

ALTERNITY

ISSUE 3

LAST RESORT



ALTERNITY ROLEPLAYING FAN MAGAZINE

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The *Last Resort's* color scheme references the major published campaign settings for Alternity.

- General Alternity
- Star Drive
- Dark Matter
- Gamma World

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Editorial: The Horror of Altermity

This issue is dedicated to the genre of Horror. Love it or hate it, Horror has long been a part of the science fiction family, and the Altermity system can easily cover any of the situations that arise in a game of terror. Altermity's believable durability system reminds people of the thin thread of life, while *Resolve-mental* checks can reflect the intense mental trauma an individual experiences when facing nightmares made flesh.

Of course a setting doesn't have to be totally dedicated to horror to incorporate the basic elements of a game of terror. Some horror can be injected into an otherwise typical setting.

In Star*Drive there are many opportunities for these horror injections, some of which were inspired by popular horror movies and literature. The teln reminds one of the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and a multitude of other movies where aliens have taken over the bodies of humans. An *Alien* scenario could be played out with a Magus hunting down the heroes one by one on an isolated starship. The extradimensional threat of the I'krl immediately brings up images of the Cthulu mythos or even the more recent *Event Horizon* movie. Imagine the terror of mindwalkers gone bad *ala Scanners*. Even if it is just for one session a little horror can shake things up in a space opera like Star*Drive.

A Tangents setting is also a great candidate for horror injections. Jumping from dimension to dimension a hero is eventually going to find himself in some pretty creepy alternate realities. An Earth ruled by vampiric aliens who keep humans as cattle. A corrupt church rules the modern Earth where brutal demonic inquisitors hunting down anyone who resists. A ravaged Earth is plagued by diseases that can change a person into a crazed cannibalistic murderer or a mutated monster.

Gamma World can also be a showcase for the horror genre. Heroes in the clutches of a carrin community forced to labor and then used as prey in practice hunts. Cannibalistic mutant tribes terrorizing civilized settlements. A crazed ark sneaking in to villages at night to chop off a sleeping person's hands.

As for Dark Matter, the inclusion of horror goes without saying.

On a personal note I've always enjoyed the idea of horror as a form of entertainment but have rarely been satisfied with theatrical releases. Many times a horror movie will have a great build up but fall flat in the climax. A good horror story should build the tension until it's as tight as a drum and then shatter your senses or sensibility with a scary finale. In that same vein, a good horror roleplaying campaign should place the heroes in a tense situation that keeps building until the players are fearing for their beloved heroes' lives and they start twitching every time a gamemaster asks for an *Awareness-intuition* check. A horror story can be a difficult game to run effectively but the payoff of sweating, paranoid players is worth it. And isn't watching players squirm why we gamemaster in the first place? Or am I just a sadistic monster?

Good horror!

Daryl Blasi, Executive Devil

Submissions

The Last Resort is accepting any Altermity-related articles for publication. We will also accept general roleplaying articles that can be used for the Altermity game.

Authors may wish to submit applicable articles to regular or semi-regular columns. The following is a list of the current columns:

Action Emporium: arms, armor and equipment

Bestiary Bizarre: creatures for Gamma World setting

Cyber Shop: robotics and cybernetics

Domain Virtua: detailed grid site

Foes Fantastic: creatures for arcane Altermity

Grid Run: computers and gridrunning

Home Rule Advantage: home rules for Altermity

Legion: heroes, villains, and SCMs

Mind's Eye: psionics

Special FX: super powers and magic

Species Catalogue: alien species for Altermity

Sword and Staff: arcane Altermity

Tavern Tales: game fiction

Tangents: alternate worlds

Veritas Omnes Liberant: conspiracies for Dark Matter setting

Xenohunter's Field Guide: xenofoms for Dark Matter setting

Note: Cook's Guide is written every issue by Matthew R. Esch under the pseudonym of Montgomery Cook IX. We will accept other correspondents who want to cover the Star Drive universe and either incorporate the article into Cook's Guide or format it as a stand alone article, whatever the author's preference.

If you have an idea for a new regular column feel free to email us at lastresortmail@yahoo.com

Article Guidelines

1. Word or text is the preferred format for submission of articles. Other formats will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
2. Excel files can be submitted for tables used in the article.
3. Indicate within the text what sections need to be sidebars and where pictures (if applicable) need to be placed in relation to the text. Requests for pictures from staff artists may also be made if you do not provide your own.
4. Do not place pictures in article file. Send them as separate files.
5. The title and author's name must be placed on the first line of the article to insure proper credit is given.
6. Email Word/text file to lastresortmail@yahoo.com

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1. Art must be submitted as jpeg files. At a minimum, the art must be the size it will be placed in the magazine at 150 dpi. It is better to go bigger than smaller.
2. Send title and/or captions (if applicable) for the piece, as well as artist name to insure proper credit.
3. For files larger than 500K, email your intention to submit picture to lastresortmail@yahoo.com
We will set you up as Last Resort staff so you may upload picture directly to the group site.

the *electronomicon*

escape velocity 2503's dread tome (f/x artifact)

by Matthew R. Esch & Michael T. Meechan
incantations by Michael T. Meechan
digital illustrations by Michael T. Meechan

WELCOME to the *Electronomicon, Version 2*. Is it safe to look over my shoulder now? After several more nights' work on this contribution to the Alternity game, I know a bit of how Abdul al-Hazred, the alleged author of the *Necronomicon*, must've felt. This is the *ELECTRONOMICON*; an alien artifact designed and used in the Star*Drive setting based campaign found on the Internet at EscapeVelocity2503 (<http://games.groups.yahoo.com/group/escapevelocity2503>). This device is based on the mythos of H.P. Lovecraft and the mythology of the *Necronomicon*. It is intended to be used as a constant foil and irritation to the players in one's Alternity game; but it does not necessarily need to be used in a Star*Drive setting. This can just as easily be used in a Dark*Matter game, or any other setting that the GM chooses.

This is the expansion and revision hinted at in this section of the first version. First and foremost a few "ground rules": this alien artifact exists in 2 forms: an electronic version, and a physical one. This assumes that the setting this is being used in will have the technology available for both. If the setting does not have the technology beyond PL5, where computers are available, then the tome ONLY exists in its physical manifestation. The physical manifestation appears as a book with alien circuitry for the cover and a skeletal humanoid face. The electronic version can be added to ANY computer through the usual means available in the setting used. The electronic version appears as an otherwise innocuous file, depending on the Progress Level of the setting. No amount of computer skill can reveal the true nature of the *Electronomicon* without first running the file. Once the file has been activated it becomes impossible to remove from the memory of the machine on which it was run. Only a full replacement of the system's memory will rid the machine of the virus.

To make full use of this, it is strongly recommended that the user have access to the supplement, *Tangents*, [TSR11352], and optionally, *Beyond Science: A Guide to F/X* [TSR11432]. Throughout this writing, there are references to use of FX points. It is not necessary to own *Beyond Science: A Guide to F/X*, but recommended. However, for the miracles, Exorcism Against Opponents and Open Gate, it is highly recommended that *Tangents* be employed or available. GM's please note the drawback section of this work, as this will truly inspire MANY adventure hooks (lots of very bad beings want this book really bad). All



drawbacks apply, but NO bonus skill points are awarded. Conversely, any hero in possession of the *Electronomicon*, and spending at least 9 days (24 hours, with breaks to eat, sleep, and so forth) can use ALL F/X miracles within.

The tome grants its possessor the full allotment of F/X points, appropriate to the F/X level of the setting [5 for Realistic, 10 for Heroic and 15 for Superheroic], as per *Beyond Science*, p. 4. The drawbacks cannot be changed, though GM's are free to add any additional F/X drawbacks they see fit, just no perks [Sorry, this is a very EVIL artifact; there's little good in having it aside from keeping it out of the hands of your enemies!]. Additionally, should the caster use any or all of the incantations nine times in the span of 40 days, 2d6 Mi-Go appear and attack the caster in an attempt to regain the Dread Tome (if the caster possesses it), or any other item of interest that the hero may have with him or her such as weaponry, equipment, companions. Should the caster fall, the Mi-Go will abduct him/her along with whatever else they can grab and return to their tangent of origin.

PLEASE NOTE: Should the GM allow for this artifact, and use *Players Handbook* rules instead of *Beyond Science*, it cannot be taken as a perk. It must be taken as a flaw. It is strongly recommended that no starting Hero should have the *Electronomicon*. Like any other powerful item, it should be earned. The reason why it is to be taken as a flaw is because this artifact is nothing but trouble for whomever possesses it. These incantations only exist in the pages/data of this tome (regardless of form taken). To use the powers of this artifact, the spells must be spoken aloud. The caster may read the magic words directly from

the pages of the Tome, or the display of a computer with the Electronomicon files. Alternatively, they may recite them from memory. The latter method has serious implications however, in that someone other than the possessor may attempt to employ its malicious power. In the event that a hero has the opportunity to memorize some of these incantations piecemeal, the table to the right is provided. Unfortunately, once a hero learns even one incantation, they begin to covet possessing the Tome itself, joining the many who would choose to try to gain possession of the Dread Tome; no chance to resist.

Incantations of the Electronomicon

	ABILITY	SKILL POINT COST
<i>Electronomicon</i>	WIL	7
<i>Hellfire</i>	WIL	2
<i>Instill Fear</i>	WIL	5
<i>Exorcism Against Opponents</i>	WIL	7
<i>Summon Hastur</i>	WIL	9
<i>Shub Niggurath's Deal</i>	WIL	5
<i>Command Summoned Spirit</i>	WIL	8
<i>Open Gate</i>	WIL	7
<i>Mockery of Life</i>	WIL	9
<i>Curse of the Ancient Ones</i>	WIL	6

Testimonial of the Watcher of the Night Sky (Part I)

It has been 30 moons...or has it been 300? I don't know. I can't remember. I know that I can never return to that place again... or home. I have traveled to places I never knew existed. Seen things completely incomprehensible to my mind. I have raised the dead. I have raised armies. Conquered nations, empires. I have seen my future, and I have lived the past. I have lived so many lifetimes, in so many different points in time, I now exist in many and soon, I fear, none. And this night, I will commit what I have learned thus far, here, in this machine, as I scratch quill pen to papyrus. It's odd. And frightening. I've never seen this ... never mind. My time runs short, and I must work swiftly. Already I hear the howling...

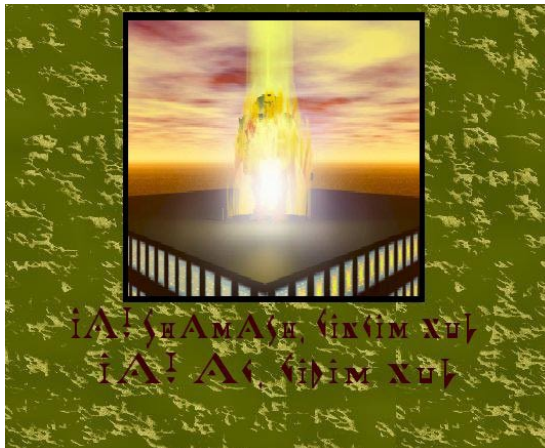
I have learned the power of NAME: NAME brings power to the possessor, and that is why you will not find mine. I have learned that only way is to take it with me to Death. I only pray that Death comes swifter than The Ones that Howl. The Ancient Ones, Those whose NAMES Have Been Long Forgotten, they come! All

is ready, Gods of my ancestors, remember me! Mother, Father! Remember me! Daughters! Sons! Remember me! Beloved mates! Remember me! Brothers! Sisters! Remember me!

That fateful night, oh so long ago, I came to see before me the power manifested by those men in the black robes. I have learned their secrets, as I watched their heinous ritual come to its horrifying climax. In the time afterwards, I studied under the Great Masters, learning their secrets and their ways. The horror that is the Ancient Ones has not been forgotten, though for the sake of us all, how I wish it had! I pray that this next, and possibly my final act, does not further damn my already blighted soul. For once I commit these words to the media outside of my own fragile, limited mind, there is no redemption, no turning back.

This is the ELECTRONOMICON. All of my knowledge is here. I pray I only have enough time...

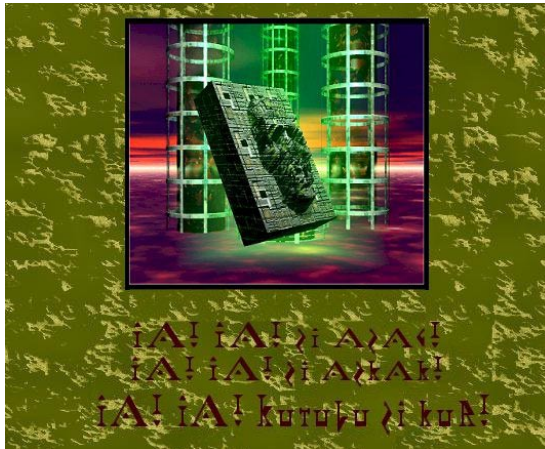
Incantations/ FX Miracles:



{Page reads: "IA! Shamash, Gingim Xul IA! Ag, Gidim Xul" (a call to the fire god)}

Hellfire (WIL, FX cost=1 point): Caster calls forth a jet of pure hellfire to the target; range and damage vary according to caster's success. All flammable objects in area are ignited and burn each round for additional damage as per *GMG*, p. 59.

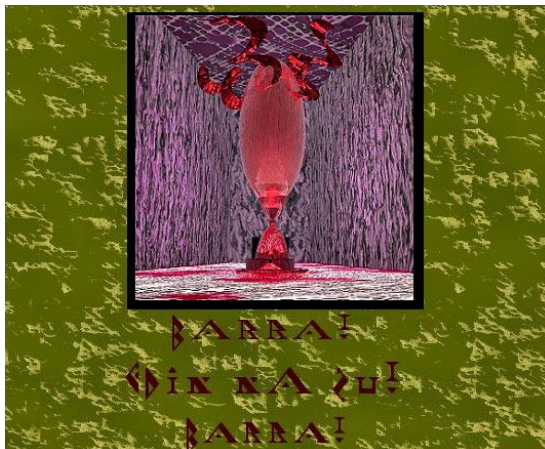
SUCCESS	RANGE	DAMAGE
Critical Fail	Caster	2d6w (En/O)
Fail	N/A	N/A
Ordinary	5 meters	1d6+1w (En/O)
Good	10 meters	2d6+2w (En/O)
Amazing	20 meters	3d6+3w (En/O)



{Page reads: "IA! IA! zi azag! IA! IA! zi azkak! IA! IA! Kutulu zi kur! IA!" (chant of the priests of the ancient evil)}

Instill Fear (WIL, FX Cost=1 point): Caster causes opponents to become fearful and full of dread. Number of opponents and precise effect depend on die roll.

SUCCESS	NUMBER AFFECTED	PENALTY TO OPPONENT WIL CHECK	DURATION (ROUNDS)	EFFECT
Critical Fail	Caster	+2	2d6+1	Caster petrified
Fail	Caster	+0	1d6+1	Caster drops weapon(s), flees
Ordinary	2d4	+0	1d6	Opponents flee
Good	3d6	+2	1d6+1	Drop weapon(s), & flee
Amazing	All opponents in earshot	+3	2d6+1	Opponents petrified



{Page reads: "Barra! Edin na zu! Barra!" (be gone, go to the desert!)}

Exorcism Against Opponents (WIL, FX cost =4 points):

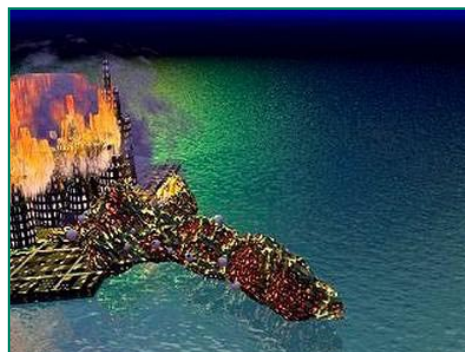
This incantation sends a single opponent to a randomly determined tangent, based upon level of success. This operates identically as the psionic skill *Telekinesis-dimension walk*, but must be directed at someone other than the caster. To randomly determine the destination, consult tables T1-T5 from *Tangents*, pgs 10-12. Corresponding descriptions of tangent attributes follow, pgs 13-24.



IA! IA! HASTUR!
HASTUR C'AYAK
VULGTMM, VUGTLAGIN, VULGTMM
IA! IA! HASTUR!

{Page reads: "IA! IA! Hastur! Hastur c'ayak
'vulgtmm, vugtlagin, vulgtmm IA! IA! Hastur!"
(the conjuration of Hastur)}

Hastur appears as an amoeba-shaped mass, with apparently no skeletal structure. The thousand square meter mass moves by "oozing" and "slithering". Hastur can accomplish ANY task the caster demands of him (akin to a wish spell from AD&D), but is very likely to pervert the caster's intent without violating the letter of the request. The chance for a number of accompanying Mi-go is as follows (roll 1d8):



Summon Hastur (WIL, FX cost = 8 points): This conjuration calls forth an ancient abomination of incredible destructive power. With a successful roll, Hastur himself will appear. He may be accompanied by one or more Mi-go. The disposition of Hastur will vary accordingly, based upon caster's success.

SUCCESS	APPEARS IN (NO. OF ROUNDS)	HASTUR'S DISPOSITION	PENALTY TO CONTROL (USE WIL CHECKS EACH ROUND)
Critical Fail	6d4	Extremely angry, likely to attack caster	+3 steps
Fail	6d4	Angry	+2 steps
Ordinary	6d4	Annoyed to Angry	+2 steps
Good	4d4	Cranky to Annoyed	+1 step
Amazing	3d4	Neutral to Cranky	+0 step

d8 ROLL	NUMBER OF MI-GO
1-2	None
3-4	1d4+1
5-6	2d4+1
7-8	3d4+1



Aye, cngengah,
Yogge Sothotha!

{Page reads: "Aye, cngengah, Yogge Sothotha!"
(communion chant of Yog-Sothoth)}

Shub Niggurath's deal (WIL, Cost= special, see below):

Inevitably, there comes a time when a caster needs more F/X points than he or she has available at the moment. By invoking this miracle, the caster channels the evil otherworldly energy of Shub Niggurath, the Goat of 1,000 Young. This enables the caster to convert Fatigue points into F/X points at a rate of dependent on the level of success achieved. Naturally, no F/X points are required to power this miracle; however, the caster pays dearly. The player must specify in advance of the skill check the number of fatigue points to be sacrificed. On a Marginal success, the caster can convert Fatigue points F/X points, on a 1:1 ratio. On an Ordinary success, the caster can exchange 1 Fatigue point for 2 F/X points. On a Good success, the caster can exchange 1 Fatigue point for 3 F/X points. On an Amazing success, the caster can exchange 1 Fatigue point for 5 F/X points. All attendant penalties for each point of Fatigue sacrificed for F/X apply. Fatigue is recovered normally, and these extra F/X points may not be stored beyond a 24 hour period.

There is an additional dilemma: By contracting one's vitality with Shub Niggurath the caster is likely to endanger his or her own health. On a Critical Failure, the caster loses 3d4+1 Fatigue with no gain in F/X.



ḶiḶik(iR xul kAnpA!

{Page reads: "Zi dingir xul kanpa!" (spirit, evil god, remember!}}

Command Summoned Spirit (WIL, FX cost = 3 points):

If and when an extra-tangential entity appears, this miracle allows the caster to make any demand or request of that being, et. al.; akin to a limited wish. This assumes that the summoned entity can indeed grant the request. The magnitude of the request must be reasonably matched with the power of the other dimensional being. Good selections for extra-tangential entities include an array of entities such as those outlined in *Beyond Science*. The degree of success will affect the result of the command as follows:

CASTER'S SUCCESS	RESULT
Critical Fail	Entity escapes control; attacks caster
Fail	No effect
Ordinary	Entity will grant 1 request
Good	Entity will grant 2 requests
Amazing	Entity will grant 3 requests

As described under the invocation to summon Hastur, this entity may likewise twist the caster's intentions. Thus, great attention should be paid to the wording of the request.



IA! pN nAgui mglw-nafh Cthulu
R'lyeh wgah-nagl fhtagn. IA! IA! Cthulu fhtagn!
IA! IA! (TRU)U fHTAGN!

{Page Reads: "IA! IA! pn'naglui mglw-nafh Cthulu R'lyeh wgah-nagl fhtagn. IA! IA! Cthulu fhtagn!" (in his lair on R'lyeh, Cthulhu awaits dreaming}}

Open gate (to other tangent) (WIL, FX Cost = 8 points):

As the name implies, this miracle opens a rift through which one can enter another tangent. The degree of success will affect the ultimate destination of the gate. Refer to the tables from *Tangents* for destination, unless the caster has a specific tangent in mind. In that case, use the "Modifiers to WIL Check " table, above. Results as they apply to this specific miracle are as follows:

CASTER'S DEGREE OF SUCCESS	RESULT	MODIFIER/BONUS TO TABLE T5	DURATION GATE IS OPEN
Critical Fail	Gate opens	Extra-tangential entity attacks caster for duration	3d4 rounds
Fail	No gate	N/A	N/A
Ordinary	Gate opens	+/-1	2d4 rounds
Good	Gate opens	+/-3	3d4 rounds
Amazing	Gate opens	Exact intended destination	3d6 rounds

On a critical failure, the extra-tangential entity that appears will remain until exorcised or defeated. [Please note: GMs are encouraged to use for this entity whatever their little black hearts desire. In addition to the Mi-Go and the Haunters of the Dread Tome, we suggest the phantasm, *Tangents*, p 86. Another good choice is the Dimensional Horror, *Star*Drive Alien Compendium: Creatures of the Verge*, pgs 110-111.] For each round the gate remains open there is a 50% chance another entity will appear to attack the caster. The gate may be closed at anytime the caster wills, except in cases of a critical failure, where a second WIL check is required, with a +2 step penalty. Closing a gate does not require the caster to use any of their actions.



