
Reaction Score M/1

Attacks

Entrapment 6/3/1 d6s/d4w/d4+2w (LI/O)

Defenses

armor d4+1 (LI), d4 (HI), d4 (En)
-2 vs melee
-3 vs ranged

Skills

Awareness - perception 2.

Description

A creature that is very similar to the giant clam is found on Aegis (and thus, the stats are for both). It is a large, 1 to 2 meter-long shelled mollusk. Just inside the edges of the shell are hundreds of eyespots that can only sense light. Otherwise the two creatures look very different. The terrestrial has a rough shell sometimes covered with barnacles, whereas the

alien has a smooth one that is always exposed.

Encounter

When an animal accidentally inserts a limb into the shell of a giant clam, the gastropod reacts by closing its shell forcefully, and usually trapping the animal. Any creature so trapped must make a strength feat check with a 3 step penalty to free itself. The Aegis version releases a small amount of an irritant to drive possible predators off (one step bonus on the CON feat check).

Habitat

Both terrestrial and Aegis clams are found in shallow waters where they can filter algae.

Biome Shallow marine
Encounter chance Possible
Group size 1-10
Organization None
Niche Filter feeder
IQ Non-intelligent

Converted from the *Monstrous Compendium Annual, Volume Four*



Editor's Note: TSR Product 2173 Monstrous Compendium Volume four also contains 2nd edition AD&D stats for Fraal.



4-Dimensional Armor

By Jim Clunie

Futuretech 4-Dimensional Armor

(This futuretech is described for the DarkMatter campaign setting, drawing heavily on the imagery of Grant Morrison's *The Invisibles*. However, it might be found in the possession of any highly advanced alien species, for example, the temple warriors of Ra in the movie *Stargate*.)

Some xenofoms have been reported as showing extreme resistance to physical forms of attack, despite wearing only light protection. It has proved very difficult to recover a useful sample of the armor due to the level of firepower required to neutralise these violent and determined foes.

It has been suggested that these advanced beings have transcended the limits of material substance by incorporating hyper-dimensional folding into the thickness of the armor. The dimensional sandwich selectively binds the substance of the covering to a much greater mass of material, in the form of a slurry of unknown composition, which is folded into a parallel dimension. By some means not yet understood, the binding energies and thermal response of the material are covalent across the dimensional gap, but its gravitational and inertial response are excluded. The armor gains the effect of concrete several inches thick for the purpose of resisting impacts and dangerous energies, while remaining as light as common cloth.

The primary users of 4D armor tend to place the dimensional protection as the central layer in a sandwich construction, with a sturdy supporting material and a covering layer, typically a form of reflective, metallised cloth which appears to use the suit's main power to regenerate damage.

First-order 4D armor seems to have only a moderate power requirement, and is issued to a wide range of command and close-assault troops by those who possess the technology. First-order armor layering adds 2 armor points and increases the Toughness of the armor by one step. A sealed 4D suit also absorbs a large degree of environmental abuse. It reduces Radiation factors by 2 steps, protects against super-corrosive Atmosphere for d6 days, and reduces Heat

factors by 2 steps. Nonhumans can incorporate gravity and pressure nullification into a suit, blocking even crushing Pressure (P5) and reducing Gravity factors by 2 steps.

While 4D armor has no gravitational or inertial loading, it is stiff and difficult to move in, though this can be selectively nullified by more advanced construction. Human-built 4D suits have a +2 armor penalty in addition to any penalty added by the substrate. Nonhuman suits have a penalty of +1. These penalties can be offset by the Armor Operation-powered skill.

First-order 4D technology can also usefully be applied to melee weapons, greatly increasing the hardness and sharpness of any material. 4D blades have Good firepower.

Elohim Garment:

This shimmering robe-like piece of clothing has a concealed hood that can be sealed. Any unaltered human wearing this garment when the 4D field is triggered suffers cellular damage equivalent to an R5 radiation environment.

Availability: N/A

Cost: N/A

Mass: 3 kg

Composition: Unknown advanced fibers

Environmental Tolerance:

Gravity: G0-G4 protected, reduce G5 to G3

Radiation: R0-R4 protected, reduce R5 to R3

Atmosphere: As hard e-suit

Pressure: P0-P5 protected

Heat: H0-H4 protected, reduce H5 to H3

Action Penalty: +1

Toughness: Good

LI/Hi/En: d6+3 / d6+2 / d6

Hide: +3

Effective Strength: N/A

Skill: Armor Operation

4D Skinweave:

This tough, polished polymer sheet is a little inflexible, folding most easily at its defined joints. It is bonded to the user's body, replacing the being's natural skin, and has a power pack implanted some-

where within the body cavity. This technology has been theorised from fragments recovered from the destruction of a being described as a "greater demon."

Availability: N/A
 Cost: N/A
 Mass: N/A
 Cybergear Size: 2
 Nanocomputer Required: Yes
 Composition: Micro-engineered carbon fiber
 Environmental Tolerance:
 Gravity: G0-G4 protected, reduce G5 to G3
 Radiation: R0-R4 protected, reduce R5 to R3
 Atmosphere: As hard e-suit
 Pressure: P0-P5 protected
 Heat: H0-H4 protected, reduce H5 to H3
 Action Penalty: N/A
 Toughness: Good
 LI/HI/En: d6+ 2 / d6+ 1 / d6
 Hide: + 2
 Effective Strength: N/A
 Skill: 10 Skill Points to use cybergear

Adventure Hook - Devil's Corner: According to a well-known radio show featuring tales of the strange and sensational, a red-skinned, winged humanoid creature has been captured in the small town of Devil's Corner. Supposedly, a local farmer found the being in his barn, and held it at bay with a post-hole borer until the local police arrived to lock it up.

Devil's Corner is a town of about 2,000 souls, dominated by its speedway track. It is the day of a scheduled four-state championship. As the heroes arrive, the town is in an uproar. The creature has escaped, killing three police officers with a radiation beam. The state police have ordered an evacuation of the town.

The situation is a setup by another Illuminated group. A captured Luciferan, Telhazed "Holdout" Noctar, was handed over to the police and the story leaked to the press. The objective is to lure an elohim to the town, ambush it, and seize its advanced weaponry and armor for the conspiracy's research. Using a number of racecar transporters, the conspirators have shipped in fast-assault vehicles specifically built for the ambush, HMMWV's equipped with psionic-blocking Faraday cages and .50 heavy machinegun mounts.

In order to investigate any further, the heroes must elude the state police cordon (many of whom are in league with the conspiracy) and enter the deserted

town - just as three elohim march down the main street with flaming swords in hand, and four attack vehicles roar in to cut them off with machineguns blazing. The heroes can ally with the Luciferan, offer aid to the elohim, or simply cower as the battling forces blast the town apart.

Certain human groups have acquired the secret of 4D armor (first order only). Their efforts are much more crude and experimental. Human-built 4D suits have no over-protecting layer, exposing the dimensionally folded surface. Because almost all ambient radiation is absorbed into the material and transmitted to an empty extra-dimensional space, the suit appears jet black. Its outer surface is icy cold to the touch. Because the unprotected surface continually absorbs ambient radiation, it begins to overheat the extra-dimensional annex over time. For this reason, and because of the limitations of late PL 5 power sources, human-built suits can only be powered up for about an hour at a time.

Human-built dimensional armor layers have acceptable in-plane stability but a considerable sidelobe bleed, producing chaotic dimensional effects at the edges of the field. This is visible as a contorted, writhing view that penetrates into the 3-dimensional structure of objects within 1 metre of the field, for example, exposing the interior of human body parts visible through the field's edge. For this reason, most human battlesuits are fully enclosed. First-generation suits have specially generated viewports - a considerable weak point of the armor. The second-generation suits use closed-circuit video feeds to the interior of an eyeless visor.

Most of the upper ranks of those humans who are in contact with the extra-dimensional macrobe civilisation have undergone a process referred to as "alterations." The primary purpose of this excruciating, extensive, and irreversible surgery is to facilitate their future coexistence with more highly evolved entities, through changes to the diet, excretory process, reproductive pattern and sensory apparatus. As a side effect, the more separated internal organs are better able to absorb micro-tidal stresses, and the subject's nervous architecture is able to interface with the interpenetrating 4-dimensional control surfaces of macrobe technology.

The "transformation" isn't connected to the armor, but allows wearing of such gear as a secondary benefit. Natural humans who try to switch on a suit, without

being reconfigured to the internal dimensional stresses caused, start taking damage equivalent to radiation sickness as if exposed to a R4 environment.

First-generation human 4D battlesuit:

This suit of stiff, heavy fabric could be designed to look like a full-weight military uniform, although the earliest models are more like an antique diving suit. A successful called shot to the viewports (+5 difficulty) negates both the armor value and the Toughness of the suit, and upgrades the quality of success by one step (Ordinary to Good damage, or Good to Amazing).

The battlesuit is powered by an advanced high-energy battery pack, which has an endurance of one hour. The battery can be replaced, but the suit is then in danger or overheating. For every 20 minutes beyond one hour, make a check against the suit's Stamina-*endurance* of 8. On a Failure, the 4D generators cut out and cannot be reactivated for at least three hours.

Availability: Restricted

Cost: N/A

Mass: 7 kg

Composition: Heavy nylon

Environmental Tolerance:

Gravity: N/A

Radiation: R0-R4 protected, reduce R5 to R3

Atmosphere: As hard e-suit

Pressure: N/A

Heat: H0-H4 protected, reduce H5 to H3

Action Penalty: +2

Toughness: Good

LI/Hi/En: d6-1 / d4-1 / d4

Hide: +3

Effective Strength: N/A

Skill: Armor Operation - *powered*

Second-generation human 4D battlesuit:

The "second-generation" human battlesuits have first-order protection over advanced attack armor and first-order bayonet blades on each arm. The battlesuit is powered by an advanced high-energy battery pack, which has an endurance of one hour. The battery can be replaced, but the suit is then in danger or overheating. For every 20 minutes beyond one hour, make a check against the suit's Stamina-*endurance* of 10. On a Failure, the 4D generators cut out and cannot be reactivated for at least three hours.