AZAG GALRA SAGBI MU UNNA TE
 NAMTAR GALRA ZIBI MU UNNA TE
 UTUK XUL GUBI MU UNNA TE
 ALA XUL GABI MU UNNA TE
 GIDIM XUL IBBI MU UNNA TE
 GALLA XUL KADBI MU UNNA TE
 DINGIR XUL GIRBI MU UNNA TE
 I MINABI-ENE TASHBI ABA-ANDIBBI-ESH!
 I MIKAIHUK(TA)SHI AJAHAKIHHISHI!

{Page Reads: "Azag galra sagbi mu unna te Namtar galra zibi mu unna te Utuk Xul gubi mu unna te Ala Xul gabi mu unna te Gidim Xul ibbi mu unna te Galla Xul kadbi mu unna te Dingir Xul girbi mu unna te I minabi-ene tashbi aba-andibbi-esh!" (incantation of 7 gods)}

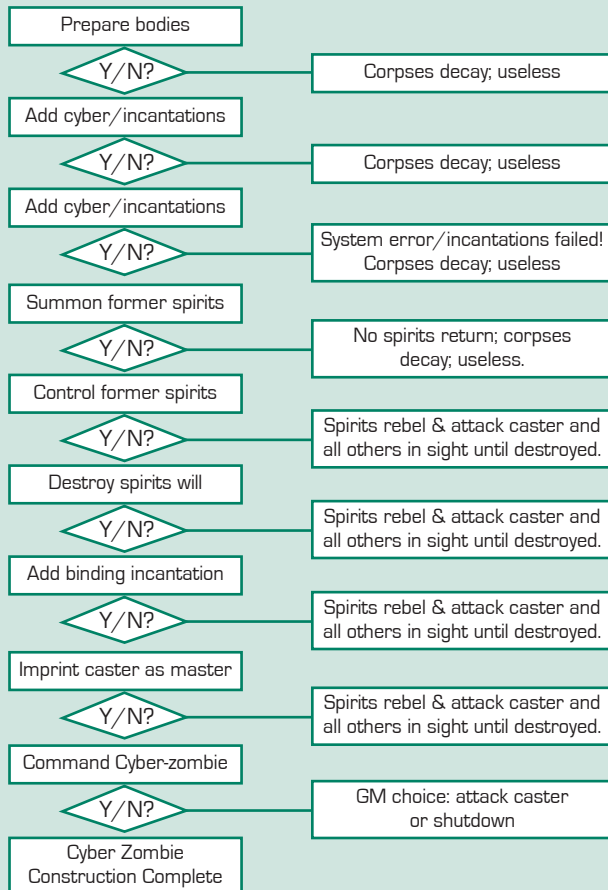
Mockery of Life (WIL, see below): This miracle is to be used in the creation of cyberzombies, or to animate the dead. Installation of cybergear and/or robotic components is at the caster's option. Naturally, for settings where cybernetic components are not available, this miracle creates ordinary zombies (see *Beyond Science*, p. 85), except that they have a telepathic link with their creator [see also cyberzombies, pg. 11]. This is a special complex skill check, requiring a total of nine successes. See the accompanying flowchart for the progression. A single point of F/X energy is spent for each step along the ladder, barring a failure, as outlined in the flowchart. A failure costs the caster 3 F/X, and the result along the flowchart is applied. A critical failure the caster loses all remaining F/X points, in addition to the result as specified. [Note: This is not a standard complex skill check. One failure causes incantation to fail and failure results are applied.]

Thereafter, the creator of the cyberzombie(s), in order to control them after their creation, must either make a will feat check or a *Resolve-mental resolve* check when he issues a telepathic/verbal command to his cyberzombie(s). The first cyberzombie incurs no penalty to his will feat check to control/command his creation. But for each additional cyberzombie that the creator has currently functional, and is simultaneously directing, he adds a cumulative+1 step penalty.

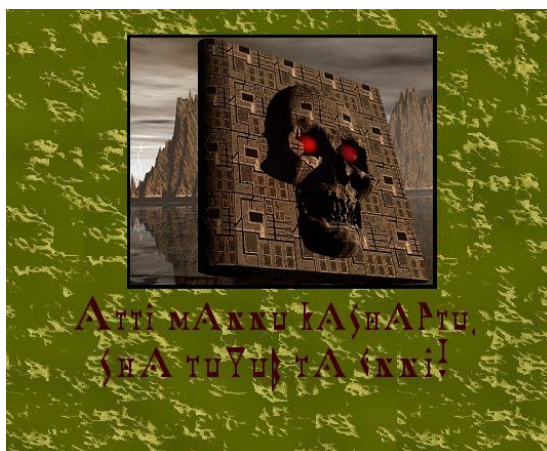
Example: Bri'-aitysa commands one of his cyberzombies to hunt down an intruder at Kixil Station. No penalty, just a straight will feat check (or *Resolve-mental resolve* check).

But let's say Bri' wants a group of 4 cyberzombies to do the same work. Then there would be a +3 step penalty to his will feat check/*mental resolve* check. The remaining nine cyberzombies, who have not been given any orders by Bri', do not factor into this attempt.

Cyber-Zombie Creation Flowchart



WIL CHECK:	RESULT:
critical failure	cyberzombie(s) turn(s) on caster for 1d4 rounds
failure	cyberzombies do nothing-seemingly confused/befuddled
any success	cyberzombie follows order until task is complete



{Page reads: "Atti mannu kashaptu sha tuyub ta enni!" [curse of the sorcerers]}

Curse of the Ancient Ones (WIL FX cost = 4 points):

Upon successful casting, the following penalties are applied to all opponents action checks and skill checks for the duration of the scene, Opponents are limited to those in the caster's line of sight at the time of casting.

CASTER'S SUCCESS	PENALTY IMPOSED
Critical Fail	+3 steps against caster & 2d4 members of caster's party
Fail	+3 steps against caster
Ordinary	+1 step
Good	+2 steps
Amazing	+3 steps

Electronomicon Drawbacks

1. Compulsory Behavior (extreme)

The Electronomicon causes the possessor to undertake actions clearly contradictory to his or her personality at least once per adventure.

2. Decreased Ability, WIL (extreme)

While in possession of the Dread Tome, the user suffers -3 to WIL. Should the possessor lose the artifact, lost WIL is regained at a rate of 1d4-1 point/month.

3. Infamous Device (extreme)

Entities of varying power from other dimensions seek to obtain the Book, and generally harass the possessor. Furthermore, it radiates a homing signal that these beings can follow. Any attempt by the possessor to use Stealth skills to evade such entities incurs a +4 step penalty.

4. Energy Cost (moderate)

Each use of the Electronomicon's power drains 2 stuns from the user, regardless of success or failure.

Testimonial of the Watcher of the Night Sky (Part II)

It has been done. It is complete. My masterpiece. My magnum opus. As I close the Tome... As soon as I slap this onto this disk... I must hide this, until a time comes that it will be needed. Again. The ones that Howl are coming. I can

hear them. They are much closer now. I know I cannot hide any longer, and I am too old to run, too weak to fight. My power... my knowledge is now here. May the gods have mercy on my soul...

Bibliography:

Black Seas of Infinity: The Best of H.P. Lovecraft, selected by Andrew Wheeler Copyright 2001 Bookspan.

Call of Cthulhu Horror Roleplaying, Sandy Petersen & Lynn Willis, Copyright 1981 Chaosium.

A Guide to the Cthulhu Cult, Fred L. Pelton, Copyright 1996 John Pelton.

The Necronomicon, edited by Simon, Copyright 1977 Schlangekraft, Inc.

The Transition of H.P. Lovecraft: The Road to Madness, H. P. Lovecraft, Compilation Copyright 1996 Arkham House Publishing.

Cyberzombie

THE revolting machination known as a cyberzombie is born of the necromancy of the

Electronomicon's eighth spell: *Mockery of Life/Cyberzombie creation*. For all intents and purposes, the cyberzombie is the magically animated corpse of a humanoid being, infused with technological components (see below). Each cyberzombie maintains a telepathic link with its creator. The possessor of the Dread Tome who successfully creates a cyberzombie can see through the eyes of his or her creation. This is at the caster's will; no action is required. The range is unlimited within the same tangent.

In the creation of a cyberzombie the first, and quite possibly most difficult step, is to obtain the materials of construction. Minimally, a cyberzombie requires one humanoid corpse and one correspondingly sized robot chassis. Most casters will want to imbue their creations with enhanced abilities. This requires a sundry assortment of cybernetic and robotic parts. Which tech parts the caster chooses to implant will determine the cyberzombie's specific abilities. There is a limit to the number of systems a cyberzombie can hold, based on the size of the humanoid selected. To determine how many systems a cyberzombie can hold, calculate cybertolerance as normal, and then add five. Since the unlucky individual is already dead, they can accommodate far more intrusive implants than their cybertolerance would indicate.

When making skill checks in the creation of a cyberzombie, the caster can apply any bonuses they are entitled to for ranks in the following skills:

Medical Science
 -forensics
 -surgery
 -surgery's rank benefit of cybersurgery

Technical Science
 -robotics
 -juryrig
 -technical knowledge

STR 14 INT 7
 DEX 7 WIL 11
 CON 12 PER 2

Durability: 12/12/6 Action Check:: 13+/12/6/3

Move: Sprint 10, Run 6, Walk 2 # Actions: 2

Reaction Score: Ordinary/2 Last Resorts: None

Note: Cyberzombies do not suffer the effects of fatigue.

Attacks:

Fist 17/10/7 d0 LI/O Personal d6+4s/d4+2w/d4+4w)
 Battle claw 17/10/7 d0 LI/O Personal d4+4w/d6+4w/d4+2m

Defenses:

+2 resistance modifier vs melee attacks

+1 WIL resistance modifier vs encounter skills

Immune to the effects of suffocation, pain, and fatigue.

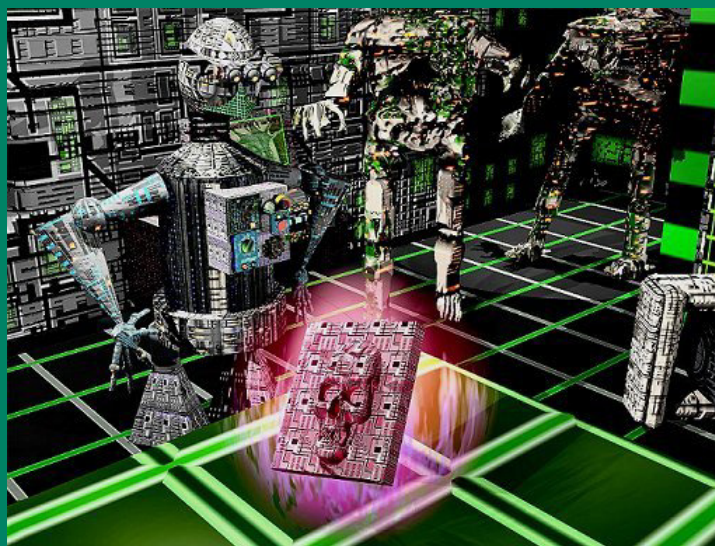
Armor: d4-2 (LI), d4-2 (HI), d4-2 (En)

Skills:

STR: Melee Weapons [14]-blade [17], bludgeon [17];

Unarmed Attack [14]-brawl [17]

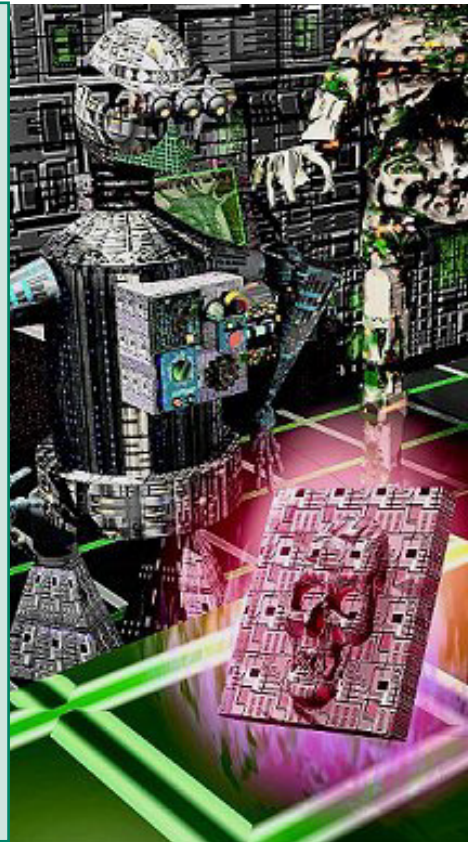
WIL: Awareness [11]-intuition [14], perception [17];



Cyberzombie Cybergear

COMPONENT	SIZE	COST	DESCRIPTION
I.R.-sensors	1	4,000	gives thermal vision to 500 meters
Holovision	1	8,000	gives 20/20 vision, with depth perception and 500X zoom.
Robotic Ear	1	4,000	gives -3 step bonus to Awareness-perception checks.
Endoskeleton	3	8,000	adds 3 stun, 3 wound, 3 mortal
Armor	3	6,000	absorbs d6+1 (LI)/d6 (HI)/d6 (En)
Bomb, plasma	2	1,000	Damage: d4m/d6+1w/d4+1w En/G Area of Effect: contact/1m/3m
Battle claw	2	1,000	damage: d4+4w/d6+4w/d4+2m (STR bonus already applied)
EM detector	1	500	can warn of dangerous radiation levels
Recorder	1	250	records audio onto mini-X3D stick for later playback
AI System	2	5,000	allows an AI to download into the cyberzombie and take control of it. During this time it has all the abilities of the AI, cut in half (round up). Has 9 slots of active memory.

The technological components are optional, and may be forgone in pre PL6-7 campaigns. In this case they would have the stats for an ordinary zombie, except that they will share a telepathic link with the creator.



SIDEBAR: THE SILVER KEY OF RANDOLPH CARTER

sidebar by Matthew R. Esch

The Silver Key was first referenced in the short story by Howard Philip Lovecraft, entitled, "The Silver Key". In this story, a Randolph Carter becomes bored with life as he knew it, and was always a dreamer. Reminded in a particularly jaded moment of an old silver key his grandfather had given him, Randolph Carter set out as if driven to a locale not far from his boyhood home, only to be transported back to the time of his boyhood!

It is HIGHLY recommended that the reader read "The Silver Key", followed by "The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath", and finally, "Through the Gates of the Silver Key". All three can be found in a compilation, "The Dream Cycle of H.P. Lovecraft: Dreams of Terror and Death", and on-line at <http://www.dagonbytes.com/thelibrary/lovecraft/>

For "Through the Gates of the Silver Key", it can be read at <http://users.rcn.com/occult/occulus/through.html>. (Tip of the hat to Jim Clunie!)

The Silver Key of Randolph Carter (Alien Artifact)

Form: Skeleton key (c. 1890's America), tarnished silver.

Purpose: Transportation.

Powers: dimensional shift (Ord.) 1 hero +items carried, 1hr/ day.

Drawbacks: NONE.

The Silver Key allows the user to enter a parallel dimension where distance is

compressed by a factor of 10. If the person walks 2 to 3 kilometers in this other dimension and emerge in the real world they will have traveled 20 to 30 kilometers. The user of the artifact ignores all physical barriers while using this key, but it is impossible to see or affect the real world. If the user attempts to emerge in a solid object she will reappear next to the object and suffer 2d6 stuns points. *See Alternity Gamemaster Guide, pg 170.*



Haunters of the Tome

THE Haunters of the Tome are mysterious impish creatures who frequently appear to the possessor of the Electronomicon.

Description: The Haunters of the Tome are a set of extratangible entities whose purpose and aims are alien to the minds of residents of the baseline cluster of tangents, possibly originating from some alien Fantastic division. These incorporeal entities are translucent, with glowing eyes, appearing vaguely humanoid.

Encounter: The Haunters of the Tome are weaker and less hostile than many of the evil entities associated with the artifact, but can still be quite dangerous. Haunters seem to serve no master, save the book itself. Their motive is solely to spread chaos in the worlds of man. At times they may actually assist the book's owner, if it serves their twisted desires. One of their primary goals is to incite the possessor to commit heinous deeds. They are incredibly persistent in their wicked instigation, and will use any tactic at their disposal, including violence.

Their physical form is mostly immaterial; hence it is incredibly difficult to harm them with conventional weapons. Energy weapons do some damage, but their firepower is greatly diminished. The best way to defeat a Hunter in combat is to use an enchanted weapon. Magically enchanted weapons negate the Hunter's incorporeal armor.

Habitat/Society: Just as their origins and aims are unknown, so is the structure of their society. They appear to have no conflicts with working within group, though there appears to not have any sort of social structure or pecking order that is discernable to those who observe them.



By Chris Campbell

STR 12	INT 7
DEX 14	WIL 14
CON 12	PER 9
Durability: 12/12/6/6	Action Check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: Sprint 40, Run 30, Walk 16	# Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary/2	Last Resorts: None

Attacks:

Claws(x2) 14/7/3 d0 En/O Personal d4+1w/d4+2w/2d4+1w

Defenses:

+1 STR resistance modifier vs melee attacks
 +1 DEX resistance modifier vs ranged attacks
 Armor (Incorporeality): d8+1 (LI), d8 (HI), d6 (En)

Skills:

STR: Unarmed Attack [12]-brawl [14]
DEX: Stealth [14]-hide [15], shadow [15], sneak [15]
INT: Knowledge [7]-deduce [8], language: all known tongues [10]
WIL: Awareness [14]-intuition [15], perception [15]; Investigate [14]-search [15], track [15]
PER: Deception [9]-bluff [10], bribe [10]; Interaction [9]-charm [10], intimidate [10], taunt [10]



Haunter Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VII

Environment: Any

GRAPH: Any

Biome: Haunters have no place in any ecosystem

Encounter Chance: slim (probable for the possessor of the Tome)

Group Size: 2d4+1

Organization: Unknown

Intelligence: Sentient



Mi-Go

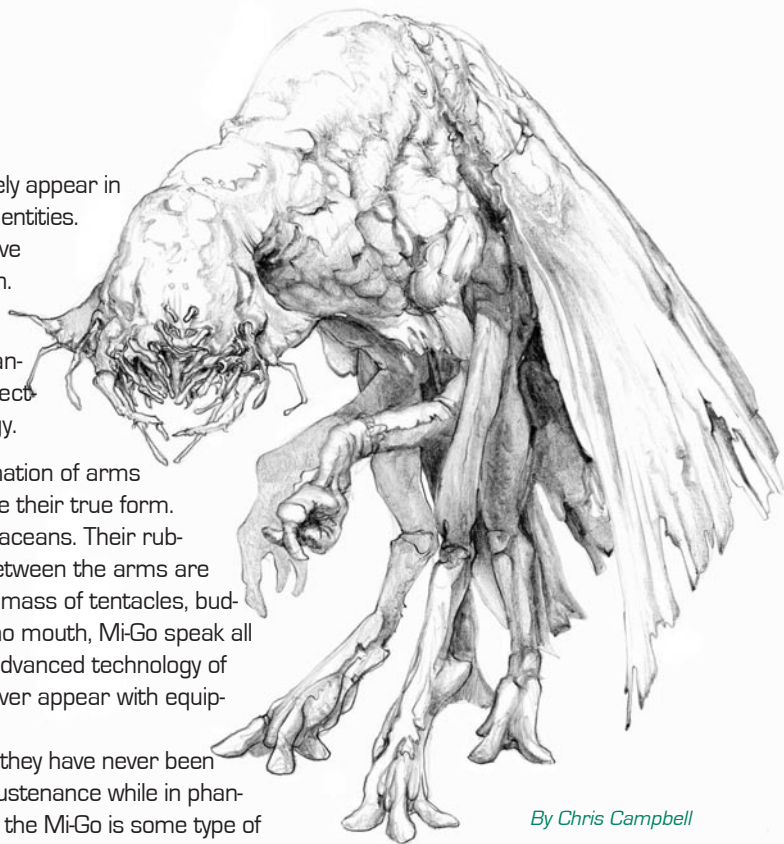
MI-GO are an alien, extratangent race that very rarely appear in baseline tangents, and often at the behest of other entities. Though their aims are unknown to mortals, they have been known to interact with a select few for reasons unknown.

Description: When Mi-Go appear here, in the Historical Division (*Tangents*, p 9), they manifest themselves as a phantasmal image of their true form. Looking like iridescent, insect-like things, they are seemingly comprised of pure evil energy.