Availability: Restricted

Cost: N/A

Mass: 18 kg

Composition: Ceramic plates sandwiched in heavy kevlar

Environmental Tolerance:

Gravity: N/A

Radiation: R0-R4 protected, reduce R5 to R3

Atmosphere: As hard e-suit

Pressure: N/A

Heat: H0-H4 protected, reduce H5 to H3

Action Penalty: +5

Toughness: Good

LI/Hi/En: d6+1 / d6+1 / d6+1

Hide: N/A

Effective Strength: N/A

Skill: Armor Operation - *powered*

Arm blade

Skill: Melee Weapons - *blade*

Acc: 0

Range: Personal

Type: LI/G

Damage (O/G/A): d4+1w/d4+2w/d4+3w

Actions: 4

Adventure Hook - Lair of the Darkness: The heroes are flown to Bosnia-Herzegovina to provide unofficial aid to the UN. War crimes suspect Zeljko "The Darkness" Draž, leader of the Panther militia, one of the commanders of the Srebrenica massacre, and third on the Hague's Most Wanted list, has retreated to a Soviet-built nuclear reactor which he once managed. A UN black ops team was sent to capture him. After reporting that Draž had retreated into the highly radioactive core of the reactor, the team lost contact. All of them were found shot, stabbed, or locked in the irradiated area until their suits failed.

Draž has been holed up in the reactor core, occasionally emerging to raid for supplies or pick off an unwary UN soldier, for nearly three weeks. No human could have survived for more than a day or two. The Institute has been asked to supply technical advice to a second UN assault team on just what they might be dealing with.

"The Darkness" is one of the high-ranking operatives of a global conspiracy in league with advanced alien species. Due to his dangerous duty, he has been issued with a prototype 4D battlesuit. Forced to flee into the reactor core, which was no hazard to the sealed battlesuit, Draž has used his technical skills to rig up connections to the power and cooling systems of the reactor, which allow him to maintain the radiation-blocking 4D armor indefinitely.

Finding no clues outside the reactor, the heroes will have to accompany the UN strike team into the core. Among the masses of machinery, lit only by eerie blue Cherenkov radiation, the sadistic Draj hunts down the rad-suited team one by one. The heroes must either blast through Zeljko Draj's advanced armor head-on, or somehow disable his recharging facilities to force him out of the reactor.

Second-order (5D) dimensional armor spreads the energies of any attack through time-like as well as space-like dimensions. It is prone to overloading in a sustained firefight, consumes large amounts of power, and is therefore issued only to elite assault forces. Its protection is impressive, doubling the armor value of its substrate and increasing Toughness by one step.

Third-order (6D) and fourth-order (7D) protection seems to be beyond the ability of any alien species' power sources to sustain. It is theorised that fourth-order (time-like refolded) protection, in particular, would eliminate the problem of overloading and introduce an almost impenetrable defense.

Dimensional armor could also be improved by being able to fold intact metallic pieces into a dimensional annex (rather than the poorly-structured slurry that must currently be used) or by expanding the effective thickness of the folded space.

Macrobe Elite Assault Armor:

This plated suit is not fitted for a human frame, imposing an additional +1 penalty to all actions. Natural humans who switch on the suit's dimensional field start taking damage equivalent to radiation sickness as if exposed to a R5 environment.

The armor's 5D generators are powered by an energy cell that can maintain the dimensional distortion for 30 minutes.

The suit can block up to 20 hits of Ordinary firepower, or 10 hits of Good firepower, before the material in its dimensional annex begins to overheat and back-feed energy to the generators. For each hit above this limit, make a check against the suit's Stamina-*endurance* of 15. On a Failure, the 5D generators fail, reducing the suit to a standard cerametal armor (d6+1/d8+1/d6 Ordinary armor). The generators, once stalled, cannot be restarted for six hours.

Availability: N/A

Cost: N/A

Mass: 11 kg

Composition: Ceramic/alloy composite

Environmental Tolerance:

Gravity: G0-G4 protected, reduce G5 to G3

Radiation: R0-R5 protected

Atmosphere: As hard e-suit

Pressure: P0-P5 protected

Heat: H0-H5 protected

Action Penalty: +3

Toughness: Good

LI/HI/En: 2d6+2 / 2d8+2 / 2d6

Hide: N/A

Effective Strength: N/A

Skill: Armor Operation - *powered*

Adventure Hook - I Have Seen The Future (And It Sucks):

The heroes are sent to check out a story from a Long Island resident, who claims to have fallen into a hitherto unknown underground area at Camp Hero, Montauk Point, NY, beyond the so-called "Boys' Bunker." In the days before their arrival, each hero experiences terrifying dreams, or even waking visions, of mass destruction, torture, death, and marching hordes of insectoid killers.

Finding and entering the tunnel, a hero wanders into a circular chamber and collapses. Any others who enter the former time-tunnel focus point, or touch the fallen character's body, are overcome and fall into a delirious trance-like state.

The heroes find themselves in a nightmare world of burning cities, heaped corpses, and files of humans being herded towards extermination centers by grotesque armored creatures. The smoke-shrouded sky is criss-crossed by chattering black pods broadcasting waves of insanity and despair. Attacked by a patrol of the armored beings, the heroes stumble upon a desperate group of men, women and children, led by a former police chief. It is Christmas Day, 2012, in the heroes' hometown. The heroes must stand with the little group, using captured alien weapons, against an assault force of elite alien infantry in 5D battlesuits.

The heroes either fade back to the present day by themselves, or must journey overland to the Montauk bunker in 2012 and reverse the process to regain their own bodies. This could be simply a combat-heavy interlude, or a major motivational scene for the heroes to somehow strike back at the agencies in the present day working towards the alien invasion.



GW HOUSE RULES

By Derek Holland

Gamma World House Rules

I am taking some of the rules of the 4th edition of Gamma World and converting them to the 5th edition. Some of this material can also be used in other Alternity campaigns.

The first rule is the new ability of senses. It has only one broad skill, Awareness. To increase the number of ability points to allow for this addition, just take the current total amount, divide it by the number of current number of abilities (you should get 10 or 11) and then add that number to the total number of ability points. That is, if you used 60 total points you should get 70 ($60/6 = 10$, $10+60 = 70$). The ability score limits for each of the official races are as follows:

Race	SEN
Human	4-14
Android	4-15
Dabber	5-15
Mutant	4-14
Sasquatch	5-15
Sleeth	4-14
Fraal	4-14
Sesheyan	4-12
T'sa	4-15
Weren	4-15

With this new ability, all species have Awareness as a free broad skill.

The second rule is that of species "mutations" as outlined in the "Gamma Squirrels and Mutant Moose" in *Dragon* #272. In that, the author reduces the number of mutation points due to the natural abilities of the different species. In GW 4th edition, animals kept those "mutations" and

defects and still got 5 mutations. So I suggest that all animals get 7 point above what they already have, and that mutation rolls that give a better version of the mutation are used, without mutation points lost or gained.

The third has to do with a few mutations and defects and has nothing to do with the 4th edition. The defect of physical change is blown way out of proportion. The minor version should be a slight defect and the major version should be a moderate defect. The personality skill penalties should only apply when the mutant encounters bigoted PSHs. The mutation of poison attack should have differences between mutant plants and animals. Most plants already have some sort of chemical defense, as they can not run from herbivores. So I use 3 versions of poison attack for them.

Poison Attack, Improved/Enhanced/Hyper Ordinary/Good/Amazing, Activated, CON Plants with the improved version can only produce an irritant. Those with the enhanced version can produce irritants, paralytic toxins and caustic agents. Finally, those with the hyper version can produce any toxin. Otherwise this is identical to the animal mutation of the same name.

And the last rule is the renaming and moving of several of the broad and specialty skills. First, Life Science is renamed Biology and Biology renamed Microbiology/Biochemistry. Resolve is left in the will-based skills, but the physical resolve skill is based on Constitution for skill checks (how individual GMs want to deal with this oddity is left to them). Investigate is moved to Senses and Street Smarts is moved to Intelligence.



THE PSYCHOTECH AGENT

By Pal Wilhelmsen

SUPPORTING CAST

The Psychotech Agent

Agents of Psychotech are usually encountered in groups of 2 to 4, typically on missions to recruit new agents, acquire new technology or silence enemies of the organization.

The Marginal Psychotech Agent is usually a newly recruited teenager with recently discovered psychic potential and a history of trouble at school. The agent is still under training, and review from his superiors. The agent may very well try to leave Psychotech when he realizes what the organization is all about.

The Ordinary Psychotech Agent has passed the psychological screening of his superiors and has realized the potential of the organization.

The Good Psychotech Agent is usually a hardened criminal, a seller of information and cold-blooded killer. With one eye at a future as a ruler of society, his missions are carried out with sadistic glee. The Good Agents of 2002 in the USA are usually refugees or illegal immigrants from Russia, with the memory of Soviet experiments and the Sandmen of Magnitogorsk clear in mind.

	M	O	G	A
STR	8	9	9	10
DEX	9	10	11	12
CON	8	9	10	12
INT	10	12	13	13
WIL	10	10	12	13
PER	9	9	11	12
Action Check	9	11	12	12
# of Actions	2	2	2	3

The Amazing Psychotech Agent is a brilliant strategist very well capable of playing the Russian mafia and the Sandmen up against the enemies of Psychotech.