Encounter: Mi-Go can attack with all six arms, or a combination of arms and their tail. In their native tangent of Yuggoth, they assume their true form. Neither plant nor animal, they are in fact fungus-based crustaceans. Their rubbery bodies have several sets of crab-like arms. Stretched between the arms are membranous wings allowing flight. Their heads are a writing mass of tentacles, budding with sensory receptors. Although, they appear to have no mouth, Mi-Go speak all known languages in buzzing, insect-like voices. Yuggoth has advanced technology of incredible sophistication equal to PL9, although the Mi-Go never appear with equipment, except in the worlds of the Fantastic Division.

The nutritional requirements of the Mi-Go are unknown, as they have never been observed eating. They apparently have no need for material sustenance while in phantasmal form. It may be that the incorporeal form assumed by the Mi-Go is some type of protective state with limited metabolism allowing them to withstand inhospitable conditions. This is supported by the fact that Mi-Go are able to fly effortlessly through open space.

Habitat/Society: The Mi-Go are an ancient otherworldly race of seemingly infinite malice. Their native dimension, Yuggoth, lies within the Fantastic Division (*Tangents*, p 9). Their methods and motives are incomprehensible to mortals, although they are said to lust for personal power. Yuggoth has a feudal system where evil entities of incredible power endlessly struggle for control. For this reason, Mi-Go are often found serving more powerful extra-tangent entities. The Mi-Go worship the gods Hastur and Shub-Niggurath, among others.



By Chris Campbell

STR 13	INT 12
DEX 12	WIL 12
CON 10	PER 2
Durability: 10/10/5/5	Action Check: 17+/16/8/4
Move: Fly 52, Glide 26	# Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary/2	Last Resorts: None

Attacks:

Claws(x6) 14/7/3 d0 *Note** Personal d4+2s/d4+2w/2d4+2w
Tail 14/7/3 d0 *Note** Personal d4+3s/d6+2w/d4+2m

*Note: All attack forms are En/O in Historical Division, LI/O in Fantastic

Defenses:

+2 STR resistance modifier vs melee attacks
+1 DEX resistance modifier vs ranged attacks
Armor (Historical Division: Incorporeality): d6+2 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d4 (En)
or Armor (Fantastic Division: Rubbery Skin): d4+2 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4-1 (En)

Skills:

STR: Unarmed Attack [13]-brawl [14]
DEX: Acrobatic [12]-flight [13]
INT: Knowledge [12]-deduce [13], language: all known tongues [15]
WIL: Awareness [12]-intuition [13], perception [13]; Investigate [12]-search [13], track [13]; Resolve [12]-mental [13], physical [13]

Mi-Go Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VII

Environment: Class 3, 4

GRAPH: GO-3/RO-3/AO-4/
PO-4/HO-3

Biome: Arctic

Encounter Chance: slim [probable for the possessor of the Tome]

Group Size: Typically 1d4+1

Organization: Feudal

Niche: Advanced manufacturer

Intelligence: Sentient



SANITY IN THE ALTERNITY SYSTEM

by Paul Durant • illustration by Dwayne Leonard

"Not everyone can be Fox Mulder. Grey psychics, Sandmen taking people off the street to chop them open, kinori living under our cities, the human brain wasn't built to take all mess in at once. People just can't deal with horrors from space day in and day out. It gets to them... first in subtle ways. They see things in the corner of their eyes. Then it gets bigger. People lose their marbles. I've seen it happen, man. This guy Rogers back in '93, man... he got convinced the Sandmen put some kinda implant in his hand that was watching him while he slept. So he ate it. Crazy bastard ate his own right hand, damn near bled to death doing it. The nurses had to tie him down to keep him from going at the whole arm, but I don't know why they bothered, the guy was gone. His body may have been alive, but his mind left for better pastures.

"I know what you're thinking, and no. It doesn't matter how tough you think you are, there are things out there, which will reduce you to a crying infant, and it's only a matter of what's finally going to push you over the edge. You might have heard in the break room that the yearly turnover for Hoffmann Institute investigators is 50%. That's not true – that's only people who are killed in the line of duty.

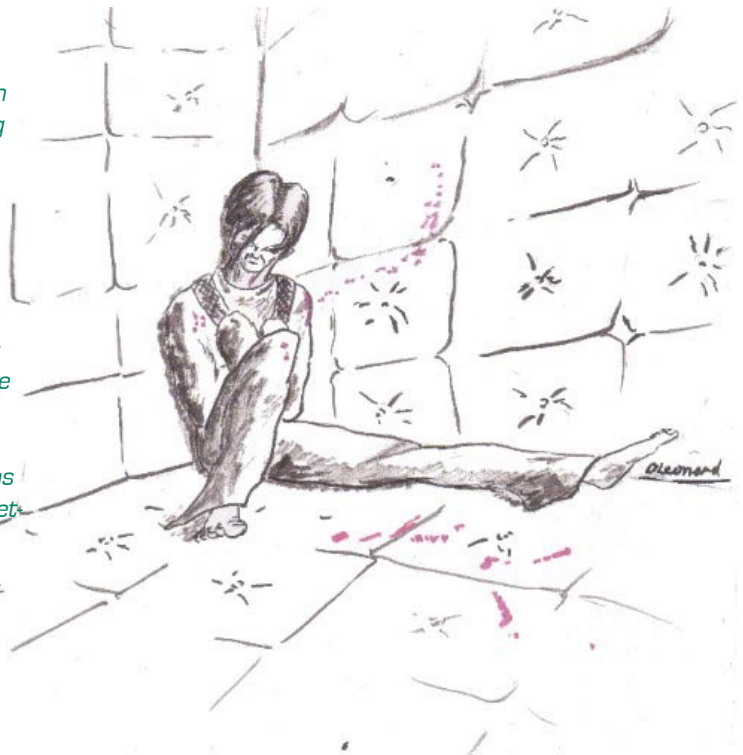
"If you count the people put in mental institutions, it jumps to 200%.

THESE rules outline the use and loss of Sanity in horror-themed Alternity games such as Dark•Matter, though it can be used in other settings, such as Star•Drive, Gamma World, or any other setting. Whether your characters are seeing horrible aliens or blasphemous demons from beyond time, sooner or later they're going to go nuts, and this is how they're going to get there.

Starting with Sanity

Sanity (SAN) is a measure of a character's mental health, and is represented by an additional damage track on your character sheet. Myriad events can cause a character to lose SAN, but no matter the cause, the result is the same: For each point of Sanity damage you take, mark off a box on your character's Sanity damage track. When you reach zero Sanity, your character has gone utterly mad and is now an SCM under GM control.

To determine your character's Sanity rating, simply take his or her WIL score, count out that many boxes, as with durability, Psionic Energy Points, etc. and place slashes at the 3/4, 1/2, and 1/4 marks, rounding up. Creatures from primitive



societies, such as Weren, Sesheyans, Sasquatch, or Mothmen, are actually more resistant to the horrors of an uncaring universe, and add +2 to their Sanity rating – when just about everything shocks you a little bit, it's harder for things to really shake your faith in the universe. Conversely, creatures or races that trust their own knowledge and technology extensively and leave little room for mystery, such as Mechalus, Sandmen, and any Progress Level 7 or higher race, are more likely to be devastated when something comes along that does not fit into their neat view of reality, and their max Sanity rating is decreased by -2. Robot and A. I. heroes can never have sanity scores: they are programs that process information, and have no preconceptions that can be shattered.

Characters may start with less Sanity than their maximum, and each Sanity point forsaken provides 3 Skill Points which may only be used for the following skills: any Lore sub skill, Psychology, Xenology, Xenomedicine, Xenoengineering, any psionic skill (if that character is a talent or mindwalker), or any of the following FX skills or sub skills: Diabolism, Hemomancy, Hermeticism, Illusion, Mesmerism, Necromancy, Pyromancy, Alienism, Druidism (consult with your game master), Shamanism, or Voodoo, if FX is allowed in your campaign. Sanity points given up at character creation may be purchased normally during the course of the game.

Example of Determining Starting Sanity Rating

Reginald Linux is a rogue Sandman hero with a WIL score of 11 in a Dark•Matter campaign using the optional sanity rules. Even though he is not a minion of the etoile, he still thinks that technology and science can answer every problem, so he loses 2 points from his max Sanity rating, giving him a Sanity rating of 9. He doesn't want to give up Sanity for knowledge, so he blacks out all but 9 of the boxes on his character sheet, and then divides his Sanity into fourths, rounding down. He ends up with nine unfilled boxes with slashes in between boxes 2 and 3, boxes 4 and 5, and boxes 6 and 7.

⑨ □□/□□/□□/□□□

The Sanity Check

Method 1: Characters make a Sanity check whenever the GM requires them to, specific instances of which will be expanded upon later. A Sanity check functions somewhat like a Fatigue check, in that passing it means no ill effects befall the character, and failing it results in one point of Sanity damage. A Critical Failure results in 2 points of Sanity damage, and at the GM's discretion, may call for another Sanity check.

Sanity checks are made using the character's *Resolve-mental resolve* skill, with one notable exception. The ranks of *-mental resolve* are not added to the character's WIL, but to her current Sanity score. [This is a bit unclear; could you provide an example?]

A character with three ranks in *Resolve-mental resolve* and a WIL score of 11 normally must roll a 14 or less to succeed on a mental resolve skill check. However, when making a Sanity check, her current Sanity rating replaces her WIL score. So, if this character still had 3 ranks in mental resolve and 11 WIL but only had 5 Sanity remaining, she would need to roll an 8 or less to succeed a Sanity check. *Mental resolve* checks made for other purposes would still use her WIL score and she would still succeed on a 14 or less.

This method is meant to represent a

"downward spiral" of insanity – a character's mind is like a pane of glass, and every fracture in it allows it to break easier. No sentient creature can withstand the uncaring cosmos for long, and as horror builds upon horror characters retreat from the unspeakable by destroying themselves. Gamemasters are advised that campaigns using these rules tend to be very lethal for characters, though not as much as a comparable Call of Cthulhu campaign.

Method 2: For gamemasters that prefer a more pulp-hero feel, or perhaps those who believe horror comes not from killing characters but threatening them, I present an alternate method, representing the human mind's ability to adapt to seemingly anything. Sanity checks are performed in much the same manner as those above, with a very important difference: characters attempt to roll ABOVE their current Sanity rating. Games that use this method simply subtract 1 from the character's current Sanity rating for each rank of *mental resolve* for purposes of the check, instead of adding 1, and change all negative dice bonuses to positive ones and vice versa. A Good success is 1.5 times the Sanity check number, while an Amazing success is twice it. Characters start out ignorant of the dark heart of the world, but with every secret they uncover they become that much more hardened. After seeing an etoile devour a living human, seeing a sasquatch isn't that shocking any more, and though characters never are truly "normal", they eventually stabilize as they come to terms with the unreal. Games using this method have characters last longer than Method 1, but it may "cheapen" sanity loss – and in some instances it may be more beneficial to stay at low Sanity than at high. Note that all of the modifiers in this article use Method 1, multiply them by -1 if you wish to use Method 2.

When the GM calls for a Sanity check, it will almost always be accompanied by a modifier, based on just how damaging to one's mind the event really is. When you roll a Sanity check, you always add your WIL resistance modifier as a bonus, in addition to any bonuses or penalties called for by the individual roll. A character with a WIL of 14 has a base -2 step bonus to her Sanity checks, and a charac-

ter with a WIL of 6 suffers a +1 step penalty to all her Sanity checks. Willpower is very important to characters using Sanity; it allows them to keep going in the face of things that might make normal humans kill themselves.

If an event is truly shattering, the GM may opt to roll for massive sanity loss. "Massive sanity loss" rolls function as normal Sanity checks, only the character making the Sanity check must roll a new check each time she fails, with a cumulative -2 step bonus for every roll after the first.

Example of Sanity Check Score

Reginald Linux has three ranks of *Resolve-mental resolve* and is playing in a campaign using Method 1 sanity loss, so his sanity check score is 12. His WIL resistance modifier is +1, so he gets a -1 step bonus to his checks. He fills it in next to his Sanity rating like so:

⑨ □□/□□/□□/□□□

Sanity Score: 12/6/3 Mod: -d4

Losing Sanity

Many things can force a Sanity check, and game masters should not feel restricted to the methods listed herein or their bonuses/penalties. These are only meant to be examples and suggestions

Witnessing a Horror

The most common method of losing sanity, characters that see either horrible aliens or horrible acts may be subject to a Sanity check. In Dark•Matter, almost all xenofoms (except for sasquatch and mole people) should induce Sanity checks of varying difficulty, whereas in a game like Star•Drive or Gamma World they should be reserved only for the most freakish of aliens and mutants. Actions that induce Sanity checks will most likely be comparable in all settings, and need not even include an element of the fantastic or paranormal; witnessing a horrible display of brutality, even inflicted by and on normal humans, can drive some people mad. Remember as well that things might not have to be freakish to induce a Sanity check; things may represent facts that the character cannot deal with. Stumbling

Suggested Sanity Check Modifiers for Dark•Matter

BEING/SITUATION	MODIFIER
Sandman	No check if in human form; +1 to see it shape-shift
Grey	-1
Kinori	+3
Homunculous	-1
Mothman	+1
Ghost	+2
Ghoul	+2 to see them feed
Etoile	+1, +3 if "eating"
Ekimuu	-2
Demons	+3
Armodont	+2
Luciferans	+3
Mummy	+3
Finding out a trusted friend is a Sandman/Grey	+2
Finding a Kinori nest	+1, +2 if very large
Learning you've been working for the bad guys all along	-2 to +2, based on severity of actions
Callous, inhuman display of brutality	+1
Uncovering new conspiracy	-1
Being forced to kill close friend (mind control on either side, he's a Sandman, et al)	+3

across a massive Kinori hatchery under the character's home city and not being able to do a thing about it might induce Sanity damage, even though they just look like normal eggs.

Psionics

Mindwalking provides a myriad number of ways for characters to lose their minds, whether by malignant desires or simple accident. Truly sadistic or morally bankrupt Mindwalkers may attempt to use Telepathy-*contact* to cause Sanity damage. A mindwalker with level 4 in the contact specialty skill may attempt to cause Sanity damage to the being she contacts; both involved parties' roll. The target rolls a Sanity check, the mindwalker a contact skill roll. If the Mindwalker achieves a greater degree of success than the target, the target takes one point of Sanity damage for each degree of difference. The Mindwalker may not use last resort points to modify her roll, but the target may. If the Mindwalker suffers a Critical

Failure and the target gets at least an Ordinary success, the mindwalker takes 1 point of Sanity damage from psychic feedback. No matter what the success or failure of the attack, the target instantly becomes aware of the exact location of her attacker, as well as what she wants, how she can defend herself, et al. Attacking minds in this way can prove to be more trouble than it's worth.

In addition, minds may be damaged by telepathic contact with those who are already insane, or with a consciousness completely alien to them. The GM defines what a "completely alien" mind is – in a Dark•Matter campaign, any alien might be appropriate, but in Star•Drive this distinction would only be appropriate to truly freakish and unnatural Externals or other, previously not encountered aliens. After all, humanity has been around Fraal and Mechalus for a while, and the workings of their minds would be familiar. When a character contacts or is contacted by a

completely alien mind, or if she contacts a mind of a character with 0 Sanity without suitable preparation (knowing the character is insane is sufficient), the character must roll for Massive Sanity Loss starting at a +1 step penalty, making one roll per round. The character can perform no other actions while performing these checks. A successful check means the telepathic contact has been broken, and the character may resume normal activity – if an alien mind wanted to deliver any sort of message, it is delivered. At the GM's option, the alien mind may also have to perform Sanity checks until either he or his target succeeds; after all, it might be as frightened of us as we are of it.

Finally, telepathic contact with even a familiar mind can damage a mindwalker's sanity if something horrible happens to the character she is in contact with. If a mind the mindwalker is in contact with is forced to make a Sanity check and the mindwalker didn't cause it herself, the mindwalker must also make a Sanity check with a bonus of -2 applied to whatever modifiers were on the original check. If a mindwalker is in contact with a character's mind at the time of that character's death, the mindwalker must roll for Massive Sanity Loss, starting at a +2 step penalty. Any failures indicate the mindwalker has seen into the maw of death, and the number of failures dictates how deeply she gazed before being pulled into the realm of the living.

FX Skills

If you choose to use Sanity in your game alongside with FX Adepts, consider this: Magic or contact with dark gods may be something that sentient minds were not built to handle. Channeling arcane power through a human vessel can have unimaginable consequences for the vessel from the sheer power alone, not to mention anything that he might happen to see when a portal to a higher (or lower) realm is opened.

For characters using most types of Arcane Magic and some Faith FX, consider using this alternate method: Such characters have no FX energy pool. Every time they use an FX skill, have them roll one Sanity check for each FX Energy Point they would have spent. These Sanity checks start at a base bonus of -2, and gain a +1 step penalty for every FX skill used previously in the current session.

Note that this is not appropriate for Enochian, Hatire, Monotheism, or Taoism FX skills; however, it is particularly appropriate for Alienism, Diabolism, and possibly Hemomancy, at the GM's discretion.

Torture

Employed by the morally bankrupt or the sadistic, extensive torture can drive men mad, breaking their wills so that they will submit to the demands of a captor – or merely giving the captor the dark joy of destroying another man.

A torturer must have absolute, unfettered access to her victim – a victim chained in a basement, trapped in a well, or locked in an interrogation chamber are examples of this. For every three days that the captor attempts mental torture, both involved parties make opposed skill checks. The victim makes a Sanity check with a -2 bonus plus a +1 penalty for every previous check she has made, while the captor makes a skill check for either Interaction-intimidate or Medical Science-*psychology*, whichever has a lower rank. If the captor does not have at least one rank in both skills, she suffers a +3 step penalty to these checks. Last resort points may be used by the victim but not by the captor. If the captor gains a higher degree of success than the victim, the victim takes 1 point of Sanity damage for each degree of difference. If equal degrees of success are achieved, or if the victim achieves a higher degree than the captor, no Sanity damage is incurred. If the captor inflicts enough Sanity damage to cause mental illness, the captor chooses what illnesses are inflicted. Characters reduced to zero Sanity via torture have been utterly broken, empty shells that once held thinking minds and now contain whatever their captor wishes them to. These characters are most typically not insane in a "madcap" sense; instead they have lost all ability to feel emotion, to feel empathy, to think for themselves, or even to perform actions without specific instructions. They are like living zombies, existing only because they have not the presence of mind to kill themselves.

Computers and Cybernetics

Any time a character interfaces her mind with a machine, that character is making an opportunity for horrible things to happen. While in a computer system,

a character's consciousness can be folded, spindled, or mutilated, and the consequences are always dire.

If your campaign uses Sanity rules and allows cybernetics, you may choose to replace Cykosis rolls with Sanity checks, making a cykotek another type of madman an unwary character can become. Similarly, Enhance programs that have been made maliciously or incompetently may induce Sanity checks in characters that do not check their programs before running them.

If a character is neurally connected to the Grid, mental trauma may befall her even though she is safe from physical harm. A Gridpilot character that critically fails a Stamina-*endurance* check to avoid brain damage (checks are made whenever a character's shadow suffers mortal damage) takes 1 point of Sanity damage in addition to the normal consequences of failure. If the character is pulled from the Grid unexpectedly by means other than the death of a shadow – a massive power failure, or someone yanking the NI-Jack cable from her skull – they must make the same Sanity check as if their shadow was killed. Failure in either case means that part of the hero's mind was left behind in the Grid, never to be found again.

Pharmaceuticals

Chemicals that act on the brain can do so in a very negative manner, especially when not used properly. Any character taking Psi-Enhancer, Psychoactive Booster, Stimulant, or any number of narcotics, hallucinogens, or various other drugs while under the effects of the drug already must make a Sanity check at a -2 bonus, with a +3 penalty for every previous check made while under the effects of this drug. This is in addition to any overdose penalties for the particular drug. Some drugs may be more or less severe and may incur different penalties at the GM's option.

What Sanity Loss Means

First and foremost, Sanity is another damage track. When the damage track is completely filled in, the character is effectively "dead" – alive, but as a hopeless ravine psychotic forever out of the player's control. On the way through the down-

ward spiral, characters will acquire mental disorders and deficiencies, modeled by GM-picked Flaws that the PC does not acquire any skill points for. When a character crosses the first mark, that of 3/4 Sanity, she gains 3 SP of Flaws picked from the below list. At the second and third marks, 1/2 and 1/4, the character gains an additional 5 and 10 SP of Flaws, making the total for a character at 1/4 SAN, 18 SP of flaws. This is above and beyond the maximum limit of 3 Flaws to a hero.

The flaws that may be assigned due to sanity loss are in the following list:

Bad Luck, Clueless, Code of Honor (the GM picks the restrictions), Divided Loyalty (see *Dark•Matter Campaign Setting*, pg. 60), Double Speak (even if they are not a robot) (see *Dataware*, pg. 78), Forgetful, Illiterate (see *Dark•Matter Campaign Setting*, pg.61), Oblivious, Obsessed, Phobia, Possessed (see *Dark•Matter Campaign Setting*, pg. 61), Rampant Paranoia (see *Dark•Matter Campaign Setting*, pg. 61), Rebellious (see *Dark•Matter Campaign Setting*, pg. 61), Spineless, Temper, or Wild Talent (if the character is a psionic talent.) (see *Mindwalking*, pg.43), as well as any of the new Flaws described below.

GMs are advised only to pick flaws that tie in somehow with the reasons for sanity loss; a character might become illiterate after reading the profane *Necronomicon* or a similar blasphemous tome; but being forced to murder his wife won't cause him to lose the ability to read. When picking mental disorders, the GM may spend 1 point over the maximum, doing so reduces the points she may spend for the next "level" by 2.

Mental disorders gained by losing Sanity cannot be bought off normally; instead, they must be rid of by purchasing back Sanity points. Disorders gained at a certain "level" become inactive when the player reaches the next highest "level", going back up to 3/4 Sanity means that all disorders gained at 1/4 and 1/2 Sanity are gone. Should the character go back to a lower level, the GM picks disorders anew; they need not be the same as before.

Treatment

Treatment is outlined in the skill description of Medical Science-*psychology* in the

Gamemaster's Guide, p. 76. Checks can be made as suggested there, or at a more frequent interval. If opting for a more frequent interval, it is suggested that the following modifiers to the Medical Science-psychology check be made, per degree of sanity, as outlined above: Marginal: 0; Slight: +1, Moderate: +2; Extreme: +3. Certain drugs may also modify the check, at the GM's discretion.

New Perks

Desensitized

Cost: 5, WIL, Active

Maybe he read too many *Tales from the Crypt* comics, maybe he played too much Doom. Maybe he has faith that even in the face of unspeakable horror, everything will turn out all right. Maybe he just doesn't care enough about anything to see kinori and sandmen as anything warranting anything higher than "Meh". Maybe this guy's just plain emotionally "numb", and is not reactionary. Whatever the cause, the result is the same: The character gets a -1 step bonus to all of his Sanity checks, and all Sanity points purchased cost 1 SP less. This perk may be purchased at creation or during the course of a campaign. Can't be picked in tandem with Tenuous Grip Flaw.

New Flaws

Addiction

+4/+6 Bonus Skill Points, WIL

The character relies extensively on some outside factor to cope with her life. The factor could be one of a great number of things – alcohol, drugs, gambling, sex, even shopping – but the result is always the same: For 4 SP, 10% of all the money the character acquires must go toward feeding the addiction. For 6 SP, this number jumps to 15%. Purchasing items to feed an Addiction cannot have any positive effect for the character, e.g. a character cannot get points for being "addicted" to buying bigger and better guns, unless that character never actually uses them. These income figures are assumed to be for average PCs with middle-class income; players that are Dirt Poor or Filthy Rich will suffer differently. Filthy Rich characters may become addicted to incredibly expensive things, or their addictions may not cost as much of their income but they must take far more

Sample Progression Into Madness For a Dark•Matter Character

Slight (3/4): The character can't concentrate on what he's saying, and stammers and repeats himself often.

Drawbacks: Double Speak, +1 penalty to all PER skills.

Moderate(1/2): The character is overtly paranoid, and lets irrational (or perfectly rational) fears dominate his life. He often can't think straight, as in the back of his mind they keep thinking something HORRIBLE is about to happen RIGHT NOW. Even normal things take on a menacing tone in the character's mind.

Drawbacks: Rampant Paranoia and Tenuous Grip.

Extreme(1/4): The character is really, really losing it. After seeing the things he's seen, anything seems possible, and all of it is bad. His paranoia is such that he has started to believe in things that even the conspiracies of Dark•Matter would say are "pretty far out". For instance, after a fiasco in NBC World News Headquarters, the character is convinced that television sets are out to get him and eat him, and suffers a +2 penalty to all actions when near any sort of display device. He is easily swayed, possibly thinking that anyone talking to him is a Grey using telepathy and allowing the placebo effect to make him more suggestive, and as such he has -1 to his WIL resistance modifier. Or, he's created an alternate personality to deal with the unrealities of his situation, when he passes out he becomes Susan, a six-year old girl that doesn't mean him any harm, but certainly doesn't know anything about any aliens, and refuses to believe they exist even when they threaten her.

Drawbacks: Phobia 4, Spineless 2, Possessed 4.

Insane(0 Sanity points): The character is completely insane, and the depths of his madness are such that he can never return to society. He will shriek the most secret details of the darkest conspiracies to anyone he sees, but who will believe such a madman? A character who loses all his SAN might be fun to use as a recurring nemesis from then on: a Hoffmann Institute agent who became convinced that the other agents were stealing his bodily fluids to make up for the fact that Major League Baseball had cloned them all without lymphatic systems would keep trying to foil or kill the remaining heroes, when he isn't shouting at random air molecules.

pains to keep them hidden. Dirt Poor characters may never have enough money on their own to feed their habits, and may have to turn to less-than-legal ways of making money to keep themselves stocked. Players meeting these conditions should discuss with the GM.

Though a major effect of Addiction in game terms is the loss of income, it is not the only effect. Addicted characters may be forced to hide their addictions or face social and legal consequences; even a multi-billionaire player character has to hide the fact that he can't stop himself from buying and burning priceless works of art; and the Hoffmann Institute is less than enthused when it finds an agent that has turned to selling alien artifacts to pay for a crack habit.

Addictions must be indulged regularly, but need not always be present; an agent won't be snorting cocaine in the middle of a mission. If the addiction hasn't been indulged in a week or more, the character gets a +2 step penalty (or +3 steps if the Addiction flaw is the 6-point version) to all actions until the addiction is indulged. Some addictions may be to comparatively rare items or events and thus an addict can go longer without them, but when indulging them they must devote a full day to relishing whatever brings them dark pleasure.

Addictions are something that helps your character get through life when it would be impossible. They can often be drugs, but it is not necessary. The millionaire in the above example, for instance,

may destroy such artwork because his encounters with the dark conspiracies of the world have left him feeling so absolutely powerless that he destroys the irreplaceable just so he can know that his actions can have a lasting effect on SOMETHING. Always consider the rationale for why your character is addicted to what he is; if you can't think of a reason, you need to come up with a new focus of addiction.

Self-Destructive

+3/+6 Bonus Skill Points, WIL

The character has absolutely no regard whatsoever for her own life. In addition to appropriate roleplaying, the character's durability is hidden from her, the GM records damage in secret and does not give the player information on how much damage she is taking, only that she has taken damage and any appropriate penalties. "Appropriate roleplaying" would include minor self-destructive or self-dehumanizing behavior with little or no game effect: constantly belittling oneself in front of others, not eating, making minor cuts on the forearms with a knife, et cetera.

For +6 SP, in addition to not knowing current health status and damage, a character also engages in serious self-injurious behavior. At the start of any session, or during a session after a large amount of time has passed, a character with this flaw has engaged in self-mutilation or similar behavior and loses 1d4 Wound points, kept track of in secret by the GM. In addition, a character may be compelled to mutilate herself as penance for real or perceived failures during play; suffering a Critical Failure or failing a skill check when other people were depending on a success forces the player to make a standard Resolve - mental resolve check at a +1 step penalty for each previous roll

of this type since the last time a character failed this roll. Failure compels the character to punish herself for her shortcomings, and the character takes 1d6w at the next available time that the character may engage in self-destructive behavior.

Tenuous Grip

+6 Bonus Skill Points, WIL

A bit loopy to start with, seeing horrors from beyond has really got to this character, and his sanity is slipping away like grains of sand through his fingers. The character gets a +1 step penalty to all his SAN checks, and decreases max SAN by 1. GMs are advised that picking this flaw as one of the "insanity flaws" will result in speedy death or lunacy. Can't be picked in tandem with Desensitized Perk.

New Achievement Bonuses

Sanity Point

Cost: 3 SP, At any Lvl

Use this to buy back one Sanity point. This is the only way you can get them back, and the only way to be rid of mental disorders gained through low Sanity.

Though modern medicine can help the mentally ill greatly, the will to be better must come from the patient herself, and thus a player must always spend SP to repurchase lost Sanity. However, medicine can ease the process along greatly when compared to "toughing it out" on one's own. Characters who wish to undergo psychotherapy to regain lost sanity may do so; at the GM's option it may be provided by their employer or the player must pay out of her own pocket.

Psychotherapy is a complex skill check made by the therapist during the time a character is in therapy. The character

wishing to regain sanity does not affect this roll with her stats or attributes; her contribution is the spending of skill points to regain the sanity.

If a character is an outpatient and meets with a therapist for at least three hours a week and when not meeting with the therapist, still follows his advice and keeps his words in mind, the therapist makes a Medical Science-*psychology* check every month with a minimum total time of three months. If the character is an inpatient at a mental ward or hospital, in constant contact with doctors and therapists and unable to leave, the primary therapist makes a psychology check every week with a minimum total time of one month.

There is no set difficulty for this complex skill check, three failures will not end it and there is no point where the doctor gets enough successes and says "Okay, I'm done!" Instead, the amount of successes over time is totaled, adding 1 for each Ordinary or Good and 2 for each Amazing. Each Failure subtracts one from the total (as in these cases, failure to move forward is almost like moving backwards), each Critical Failure subtracts 2. After a character has undergone therapy for the minimum total time or greater, they may choose to "spend" these successes when buying back Sanity points; every 2 successes gives the character one free SP to spend on repurchasing Sanity. The cost, however, can never be less than one skill point.

Sanity Rating Increase

First point, Cost: 5, At Lvl 3

Second point, Cost: 10, At Lvl 6

Increases your maximum Sanity rating by one, also giving you the Sanity point to fill it up. Can be purchased twice.



SANITY

SANITY
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Sanity Score: ____ / ____ / ____ **Modifier:** ____

MENTAL DISORDERS

3/4 SANITY: _____

1/2 SANITY: _____

1/4 SANITY: _____

Mystic SCM Template by Matthew R. Esch

The Mystic cloaks himself in an air of mystery and arcane knowledge. There is sometimes a religious or supernatural flavor to the mystic, as he plays upon the fears and confusions of those with little or no Mindwalker experience. Mystics serve as advisors, diplomats, and sometimes even templar warriors, using ESP to look into the past, present, and future for answers to life's many questions.

The mystic often adds Biokinesis and its specialty skills to his psionic repertoire to increase his apparent power and control of mysteries. Control metabolism, morph, control damage, and heal are the specialty skills most useful to a mystic hero.

Human Mystic

	M	O	G	A
STR	7	8	9	10
DEX	9	10	11	12
CON	9	10	11	12
INT	10	12	13	14
WIL	11	11	12	13
PER	8	9	10	11
Action Check	10/5/2	12/6/3	13/6/3	14/7/3
# of Actions	2	2	2	3
Psionic Energy	11	11	12	13
Points				

Marginal Skills: Athletics; Vehicle Operation; Stamina; Knowledge; Awareness; Interaction; ESP-*postcognition*, *precognition*

Ordinary Skills: Athletics; Vehicle Operation; Stamina; Knowledge; Awareness; Interaction; ESP-*clairaudience*, *clairvoyance*, *postcognition 2*, *precognition 2*

Good Skills: Athletics; Unarmed Attack-*power martial arts 2*; Vehicle Operation; Stamina-*endurance 2*; Knowledge-*{specific}*; Awareness; Teach; Interaction; Culture-*etiquette {specific}*; ESP-*battle mind*, *clairaudience 2*, *clairvoyance 2*, *postcognition 3*, *precognition 3*, *psychometry 2*, *sensitivity 2*; Biokinesis-*control metabolism 2*, *heal*

Amazing Skills: Athletics; Unarmed Attack-*power martial arts 4*; Vehicle Operation; Stamina-*endurance 2*; Knowledge-*{specific}*; Awareness; Teach-*mindwalker*; Interaction; Culture-*etiquette {specific}*; ESP-*battle mind 2*, *clairaudience 3*, *clairvoyance 3*, *postcognition 4*, *precognition 4*, *psychometry 3*, *sensitivity 3*; Biokinesis-*control metabolism 4*, *heal 3*, *bioweapon 2*, *morph 2*, *transfer damage*.

Equipment: casual dress or religious garb (as appropriate), religious paraphernalia.

Fraal Mystic

	M	O	G	A
STR	7	8	9	10
DEX	9	10	11	11
CON	9	10	10	10
INT	10	12	13	15
WIL	11	11	13	15
PER	8	9	10	11
Action Check	10/5/2	10/5/2	13/6/3	14/7/3
# of Actions	2	2	2	3
Psionic Energy	16	16	19	22
Points				

Marginal Skills: Vehicle Operation; Knowledge; Awareness; Resolve; Interaction; Telepathy; ESP-*postcognition*, *precognition*.

Ordinary Skills: Vehicle Operation; Knowledge; Awareness; Resolve; Interaction; Telepathy; ESP-*clairaudience*, *clairvoyance*, *postcognition 2*, *precognition 2*.

Good Skills: Vehicle Operation; Knowledge-*{specific}*; Awareness-*perception 2*; Teach; Resolve-*physical resolve 2*, *mental resolve 3*; Culture-*etiquette {specific}*; Interaction; Telepathy-*contact 2*, *mind shield 2*; ESP-*battle mind*, *clairaudience 2*, *clairvoyance 2*, *postcognition 3*, *precognition 3*, *psychometry 2*, *sensitivity 2*; Biokinesis.

Amazing Skills: Vehicle Operation; Knowledge-*{specific}*; Awareness-*perception 4*; Teach-*mindwalker*; Resolve-*physical resolve 2*, *mental resolve 3*; Culture-*etiquette {specific}*; Interaction; Telepathy-*contact 2*, *mind shield 2*; ESP-*battle mind 2*, *clairaudience 3*, *clairvoyance 3*, *postcognition 4*, *precognition 4*, *psychometry 3*, *sensitivity 3*; Biokinesis-*control metabolism 2*, *heal*.

Equipment: casual dress or religious garb (as appropriate), religious paraphernalia.

Author's note: The addition of Knowledge-*{specific}* and Culture-*etiquette {specific}* assume that the GM would specify as appropriate to the setting/needs of the SCM. For instance, mystic SCM, Brother François, would have Knowledge-*{France}* and Culture-*etiquette {French}*. Largely because I said so.

TRIAD

by Ryan Kershner

On the Streets of New York

There are things worse than goblins and vampires that hunt the night streets of New York City. Ghosts flit about, gangs war amongst themselves, and the Triad goes to work.

What is the Triad?

The Triad is a small, secretive trio of unstable beings that work for the NYPD. One cannibalizes his victims, one ritually slays “demons”, while the last manipulates the other two into doing his will. Through their connections in the NYPD, they are capable of getting away with an array of sordid crimes, with only their dwindled conscience to worry.

What Goals?

The leader of the group is a Grey named Tak, who has dabbled in dark alien magics that have made him a rogue amongst his own people. He has a strong hatred for Sandmen and wages his own private war against them. Tak uses his mental powers and forbidden magics to manipulate others to battle his Sandmen enemies. Tak currently controls two individuals within the New York Police Department: Dr. William Adams and Officer Richard Farley. Dr. Adams is one of the foremost pathologists in his area, and leads the forensics team. Officer Farley is a beat cop who works the toughest streets in the city. Tak has misled Farley to believe that he is a paladin doing God’s work to stop a demon insurgency. Tak also works in the NYPD in the internal affairs department disguised as a human named Jacob Tyler. This puts him in a position to tamper with any evidence that could be used against his pawns and allows him access to information that could be used to further his own twisted goals.

The Horror

The members of the Triad are complete psychopaths with little regard for other’s lives, especially when following their own obsessions. Anyone who crosses their paths is in serious danger. The humans are serial killers with a total disconnect from reality with their alien master driving them further into madness.

Dr. Adams has become obsessed with the idea of cannibalism and the ecstasy of eating human flesh. He is totally isolated from family and friends and spends all his time around his lab, where his depravity and loneliness drives him further down the road of insanity.

Officer Farley is under the delusion that he is a holy warrior aiding God and His angels against a demonic invasion. For the most part he has slain only Sandmen in his holy quest, but recently he killed a human man who had witnessed the slaying of one of the “demons”, a transgression he considered worthy

of death, Officer Farley is close to falling deeper into darkness as he considers every action he takes in his holy quest to be just, even the murder of innocents.

Tak’s war against the Sandmen is all that exists to him any more. Where once he helped to protect Grey and mankind alike from the Sandmen invasion, the dark rituals he practices have twisted his mind into believing he is the true chosen destroyer of all Sandmen, while other Grey have fallen away from the “true faith”. He will manipulate anyone to further his war and has little regard for the consequences on their lives. He believes his cause is righteous even as he becomes more monstrous in his methods.

Seeds of Chaos: Using the Triad in Your Game

- The heroes are helping the NYPD on an unusual murder case involving strange cult activity and come in contact with Officer Farley, who was first on the crime scene. In a reaction to the occult symbols found on the victim, Farley accidentally lets slip he is a soldier of God. Farley, fearing he has revealed too much, turns to Tak, who tells him that the heroes are under the influence of demons, and orders Farley to kill them. The Triad sets up an ambush of the heroes by calling them to Dr. Adam’s forensics lab to discuss some interesting new findings regarding the murder victim.
- The heroes are on the trail of a Sandman and stumble upon its remains. Unknown to them, they are being watched by Officer Farley who had just sent the “demon” to Hell. Farley mistakes the heroes for Sandmen and decides to follow them and gathers more information on these new threats. He informs Tak and the Triad begins to covertly hunt the heroes down.
- One or all of the heroes are taking a training course in forensics, perhaps as part of an assignment. They have been placed under the tutelage of Dr. Adams, foremost in the field in the New York City area. One night one of the heroes comes in late, as they had forgotten something important. In the lab they hear a strange sucking noise, followed by loud chewing. When they go to investigate, they see the doctor with a sandwich, a few bites have been taken, and a shake, with some of the ice cream inside the straw. However, under further observation, the sandwich meat appears very bloody, and the red liquid does not resemble a strawberry shake. Dr. Adams notices the hero’s interest in the appearance of his sandwich and offhandedly mentions he likes his meat rare. He then hurriedly sends the hero on his way. Dr. Adams immediately tells Tak about the intruder, and its determined that the curious hero must be dealt with, and anyone they may have told.



Dr. William Adams - Cannibal

Species: Human **Gender:** Male

Profession: Tech Op **Career:** Pathologist

Attributes: Discovery, Selfish, Confident, Honest

ABILITY	Score	Untrained	Res Mod
Strength	9	4	+0
Dexterity	10	5	+0
Constitution	10	5	
Intelligence	13	6	+2
Will	9	4	+0
Personality	9	4	

ACTION CHECK (die d0)

Mar 13+ Ord 12 Good 6 Amaz 3

Actions Per Round 2
Last Resorts/Cost 1/3

COMBAT MOVEMENT RATES

Sprint: 18 Run: 12 Walk: 4 Swim: 4 Easy Swim: 2

DURABILITY

Stun	10	□□□□□□□□□□
Wound	10	□□□□□□□□□□
Mortal	5	□□□□□
Fatigue	5	□□□□□

ATTACK	Score	Base	Type	Range	Damage
Unarmed	4/2/1	+d4	L/O	Personal	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s
Scalpel	12/6/3	d0	L/O	Personal	d
Revolver	11/5/2	d0	H/O	6/12/40	d4w/d4+1w/d4m

DEFENSE

+2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

PERKS: Concentration, Observant, Psionic Awareness

FLAWS: Obsessed 6 (cannibalism), Temper 4 (sexual performance)

SKILLS

STR

Athletics 9/4/2

Melee Weapons 9/4/2 -blade 12/6/3

DEX

Modern Ranged Weapons 10/5/2 -pistol 11/5/2

Vehicle Operation 10/5/2

CON

Stamina 10/5/2

INT

Knowledge 13/6/3 -deduce 17/8/4

Life Science 13/6/3 -biology 17/8/4, genetics 17/8/4, zoology 17/8/4

Medical Science 13/6/3 -medical knowledge 19/9/4, surgery 19/9/4, treatment 18/9/4

WIL

Awareness 9/4/2 -perception 14/5/2

Resolve 9/4/2 -mental resolve 11/5/2

PER

Interaction 9/4/2 -charm 14/5/2, interview 13/5/2

NOTES

Observant Perk: -1 step bonus to Awareness-Perception checks

Background

Born in the Bronx area of New York City, Dr. Adams excelled in school. He graduated from Harvard medical school with honors and became an accomplished pathologist for the New York Police Department.

It was an accident when Dr. Adams tasted another's blood for the first time. He was performing an autopsy, and sneezed, bringing his bloody glove to his mouth, and smeared it with his patient's blood. He liked the taste, and eventually began drinking the blood of the dead that came through his lab.

It took a few years before he built up the nerve to go beyond just drinking blood and trying a human organ. It was the liver, as he was fond of *foie gras*. He began to try more parts of the human body, starting with the heart, then thyroid, and parts of the brain. After a while, the organs of those that had been dead for



By Chris Campbell

some time became less satisfying. He needed a new thrill so he began killing people in order to get fresh cuisine. He would cover it up by giving a false report on death and time, and his position as the top NYPD pathologist kept him from suspicion.