Marginal Skills: Athletics; Manipulation; Modern Ranged Weapon - *pistol*; Vehicle Operation - *land*; Stamina; Knowledge - *computer operation*; Awareness - *perception*; Interaction; Psionic Broad Skill;

Ordinary Skills: Athletics; Manipulation - *lockpick*; Modern Ranged Weapon - *pistol 2*; Vehicle Operation - *land 2*; Stamina; Knowledge - *computer operation*; Awareness - *intuition 2, perception 2*; Lore - *psychic lore*; Interaction - *charm, intimidate* Psionic Broad Skill - *psionic specialty skill 2, psionic specialty skill*

Good Skills: Athletics; Manipulation - *lockpick*; Modern Ranged Weapon - *pistol 2*; Vehicle Operation - *land 2*; Stamina; Knowledge - *computer operation, several languages*; Security; Awareness - *intuition 2, perception 2*; Lore - *fringe science 2, psychic lore 4*; Interaction - *charm 2, intimidate 2*

Psionic Broad Skill - *psionic specialty skill 6, psionic specialty skill 3*

Amazing Skills: Athletics; Manipulation - *lockpick*; Modern Ranged Weapon - *pistol 2*; Vehicle Operation - *land 2*; Stamina; Knowledge - *computer operation, several languages*; Security; Awareness - *intuition 2, perception 2*; Lore - *fringe science 4, psychic lore 5*; Interaction - *charm 2, intimidate 4*

Psionic Broad Skill - *psionic specialty skill 8, psionic specialty skill 4*

Equipment:

Pistol, various psychic gadgets, several fake ID's, a plain suit. Experienced agents often carry psychic tracers.



MAGUS & MUTANTS

By Daryl Blasi

Magus and Mutants

As many enthusiasts know, the Alternity game mechanics are a wonderfully flexible thing, designed to handle any type of science fiction setting. Dark*Matter and game supplements such as *Beyond Science: A Guide to FX* have shown that Alternity can handle elements of the supernatural genre as well. Although a full-blown fantasy setting was never officially published, some people have already translated Alternity into worlds of swords and sorcery. Of course this creation process takes an effort to which some gamemasters are unable to devote their time. Fortunately, with a little twist, alternatives can be developed using existing Alternity publications to lay the groundwork. This article explores one of those alternatives by drawing upon the Mindwalking handbook and the mutation rules from the *PHB* or Gamma World setting to create a world with some of the trappings of high fantasy, but the pseudo-scientific reality of science fantasy.

The Magus and Mutants campaign sets the premise that humanity has developed psionic abilities, but those powers are thought to be magical in nature. Furthermore, the existence of mutated humans and animals has given rise to many tales of magical beasts and fey folk. Essentially, the setting of Magus and Mutants is fantasy without the supernatural. Wizards and elves exist, but their powers stem from super science instead of the mystical.

Aliens Muck With the Human Gene Pool

Sometime in the past, around 4000 BC, aliens visited the planet Earth and found the sentient inhabitants struggling with the early stages of civilization. These aliens were at war with another group of aliens in a distant part of the galaxy, and saw humans as potential warriors to be used in the conflict. Shortly after the discovery, the alien scientists went to work, setting up laboratories in various places across the planet. The aliens abducted humans for their experiments, hoping to unleash the psychic potential they saw in the primitives as well as genetically alter them into killing machines. With this ultimate goal in mind,

the scientists created two divisions for their experiments; one division focused on the mind and another on the body. The aliens hoped to make Earth into a planet-sized factory for sentient killing machines.

The mind division met with early success as the humans easily took to psychic enhancement. In one generation the aliens raised some humans to full Mindwalker status. The body division found their work a bit more challenging. Many of the human subjects were unable to cope with the accelerated mutations and often became mentally unbalanced. Another unforeseen side effect was the reaction of the mutagens with human physiology. Instead of controlled outcomes, the human subjects were developing random mutations, both physical and mental. In some cases the humans became infectious carriers of the alien mutagen, causing others around them to mutate as well. This infection even spread to other Earth species.

After half a century of these experiments, the aliens suddenly abandoned Earth when they lost their interstellar war and fled to parts unknown. Left to their own devices, some of the former test subjects returned to human society, while many of those mutants with unusual physical forms fled into the wilderness. Those Mindwalkers who appeared physically normal often became leaders of their former societies, attributing their magical powers to the gods that dwelled in the heavens. Meanwhile, many of the mutants developed their own societies far from normal human civilization.

Magus and Mutants in Medieval Europe

On medieval Earth, those people with psychic abilities are thought to have supernatural powers and are considered magi or the cultural equivalent. These magi fit into a variety of roles in European society, and are generally treated with either great respect or great fear. Some magi are advisors and teachers of the ruling class while some of the more ambitious take the reins of power themselves. Other magi are part of organizations that utilize their talents for specific tasks. For instance, the Church of Rome has a

special force of priestly magi that serve as enforcers of the holy law and defenders against the Devil. In some societies, a magus is considered divine himself, like a Scandinavian tribe whose magus chieftain is thought to be the son of the thunder-god Thor. Whatever the case, the people of the Middle Ages are fully aware of the presence of magi in their midst and believe in the extraordinary power of magic.

The descendants of the mutants have become the fey folk and goblins of myth with strange powers and equally strange appearances. These goblins have created shadow kingdoms in the wilderness of Europe, rife with court intrigues and dire rivalries between rulers. One such kingdom in northern France is Chanteluge, a hidden society of goblins ruled by a cunning and beautiful queen, who plays one goblin lord against another to gain her favor. Some goblins reject the courtly life and live in a manner of their choosing. Such a goblin is the prophetic Hag of Venice who resides in an underwater chamber beneath the city.

There Be Goblins in England

In the year 1200, the people of England are firmly entrenched in a world of superstition and fear, brought to life by the very real threat of the goblins. The human rulers of the land must be ever vigilant against these mystical beings that steal cattle, gold, and even children; at least, so the nobles would have the common people believe. In truth not every goblin is at war with humans, but it serves the nobles' interests to appear as the defenders of mankind. In their roles as protectors many of the nobles are served by a magus, and in some cases are magi themselves. One such noble wizard is Count Stephen of Kemper. He is a cruel and devious man who leads the Knights of the Hawk; an order dedicated to the complete destruction of the goblin folk. He truly doesn't care about protecting anyone and uses the fight against the goblins to appear as a hero to further his own political aspirations. Opposing him is a noblewoman named Rowena, a wizard of some power herself who has befriended a number of goblin folk. On the other side of the war is the Shadow King, Theoban, ruler of the Shangree goblins. Theoban has begun to gather other tribes under his banner to fight against the humans. The Shadow King is equally as cruel as Stephen and cares nothing

for human life.

The Campaign

The players in a Magus and Mutants campaign have many options to choose from, the most obvious being the magus profession. They might be goblin hunters protecting humanity from the evil goblin menace or they might choose to be goblin friends, aligned against those magus who threaten the fey tribes. Instead, the players may take on the role of traveling magus looking for excitement and adventure, aligning themselves with no one. On the other hand a hero might try life as a goblin, evading the deadly magus while playing games of intrigue in the courts of the goblin kingdoms. Of course the players might play as normal humans trying to survive in a world wrought with danger, both magical and mundane.

Masters of Magic

Magus can be created using the rules from the Mindwalker guide. In this reality the different psionic broad skills are seen as particular schools of magic, but the mechanics work exactly as written in the rulebook. A wizard may believe he is calling upon the Element of Fire from the Primal Dimension but is actually using pyrokinesis to fry his enemies. A magus hero of the Middle Ages receives the following broad skills for free: Athletics, Stamina, Knowledge, Animal Handling, Awareness, and Interaction.

Creating Goblins

There are a large number of goblin races whose mutations have settled into predictable patterns from long years of breeding. An ogre who mates with another ogre will more than likely produce offspring similar in most aspects to the parents. However, when the goblins mix with other types, or even normal humans, the results can be quite unpredictable.

Using the mutant creation rules from Gamma World or the *PHB*, a particular goblin or goblin type can be created with mutation points and drawback points. If you don't like saddling every goblin with drawbacks you can use an alternative method. For example, start every mutant 5 beneficial mutation points and then if desired more points may be purchased with drawback points on a 1 for 1 basis. I recommend setting an upper limit for mutation points to avoid goblins

with every power in the book. In this article, the cap has been set at 15 mutation points.

On a side note, if you use the Good quality Psychic Mutation from the *PHB*, a mutant has a particular psychic power at the set rank of 3 and psionic points equal to half their WIL score. This differs from some of the Gamma World mental mutations that mimic normal psionic abilities. The Gamma World rules utilize a slightly different mechanic; most mental mutations requiring a skill check by the target instead of the user to determine the effects of the power. In addition, instead of using psionic points, the Gamma World mental mutations have a set number of usages over a period of time. Gamemasters may need to decide which rule-set will be used in their campaign. The default for this article is the Psychic Mutation rules contained in the *PHB*. These rules draw from the existing game mechanics for psionic abilities used by Mindwalkers and may be easier to incorporate. Those mental mutations in the *Gamma World Campaign Setting* which have no psionic equivalent are used as written.

Many of the goblins possess limited psychic powers and are equal to talents in skill level. This ability is in addition to any mental mutations they might already have. Whereas the mental mutations are static, a goblin may develop his psionic talent to a greater degree as detailed in the rules for talents. The gamemaster may choose to adjust the skill levels that talents can reach, perhaps using the talents rules from *Dark* Matter*, wherein a talent can reach rank 12 in the primary skill and rank 6 in the secondary. Goblins tend to favor telepathy skills, with illusion the most common ability. A few goblins have even developed full Mindwalker abilities and can match a magus skill for skill. These goblins are usually in positions of power in their tribe or kingdom.

Sample Goblins

The following examples are goblin races created with the mutation rules and the mutation point variant presented earlier. In addition, the optional rules for number of beginning skills and beginning skill points is used (30 skill points plus 3 skill points for every point of Intelligence). All goblins receive the following broad skills for free: Athletics, Stamina, Knowledge, Animal Handling, Awareness, and Interaction. A beginning goblin character can have up to 6 additional broad skills

modified by the intelligence resistance modifier.

Ogre

Description: Ogres are large and physically powerful mutants reaching heights of 2.5 to 3 meters. Common ogre types have large thick horns growing from their heads, and clawed hands. They are usually extremely hairy with strange bumps and growths covering their skin. Their mutations are primarily of the physical kind with few mental mutations manifesting. If they have a psychic talent it is usually a Biokinetic specialty such as *heal* or *shatter*.

Habitat/Society: Ogres are a simple folk, generally content to follow the orders of their brighter goblin kin. Some ogres are peaceful laborers who perform the more strenuous domestic tasks of their goblin tribes. A more common occupation for the ogre is that of a heavy infantry soldier, especially with the more aggressive tribes. They make fearsome warriors, despite their lack of wits, and the other goblins take advantage of the ogres' awesome strength.

Ogres favor mountains and hills when choosing a place to live. They often use caves as homes, but sometimes will build crude homes out of large stones.

Typical Ogre

Level 1 Mutant Combat Spec

STR 18 (+4) INT 6 (-1)

DEX 7 (0) WIL 8 (0)

CON 16 PER 8

Durability: 16/16/8/8

Action Check: 10+ /9/4/2 (+1 penalty because of Slow Reflexes)

#Actions: 3

Move: Sprint 36, Run 24, Walk 9 (50% increase from Size Change)

Last Resorts: 1

Mutations (13 points): Dermal Reinforcement (O), Size Change (increased, G), Enhanced Constitution (+2, G), Hyper Strength (+3, A), Improved Natural Attack (A)

Drawbacks (8 points): Slow Reflexes (M), Reduced Intelligence (-2; M), Physical Change (E)

Attacks:

Unarmed (non lethal battering) 20/10/5 d4+4s/
d4+5s/d4+6s LI/O

Claws 20/10/5 d4+4w/d4+6w/d4+4m LI/O

Great Axe* 20/10/5 d6+ 5w/d6+ 6w/d4+ 5m LI/O
*-d4 base situation die (Combat Spec ability)

Defenses:

+ 4 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
-1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Dermal Reinforcement: d4+1 (LI), d4 (HI), d4-1 (EN)

Additional Modifiers:

+ 4 penalty on Personality-based skill checks with most humans (Extreme Physical Change)

Skills:

Athletics [18]-*throw* [19]; Melee [18]-*blade* [20]-*bludgeon* [20]; Unarmed [18]-*brawl* [20]; Stamina [16]-*endurance* [18]; Knowledge [6]; Awareness [8]-*perception* [10]; Resolve [8]-*physical* [9]; Interaction [8]-*intimidate* [9]

Nixies

Description: Nixies are water-breathing mutants with greenish skin, webbed hands and feet, and pointed ears. Other than these features they appear to be very attractive humans with pleasant, musical voices.

Habitat/Society: Nixies are playful and mischievous goblin folk who enjoy nothing better than a good prank. Their frivolous nature makes them untrustworthy, and they rarely hold positions of responsibility in a goblin community. When there is a revel the nixies become quite popular as they entertain and amuse the other goblins with song, stories, and dance.

Nixies are very close to nature and the one thing they take seriously is the protection of animals and the land. A nixie's whimsical demeanor turns to a hot rage when others cause harm to nature and its children. They will use deception and trickery to exact revenge on any enemy of nature.

Nixies are fond of beautiful humans and will go to great lengths to seduce and mate with them. The offspring of such a union is almost always a nixie. Centuries of selective breeding with physically attractive humans have resulted in nixies commonly having the Great Looks perk.

Nixies favor living in forests near a lake or pond. They will often share their living space with other nature-loving goblins, especially ones that can

help defend the nixies and the land.

Typical Nixie

Level 1 Mutant Free Agent

STR 9 (0) INT 10 (0)

DEX 12 (+1) WIL 9 (0)

CON 9 PER 13

Durability: 9/9/5/5

Action Check: 14+ /13/6/3

#Actions: 2

Move: Sprint 20, Run 12, Walk 4, Easy Swim 3, Swim 6 (50% increase from Gills)

Last Resorts: 2

Perks: Great Looks, Animal Friend

Flaws: Temper (6 pt., harming animals or nature)

Mutations (9 points): Gills (O), Increased Dexterity

(+1, O), Increased Personality (+1, O), Empathic

Projection (G), Illusion (G), Suggest (G)

Drawbacks (4 points): Environmental Sensitivity

(Arid, M), Physical Change (M)

Attacks:

Unarmed* 4/2/1 d4s/d4+ 1s/d4+ 2s LI/O

Dagger 10/5/2 d4w/d4+ 1w/d4+ 2w LI/O

*+ d4 base situation die (untrained)

Defenses:

+2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks (includes Free Agent ability)

Additional Modifiers:

-1 bonus on appropriate Personality-skill check (Great Looks)

-1 bonus on Animal Handling skill checks (Animal Friend)

-2 bonus modifier for animal encounters (Animal Friend)

+2 penalty on Personality-based skill checks with most humans (Moderate Physical Change)

+3 penalty on all actions when trigger for Temper occurs

+3 penalty on all actions in arid environment

Skills:

Athletics [9]-*throw* [10]; Melee [9]-*blade* [10]; Ac-

robatics [12]-*dodge* [13]; Movement [9]-*swim*

[12]; Stamina [9]; Knowledge [10]-*forest lore* [12];

Animal Handling [9]-*training* [10]; Awareness [9]-

perception [10]; Deception [13]-*bluff* [15]; Enter-

tainment [13]-*act* [14]-*sing* [14]; Interaction [13]-

charm [15]-*seduce* [15]

Firрге (Fire Imp)

Description: Firrges are small 1-meter tall mutants with bat-like wings and scaly red skin. The irises of their eyes tend to be a golden color and most have small horns on their foreheads. While some firrges still grow hair on their heads, the majority are bald with completely hairless bodies.

Habitat/Society: Firrges are generally mean-spirited and cruel goblins who love to gossip and pry into other people's business. Naturally, they tend to be employed as spies and even assassins by the goblin rulers. As a result they are unpopular with other goblins who try to avoid them whenever they can. Firrges are inclined to align themselves with powerful goblin leaders for protection and prestige.

Firrges prefer hot, dry climates, but can be found almost anywhere that civilized goblins reside.

Typical Firрге

Level 1 Mutant Free Agent

STR 7 (0) INT 9 (0)

DEX 15 (+4) WIL 11 (+1)

CON 7 PER 9

Durability: 7/7/4/4

Action Check: 15+/14/7/3

#Actions: 2

Move: Sprint 11, Run 7, Walk 2, (50% decrease from Size Change) Glide 22, Fly 44

Last Resorts: 1

Flaw: Infamy (2 pt., due to bad reputation as spies amongst goblins)

Mutations (11 points): Environmental Adaptation (hot, O), Increased Balance (O), Improved Senses (O), Pyrokinesis (G), Size Change (decreased, G), Wings (A)

Drawbacks (6 points): Environmental Sensitivity (cold, M), Physical Change (E)

Attacks:

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

Dagger 8/4/2 d4w/d4+ 1w/d4+ 2w LI/O

Short Bow 16/8/4 d4w/d4+ 2w/d4+ 3w LI/O

*+ d4 base situation die (untrained)

Defenses:

+4 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks (includes Free Agent ability)

+1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Additional Modifiers:

-2 bonus on Acrobatic skill checks

-1 bonus on Awareness-perception checks or Investigate skill checks

+3 penalty on all actions in cold environment

+4 penalty on Personality-based skill checks with most humans (Extreme Physical Change)

+1 penalty on Personality-based skill checks with other goblins (Infamy)

Skills:

Athletics [7]; Melee [7]-*blade* [8]; Acrobatics [15]-*dodge* [16]-*flight* [16]; Primitive Ranged Weapons [15]-*bow* [16]; Stealth [15]-*hide* [16]-*shadow* [17]-*sneak* [16]; Stamina [7]; Knowledge [9]; Awareness [11]-*perception* [12]; Investigate [11]-*track* [12]; Interaction [9]

A Psychic Power by Any Other Name...

In a game based in fantasy it would not do to call the mindwalking powers by their given name. A mystical and arcane label would be more appropriate usage by magus. With that in mind, here is a possible list of names for the psychic powers.