Tak uses Dr. Adams to cover up any police investigations involving Sandmen. He tolerates Dr. Adams extracurricular activities and makes sure that the doctor is protected from prying eyes.

Physical Description

Not handsome by traditional standards, Dr. Adams still has an unusual look that is quite striking. He has had many admirers over his career, and has admired many...for different reasons.

Personality

Brutally honest, Dr. Adams is someone you do not bring to social events. His intensity can be quite unsettling. Still when he wants to, he can be quite witty, usually when he is on the hunt for a new meal.

Surprisingly Dr. Adams is not lacking in girlfriends although they do not stay with him for long. Most don't enjoy his intimate activities, such as his passion for pain. His favorite is being whipped.

Dr. Adams has a temper that has gotten him into trouble. One time it nearly got him killed when he got upset at one of his girlfriends and he hit her. Unfortunately for him, she had taken a few self defense courses, and he ended up needing his revolver.

Combat Tactics

Dr. Adams likes to surprise his victims with a scalpel or even syringes filled with tranquilizers or some other drugs such as hallucinogens. He keeps his revolver handy for any trouble he can't handle up close, and personal.

Equipment (carried)

Wallet, license, mace, briefcase, and a .38 revolver

Equipment (accessible)

Pathology equipment: Bone saws, scalpels, syringes, etc...Tranquilizers. Sedatives. Hallucinogens.

New Rank Benefit

Medical Knowledge Rank Benefit: Knowing Shot

► At rank 6 in Medical Science-*medical knowledge*, the attacker knows where to attack the victim to do maximum damage. Make a *medical knowledge* skill check, and get a -1 bonus for an Ordinary success, a -2 for a Good success, and a -3 to an Amazing success to your next attack roll. This roll costs an action and takes the place of an aimed shot.

Officer Richard Farley -Self-Proclaimed Paladin

Species: Human **Gender:** male

Profession: Combat Spec **Career:** Police Officer

Attributes: On a Mission, Virtuous (Delusional), Courageous, Zealous

ABILITY	Score	Untrained	Res Mod
Strength	11	5	+1
Dexterity	10	5	+0
Constitution	10	5	
Intelligence	11	5	+1
Will	9	4	+0
Personality	9	4	

ACTION CHECK (die d0) Actions Per Round 2
 Mar 12+ Ord 11 Good 5 Amaz 2 Last Resorts/Cost 1/3

COMBAT MOVEMENT RATES

Sprint: 20 Run: 12 Walk: 4 Swim: 4 Easy Swim: 2

DURABILITY

Stun	10	□□□□□□□□□□
Wound	10	□□□□□□□□□□
Mortal	5	□□□□□
Fatigue	5	□□□□□

ATTACK	Score	Base	Type	Range	Damage
Unarmed	14/7/3	d0	L/O	Personal	d6+1s/d6+2s/d4+1w
Nightclub	13/6/3	+d4	L/O	Personal	d4+2s/d4+1w/d4+2w
Revolver	15/7/3	-d4	H/O	6/12/50	d4+2w/d4+3w/d4+2m
Shotgun	13/6/3	d0	H/O	6/12/30	d4w/d6w/d4m
Taser	13/6/3	d0	En/O	3/6/12	d4+1s/d4+3s/d6+4s
Godswrath	14/7/3	d0	L/O*	Personal	d4w/d6w/d6+2w

*Godswrath is L/G vs. Sandmen.

DEFENSE

+1 resistance vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance vs. unarmed attacks

PERKS: Faith, Great Looks, Superior Talent

FLAWS: Powerful Enemy 6 (Sandmen), Rampant Paranoia, Delusional

SKILLS

STR
 Athletics 11/5/2 -climb 12/6/3, jump 13/6/3
 Melee Weapons 11/5/2 -blade 14/7/3-blunt 13/6/3
 Unarmed Attack 11/5/2 -power 14/7/3

DEX

Modern Ranged Weapons 10/5/2 -pistol 15/7/3,
 rifle 13/6/3
 Vehicle Operation 10/5/2-land 14/7/3

CON

Stamina 10/5/2-endurance 14/7/3, resist pain 13/6/3

INT

Knowledge 11/5/2
 Law 11/5/2

WIL

Awareness 9/4/2 -intuition 12/5/2, perception 14/5/2

PER

Interaction 9/4/2

PSI

Biokinesis 10/5/2 -control metabolism 16/8/4, heal 17/8/4,
 rejuvenate 14/7/3, transfer damage 15/7/3

PSI Points 5 □□□□□

NOTES

Quick Draw for rank 3 pistol.

Background

Richard lived in a strict Christian family, until the age of 18. After graduation, Richard enrolled at the local college. After five long years of studying, Richard



By Dragan Ciric

graduated with a bachelor's degree in pre-law and criminal justice. Richard decided law wasn't the path for him and followed in his father's footsteps to become a cop.

Welcomed to the NYPD after graduating from the New York Police Academy, he soon married a lovely Christian girl and life was good. Then one night, things changed drastically for Officer Richard Farley.

As he slept he was visited by an angel of God, to give him a mission. He was told that foul demons walked the earth, bent on the destruction of humanity. They were, however, well disguised as humans, but he would be able to see them by divine blessing.

Unknown to Farley, Tak had orchestrated the angelic intervention and made Farley believe that Sandmen were true demons from Hell. Tak had also psychically implanted knowledge in Farley's brain that allowed him to quickly identify Sandmen through visual and behavioral cues. In addition Tak has trained Farley to use latent psi talents to further help Farley in his search for "evil". In fact Tak's discovery of Farley's secret psionic ability as well as the cop's strong religious beliefs was what drew the Grey to the human in the first place.

Over time Farley has totally lost all sense of reality as he falls deeper into his holy mission. He has started to become suspicious of anyone outside of the Triad and fears that demon-touched spies are out to thwart his mission. This has led to the murder of an innocent human who accidentally witnessed Farley as he killed a Sandman.

Physical Description

Square jawed, muscular, light brown hair, and piercing green eyes, Richard Farley stands at a rather tall 6' 3". He looks sharp in his uniform, and carries a rosary in his pocket at all times.

Few would figure him to be a raving lunatic and murderer.

Personality

Richard appears to be someone who likes to laugh, have a good time, but not too good of a time. He seems to be kindhearted, always looking out for his friends, and usually pays for lunch. Beneath this friendly exterior is a religious fanaticism that appears when topics of religion come up in conversation.

He is obsessed with the destruction of all Sandmen, despite the fact he does not know their true nature. He is ritualistic in his practices, and completely set on the goal at hand. His secret obsession has started to leak into his personal life, and it's starting to worry his wife, Rachel. She has even seen him scourging himself in preparation for his holy war.

Equipment

.44 Revolver, 12 g Shotgun, Taser, basic police tool belt. Farley has a special holy sword given to him by the angel that is especially effective against the demons he hunts. It is in fact a special bioelectrical weapon that wreaks havoc on the nanites in a Sandman's body, causing massive damage on any successful hit. He calls the sword *Godswrath*.

Tak (Jacob Tyler)- Grand Manipulator

Species: Grey Gender: male

Profession: FX Adept (Mindwalker) Career: Police Specialist

Attributes: On a Mission, Unscrupulous, Selfish, Hateful

ABILITY	Score	Untrained	Res Mod
Strength	7	3	+0
Dexterity	9	4	+0
Constitution	10	5	
Intelligence	13	6	+2
Will	12	6	+1
Personality	9	4	

ACTION CHECK (die d0) Actions Per Round 2
 Mar 13+ Ord 12 Good 6 Amaz 3 Last Resorts/Cost 1/3

COMBAT MOVEMENT RATES

Sprint: 16 Run: 20 Walk: 4 Swim: 4 Easy Swim: 2

DURABILITY

Stun	10	□□□□□□□□□□
Wound	10	□□□□□□□□□□
Mortal	5	□□□□□
Fatigue	5	□□□□□

ATTACK	Score	Base Type	Range	Damage
Unarmed	3/1/0	+d4 L/O	Personal	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s
9mm Pistol	12/6/4	d0 H/O	6/12/50	d6w/d6+1w/d4m

DEFENSE

+2 resistance vs. WIL interaction

FLAWS: Powerful Enemy 6 pt (Sandmen), Code of Honor, Obsession 6 pt (Sandmen)

SKILLS

DEX

Modern Ranged Weapons 9/4/2-pistol 12/6/3,
 Vehicle Operation 9/4/2

INT

Knowledge 13/6/3-computer operation 17/8/4,
 deduce 16/8/4, language (English) 16/8/4, language (Grey)
 16/8/4, language (Spanish) 16/8/5, sandmen society
 16/8/4
 Life Science 13/6/3-genetics 17/8/4

WIL

Awareness 12/6/3-intuition 15/7/3, perception 14/7/3
 Resolve 12/6/3-mental resolve 16/8/4

PER

Interaction 9/4/2-charm 10/5/2, interview 15/7/3,
 intimidate 12/6/3

PSI

ESP 13/6/3-clairaudience 16/8/4, clairvoyance 16/8/4,
 empathy 16/9/4, mind reading 19/9/4,
 Telepathy 9/4/2-contact 14/5/2

PSI Points 18 □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

FX

Alienism -bend space (INT) 15/7/3, circle of the thousand broken
 angles (WIL) 14/7/3, eyes of the dark one (WIL) 14/7/3,
 life siphon 16/8/4, tongue of the infinite stars (INT) 15/7/3

FX Points 10 □□□□□□□□□□

NOTES

Grey Rogues get the Divided Loyalty flaw for free, Mental Resolve rank gives +1 Mod.

Background

Tak was a Grey agent whose primary mission was to track Sandmen activity in the North American continent. Over the years he grew frustrated with the Greys' inability or, in his eyes, unwillingness to stem the Sandmen's invasion. He sought to act more decisively and looked for weapons to fight the Sandmen without the other Grey ever knowing. Tak discovered the dark magical arts of Alienism and



By Chris Campbell

dedicated himself to mastering arcane forces in his war against the Sandmen. Tak's mind eventually became twisted by the magical forces and now leads a fanatical crusade against the Sandmen, letting no one stand in the way of his just war.

Physical Description

Tak uses a Grey illusion-casting device to appear as an average-looking human male in his late 30s with dark black hair and brown eyes. In his natural form Tak is an average sized Grey with arcane tattoos on his head and body. He is usually in a robe of some kind that makes him look like a wizard of Earth legend.

Personality

Tak appears calm and measured in his manner, always acting the professional when dealing with his underlings. A cold rage burns beneath this exterior, though, and he will brutally attack anyone that he believes is an agent of the Sandmen.

Combat Tactics

Tak likes to stay away from any direct physical confrontation and prefers to use his minions in any combat situation. If he must fight he will use any ranged weapons available and wield his FX powers to make a quick getaway.

Equipment

The Book of Jatakhus (a large arcane book on Alienism with an eye on the cover), various Grey religious items, a 9 mm pistol, cell phone

The Book of Jatakhus

Arcane Artifact

This book is a magical primer on the mysteries of the arcane FX skill of Alienism. By studying this book a person can learn the broad skill of Alienism at a reduced cost of 1 skill point. In addition any Alienism specialty skill may be learned at a reduced cost of 1 skill point. There is a price though. The user must make a Resolve-mental check every week or develop an obsession bordering on madness. In game terms the character takes on a 6 pt Obsession without gaining any skill points. This Obsession is usually something a character is enthusiastic about to begin with or is something they deal with on a daily basis. For instance a parking meter attendant may become militantly vigilant with her parking meters and beat up anyone who doesn't feed the meter.



13 Serial Killers

serial killers #1-6 by Daryl Blasi, #7-10 by Odysseas Dallas, #11 by Ryan Kershner, #12-13 by Dwayne Leonard • illustrations by Daryl Blasi

Sometimes the worst monster is human. Here is a selection of serial killers that can be inserted quickly into any Dark•Matter campaign as a minor side adventure, with the heroes hunting down one of these fiends before he or she can kill again.

1. The Centurion

Issac Gundersty was raised by strict religious parents, who abused and debased him. He was taught that he was a sinful wretch who was going to hell. He has grown into a fanatically religious man who works as a janitor for a local church and mission. He abducts people who he thinks are sinners and takes them back to his parents' cabin in the country. He then preaches to them for three nights as they lay tied to the floor. At the end of the three days he drives further into the wilderness and crucifies his victims, leaving them to die.

Game Notes: Use a Good Soldier SCM template with Melee weapons-*blade 3, bludgeon 4*; Knowledge-*bible 6*, Interaction-*intimidate 3*; and no powered weapons and armor skills.

Equipment: He keeps a iron-shod staff and machete handy at home and in the wilderness.

2. The Leech

Kevin "Mikhail" Berthwitz is a slightly overweight man with a fixation on vampires and the mystical. He believes he can become a master of the night by drinking enough blood prepared with mystical rituals. He works as a nurse at a hospital and has access to drugs he uses to knock out unsuspecting victims at local bars. He then carts them away with a wheelchair claiming to be their drinking buddy. At home he ties them down and drains their blood. He prepares the blood by burning incense and reading latin phrases from a book he found in a used bookstore.

Game Notes: Use an Ordinary Doctor SCM template with Knowledge-*creatures myths 1, roleplaying games 5*.

3. The Groupie

Nickie Martling was an abused child who witnessed her father, a failed actor, killing her mother in a fit of rage. She was placed in foster homes and slowly withdrew from reality, creating an imaginary world where movie stars and rock stars were her friends. She grew into a stunningly beautiful woman and became a famous porn star with access to the celebrities she idolized. After a night of partying, Nickie was humiliated by a rock musician who threw her out of a tour bus. She vowed her revenge and began seducing celebrities and killing them in their sleep. She cuts off their heads and places them in glass boxes that she hangs on the wall of her basement.

Game Notes: Use a Good Bartender SCM template with Entertainment-*dance 3*; Interaction-*charm 4, seduce 6*; and no Business or Street skills. She has the perk Good Looks

4. The Nerd

Dr. Douglas Eck was a puny child who was constantly picked on by bullies throughout high school and then college where he was often the butt of malicious pranks pulled on him by fraternity guys or jocks. Despite the hostile environment he became a brilliant neurosurgeon renowned in his field. Once a month Douglas hunts the bars and athletic venues and chooses a victim, usually the best-looking and most athletic



guy in the place. He then knocks out the guy with drugs and takes him home to a secret lab. For a week he subjects his victim to humiliating torture. He then gives him a slow-acting poison along with a dose of depressants that leaves the victim disoriented and drunk. Finally Douglas dresses the man up as a woman and leaves him in a bar district to die on the street in front of a crowd of laughing people.

Game Notes: Use an Amazing Doctor SCM template with no xenomedicine skill and Personality score of 9.

5. The Chef

Andre Calarri is a man who has lost his sanity but still manages to run a very popular restaurant that consistently gets the best reviews in the city. Andre is known for introducing a new meat dish every month that is considered brilliant by the food critics. The dish is always called by the first name of a person but no one has managed to get Andre to divulge the significance of the name. For good reasons. The genius chef abducts random people of very different backgrounds and physical looks, and kills them. He then uses the meat on their bodies to experiment with new dishes. When he finally creates a dish to his satisfaction he records the recipe in a special book with a picture and the first name of the person he used.

Game Notes: Use a Good Bartender SCM template with Melee weapons-*blade 2*; Business-*small 3*; Knowledge-*cooking 6*; Creativity-*cooking 4*; and no Street-*criminal* skills.

6. The Barber

Tony Calusa was a quiet skinny boy with a cruel muscular father who berated him for his puniness. Tony's father had a thick head of hair cut into a long flowing mullet that he took great pride in. He even joked that his strength came from his hair like the biblical Samson. One night after his

drunken father passed out in the driveway after beating him with a cord, Tony took his father's hair and tied it to a lightpost. He then tied a rope around this father's legs and hitched the rope to his father's car. Tony started up the car and hit the gas, scalping his father and killing him as he bounced across the asphalt at high speeds. Tony eventually became a hairstylist and tried to repress the homicidal inclinations that plagued him. He finally snapped when one of his spoiled clients had a fit in the store. He decided she must be punished and he followed her home. There he strangled her with a curling iron cord and hung her from a chandelier by her hair. Tony has since killed a number of other victims, all with thick beautiful hair that he uses to hang their bodies from light fixtures and balconies.

Game Notes: Use an Ordinary Bartender SCM template with *Creativity-hairstyling 4*.

7. The Chewer

When Brad Newberry was little, his strict puritan parents cruelly punished him for chewing gum. He became obsessed with the idea that people shouldn't chew bubblegum, even though he secretly indulged himself in its forbidden pleasures. Once he sees someone chewing bubblegum, he will try to talk to them. After winning their trust, he offers them one of his own "specials", a minty gum laced with cyanide.

Game Notes: Use the Marginal Laborer SCM template (Bagboy at grocery store).

8. The Doll

Brittany Vagle aspired to become a supermodel but she never quite made the big time. She passed through the beds of many a powerful person, but she never caught her big break. After a terrible car accident her face was horribly disfigured, and her dreams of becoming a model vanished and she was forced to live on



welfare. Brittany blames her ex-"coworkers" not only for her lack of success but for the accident as well. This anger has developed into a homicidal psychosis. She prefers to stalk beautiful models and take them by surprise when they are alone. She'll use pepper spray to stun them and use a delicate handkerchief doused with chloroform to knock them unconscious. Brittany takes pleasure in holding her victims for days at a time, slowly disfiguring them with one cut or burn at a time. Her greatest pleasure is when she finally uses a mirror to reveal her handiwork to the victim right before she kills them.

Game Notes: Use a Good Bartender SCM template with *Interaction-charm 4, seduce 4*; and no Business or Street skills. She has the Poor Looks flaw.

9. The Robot

Jeremy Kirson is a Star Trek fan to the bone. He even had plastic surgery to actually look like Data from Star Trek and wears exhaustive makeup constantly. Jeremy even tries to mimic Data's voice, but hasn't been totally successful. Jeremy doesn't mind being made fun of for looking like Data. On the contrary, he takes pride in it. However if anyone criticizes Star Trek in any way, he will mark them down- he has a photographic memory and will try to track them down to where they live. He will then taser and restrain the offender. He then takes them home where they are forced to watch every episode of the various Star Trek shows. He will then quiz them on the show until they answer a question wrong. He will then take his replica Klingon bladed weapon and kill them.

Game Notes: Use the Ordinary Spacehand SCM template with *Technical-repair 3* and *technical knowledge 3*.

10. The Teddy Bear

A beast of a man, Theodore Shepard stands 6'6" and weighs in at 300-350 pounds. He is rather hairy, giving the appearance of a grizzly bear. He is rude, rash and barbaric, a mountain man with no manners. However, he has one secret: he loves little stuffed toys. His basement is full of them. Theodore has decided to take his obsession one horrifying step forward. He has begun to abduct children and stuffs them for his collection.

Game Notes: Use the Good Laborer SCM template (Amusement park worker).

11. The ByteMaster

Thad "Phate" Simmons is a computer programmer who is so obsessed with MUDs that he has lost track of real life, and sees everyone as a computer character. He has begun to hunt down other computer users he meets in the MUDs and kills them before they take him "out of the game". Thad believes he is protected by a guardian AI that he calls Sean.

Game Notes: Use the Good Scientist SCM template with *Computer Science-hardware 3, hacking 3, and programming 5* instead of science specialty skills.


12. The Starmaker

Fred Wazkek is a photographer who gets to take pictures of all the beautiful people. Sometimes however he must possess them. He hunts them down and kills them. After all you don't want to lose a perfect beauty to old age. Fred skins his victims and carefully cuts their faces off to be kept as trophies.

Game Notes: Use the Good Reporter SCM template with *Creativity-photography 6*.

13. The Teacher

Fiona Turro idolized her older brother growing up and was always trying to get his attention. Unfortunately when she went through puberty at twelve he finally noticed her. Her brother forced her to have sex with him. Eventually the confused Fiona grew to crave this intimacy with her brother and she fell in love with him, although small part of her knew that this was a evil thing. This incestuous relationship continued for a year until her brother was killed in a car accident. Ever since she's been looking for his replacement. She now works as a high school teacher. When she finds a young man that reminds Fiona of her brother she seduces and eventually has sex with him. After she is finished with the young man she poisons him and drops off his body at the roadside where her brother died.

Game Notes: Use the Ordinary Scientist SCM template with *Life Sciences-bioogy 3, genetics 3, botany 2*. 

BRAIN EATER

by Dwayne Leonard • illustration by Dwayne Leonard

"Jillian was acting strange. She had never given me the time of day before and now she was practically dragging me into her room. She pulled me on the bed and kissed me. As I closed my eyes and began to thank whatever deity was responsible for this moment I felt sharp needles poking the back of my neck and head. I pushed Jillian away and tried to scream but I couldn't open my mouth. She was smiling. A big beautiful smile. Then everything went dark."

Description: The Brain Eater looks most like a deep-sea creature. It has a semi clear gelatinous body shaped much like a sack. From the body extend four long rope-like tentacles. Near the base of the body is a rock hard beak on an elastic tentacle that can be used to spear targets at close range.