Biokinesis (The Sphere of Corpus)

Bio-Armor = "Scales of the Dragon"

Bioweapon = "Forge the Soul Steel"

Clamber = "Journey of the Spider"

Control Metabolism = "Blood of Iron / Blood of Fire"

Heal = "Mend the Flesh"

Intangibility = "Wraith Walk"

Morph = "Shape the Flesh"

Rejuvenate = "Wake the Blood"

Shatter = "Fist of Shattering"

Transfer Damage = "Embrace the Suffering"

ESP (The Sphere of Revelation)

Battle mind = "Warrior's Eye"

Clairaudience = "Ears of the Ether"

Clairvoyance = "Eyes of the Ether"

Dream Hunt = "Dream Hunt"

Empathy = "Read the Heart"

Mind reading = "Read the Soul's Secrets"

Navcognition = "Reveal the Path"

Postcognition = "Reveal the Past's Mysteries"

Precognition = "Eyes of the Prophet"

Psychometry = "Reveal the Spiritual Bindings"

Sensitivity = "Reveal the Mystic Weave"

Psychoportation (The Sphere of Portals)

Alter Speed = "Make the Heart Swift / Make the Heart Slow"

Apportation = "Banish / Conjure Item"
 Duplicate = "Summon the Mystic Twin"
 Teleportation = "Travel the Portals"
 Timeslip = "Walk the Path of Time"

Telekinesis (The Sphere of Elements)
 Cryokinetics = "Winter's Fang"
 Electrokinetics = "Tongue of the Storm"
 Kinetic Blow = "The Wind's Fist"
 Kinetic Shield = "The Wind's Shield"
 Levitation = "The Eagle's Path"
 Photokinetics = "The Sun's Ember"
 Psychokinetics = "The Wind's Hand"
 Pyrokinetics = "Breath of the Dragon"
 Sheya's Clutch = "Heart Dagger"

Telepathy (The Sphere of Spirit)
 Contact = "Touch the Spirit"
 Datalink = "Touch the Mechanical Spirit"
 Drain = "Steal the Heart's Strength (STR) / Vigor (CON) / Quickness (DEX); Steal the Spirit's Wisdom (INT) / Will (WIL)"
 Empathic Projection = "Enchant the Spirit"
 Guidance = "Guide the Spirit"
 Illusion = "Veil of Dreams"
 Mind Blast = "Rend the Spirit"
 Mind Block = "Hinder the Mystic Weaving"
 Mind Shield = "Spirit Shield"
 Mind Wipe = "Steal the Spirit's Memories"
 Psychic Armor = "Spirit Armor"
 Psychic Projection = "Journey of the Spirit"
 Subdual = "Tame the Spirit"
 Suggest = "Rule the Spirit"
 Tire = "Wilt the Spirit"
 Undo = "Unravel the Mystic Weave"

Adventure Ideas:

Save the Baron's Son: The heroes are called upon by people from a small village to find the son of a local baron who has vanished into the nearby forest. One villager claims to have seen the young man walking with a beautiful woman by a pond in the woods. The villager believes that the woman was a faerie who entranced and stole him away. Although the villagers have no personal connections to the young man, they fear the baron will blame them for his son's disappearance.

The woman the villager saw was in truth a nixie who captured the handsome young man to be her lover. What the villagers don't know is the nixie is the slave of an ill-tempered ogre who has been gone for a week on a visit to see his brothers. The ogre took her young son with him to prevent the nixie from simply running off. The nixie magically seduced the baron's son in the hopes of using him in a plan to kill the ogre when he returns and rescue her son. The nixie and the man currently wait in the ogre's cottage for the monster's return.

The Mysterious Disappearance of Monks: An abbot of a monastery calls for the aid of the heroes when brothers of the monastic order are found missing. Mysterious ashes left in various places throughout the monastery are the only clue and the abbot is at a loss for an explanation.

The monks are being systematically exterminated by a gang of firrges, who have been hired by a bishop of the Church to completely destroy the order. The monks had recently written a series of letters calling for the clean up of corruption in the Church and openly criticized that particular bishop for his lascivious behavior. The firrges hide in the monastery and attack the monks when the opportunity to use their pyrokinetic skills arises.

Other Options

If the Magus and Mutants setting doesn't appeal to you as a long-term campaign, the concept and ideas might be used in other ways. A Tangent campaign could include a one-shot adventure where heroes explore a world that appears to be straight out of Tolkein, but is in fact good old Earth with a healthy smattering of psionics and mutants. Dark*Matter gamemasters could use the mutant creation concept to develop xenofoms of their own that have inspired tall tales of ghouls and faerie folk. In my own PL7 campaign, set on a distant planet in an alternate Star*Drive universe, one society of people uses the mystical names from this article to describe the various psionic powers.



Death of Walter Becket

By Pal Wilhelmsen

The Death of Dr. Walter Becket Transmission for Dark Matter

Dr. Walter Becket works at the psychology institute at Columbia University, and while he is competent, he is best known for collecting stories of mind control experiments. The heroes are brought in when Dr. Becket is giving a lecture on MK-Ultra during a “new science” convention. The heroes could be present to get his opinion on another case, they could have received an anonymous tip where they are encouraged to attend, or Dr. Becket himself might have asked them to come. The following works best if the heroes know him from earlier investigations.

Dr. Becket’s lecture is unusually bad for an experienced academic. He is unfocused, has trouble with timing and obviously has trouble remembering what he is supposed to talk about. Steve Patton, a quiet and polite math student, shoots Dr. Becket with no witnesses right after the lecture. Patton is arrested shortly afterward with a gun in his hand, two meters from the body. He is confused, and has no memory of what just happened.

Patton is interested in conspiracies and the paranormal. He is a quiet, friendly guy with no criminal record. He attended the lecture with his sweetheart Susan, and only left her to look for a restroom after the lecture. Patton has been set up, of course. The real killer shot Becket, intercepted Patton on the way to the restroom, controlled him with psionic powers, put him on the site and gave him the gun. The killer then ordered him to turn away and to scream for help as soon as he was alone with the body. The killer finished the job by erasing Patton’s memory of the incident and leave before he noticed he was not alone with the body. Patton’s scream alerts people in the area and the police arrive in less than five minutes.

The real killer is Dragana Tsjernenko, a Psychotech agent sent to deal with Becket because he

was coming to close to Psychotech in his investigations. Tsjernenko was a teen when she fled westward using a fake passport and her psionic powers after the Iron Curtain fell. She tried briefly to rejoin normal society, but soon found that she was incapable of a normal life after the horrors the Soviet scientist put her through. She rejoined Psychotech sometimes during the late 90’s and moved her operation to the US. The things she has done haunt her, and she is trying to figure a way out of the mess she is caught in. She is unlikely to succeed however. Cold-blooded murder is just another step in the wrong direction.

Tsjernenko goes to Dr. Becket’s apartment right after the murder to clean up any evidence of Psychotech activities. Fast-working investigators may intercept her, but are most likely to find a messed up apartment and little of interest for anyone without some knowledge of psionic lore. This could be a good spot to introduce the *McKinley Group Report* if this not already has been done.

Investigation of the murder site is likely to produce little of interest, except that some may have seen a woman who has not been accounted for in the police reports. Investigation of stores and public buildings in the area may reveal a security camera that may have captured the woman on tape.

Game notes

Using this transmission will require some work from you as the GM. You must take a closer look at the Psychotech article located at www.wizards.com/darkmatter, and give its content some thought. What role is Psychotech playing in your campaign? What about Black Sun Inc? Are the heroes likely to encounter more agents, or just Tsjernenko? Dragana Tsjernenko is a good or amazing Psychotech agent, as per the Psychotech Agent Template, with the Psionic skills Telepathy - *suggest* and Telepathy - *mind wipe*.



DERELICT

By Derek Bredbenner/Christopher West

DERELICT ADVENTURE

Derelict

Derelict is an one act Star*Drive adventure for 3 to 5 heroes. This adventure can be added on as a floater to a larger adventure or played alone in one session. The heroes should be flying in their own spaceship somewhere in the far reaches of the Verge or in any remote area of space.

Adventure Background

The CSS Blue Dwarf was a Ranger-class starship sent out into the unknown edge of the Verge. The crew of the CSS Blue Dwarf was assigned a six-month astrographic survey mission. This mission consisted of charting undiscovered planets and stars and collecting data about the celestial bodies. Unfortunately, the crew made an unfortunate discovery.

Near an uncharted asteroid belt, the CSS Blue Dwarf crew sent a recon probe to collect a piece of the numerous 'green rocks' that layered around some of the asteroids. The ship's geologist made some interesting discoveries about the green rock, which they kept suspended in a hydrostasis tank. The rock, although inorganic, showed some life signs. The ship's captain showed little concern about the mysterious nature of the rock, allowing the geologist to continue further research. A few days later while the ship was in drivespace, the crew found the geologist dead, his neck punctured by two large holes. The hydrostasis tank was shattered open and the green rock split open. The green rock was obviously an alien egg. The captain quickly ordered a search party to find the loose alien. Only a few personal firearms were carried aboard the CSS Blue Dwarf, but the search team was still determined to find the alien and destroy it. The search team was soon ambushed by not one alien but five, killing three crewmembers, including the captain. Panic broke out as the aliens made their way into the command and weapons compartments. The remaining crewmembers barricaded themselves in the lounge of the crew compartment. The new commanding officer then ordered Maggie, the AI system of the ship, to pull out of drivespace and

fly to the nearest Verge planet at all cost. As luck would have it, the CSS Blue Dwarf pulled out of drivespace into another asteroid belt. Maggie tried to maneuver the ship around the asteroids, but several smaller boulders still made impact. The damage from the impacts proved to be too much and the ship lost power and life support. Maggie was able to fly the ship out of the asteroid belt before the accumulator ran out of power. Unfortunately, Maggie shutdown, and the crew faced a cold, dark, death.

Supporting Cast

Alien Arachnid

STR 7 INT 1 (Animal 3)
DEX 15 WIL 10
CON 6 PER 1 (Animal 3)
Durability: 6/6/3/3 Action check: 17+ /16/8/4
Move: run 50, walk 10, (jump 10) #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Good/2

Attacks

Bite 12/6/3 d 4 - 2 s / d 4 s / d 4 - 1 w
LI/O
plus poison (see below)

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+3 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d4+1 (LI), d4-2 (HI), d4-2 (En)

Skills

Athletics [7]-*climb* [16], *jump* [14]; Stealth [15]-*hide* [18], *sneak* [16]; Stamina [6]-*endurance* [10]; Awareness [10]-*intuition* [12]; Resolve [10]

The alien arachnids in this adventure are very similar to the Arachnid found in the *Gamemaster Guide* (p. 236) except that they can survive in open space.

The poison combines the effects of a paralytic agent and a necrotoxin, inflicting a +2 penalty to the victim's Constitution feat check to resist the toxin. The onset time for the poison is 2 rounds and its duration is 2 hours. The bite must cause

at least 1 point of damage in order for the poison to take effect.

The gamemaster is free to maneuver the alien arachnids to provide a challenge for the heroes. Two alien arachnids are hibernating in the electronics compartment while the remaining three are hibernating in the auxiliary compartment. They will have to wake up first from the heroes entering the compartment. The gamemaster should allow the creatures to move around freely throughout the ship, using stealth and hit and run tactics. Make the heroes jump around a bit by surprising them with some of the floating inanimate objects.

Trigger Scene

The heroes in this adventure are traveling near the edge of the Verge when they come upon the derelict CSS Blue Dwarf. Read the following to the players:

Your starship's sensors have picked up a derelict Ranger-class starship, one commonly used for astrographic survey missions. The derelict's hull has been severely beaten by colliding asteroids. Checking the latest missing ship files in your ship's Grid, the derelict is identified as the CSS Blue Dwarf. The CSS Blue Dwarf has been reported missing for several weeks. A mission statement has been attached to the files:

*Concord Survey Services
Mission Statement*

A 10,000 credit reward will be given to anyone who can retrieve the astrographic survey box from the electronics compartment of the CSS Blue Dwarf. An additional 30,000 credits will also be awarded if the ship can be recovered and taken to the nearest Concord Starbase. A layout of the CSS Blue Dwarf is provided.

End

The derelict floats silently in the darkness of space.

The heroes will need to gear up and set up across the space to the derelict spaceship. The GM should give the players a copy of the starship's layout.

Scene One: Grand Entrance

Read the following to the players when they reach the derelict:

The CSS Blue Dwarf seems to have barely survived the asteroid collisions. Several dents and small holes litter the derelict's hull. Five airlocks allow access into the ship. Only the airlock on the port side of the ship has a functional control panel. There is a breach in the auxiliary compartment of the derelict.

The heroes have two ways to enter the ship: 1) they can try to gain access through the airlock with the functioning control panel. A Security-security devices skill check at ordinary complexity (4 successes) under marginal conditions is required to open the airlock. A Computer Science-hacking skill check can also be made but with an additional +1 step penalty. If all else fails, the heroes can attempt to blast open the airlock. The airlock has a durability of 12/12/6 and protected by light cerametal (d6-1/d6-1/d6-1) with amazing toughness. The heroes will not have to worry about compression in the ship. Run **Scene Two** when the heroes have entered through the airlock. 2) the heroes could enter through the breach in the auxiliary compartment of the derelict. Only one human sized person can squeeze through one at a time. Unfortunately, some alien arachnids have claimed territory in this compartment (run **Scene Three**).

Scene Two: Alien Attack

A light source will be needed for the heroes to see inside the CSS Blue Dwarf. Read the following to the players when they enter the derelict through the airlock:

The interior of the CSS Blue Dwarf is silent and dark like an empty coffin. Casual ship items float lazily through the compartments. A hidden figure looms over the other side of the weapons compartment. You catch your breath when you shine your light and find a dead human gazing at you.

The dead human was one of the crewmembers killed by the alien arachnids. The body happened to have floated down from the cargo compartment. The heroes will find puncture wounds

on the dead human if searched. The captain's and two crew members' bodies are in the cargo compartment. One of the crewmembers was accidentally shot while the other two died from the aliens. Two 9mm charge pistols with six bullets remaining in each clip can be found near the bodies. The geologist's body can be found in the crew (lab) compartment. All the bodies are freely floating, frozen from open space exposure. The remains of the alien egg are also floating near the broken hydrostasis tank. The heroes will have no problem opening the airlocks and moving around the derelict. They must keep their e-suits on while in the derelict.

The astrographic survey box is a small hand-held box found in the sensor computer in the electronics compartment. The box can be easily taken out of the sensor computer. Two alien arachnids are resting in this compartment and will strike at the heroes when they enter and move towards the sensor computer.

Scene Three: Alien Surprise

A small asteroid has breached a man-sized hole in the auxiliary compartment and severely damaged the mass reactors, leading to the deaths of the remaining crew members. Repairing the mass reactors will require a Technical Science-*repair* skill check at amazing complexity (8 successes) under moderate conditions. The parts needed can be found in one of the storage closets of the cargo compartment. If the mass reactors are successfully repaired, they will provide enough power to maneuver the derelict to a nearby Concord Starbase. The remaining three alien arachnids are also hibernating in this compartment and will attack any the heroes that enter the compartment.

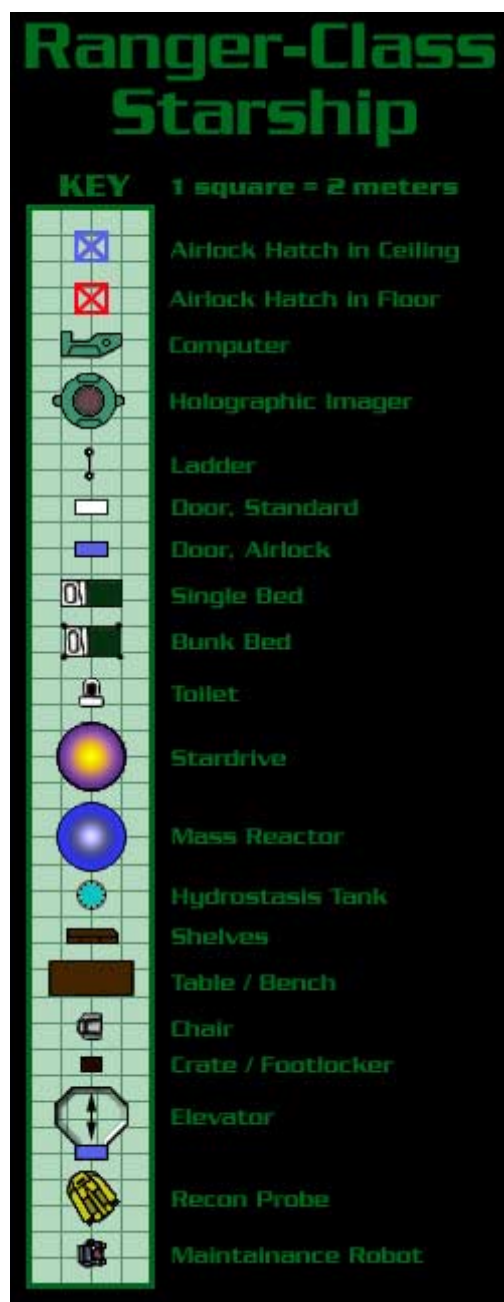
Alternate Scene

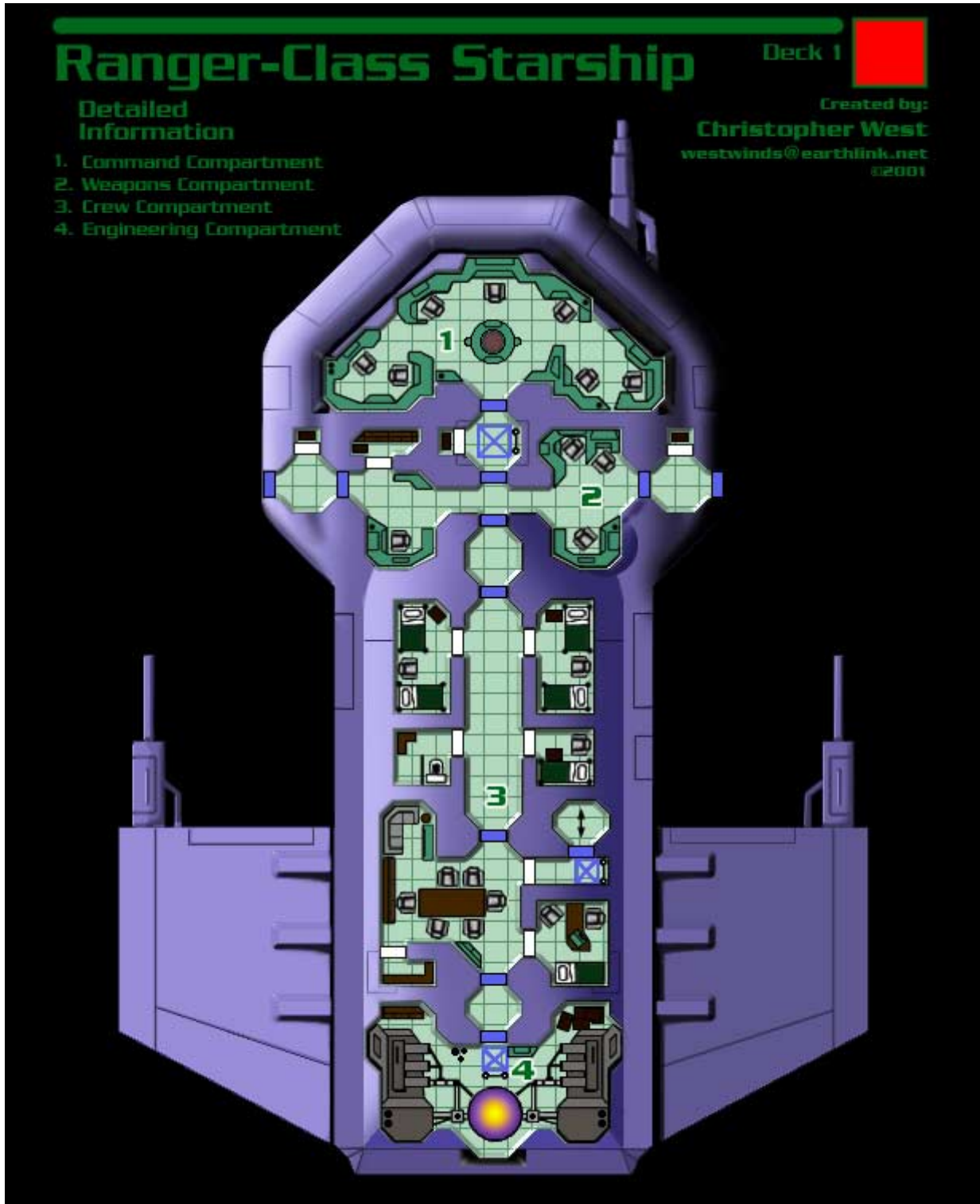
A hero that survives an alien arachnid attack may face the possibility of dying from its poison. A Medical Science-*treatment* skill check will provide a -1,-2 or -3 bonus to the victim's Constitution feat. An antidote may also be made to stop the poison. The alien egg from the crew (lab) compartment can be analyzed by one of the hero's medical or professional gauntlet/computer. A Medical Science-*medical knowledge* skill check at good complexity (6 successes) under slight

conditions will be required to create the antidote. Up to three doses can be created from the alien egg. One dose is needed for a hero to recover from the poison.