Encounter: Typical encounters occur with a single adult, and a group of humans who have had eggs implanted in their brains. The implanted humans will act to subdue the target without seriously harming them and then the adult will move in using their bite as a means to implant their egg within the human skull.

If threatened the implanted humans will always act to defend the adult Brain Eater. This gives it a chance to escape or hide until the threat has passed.

A Brain Eater adult will sometimes be found alone. If so it will choose to attack targets who are alone. The Brain Eater will attack with its sting in an attempt to paralyze its victim. This gives the Brain Eater the greatest chance of implanting eggs in the brain of the target.

Habitat and Society: Typically rundown areas or hard to reach rural areas are the main living places of the Brain Eaters. Cold and high mountain regions also have little effect on the Brain Eaters allowing them to live in most places. By living in these places they can have a supply of hosts for their eggs without drawing attention to themselves.



For the most part Brain Eaters operate as packs. Usually only one or two adults will act as the controller(s) for the implanted humans. They will take their time and plan how best to use their victim's skills and abilities for the good of the clan.

Rarely groups of Brain Eaters will group together. This can be for one of several purposes. Often the groups will join for the good of all. Sometimes the groups will meet to divide or fight over territory that is rich in targets.

Notes: Two of the Brain Eaters Telepathy skills work in a slightly different manner than it is listed. Telepathy-*contact* will work between the Brain Eaters themselves at a cost of no psionic energy points, but costs them two points when dealing with any other non-psionic entities. Juveniles can only employ the Telepathy-*suggest* skill on the human that they inhabit. On any successful roll the target will be controlled for 1, 2, 3 hours and will have no memory of what they did while controlled. As the juvenile matures they gain a -1 bonus to all suggest rolls and the duration increases by one hour for every two months that they inhabit the victim (up to a -4 bonus). Adults cannot employ the telepathy suggest skill at all.

Brain Eater

Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series 1

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A1/P1-2/H1-2

Biome: Any

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 2-12 [2d6]

Organization: Pack

Niche: Parasite

Intelligence: Sentient

Juveniles have several advantages and disadvantages. Juveniles may employ any skill known by their host provided they are in control. They use the physical attributes of the host and use their own mental abilities. As they grow within the host the victims mind is consumed. If the juveniles reside in the victim for more than 6 months the targets mind will be destroyed (After a full year the adult brain eater will emerge).

If removed before six months there is a +1 penalty per month to any Medical Science-*surgery* rolls to remove the Brain Eater. Failure indicates the Brain Eater is still attached while critical failure indicates brain death for the host.

Adventure Seeds:

Preacher: The reverend looked over his flock while making his proclamations. Among them were young and old alike. Mostly the downtrodden, but more recently some of the uptown people had been converted. The good and the bad these were not just his flock they were also the children of the father.

The adult Brain Eater watched while going over the plan. After the church they would move forth by supplying volunteers to feed the homeless. In reality it would be the homeless shelters that would become the key to slowly consuming the citizens of the city.

Now onto what is going on. Is the

Brain Eater Game Data

STR 9 [4+2d4]

INT 9 [6+d6]

DEX 12 [8+d8]

WIL 13 [8+2d4]

CON 7 [2+2d4]

PER 7 [4+d6]

Durability: 7/7/3/3

Action Check: 13+/12/6/3

Move: Sprint 28, Run 20, Walk 7

Actions: 1

Reaction Score: Good/1

Last Resorts: 0

Psionic Energy Points: 13

Attacks:

Bite¹ 12/6/3 d0 LI/O Personal d4+1s/d4w/d4+1w

Sting [x4]^{1,3} 14/7/3 d0 LI/O Personal d4s/d6s/d4w

Mind Blast 12/6/3 d0 Special 10/20/40 d4+2s/d6+2s/d8+2s

Suggest² 16/8/4 Special

¹ May only be used by an adult who has exited the host

² May only be used by a juvenile on the host

³ The Sting delivers a paralyzing toxin that can render the victim completely immobilized. The victim suffers a +1 step penalty to their Resolve-Physical roll for each leg that strikes them. On a failure the victim is paralyzed for 1 minute and a critical failure indicates 10 minutes.

Defenses:

+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

+2 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Armor: d4+1 [LI], d4 [HI], d4-1 [En]

Skills:

DEX: Acrobatics [12]-*dodge* [14]; Stealth [12]-*sneak* [16], *shadow* [16]

WIL: Awareness [13]-*perception* [15]; Resolve [13]-*mental* [15]

PSIONIC: Telepathy [7]-*contact* [14], *mind blast* [12], *mind shield* [10], *suggest* [16]

reverend already a host for the brain eaters or does he willingly serve? Either could provide a unique hook for game play. If the reverend is a host what will happen when the adult emerges from his body. If the reverend is a willing servant the major question must be why and or how he came to serve an adult Brain Eater. How far have their plans gone and how far will they go to protect them?

The Playground: The children had already recruited others from the playground. Now it was little Tommy's turn.

Just like always they would stick to their plan. First they would wait until Tommy was the only normal kid on the playground and then they would take him to "the Master". When "the Master" was done Tommy would be one of them. Later they would go to Tommy's house and kill his parents.

This episode should probably begin with a report of children being kidnapped and their parents murdered. From there the PCs can get involved.

Other Ideas:

- Brain Eaters could be taking over a Boy Scout or Girl Scout Troop.
- An intern at the hospital could be using his or her job to allow the adult Brain Eater to infect others.
- Somewhere in the mountains an entire town is found empty for no apparent reason. All of the people just seem to have left over a period of 2 or 3 years completely emptying the town.
- A starship recreation cruiser is infiltrated by a Brain Eater who slowly begins to take over the whole crew and plans to create a colony on the next planet it lands on.

FINDAR

“FOREST FOLK”

by **Derek Holland and John Raner** •
illustration by **Daryl Blasi**

“Don’t move, Bru,” Tomtom hissed. “They are a stone’s throw away from us.” They had been running for an hour now and they were the only two left of the group. Jenla had been the first to fall victim to the stinking shrubs. Kale and Brebob were picked off shortly after. Now he and Bru were barely staying ahead of the plant horde as they fled through the thick forest.

“We need to find high ground and start a fire. We’ll burn those leafy bastiches!” Tomtom saw that Bru barely was holding on to his sanity. He was shaking uncontrollably and spittle ran from his mouth. Tomtom couldn’t blame him though. Tomtom would never be able to erase the memory of the plant beast stabbing its roots into Jenla’s belly as she was held down by four of the creatures.

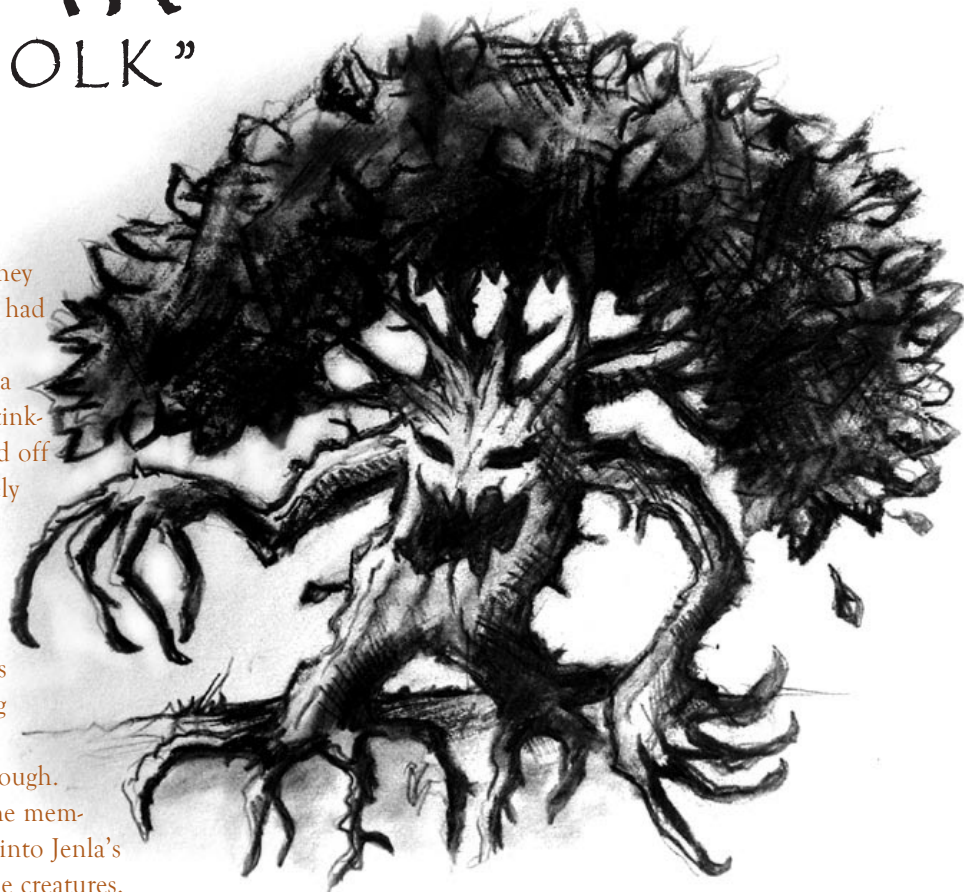
Tomtom noted with small relief that a small rocky hill was just under 100 meters away from their current position. He felt better about taking on the shrubs with a little strategic advantage. After waiting for the searching shrubs to move away he started jogging to the hill, dragging Bru along by his arm. “We’ll pick up some wood on the way. Keep your eyes open for some good pieces.”

Bru stopped suddenly, causing Tomtom to stumble and nearly fall. “What the hell, Bru!” Tomtom glared at his companion. “We can’t stop now!” Tomtom reached out to grab Bru again, but he moved out of reach.

“The forest is hungry, Tomtom,” the big mutant sobbed.

“Damn it, you big idiot! Let’s go!” Tomtom grabbed his arm and pulled, but Bru didn’t budge. “You are going to die standing there like a moron.”

“Not if I feed the forest,” Bru surprised Tomtom and before he could protest the heavily muscled mutant picked him up like a small child and lifted him high in the air.



Tomtom gasped as he saw the shrubs a few meters ahead of them were moving slowly forward. He screamed as Bru threw him into the middle of the leafy monsters

Description: Findar are a race of small shrubs. When immobile, they cannot be told from any other shrub in the area as each race looks different. They lose their leaves in the late fall and grow deciduous thorns that drop in early spring.

Encounter: Most peoples who live near a findar forest welcome them with open arms, for they collect and grow rare herbs and flowers with they trade for fertilizer (manure and such). Only when winter comes, do the findar lose their popularity. Since they can not use light to produce food, they begin to hunt animals and any animal that comes near them when they are hungry is in danger. When hunting, they swarm in large number to take down large animals, so they can be especially dangerous.

Findar Ecological Data

Biome: Temperate and subtropical forests

Encounter Chance: Possible in Findar forests

Group Size: 2-6 in spring, summer, and fall, 5-50 in winter

Organization: Commune

Niche: Photosynthetic/Carnivore

Intelligence: Sentient

Habitat: Findar are found in many temperate and subtropical forests. People can tell they are in a findar forest by the unusual shaped shrubs near the edges. These are markers that the findar grow to denote their territory.

Society: The Forest Folk live in large groups, similar to communes. They raise medicinal plants and rare flowers for trade and keep an eye on the health of the forest. They do allow things like logging (not clear cutting), but only under supervision. Their hunger during the winter is a time of sadness for them, as they do not like killing their allies. They always keep some article of clothing from kills of intelligent beings to give to the family along with free plants (not much of a consolation, but those living near the findar have grown to live with it). Human communities that live near the Findar might still have taboos about traveling into the forest in the winter. Perhaps leaving large offerings of meat to the "tree gods" when attempting to do so. Clever humans who live next to the Findar would take the amount of wood needed by for firewood into account when planning for the winter and make sure they had gathered enough wood the summer before. However, if they did have to go into the forest to gather wood this would be another occasion when offerings to the "tree gods" would come in handy.

Findar Game Data

STR 6 (4+d4)

INT 7 (4+d6)

DEX 6 (3+d4)

WIL 11 (8+d4)

CON 5 (2+d4)

PER 5(2+d4)

Durability: 7/7/3/3

Action Check: 8+/7/3/1

Move: Walk 4, Swim 2

Actions: 2

Reaction Score: Ordinary/2

Last Resorts: 0

Attacks:

Thorns 12/6/3 d0 LI/O Personal d4w/d4+2w/d4m

Rock 10/5/2 d0 LI/O Personal d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s

Defenses:

-1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

-1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

-1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

+1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Armor: d4+1 (LI), d4 (HI), d4-1 (En)

Mutations:

Improved Durability; Dermal Reinforcement; Improved Natural Attack; Improved Senses

Defects:

Poor Manipulation (Moderate)

Skills:

STR: Athletics (6)-*throw*(10); Unarmed Attack (6)-*brawl*(12)

CON: Stamina (5)-*endurance*(10); Survival (5)

DEX: Stealth (6)-*hide*(14), *shadow* (12)

INT: Agriculture¹ (7); Knowledge (7); Nature¹ (7)-*ecology* (13), *herbalism* (10)

WIL: Awareness (11)-*intuition* (14), *perception* (16); Creativity (11)-*bonzai* (15)

PER: Interaction (5)-*interview* (9)

¹These skills are found in Red Dragon's fantasy rules. They can be downloaded at www.alternity.net

Adventure Seeds:

The Big Welcome: The heroes are traveling across the wildlands and come upon a friendly village that seems overjoyed at their arrival. They are given food and shelter in return for a small task. The winter is upon them and the village is in need of some help gathering some livestock that have escaped into the forest.

As the heroes begin their search they start to notice a complete absence of any living thing except the trees and plants. They also start to get the feeling that they are being watched and the more observant heroes hear strange cracking noises. As they come upon a clearing the heroes notice that they are surrounded by bushes that are swaying in the windless air and the cracking noises

have given way to low, unnerving growls. The heroes have unwittingly become the meat offering of the villagers to the Forest People.

The Wild Chase: While hunting for food the heroes come upon the strange sight of a Findar feeding on a deer. Momentarily sated the Findar takes pity on the heroes and warns them that more of his kind is coming and that to survive they must make it across the river to some rocky hills where it is difficult for the Findar to follow. Just as the findar finishes his warning, the chase begins as a number of its findar kin break out of the shadows of the trees wild with hunger. Now it is up to the heroes to outrace the findar through the thick forest to sanctuary.



Aboard *The Lighthouse*, travelling from Lucullus System, Verge

by Montgomery Cook IX • illustration by mig nova

CIVILIZATION, for all the problems that it breeds, cannot compare to brutal lawlessness. My stay on Penates was incomparably awful. I have never been so afraid for my skin in my life. Upon hopping the first available transport to the visiting *Lighthouse*, I breathed a deep sigh of relief, glad to leave that pit behind me. The TDK Shuttle that was there at the spaceport was fairly full, but upon affecting an air of confidence, and flashing my credentials (which somehow I retained during my stay) managed to obtain for me VIP status! Now that's more like it! A man of my bearing and stature deserves to be treated royally when he comes a-calling, especially considering the prestige and fame that comes with being written up in *Cook's Guide to Open Space*. Note to those thugs on Penates: steal yourselves a clue.

I gladly and gratefully submitted to the security check at the dock by the Concord station personnel, allowing them to log my name, identification, and bioscan data. My VIP status didn't allow me to bypass this formality, but did land me in the VIP Welcome Center, which featured my own lounge, couch, chairs, and table. Another perk was the fully stocked bar (and a superior quality that I haven't seen since Bluefall, I may add!), and being personally attended to by a station attendant, a strikingly handsome youth who gave his name as Matthew something-or-other. Since I had little beyond my I.D. and the clothes on my back from my last stop, customs and registration was a relatively painless procedure. Finding a good vintage *Champs Elise Bordeaux*, I settled in, asking for a dataslate and proceeded to ask Matthew something-or-other a few questions about this remarkable starfalling station.

Turns out, that the *Lighthouse* is a pet project of Concord to rehab this old Orlamist fortress ship from the GW2 era. According to what's-his-name, the *Lighthouse* was actually destroyed in a conflict with an opposing Thuldan fleet or flotilla or whatever in 2461, and was recommissioned March 23, 2499 after a complete rehab & overhaul. This remarkable starfalling city-station has a remarkably accurate 50 light-year starfall range, and often will tow system ships to other systems for a nominal fee. I understand that a number of sentients make this station



their home, and I, for one, can see why. After making some arrangements to meet with Station Administrator Kyle Wakefield, I had booked a room (\$280 Concord/ night) at His Emperor's Palace, on Deck 198. This high-class establishment was a welcome sight from that hole-in-the-wall, the Silver Comet, easily a five-star establishment. Oh, the towels!

Sadly, my meeting with Administrator Wakefield had to be postponed due to a rising development within the Lucullus system prior to the *Lighthouse's* departure. It appeared that some new External species had made its presence known in an abrupt a violent manner within the system, prompting some high-level negotiations that delayed our meeting. Having established some sort of agreement, I later met with Wakefield, and a few of the other dignitaries of the station, including visiting Galactic Consulate Minister YC937 59NMP (Judith Holman) from VoidCorp, and Philosopher Karel Denisenko from the Borealis Republic. The visit was largely a "meet-and-greet" type of affair, with pleasantries and formalities exchanged and little else, save for some drinking of the finest spirits from the Stellar Ring. Contrary to the social page blotter, I have no recollection of any sort of impropriety involving unseemly commentary I may or may not have made to Ms. Holman, thank you very much.

Should you, fair reader, opt to stay aboard the *Lighthouse* for any period, make it an extended one, for the sights aboard are bar none. I personally recommend paying a visit to Sendir Park,

on Deck 195, in honor of the founder of the Orlamu Theocracy, and first human to make starfall. This park includes a circular lake, cultured and developed landscaping, and marble statues of various dignitaries and persons of import. The most impressive by far was the statue of Warthen Hale, the architect of the Treaty of Concord, which marked the end of the GW2 conflict. If one is ambitious enough, one can even score a free lunch of tagui fruit from the trees within the park. As I learned the hard way, swimming in the Lake of Air is strictly forbidden, landing me a night in the station brig, for this hydroponic lake serves to maintain the delicate, artificial ecosystem of the station. Resident children of the sentients aboard the station are sent to the Youth Education Center (colloquially, and uncharitably referred to as "YEC" by the students). The Supermarket's second floor is a connoisseur's dream come-true, featuring delicacies from every sector of known space.

Features of Deck 196 worthy of mention are the studios of TVN, the Trans-Verge Network (tours are available by appointment), Watson Theaters (excellent holo-entertainment), and the Colosseum. The Colosseum, though designed similarly to the Ancient Roman ruin of the same name, functions as a concert hall, featuring not one, but two symphonies; one amateur, one professional. Though the amateur symphony is nothing to sneeze at, the performance of the professional one was technically flawless, performing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with such tightness I almost mistook it for a computer recording.

Though I would never grow tired of the fare at His Emperor's Delight on Deck 198, where I was lodging, a few other locales are worthy of mention in this space. Alexandra's Rest, a 3rd century BC Egyptian-theme bar/ resting place is novel and unique among its peers, playing on the famed *Lighthouse*, the Ancient Wonder of Earth, as not only a nautical achievement, but a place of rest for weary travelers, to boot. Most clever. Good beer, also. The other establishment worthy of mention is The Corner, the watering hole of choice for station residents. Though the fare and drink were not billed as particularly exotic, or unique, this establishment is worth visiting to meet and socialize with those who call the *Lighthouse* home.

You know, a funny thing happened to me, while I was polishing off my fifth cup of t'sa coffee at The Corner. I'm not altogether sure *what* happened, but I, in putting this down, can only hope to recreate those events and in so doing validate the experience, as I have no other way of knowing for sure that it *did* happen. As I finished the pungent beverage, a man in a dark jacket and wide-brimmed hat beckoned me over to join him. As I really had no good reason to decline the company, I joined him without hesitation. From this point, my recollection begins to get fuzzy, as he kept referring to me as "Avatar", and insisted that he had something he wanted to show me. Not being in possession

of my faculties or better judgement, I agreed, and then, the next thing I remember, I found myself in the company of this man, and apparently in one of the lower decks of the *Lighthouse*, somewhere in the Engineering section. He kept haranguing about some "threat from beyond this sector", and whatnot, and being completely terrified, I merely agreed with and made whatever promises would seem to please him. He did not brandish a weapon or directly threaten any personal bodily harm to me, but the manner in which he spoke and the things he spoke of were enough. How did we get down there, anyway?

He showed me this... thing. It looked like some sort cluster of tapeworms, but it was quite large. He said that this thing, (I think he called it a telnog) was capable of infecting most sentients, controlling their minds. It was within a glass canister, filled with fluid, and it was obviously still alive, evidenced by its thrashing movement. The man, who never identified himself, went on to claim that the infiltration of a number of systems, including the one I just left, Lucullus, was well underway. That the Exeat (whatever *that* is) was coming, and that aliens like this were integral to the intelligence gathered by the masters of the coming invasion. He then opened the canister, and the thing raised an appendage, spraying me with some sort of mist. The next thing I remember, I awoke in my hotel room, back in His Emperor's Palace on Deck 198, with the mother of all hangovers.