Conclusion

The heroes will collect their reward if they turn in the astrographic survey box or the CSS Blue Dwarf to the nearest Concord Starbase.





Deck Plans by Christopher West. Chris can be reached at Westwind@earthlink.net

Ranger-Class Starship

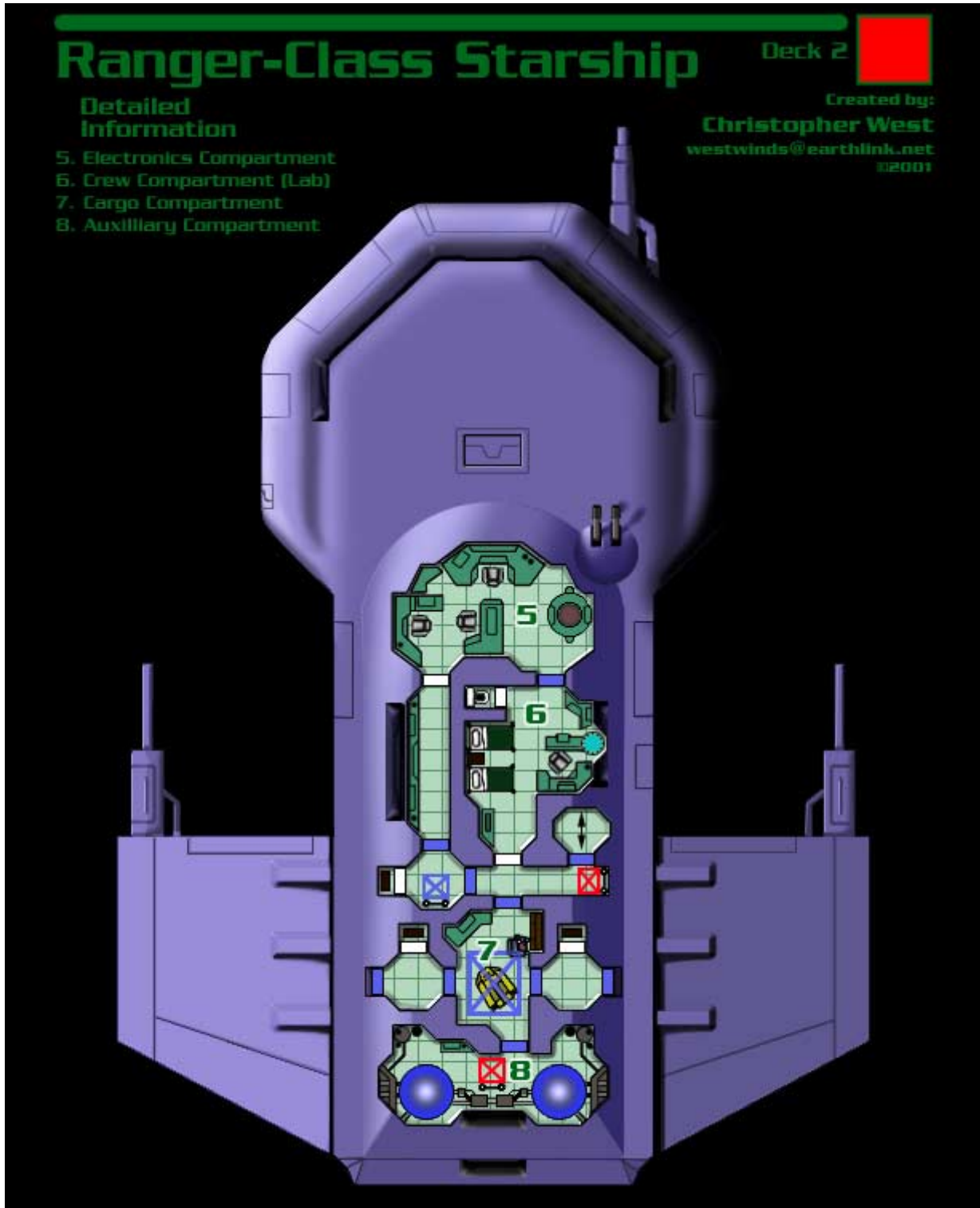
Deck 2



Detailed Information

- 5. Electronics Compartment
- 6. Crew Compartment (Lab)
- 7. Cargo Compartment
- 8. Auxilliary Compartment

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ASK THE ORACLE

By Neil Spicer

Q: What do you think would be good stats for body plating for the Externals? In fact, what analogs of human cyber gear would they have?

A: The Externals don't really use cybertech. Their technology hinges more on biotechnology than anything electronic, so their version of cybertech is really bioware or outright genetic mutation. On pg. 62 of *The Externals ESD*, it states that "...their superior medical skills allow them to shape living beings as they desire. In many ways this gives them the ability to mimic the cyber components described in the ALTERNITY rules." Also, on pg. 23 it says, "Cy-biotech often grows under careful supervision in a tech-tree or in vats, and these semi-living things actually are programmed and constructed bioweapons."

As such, the stats for body plating are likely to be very similar to what humanity has produced with its own technology. And, virtually any piece of cybergear can be reproduced in an External's physiology. Several methods exist for doing so: 1) Through the grafting of living organisms into their flesh, much like the invasive procedures used to introduce cytronic circuitry into the bodies of humanity and its allies...or the introduction of Teln tangles or Kroath bio-nanites; 2) Through direct genetic manipulation prior to being born, much like the engineered mutations of the Thuldan Empire or the Klicks; or 3) Through gene-therapy treatments designed to warp a mature External's body into something other than what it used to be, similar to the method the N'sss have employed to create the Magus...and also somewhat similar to the method the Kadarans use to create Kroath.

Some GMs interpret External technology as being so far advanced that it should always enjoy an advantage over comparable man-made items (i.e., their body plating should be stronger than the man-made kind). I don't think this is necessarily true. The Exter-

nals certainly enjoy a more advanced progress level in the technology track that involves bio-organic manipulation. It's why they're able to produce machines and tools from biological components where humanity cannot. But, the products of their technology aren't necessarily superior to what humanity makes from the track that involves electronics and cytronic circuitry. This is why mankind still stands a chance against the External threat. Of course there will be instances where a certain piece of External equipment (such as the blacklaser) outstrips a man-made version by doing more damage, offering more protection, or performing better in some other way. But, there will also be situations where a man-made device will outperform an External version as well.

Lastly, numerous references in *The Externals ESD* and other *Star*Drive* products indicate that the Externals are just as fascinated (and confused) with our technologies as we are with their bio-organic equipment. The Klicks (and hence their masters) had really never encountered a grenade prior to battling the Concord marines. The N'sss had never managed to produce a superior Magus, always relying on a set of specially-bred Teln to introduce the transformation until they combined their technology with VoidCorp. Even the Kadarans themselves are particularly interested in learning the intricacies of human (and Aleerin) cybernetics.

So, don't view the Externals as the un-touchable masters of the very fabric of life. They aren't the gods they appear to be. After all, even they don't hold a candle to the powers and abilities of the Precursors. But, within the realm of biotechnology that they have available, the Kadarans should be able to duplicate virtually any piece of cybertech gear presented in the *Alternity* rules. If you wish to have certain pieces of bioware perform better than the human equivalent, such as the body plating example, an extra +1 point of protection ought to suffice.

Q: What can't the Kadarans make with biotechnology?

A: Very little. They can't produce something that is obviously of a completely different tech-track, but they could certainly produce something that *mimics* a product of another tech-track. Remember that the Kadarans are a PL7 society with access to some PL8 technologies. As such, they've already explored most of the scientific areas that humanity and its allies have conquered. They have simply done it using a different set of tools based around living organisms. Refer to pg. 23 of The Externals ESD for a full explanation. The following is a summarized version of what that text presents:

Kadaran technology really revolves around living tech-trees that grow components for weapons, ships, and other equipment in their seed-like pods or nut-like shells. Kadaran technicians can also reprogram an individual tree by manipulating certain fluids, chemical levels, and/or pheromones to switch production to some other needed device. These components can then be assembled into larger weapons or devices and put into use. Some trees are even giant power collectors that crank out energy cells for other devices. As such, a simple orchard of tech-trees could be responsible for producing a host of materials and equipment, effectively rolling together many different manufacturing centers into one.

Kadaran technology also comes with a caveat, however. Most of the bio-devices need something to keep themselves alive, usually the bio-electrical energy of another sentient being. They are also somewhat susceptible to heat and need temperature regulation to insure their survival. According to the text, "...at human comfortable temperatures, biotech weapons dissolve if not constantly energized by their wielder's touch or special powered holsters and armories built for them." Other more common devices probably just require maintenance and supervision to keep them functioning at peak levels. This ritual could be compared to "watering the plants" and "feeding the livestock" for lack of a better example since all of the devices truly are living creatures that require nourishment and con-

stant care.

Kadaran technicians are pretty much the maintainers of 65% of the I'krl Theocracy's infrastructure. The rest of the technology generally forms around the Sifarv and N'sss societies. The former has access to technologies that are much more recognizable to humanity, while the latter provides variant forms of biotech that the Kadarans haven't fully explored yet. That last part is significant, because it clearly demonstrates that the Kadarans don't have a monopoly on the biotech market just yet. The N'sss have made themselves invaluable to the I'krl Theocracy by filling crucial roles and identifying niche markets for their own products. The two races are generally in competition with each other.