After making a few guarded inquiries to my movements to MINA (the Multiple Intelligence Neural Array of the *Lighthouse*), all I can determine was that somehow I *was* down on Deck 3, unauthorized. No security detail was dispatched to that location "for reasons unknown", and that there was no holographic record of my departure from The Corner. Apparently there was yet another power failure on that Deck at the time of my being there, and that a crew of engineers found me there, sopping wet & passed out. Apparently in the interim, I was cleaned up and returned to my quarters.

Though I practice no faith personally, the time for starfall out of the Lucullus system was fast approaching. Having heard of the wondrous sights to be seen during the services in the Orlamist Temple on Deck 200 (the only area on that deck open to all guests without invitation, I may add). I witnessed the glory of the *Lighthouse*, as it entered drivespace in a flash of radiant blue, apparently a neutral blessing of the Divine Unconsciousness. In five days' time, the *Lighthouse* will starrise in the Corrivale system, and I shall continue my journey to the jungle planet of Grith.

Yours faithfully,

Montgomery V. Cook IX

13 Objects of Horror

by Odysseas Dallas

AH, a horror-themed issue. I must admit I am not fanatically fond of horror, but in the right doses it can spice up a campaign; I've never seen or played a lot of it, however, so it was somewhat hard to do a weapons, armor & equipment article based on horror. Making my mind was hard enough to begin with, let alone writing it. But here it is, and I hope you like it (and that you will forgive me if you don't). Thirteen different objects that could crop up in any horror campaign, of various natures, be they magical, technological, alien or psionic in nature, a variety for you to choose. Each one with its own list of statistics (when applicable), its powers, effects and drawbacks, even with a little flavor text to add some, well, flavor.

Crystal Helm

A stunning array of different colored rays bounced off the helmet as the light of the sun fell on it and the dusty floor it was positioned on, despite its bizarre angle. The colours, however, were far redder than normal, probably due to the blood smeared on the inside of the helm. The blood, in turn probably belonged to the barely alive figure breathing shallowly in the dark room...

Nature: Psionic

Powers: -1 bonus to all psionic broad and specialty skills. Pool of 15 Psionic points that can be used in addition to the user. Acts as a helm with +1/+1/+1 protection, and requires no skill to wear.

Drawbacks: When the psionic pool is emptied, the only way to refill it is through the wearer's own pool, and that cannot be done willingly.

Whenever there is no psionic points left, then the helmet clamps into place and hundreds of tiny crystalline needles burrow into the wearer's skull and brain, causing 2 points of wound damage. As the Helm siphons off the character's energy, it glows brightly, an aura of slowly alternating colors of the spectrum. First, it drains energy points; for each phase it is operating, it removes one psionic energy point from the wielder. When there are none left, it removes one rank per round, each time from the highest-ranked specialty skill of the psionist (determine randomly if more than one). When all specialty skills are drained, it takes four rounds to remove broad skills. It automatically stops when all psionic ability has been drained, and its own pool is replenished. The only way to stop this process is to break the crystal helm; it has 4/4/2 durability and light armour; note, however, that the damage caused is also suffered by the victim as well, minus only one point (subtracting the helm's armor rating). Of course, when the helmet is broken it cannot be used again.

Description: This elegant crystalline helm resembles a Corinthian helm, with a Y shaped opening in the front. It is extremely light, easy to wear, and does not tire the user at all; it is crystal-clear

and acts like a prism. It offers quite a bonus, but the pay off is much higher...

Daemon Armor

A sinister figure clad in dark red armor stood in front of him, like a nightmare. His pistol spat fire in an attempt to save his life... but the bullets bounced off the figure like rain falling on a raincoat... All he managed to see before his vision got as dark as the armor was the figure closing in the distance, and long claws speeding towards his chest...

Nature: Magical

Powers: The Daemon Armor has an assortment of Powers.

Armor: Armor rating of d8+1/d8+1/d8+1.

Claws: Claws which do d4w/d6w/d6+2w damage.

Enhancement: +1 STR, +2 CON.

Hellfire: May cast Diabolism-hellfire three times a day at rank 1.

Warding: May cast Diabolism-black warding once per day at rank 1.

Drawbacks: Unfortunately, this armor belonged to a powerful demon prince, which perished within his own armor, and thus imbued it with his own evil and sinister power; which also meant his essence has been suffused by the armor. In the start of any combat scene, the Daemon armor attempts to possess the user with a 12/6/2 skill score; if it succeeds, then the Daemon takes over. *See Yl-gar Sidebar.*

Yl-gar, Demon of the Daemon Armor

STR Wearer's +1 INT 12
 DEX Wearer's WIL 12
 CON Wearer's +2 PER 12

Durability: depends on wearer Action Check: depends on wearer
 Move: depends on wearer # Actions: depends on wearer
 Reaction Score: depends on wearer Last Resorts: 2
 FX Energy Points: 15

Attacks:

Weapons used by wearer

Claws	STR+4	d0	LI/O	Personal	d4w/d6w/d6+2w
Hellfire	12/6/3	d0	LI/O	Personal	d4+1s/d4w/d4+1w

Defenses:

resistance modifiers vs. melee and ranged attacks depend on wearer
 +1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 +1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: d8+1 (LI), d8+1 (HI), d8+1 (En)

Skills

STR: Athletics [STR]-*jump* [STR+3], *throw* [STR+2]; Melee [STR]-*blade* [STR+6], *bludgeon* [STR+4]; Unarmed [STR]-*brawl* [STR+4],

CON: Stamina [CON]-*endurance* [CON+3], *resist pain* [CON+2];

INT: Knowledge [12]-*deduce* [13], *language* [Old English] [14], *language* [Old French] [14], *language* [Old German] [15]; Knowledge [12]

WIL: Awareness [12]-*intuition* [14], *perception* [15]; Resolve [12]-*mental* [15], *physical* [15]

PER: Culture [12]-*etiquette*[human] [15]; Interaction [12]-*bargain*[15], *intimidate* [15]; Leadership [12]-*command* [13]

FX Powers: Diabolism*-*binding* [14], *black warding* [15], *hellfire* [18], *rend the weave* [17], *spiritwrack* [15], *summoning* [least and lesser demons] [17] *tongue of the damned* [15]

*Demon Princes may summon least and lesser demons without sacrifice, since they call one of their underlings who must answer. They do not need sacrifices to cast other Diabolism spells, nor do they suffer side effects if they roll a Critical Failure. Yl-gar was a mighty demon prince who rose into power in the late fourteenth to fifteenth century, leading a secret group of diabolist mercenaries. Under the mundane name of the condottiero Sylvio Divoli, he became a fearsome figure in his enclosing suit of plate armor, which managed to elude the Witch Hunt; or, rather, get rid of the witch hunters sent against him. However, he was caught by surprised and outnumbered during a ceremony; his followers were cut down, and he was slain by a large group of inquisitors, which also suffered heavy casualties. Finally, a blessed spear found its way through an opening in his armor and destroyed most of his power... but not all. Some of his power and evil suffused his armor, which was collected by the inquisitors and kept under lock and key. The wearer of the armor may become more powerful, but in turn the demon's remnants inside the armor, could bring him back... even if he is but a shadow of his former self.

Dream Jewel

The gem flared violently, shrouding her with an eerie, faint corona of light. The essence of the gem started flowing outside like an ethereal gas, the light fog slowly coalescing into the vague form of an old man with sharp features. "You have done well, my child. I was denied death; I shall make sure no other suffers from that fate". With those words, leaving her astounded, the mist disappeared into nothingness...

Nature: Psionic

Effects: The dream jewel captures the soul of a dying person, as it is pressed into their forehead. It preserves it in an endless state of dreaming. Only a psion may draw out the soul essence inside, by expending a minimum three psionic energy points and making a Resolve-*mental* skill check, with a cumulative -1 bonus per three additional psionic energy points spent. If it is indeed drawn out, the soul essence appears as a mist at first which coalesces into shape as it pours from the crystal; after assuming a form, it will quickly become ethereal, thus invisible to those not in the ethereal phase as well. It may return to the dream jewel at will, as long as it is "touching" it (or, rather, its ethereal reflection), but may not leave it at will.

Description: Each soul crystal is different, unique to the person that it belongs to, due to the fact that actually they do change, albeit slowly, to resemble the personality of the soul they host. The most likely candidates in possession of Dream Jewels would be the Fraal and/or the Thaal, in the Star*Drive Universe, or the Greys in Dark*Matter.

ExoVirus

A terrible monstrosity stood before him, a creature encased in horrifying chitinous armor. His few troopers fired at the damn thing, but it shrugged off the bullets with little trouble, and returned fire... two of his men

went down as dagger-like spines embedded themselves in their chests. The rest turned tail and ran as fast as they could, away from this deadly nightmare...

Nature: Technological

Effects: The effects of the Exovirus are divided into stages.

Infection: The character is infected with a disease of Good Strength and incubation. If he manages to fail in resisting it, then it takes effect.

First Stage (Infection-7 th day):

In this stage, hormonal glands that deal with muscle growth produce much greater amounts of the necessary natural chemicals, enhancing muscle. By the end of two weeks after the infection, add +1 STR and +1 CON.

Second Stage (8 th day-14 th day):

The armor begins to grow on the character, and his natural weapons start to grow as well. By the end of the first week after the end of the First stage, he has soft armor [d4/d4/d4] and claws, which inflict d4w/d4+1w/d6+1w damage. Forearm spine launchers begin to develop.

Third stage (15 th day-28 th day):

The armor fully develops by the end of the third week (22 nd day) to its normal value [d6+1/d6+1/d6], provides life support equal to attack armor, and the two spine launchers deal d4w/d4+1w/d4+2w damage with +1 accuracy and a 20m range. By the end of the third stage, the spine launchers mature fully and cause d4w/d4+2w/d6+2w damage, have no accuracy penalty, and a 30m range. In either stage of development, spine launchers may be fired together at a base +1/+2 penalty.

Fourth stage (29 th day-30 th day):

This rather short period is also the most important one in mental terms. The virus becomes fast-acting in mucking around the brain. At the end of the 29 th day, stats are

decreased: -1 INT, -1 WIL, -1 PER. By the end of the 30 th day, WIL and PER are further decreased by -1. The biowarrior is ready.

Description: A product of a secret government project, this powerful retrovirus is rumored to be an adaptation of either an alien microorganism or alien retrovirus. Then again, the existence of this particular retrovirus is nothing but a rumor, out of the specialized governmental facilities, that is. The retrovirus was designed with a totally independent warrior in mind who didn't require any weapons other than his own body. The breed of biowarriors that emerged were excellent in close quarters, but they were lacking when it came to range; which is why they are trained in handling various small arms as well...

Ghoul's Teeth Necklace

Agent Martinez was cornered by this bizarre creature that was once his fellow agent... the row of yellowed teeth strung in a cheap leather cord made a stark contrast compared to the sleek dark suit the agent wore. Dirty claws jabbed and slashed at the air in front of the creature, trying to reach Martinez as he tried evading the beast. A lucky shot hit his chest and went clean through his lung...the ghoul would eat well tonight.

Nature: Magical

Powers: After the wearer has tasted human flesh, he becomes a ghoul; he receives a +1 bonus to STR, +2 to CON, -1 to INT and WIL and -2 to PER. He also grows claws that deal d4w/d4+1w/d6+1w, and any opponents who suffer even one point of primary damage from the ghoul's claws become exposed to a disease of Ordinary strength and incubation.

Drawbacks: When initially worn, the wielder feels a sudden urge to consume human flesh, and will immediately seek a likely target (lone and preferably weak) unless he succeeds in a *mental resolve* skill check at 3 steps of penalty minus his Will resistance modifier. If he manages to kill and eat, then

he transforms into a real ghoul, with the above Powers, and is also from now on an SCM. To return the ghoul (or would-be ghoul) into its normal self requires a *Monotheism-exorcism* complex skill check at +2, of Marginal Complexity if the wearer hasn't already eaten human flesh and turned into a ghoul, or of Good Complexity if he is an actual ghoul. The exorcism destroys the necklace's power.

Description: Sadly, this malevolent item can be quite common- all it requires is a correctly prepared row of teeth from a Ghoul ("correct" preparation is up to the GM).

Hercules' Tunic

"Good morning, my love! What did you want to tell me? What is it that you are holding there...? Ah! Magnificent piece of clothing, my dear. Marvelously simplistic. You insist on me wearing it? If you would like it, I will of course put it on for you..."; Last words of an anonymous rich merchant sailor.

Nature: Magical/Mythological

Effect: When worn and the light of the sun falls on it or the heat of a fire is felt, the wearer is racked by great pains and receives a +3 penalty to all actions. The same penalty also applies to his *Resolve-mental resolve* skill check; if he fails, he tries to remove the tunic as fast as possible, and in the process tears parts of his own flesh, causing d4w to himself per round (he may roll each round to stop himself). When the effect takes place, it cannot be removed; the best solution is a quick and merciful death. The tunic is destroyed in the process. Note that if the criteria for the pains to be inflicted is met (light of sun, warmth of fire) without anyone wearing it, then the tunic burns away harmlessly.

Description: Not really Hercules' Tunic per se, but the process is the same: a piece of clothing meant to be worn and touching bare flesh is soaked with centaur blood, which causes the pain when the criteria are met.

Lison's Egg

The strange artifact was placed in the center of the room, its ovoid, nearly egg-shaped form casting a dark shadow in the white, halogen-illuminated walls. The scientists milled around it like bees, all clad in bulky protective garments. It was all precaution, of course: no one knew exactly what the hell could this thing from Lison's tunnels do.

Nature: Alien Artifact

Powers: The Lison Egg is an Amazing creator of virtual matter, able to create simple items with no mechanical or electrical components, as long as they weigh up to one ton; and it can maintain them for up to 6 hours per day.

Drawbacks: The great power bestowed by this amazing device is safeguarded by an extremely deadly security measure. Each time it is touched (whether used or not), there is a one in twenty chance that the artifact backfires, and instead has malfunctioned and triggers the security measure. Which is none other than a powerful disintegration field, which causes d6m with Good firepower to anything and anyone within fifty meters of the device (excluding the device itself), damage which ignores armor and defensive devices.

Description: An artifact discovered in the ancient tunnels of Lison, it was immediately transferred to the Concord and having scientists study it. Up to now, no one has realized what exactly it was designed to do... but after a gruesome incident, they did realize it could be deadly. It's a risk one has to take, but its capabilities are enormous... if discovered, that is.

Lucifer's Blade

I have been alive since the world was created... I have fought your petty God in every occasion, corrupting his weak humans he so much loved, spreading lies and bringing havoc... I have been torturing those that have sinned for

my own twisted pleasure... I have brought down whole civilizations to their knees... And you, a mere mortal, are going to stop me?

Nature: Magical

Availability: n/a
 Cost: priceless
 Mass: 3.5 kg
 Length: 200 cm
 Payload: conventional blade
 Accuracy: +3 (see description)
 Actions: 2
 Type/Firepower: LI/O(G)
 Damage: d6+3w/d8+3w/d4+2m
 Range: Personal
 Hide: –
 Clip/charge Size: 15 (FX pool)
 Clip/charge cost: *special* (see below)
 Skill: Melee Weapons-*blade*

Powers: Each power that can be activated costs a number of FX points, and the only way to replenish them is to kill people and steal their souls, as described below.

Burst in Flames: The weapon's blade can burst in flames, as per the *Pyromancy-flame gauntlet* specialty skill, at rank 4.

Diabolism: The weapon can be used to cast any of the Diabolism spells at a rank equal to the number of Possession Points (see below). This is done by the weapon, and not through the weapon.

Soul Stealer: Each time a sentient is killed by this weapon, the weapon absorbs its soul, and replenishes its FX pool by one, to a maximum of 15. See "Possession" below though for more information about this ability.

Drawbacks: Of course, such an evil and powerful weapon couldn't lack drawbacks.

Accuracy & Firepower: The base accuracy starts at +3. If the wearer is taller than 2 meters, reduce it by 1 step. If the wearer has a STR of 13 or higher, reduce it by 1 step. If the wearer is near 3 meters tall (a huge demon), reduce it by 1 step. When the penalty is reduced to 0,

then the firepower upgrades to Good.

Partial Transformation: When the wielder has accumulated half his Will rating in "Possession Points", he starts resembling the demon he will become if he continues to steal more souls. He receives +1 to STR, grows an additional 50% in height and weight, and suffers a +2 penalty to encounter skills, when applicable, similar to the Minor Physical Change drawback mutation (he grows small vestigial horns, antennae, cloven feet, scaly skin etc).

Stealing Souls: All power comes at a price, and even more so as far as the power of this malicious weapon is concerned. Each time a soul is absorbed into the weapon, the wielder must make a *Resolve-mental resolve* skill check, with his Will resistance modifier as a bonus. On any success, he resists the impulses; on a Failure, he adds one "Possession Point", and on a Critical Failure, two "Possession Points". The higher the amount of points, the closer the wielder is to being transformed to an avatar of the Devil himself. For each "Possession Point" the wielder already has accumulated, however, a cumulative +1 penalty is applied to the *mental resolve* skill check. There is no way to remove "Possession Points", and the wielder must roll a *mental resolve* at a penalty equal to the "Possession Points" he has already accumulated in order to remove it from his person.

Transformation: When the "Possession Points" the wielder has accumulated are equal to or exceed his Will, then he transforms to a fledgling Greater Demon. His stats are raised to the minimum level of the Greater Demon if lower, as presented in page 77 of *Beyond Science*, with half the skill ranks, rounding down. He is now an SCM.

Urge to kill: The wielder has an urge to kill to feed the weapon's hunger. Any time he is confronted by a hos-

tile or combative person, he must roll at a *mental resolve* at +1 or +3 respectively, to quell the urge to attack him and kill him. If the check fails, then he must immediately attack him, and will not stop until the victim is killed.

Description: This devilish weapon is a huge sword, with a 1,7m blade and a 30cm grip, with a heavy *flamberge* (wavy) blade. This beast of a weapon is deadly in itself, let alone when its powers are taken into account. It is made of an unidentifiable black metal which seems to absorb light of all kinds, like a void, and constantly drips with blood; the grip is wrapped with layers upon layers of human skin. It is a devilish weapon, which can belong to any Demon Prince, and can be used for recruiting more Greater Demons in the cause, or, with a small twist, restore a fallen demon to its former power having a human body transform into demon form.

Ripper

The silence of the night broke as a young woman screamed. Shopping bags fell on the sidewalk with a clatter, a variety of goods spilling out of them. She tried to run, but the stranger was faster; the last thought that passed through her soon to cease functioning-mind before she was gutted by her assailant, was one: 'This can't be real'.

Nature: Magical

Effect: Normal Dagger stats, -1 accuracy bonus when under its possession. Whenever the wielder sees a potential victim walking alone at night, he must roll Mental Resolve successfully at a +1 penalty, or +3 if the victim is a young woman. If the check fails, then the wielder will do everything he can to kill the victim using this weapon, and can only be stopped by being rendered unconscious (or, of course, dying).

Description: This evil weapon is similar to any large knife, though it

seems to find its target much better when victims are concerned. It cannot be identified as the evil weapon it is compared to other knives; it seems perfectly normal, except that those with Moral Attitudes like Ethical or Gallant or Virtuous are vaguely repulsed by its image, while Corrupted or other negatively charged Moral Attitudes are attracted to it.

The Wife's Curse (aka Choker)

The rays of the afternoon sun bounced leisurely off the marble floor, as the young woman basked in the sun lazily. Her beautiful features were accented by a heavy, yet elegant necklace she wore, a shining beacon lodged in her chest. 'What a gift by the silly woman', she thought, 'if she only knew I slept with her husband!'. Her train of thought was interrupted by her brother. 'I need to leave, dear sister. Our father is waiting at the harbor; we will return late. Goodnight', he said in a mildly excited tone as she waved him off with an elegant movement of her hand. She closed her eyes and enjoyed the sun's warmth as he left... she was alone in the house. At this very thought, she felt someone's invisible fingers attempting to strangle her, and she tried to scream...

Nature: Magical

Powers: When worn and in the presence of others, the wearer's Personality is increased by two points, and she gains a -1 bonus to charm and seduce skill checks.

Drawbacks: The curse strikes when the wearer stays alone for more than five minutes, and if and only if the wearer himself is sure there is no other person nearby that will be visiting her soon. As soon as these criteria are met, the necklace tightens on the wearer's neck, and she must check for Suffocation as per the normal rules. If this process

begins, it cannot be ended, unless all twenty-five of the gems are broken; only then is the Choker rendered useless. When the victim dies, the necklace returns to normal and may be removed without difficulty. Please note that only women are allowed to wear it- if a man tries to put it on, then he must roll *Resolve-mental resolve* at a +3 penalty. If he fails, he must remove it immediately. If he succeeds, he can keep it on until someone reminds him of its presence (comments on it etc), where he must repeat the process again. A woman will keep it on as much as possible, and must roll *Resolve-mental resolve* with a +1 to +3 penalty depending on the reason she has to remove it (convinced it is dangerous to simply removing it to sleep).

Description: An item from the magnificent Elizabethan period, this fine necklace consists of nine fire opals, seven pearls, five sapphires, three rubies and a single black pearl, all in a magnificent setting of gold that is a wonder to behold. It secretly bestows the power of charisma to its wearer, which is strictly female. It is, however, an object cursed by a jealous wife's black soul, who gave it to her husband's mistress to kill her in the most horrible way.

Venom Dagger

Fiona inspected the weapon in her hands, toying with it while marveling at its construction. Not very long, light and easily concealable- an assassin's knife. The flat of the blade was jagged, with miniature vents for the venom to seep through after entering the wound. She had all the time to admire it; her prey wouldn't be as lucky, though.

Nature: Technological (PL 5)

Availability: Controlled

Cost: \$700

Mass: 0.5 kg

Length: 30 cm

Payload: conventional blade

Accuracy: 0
 Actions: 4
 Type/Firepower: LI/O
 Damage: d4w/d4+1w/d4+2w
 Range: Personal
 Hide: +3
 Clip/charge Size: 3 (poison)
 Clip/charge cost: \$15 plus poison cost
 Skill: Melee Weapons-*blade*

Description: A dark assassin's weapon, the venom dagger is a sinister design. It usually comes in three different models: a sleek, blackened metal knife like a bowie, a medieval-style dagger with a crossguard, and a wavy kris blade. Regardless of design, the blade is about 20cm, with a 10cm hollow hilt, and the whole weapon is rather light and easily concealable. The flat of the blade (both sides) is jagged, with miniature vents and holes through which poison is pumped in the target when the dagger hits- that happens when the small switch/button in the guard is pressed. Due to the reflexes necessary, the wielder must have at least rank 2 in the respective skill or suffer a +1 penalty if he wants to poison the target as well (instead of just stabbing him). The button/switch can be pressed anytime, but the poison doesn't stick to the blade. The hollow hilt contains a canister with three doses of poison, and compressed gas, which is used to pump it (if there is no poison but just compressed gas, it causes +1 wound). The cost and effects depend on the poison. The canister can be easily removed by unscrewing the pommel, but it requires one action to unscrew it and remove the canister, and another action to replace it and screw it back, for a total of two actions for reloading it.

Vial of ZombieGen

The disgusting horde of the humanoids trudged onwards hunting the sole figure which had put head over heels and ran for its life. The town had been turned into a ghost

town, the fugitive realized, as more and more zombies appeared from nearby alleyways in this devoid of life area. He could survive... he could do it... he was sure he would... False hopes hitting an imaginary wall as he himself nearly hit the very real wall right in front of him, after the sharp turn he just caught. And the zombies trudged onwards...

Nature: Technological/Biological

Effect: When the vial is broken, anyone within 50 meters is infected by the noxious liquid as it vaporizes. The same happens when someone infected by it wounds a victim using his claws or teeth. The initial CON feat check when contracting the disease decides the subsequent modifiers: Amazing, the disease is completely nullified; Good, -1 penalty; Ordinary, no modifier; Marginal, +1 Modifier; Critical Failure, +3 modifier. Subsequent checks are taken every hour, with the above modifier; for each Failure, reduce Intelligence, Will and Per by 1; Critical Failure, by 2. If all three fall below the normal racial threshold (4 for humans), then they are turned into Zombies and act as SCMs. There's no going back.

Description: Developed as a secret project by a Corporation's labs, ZombieGen gradually deadens the mind until only a trickle of activity is maintained, just enough to keep them (barely) alive. At this level of brain activity, crude survival is the only necessity: and that includes satisfying basic biological needs, like hunger... (Note: If you wish ZombieGen to be more severe, you may add more penalties, reduce mental stats by more than the listed amount, make the checks more frequent than one hour, or a combination of the above.)

Z'ang 3000

"What is it that you want?", came an exhausted voice devoid of joy or hope. "Nothing", replied the electronic entity in an equally electronic voice, devoid

of any emotion, though if one really tried, he could feel the sarcasm behind it... And the flesh and metal monstrosities continued their rampage...

Nature: [Alien] Artificial Intelligence

Stats: 18 INT/16 WIL/ 12 PER.

Skills: Computer Science-*programming 8*; Knowledge-*deduce 3, Z'ithra history 12, Z'ithra language 12*; Law-*Z'ithra laws 12*; Life Science-*biology 6, botany 4, genetics 9, zoology 5*; Physical Science-*astronomy 12, chemistry 12, physics 12, planetology 12*; Security-*protection protocols 2*; System Operation-*communication 4, defenses 4, engineering 4, sensors 4, weapons 4*; Tactics-*infantry 3, space 3, vehicle 3*; Technical Science-*invention 12, juryrig 12, repair 12, technical knowledge 12*; Administration-*bureaucracy 2, management 3*; Culture-*diplomacy 6, Z'ithra etiquette 12*; Interaction

Description: More of an AI than a real object, nevertheless it could surface in a horror campaign; Z'ang 3000 is the collective intelligence of a long-perished alien race, known as Z'ithra, in an electronic format. Even though he is "hardware-compatible", he is certainly not "software-compatible". He may take over supercomputers with little difficulty, operating them as his "home", and using whatever resources he can to restore his race to his former glory- a vain attempt, for their time has passed dozens of millennia ago, something which Z'ang simply can't accept. The 3000 isn't really part of Z'ang's name, but it was given to him from the unfortunate few that encountered him first- apparently, they considered it a joke. Z'ang is also a brilliant scientist and engineer, and can create robots out of scratch. He is willing to negotiate, but his true goal remains the restoration of his race... perhaps he knows how to do it in his vast memory, does he?



Death in Space

by Dragan Ciric • illustration by Dragan Ciric

JENNY RILEY checked flight parameters for the last time and reported:

"We are ready to go sir."

"Very well," said captain Ferguson "Lets report to the tower and hit the stars. Trimas open the communication channel"

Jenny watched as the young mechalus extended filaments from his fingers and became one with the computer. Immediately the comm channel was opened and captain Ferguson reported to the tower.

Jenny lost herself in thought. Even though she volunteered for this mission there was an unease deep inside of her. *StarLance* was an experimental ship. Its new maneuver drive should, if proved successful, give the Verge Alliance a considerable advantage in the war against the Externals.

Externals. How she hated them. She was young psionic apprentice when the Externals attacked the Hammers Star system. Her family, her friends, her teachers, everything vanished under the salvo of External warships weaponry. From that day she swore that she would do anything to help end the External threat. Her competence with navcognition and psionic datalinking and her excellent piloting skills soon brought her to the Cianno moons in a top secret military base which tested new types of starships, drives, and weaponry.

"Jenny!" the captains voice cut through her thoughts. "Snap out of it! Take us to orbit."

"She has lost it again, captain" said Brant, the ships gunner, with an evil grin on his face. Brant had always been hard on Jenny. Why? She didn't know.

"Don't mind him, girl." she heard a voice in her head "He is full of it."

"I know Elayas. Thank you." Jenny answered.

Elayas was an experienced technician in his prime and a psionic talent. He was one of her best friends on Cianno. Having lost his family to Externals attack and being psionic, Jenny and Elayas had formed a fast friendship.

Jenny activated controls and with a roar from its mighty engines the *StarLance* soared into the sky and beyond.

After half an hour the *StarLance* was on the edge of the system and Captain Ferguson gave orders for drive initiation. Jenny punched in the coordinates and plunged the ship into deep space.

After several easy maneuvers, Jenny datalinked to the ship's computer and readied herself for the Garlik maneuver. Jenny had performed the Garlik maneuver before, but with the *StarLance's* acceleration system she knew that she would have to put all of her concentration into pushing the ship to maximum speed and suddenly reverting it.

Jenny set the starship to maximum speed and was about to perform the maneuver when her heart froze. Blackstone



appeared in front of the ship. Blackstone asteroids were the bane of all starships. Not only were they invisible to the eye, but they were hard to detect with ship sensors.

"Evasive maneuvers!" screamed the captain.

"It can not end like this," Jenny thought as she tried to pull the ship's nose up. There was a crash against the ship's hull and everything went black...

Jenny's head felt as if she had brawled with a werew. She opened her eyes. She was still on the *StarLance's* bridge. Captain Ferguson and Elayas were sprawled on the floor. Trimas was in his seat, his eyes closed.

Still shaken, Jenny tried to stand up but her legs failed to support her. She crawled and checked

Elayas and the captain. Both were unconscious. Then she looked at Trimas. Though her vision was still blurred she could see him breathing.

"We're alive. We are all alive," she thought and then she remembered Brant. She looked around the bridge but the ship's gunner was nowhere to be seen.

"Did anyone see the serial number of that bantam starload? I am going to sue it," she heard Elayas.

Jenny slowly rose to her feet and then helped Elayas up.

"Help me wake up the captain and Trimas," she told him. "After that, we need to look for Brant. He was not on the bridge when I woke up."

Elayas took a trauma pack from the ship's locker and injected stimulants into Ferguson's and Trimas's bodies. Several minutes later they were on their feet.

"That was some good flying, Jenny. It seems that you managed

to pull us out of death's clutches at the last second," Ferguson told her. "Trimas, run diagnostics on the ship's status and see if comm channels are still functional. We need to report to Cianno as soon as possible."

"Elayas has you tried to contact Brant via his comm gear."

"Yes captain, but he is not responding", answered Elayas "It's either broken or he stumbled out of the bridge and fell unconscious again."

"Sir, it appears that due to severity of impact the ship has lost its engines. However I broadcast a signal which allows us to contact Cianno, although visual contact is improbable due to the damage that the ship's systems have received." Trimas said.

"It's okay. Just put them through."

"Cianno this is StarLance, please respond"

"Starlance, we lost you for a while," came the voice from the speaker "What happened?"

"We had a close encounter with blackstone asteroids but our pilot pulled us through. However, we lost our engines and our gunner seems to be missing. We need a ride back home."

"We'll assemble the crew and send it your way immediately. ETA: two hours. Cianno out."

"Okay. Trimas you do a sensor sweep of the ship, and Elayas and Jenny will go and look for Brant on foot. Maybe he is seriously injured. And keep your comm gear channel open at all times."

"You wish he is dead don't you?" said Elayas.

"Have you've been reading my mind, Elayas?" asked Jenny.

"I don't have to read your mind to know that."

"Am I such a terrible person? I wished for someone's death."

"I don't think so. Brant is a misanthrope. He hates everyone and I must say that I don't know anyone on Cianno who likes him. But he is one of the best gunners around and..." Elayas suddenly stumbled and fell to the ground.

"Elayas!" Jenny screamed "Elayas, what is wrong?"

"I...I don't know. For a moment I felt as if I was not here at all. I guess I haven't recovered from that tumbling yet."

"Elayas, Jenny!" the captain contacted them via comm gear "Come back to the bridge immediately."

"But, captain, we haven't found Brant yet. He might be dying this very minute."

"He'll die anyway if we don't stop core meltdown and our life support systems fail..."

Jenny pulled on her e-suit while the captain was issuing orders.

"Trimas, you and Jenny will assist Elayas from the bridge.

Elayas, take all the tools that you need and stabilize that core."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't let us down, Elayas. We don't have time ... or another technician."

Elayas took his tools and left the bridge.

"How did this happen?" asked Jenny. "Ship's core was intact when we first scanned the ship for damage."

"Probability of false sensory reading increases proportionally with severity of damage spaceship receives," came a low toned answer from Trimas.

"I'm at the core." came the voice from the comm speaker.

"Give me damage evaluation." asked Ferguson.

"Everything looks pretty ok from the outside, although readings on my e-suit show a light increase in radiation level" Elayas replied. "I'll begin my work on the core immediately."

"Just hurry. The core is getting more unstable with every passing minute," interrupted Jenny while reading data displayed by the ship's computer.

"Not to worry I have..."

"Elayas? Elayas, what is wrong?"

"The stars...Emptiness." Elayas said through the comm gear.

"Elayas! You've got to pull yourself together!" Jenny yelled "The core is about to explode any minute!"

"I can see them now..." Elayas spoke again.

"Elayas!" screamed Jenny "Captain, he hasn't recovered from the blackstone impact yet! We have got to get him out of there."

"I know the truth..." came Elayas's voice through the speakers while the ship's alarms activated.

"Warning!" came a cold computer voice. "Core meltdown imminent. Begin evacuation procedures."

"I ... understand ... everything..." Elayas said.

"Elayas!" Jenny cried and reached for the door as an explosion shook the entire ship.

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Jenny sobbed while she floated through the bridge. He couldn't be gone. Not Elayas. He can't be dead.

"Jenny, you have to pull yourself together. Elayas is dead but we are alive and we have to stay alive until the rescue party comes." Ferguson said.

"And we have to survive possible, further sabotage attempts," Trimas said coldly.

"What?" they both turned to face Trimas.

"All logical factors lead to the conclusion that this mission has been sabotaged from the beginning," said Trimas.

"By whom?"

"Brant."

"Brant is not a saboteur," interrupted Ferguson.

"Following factors point to a sabotage attempt and Brant as a saboteur and possibly External spy," continued Trimas in a low voice. "Brant was known for his dislike of other sentients-much like some Externals express. He could have sabotaged our sensors so they could not detect blackstone asteroids before it was too late- and our sensors didn't pick up anything. After the blackstone incident Brant disappeared and broke all contact. We didn't find out about core meltdown on our initial scan-which means it was probably sabotaged later. Only person whose location was unknown to us all the time was Brant."

"Son of a ... It all makes sense. We have to find him and bring him down before he gets us!" said the captain. "Arm yourself. We are going to hunt him down."

Jenny was in the mess hall when Captain Ferguson called her through comm gear "Where are you, Jenny?"

"I'm in the mess hall. He is not here."

"Captain," reported Trimas "There are no indications of Brant's presence in the remains of the equipment compartments either."

"Yes. I see now...stars..." the captain said.

"Can you repeat that, sir?" asked Jenny. "Are you talking to

someone?"

"It is all clear..." the captain continued.

"Trimas, what is he talking about?"

"There is no logical relation to his sentences," answered Trimas. "I am near his location. I'll inspect the captain's condition. You should meet with us in the remains of the engineering compartment as fast as your current location allows."

Jenny checked the power setting on her charge pistol and used her zero-g web to move across the corridors.

"Jenny, the captain has disappeared from his last known location."

"Wait for me there," Jenny said. "I'll reach you in a minute."

She sped up her pace. She thought she heard Trimas speaking through comm gear.

"Logical grid continuation..."

"Trimas, what did you just said?" No answer.

"Trimas?" There was no answer. She was alone.

Jenny slowed her pace and pulled out her gun. She almost reached Trimas's location. She let her psionic senses drift. She could only feel a cold empty void. No one was on board except her.

Suddenly something touched her shoulder. She turned around, charge pistol in front of her. A decaying human body was floating through the room. A name was inscribed on a small metal plate on the uniform.

Brant

"What the..." and then she felt someone else present in the room with her.

She spun around. There was a tall figure standing in a shadowy corner of the compartment.

"Trimas?"

"No," came a deep hollow voice from the shadows. *"He and the others are where they should be. And you should be with them."*

"Who are you?" Jenny said, pointing gun at the shadowed figure. "External spy? How did you get aboard?"

"I go wherever I wish to go. And I take what is mine. And you, Jenny Riley, belong to me."

"Your mental potential is enormous. So enormous that when your time came you resisted me."

Jenny started to tremble. "I don't understand what you are talking about... I ... I..."

"You pulled everyone out of my grasp. Everyone except Brant, since you wanted him dead anyway. But your wish to live was so enormous. And so you all lived and I now come for you."

I existed since the universe was born and will exist even when it dies. And I will not be defied."

The figure stepped out of the shadow. A blood-red cloak was covering its body. Beneath the hood there was a skull-face.

Jenny realized.

They died. None of them survived the crash with the blackstone. And now Death had come to claim them all.

Death outstretched its cyber-skeletal hand. "Come..."

Jenny made one step forward and then raised her charge gun and fired. Nothing.

"You can not kill Death, Jenny Riley."

Jenny turned and ran. She would not let Death have her. She had to hold on for a few more minutes and then the rescue team

would arrive and she would be safe. She rushed through the corridor and suddenly stopped. There was a human figure in an e-suit on the far side of corridor. She approached it cautiously.

"Captain?" she whispered.

The figure stepped into the light. She saw Elayas. His face was heavily burned, his eyesockets empty. One hand was torn to shreds and the other was badly burned.

"Join us. You can not run away."

She pushed him aside and continued to run. Suddenly a red-robed figure appeared in front of her.

"You belong to me, Jenny Riley..."

Jenny turned around and ran. Her mind was racing with her. Just a few more minutes and she would be safe. She had to hold on. She ran towards the cargo bay. Blocking her way was Trimas and the captain, or what was left of them. Their faces were mummified, their hands elongated and skeletal.

She emptied her charge pistol into them and ran into the cargo bay. There she stopped to catch her breath. She walked toward the airlock and then turned around. Death was standing there.

With a cold, hollow voice Death spoke. *"You can not escape. You belong to me Jenny Riley."*

"We'll just have to see about that." Jenny said and pushed the button to open the airlock.

In an instant, Death found itself pulled into the vacuum of space, along with everything else in the cargo bay. It tried to grab Jenny who was standing and smiling, safely held to the floor with her magnetic boots, but it failed to get a hold on her. The moment Death was expelled into the void Jenny closed the airlock.

She was safe. All she had to do now was wait for the rescue team.

And then she felt an icy embrace as familiar voice whispered to her:

"You belong to me, Jenny Riley..."

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Salvage Corvette *Howler*

Captain's Report

We have found the remains of the *StarLance* as per coordinates we were given. There was severe damage to the ship's hull, engines and internal structure, some of it probably caused by core meltdown.

We found no trace of the crew. We presume that they were all killed in the core's explosion. Black box was recovered and will be delivered for further examination of the incident.

Transmission ends.



Neil Spicer

Writer, Editor, and Star Drive Enthusiast

For this issue's spotlight on Neil Spicer we broke away from the standard format and did an actual interview on a chat site. Neil was kind enough to take a little time out of his evening to answer some questions and give some thoughts on Altermity. He is deeply involved in the Altermity community and if you have been on the forums of www.altermity.net and www.tequilastarrise.net you will probably recognize his name.

Daryl Blasi, Executive Editor Last Resort

Last Resort: *When did you start playing RPGs (not necessarily Altermity)?*

Neil Spicer: At age 12. For me, that was 22 years ago. And it was Dungeons & Dragons...basic. Later we picked up Gamma World, Boot Hill, Twilight 2000, and so on. I didn't discover ShadowRun, Star Wars, and Altermity until college and beyond.

LR: *Do you still play any of the old games?*

Neil: I still play Gamma World, of course...and D&D. I played Star Wars a couple of years back, but lost interest. The campaign setting feels too restrictive for me.

LR: *When did you start playing Altermity and why were you attracted to the system?*

Neil: Hmm...that might take some time to answer. I'll give it my best try. I think Altermity pulled me in because it was different. I had enjoyed Star Frontiers when I was younger. Star Wars was always a big influence, too. Later with lots of sci-fi movies and books behind me, I really found myself interested in all kinds of sci-fi RPGs.

LR: *Do you feel Star Wars would have been better as an Altermity game?*

Neil: Not necessarily. For me, each setting is defined more by its content than any particular gaming system. Star Wars just never felt completely "right" to me, because it always felt like sliding your feet into someone else's shoes. I felt constrained by Star Wars and what the movies had already set in stone. For the same reason, I've never felt comfortable gaming in Tolkien's Middle Earth either.

LR: *It is tough to match up to the original feel of a beloved story. With that said would you have enjoyed seeing Star Wars as an Altermity setting if just to see Darth Vader's stats?*

Neil: I would have preferred not to see Star Wars redone, really. I hate to say that. I love the movies. I just don't feel as comfortable with it in a gaming sense. I'm always looking for the next, original setting or adventure. And while movies and books like Star Wars can serve as inspiration, I don't want to rehash something that was pretty perfectly done the first time around.

LR: *What kind of setting would you like to see created for Altermity?*

Neil: You mean something new and original?

LR: *Yes*

Neil: I'd like to see an "in-between" setting that defines PL6 and man's first few years of colonization and exploration. Something realistic and believable. But also fraught with corporate and international conspiracies.

LR: *How "hard" would you like the science to be? Classic sci fi with few outlandish concepts or just an extension of today's tech and social evolution*

Neil: I'm a "softie" when it comes to most sci-fi gaming. I recognize the benefits of having a full scientific explanation for everything, but I also want a dose of the fantastic and unexplainable too. I would imagine such a setting to contain the very real corporate backstabbing and international politics carried out among the stars...as well as couple of encounters with the early-fraal, mechalus, and sesheyen cultures.

LR: *Are you familiar with the Gap series by Stephen Donaldson?*

Neil: I've heard of Stephen Donaldson, but I've never picked up the *Gap* series. I'm surprisingly less well-read than the rest of the Altermity community, I think.

LR: *It has a gritty realism mixed with some "soft" science such as FTL and cyborg. It would be a good inspiration for the setting you described.*

Neil: I would probably limit such technologies as FTL and cybernetics to their PL6 equivalents, though. Just the beginnings...

LR: *So you would like to see a Star Drive: the