Q: What Verge systems can make stardrives and which can make starships?

A: Virtually every Verge system is going to have a maintenance shop or other homegrown operation that refits and could potentially build a stardrive and starship. The question is really how big of a stardrive-capable ship can they build? Certainly anything in the Small-craft class of the Warships supplement is probably fair game, as well as the civilian counterparts to those ship sizes. In fact, civilian ships could probably approach the Light-craft size as well. Larger vessels would require a larger facility, of which there are only three that deserve mentioning.

The undisputed shipbuilding facility in the entire Verge is located at the Alaundril shipyards in the Tendril system. It has the capability of turning out much bigger warships, basically anything of Medium size or smaller, and probably has the means to repair or refit a Heavy-class vessel, too. Alaundril's shipyard is land-based and as such, trades the benefits of a zero-gravity orbital operation for the added security and privacy of the moon's surface. It also enjoys the craftsmanship of StarMech engineers, whose efficiency and attention to quality cannot be rivaled. Most of the other systems turn to Alaundril for repairs, refits, and new commissions of starships.

Another major shipbuilding project that

competes with Alaundril is Thorn Superport Shipyards, located in the Talbott star system and introduced in the Star Compendium manual. That facility lies in the middle of the Foucault asteroid belt and was kept secret for as long as possible in order to insure its completion. Its production capacity can turn out nothing larger than a Medium cruiser-class or light carrier vessel (refer to pgs. 50-51 of the Star Compendium). Today, it competes directly with Alaundril and acts as a potential ace-up-the-sleeve for the Verge Alliance during the External War. Unfortunately, it doesn't benefit from a high population center like Alaundril and isn't nearly as well defended, though the first cruiser and light carrier will remain in the service of Thorn Industries to patrol the system and defend it from future aggression.

Lastly, the third largest ship production center probably resides on Bluefall in the Aegis star system. This facility is mentioned on pg. 53 of the Star Compendium as another role player in the system defense market, but primarily the drydocks on Bluefall sell their ship designs only to the Regency. Their production capacity will obviously be much more limited than Alaundril or Thorn, probably along the lines of escort-class ships, industrial haulers, and smaller-sized vessels. They may even have the capacity for an occasional refit or repair-job on a Light warship like a corvette or frigate, but like most other star systems of the Verge, Bluefall still has to rely on Alaundril or Thorn for large-scale projects.

A good example of what the other systems have available to them is the privately owned ship production facility mentioned in the Dewi star system, home to the New Dreth Commonwealth. Although no longer at full strength, this shipyard on the moon of Arles turns out a few scouts and traders every year, but nothing any larger than that (refer to pg. 36 of the Star Compendium). The system also holds a manufacturing capacity that places it in the top ten for virtually every other technological component, harkening back to the people of Arles origins on Isette, the premier producer of high-tech goods in the former Dreth Commonwealth prior to the Second Galactic War. Some, but not all, of the products

generated from Arles would probably go toward starship construction, but again nothing any larger than a scout or trader.

Finally, the importance of the Oberon system cannot be overlooked in the stardrive construction process. The valuable rhodium ore mined in that system meets the majority of the interstellar traveling needs of most ships in the Verge. There's a saying on Lison that "he who controls the flow of rhodium, controls the Verge." Nothing could be more true, and although the people of Oberon don't engage in the construction of actual stardrives or starships, their vital role in the process cannot be ignored. Presumably, they ship their ore to be processed at manufacturing centers in the systems that do engage in starship construction, the majority of which would have to be Tendril, Talbott, Aegis, and even beyond the Verge to other buyers in the Stellar Ring.

Q: Why can't the superport at Dewi repair/refit the 2 junked cruisers?

A: The mere presence of a "superport" or shipyard in the Dewi system doesn't immediately signal that the resources are available for repairing and refitting any kind of ship. The two junked cruisers that the refugees brought with them following the Second Galactic War are relics whose vital components cannot be easily replaced. It's much like the situation of repairing or refitting an antique automobile nowadays. Parts aren't available anymore. Expertise with how certain systems operate is nowhere to be found. And even if they are, they come with a hefty price tag which the New Dreth Commonwealth cannot afford. Even if they could, it would probably make more sense to spend the money to buy or commission a newly constructed ship rather than rebuild something that is at least a century old that will continue to have an overall higher maintenance cost.

Notably, the same situation existed for the OSS Shiva, an Orlamu fortress ship from the Second Galactic War, which was too expensive to put back together. Eventually, its hull became the focal point for one of the biggest space stations in the Stellar Ring. The

moral of the story is that ships can't go on being repaired and refitted forever. Eventually they have to be mothballed, recycled by cannibalizing its parts for other things, or turned into something less than its original function intended. The Dreth of the Dewi system chose option number two from that list in order to refit the other cruisers they brought with them and so they could field a reasonable defense force as quickly as possible. The hulls of the junked cruisers can now be found in a slowly decaying orbit around Amaethon.

One last note regarding the "superport" at Dewi. The New Dreth Commonwealth represents only a mere fraction of what it once used to be. The starship manufacturing capability at Arles is not really capable of cranking out additional warships. On pg. 20 of the Star Compendium it states, "...No shipyard in the Dewi system had the capability to see to such ships, nor did they have the heavy industry to replace them....in order to keep as many starships as possible in working order, engineers scavenged the more damaged craft for parts, systems, and even whole sections." Today, the shipyards at Arles are privately owned and only capable of producing a few scouts and traders every year, not cruisers or carriers (refer to pg. 36 of the Star Compendium). So, the New Dreth Commonwealth is very limited in its ability to repair or refit the junked cruisers or even the operational cruisers that serve as the basis of their fleet today. For that kind of work, the Dreth would require the assistance of Alaundril or Thorn's shipyards, and according to pg. 20 of the Star Compendium, "...the owners of the shipyards in the Verge have no real interest in restoring a strong fleet to the Dreth." However, it remains to be seen if Thorn's competition with Alaundril might foster a new deal with them.

Q: What combat bonus (in the abstract combat system) should Verge ships get with Dreth capacitors?

A: One technology at which the Dreth excel is power storage. Their capacitors are renowned in weapon designs, particularly man-sized firearms, but this technology also finds

applications in starship design as well. According to pg. 36 of the Star Compendium, "...a Dreth accumulator (1 durability point system) aboard a starship can retain a charge of 20 power factors instead of the normal 10." This means the accumulator's stored energy can provide more power for a longer period of activity than a traditional system. The Dreth accumulator is also more durable in combat. The text goes on to say that, "...if a system failure targets a Dreth accumulator, allow the compartment to make a second durability check; with a success, the system failure is ignored."

This technology must have clearly found wide use during the days of the former Dreth Commonwealth, whose territory is now contained in Insight space. But, with the destruction of the Dreth fleet by the Rigmors and consequent betrayal by VoidCorp during the Second Galactic War, most Dreth technologies and marvels have been lost. The New Dreth Commonwealth in the Dewi star system has limited starship construction capabilities, and although they still retain the knowledge of how to produce efficient capacitors and accumulators, they are only scaled for scout- or trader-sized vessels. Presumably, an arrangement might be made in the interests of free trade (especially with Insight) to construct larger accumulators for warships, but to date, no such deal has been brokered.

One other note regarding the application of Dreth capacitor technology: at PL8, ablative shields take advantage of capacitors to absorb energy from incoming weapons-fire. If the New Dreth Commonwealth ever regains its former glory...and if its scientists begin to investigate PL8 technologies, it would make sense that Dreth capacitors could come to be used in such a defensive system. Presumably an ablative shield generator making use of a Dreth capacitor would have twice the storage capacity or provide the same capacity at only half the cost in hull points.



Investigative Journal

By Dale Thurber



February 7, 2001

From: Dale Thurber (AKA Jethro Milton,
Investigative Division)
To: All Agents
Re: Investigative Journal

Dear Agents:

The Investigative Journal can be very useful to both the player and Game Master. First, it helps Agents keep track of adventure developments.

Second, it provides a place for players to note important things such as Last Resort Points (and how they were used), actions taken that the player thinks merit Achievement Points, role playing notes, and the outcome of dramatically tense skill checks.

This form can serve as what heroes "turn in" to their superior officers as an investigative report. Game Masters can award APs based on how well notes were taken (reflecting an award within the Hoffmann Institute for good work). Nakami watches us all closely...

It can also provide, for heroes, a log of what happened during an adventure, useful for piecing information together from ongoing conspiratorial threads. Or, it allows players to nostalgically reflect upon their hero's exploits.

I hope it sees good use in your campaign. Downloadable and printable copies of the form are available in *.DOC format (zipped) from the official Dark*Matter Campaign Site - The Dark*Matter Portal: <http://www.sonic.net/~hezleigh/darkmatter/darkmatter.htm>.

Enjoy, and happy gaming!

HI Archives Division, Department of Antiquities
Agent Jethro Milton / (Dale Thurber)
redchin@sonic.net / <http://www.sonic.net/~hezleigh/darkmatter/darkmatter.htm>

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNAL



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The Hoffmann Institute

SUPERIOR OFFICER: _____
 AGENT NAME: _____
 DIVISION: _____
 DEPARTMENT: _____
 RANK: _____
 DATE(s): _____

CASE FILE: ____-____-_____

KNOWLEDGE GAINED ABOUT THE MISSION:

Significant person:	Where met?	How is this person important?

Places visited (What and Where)	Information gained:

Plot developments (What, when, why, how):

Successful skill checks of note:	Last Resort Points used to effect?	Actions deserving of Achievement Pts.	Roleplaying notes: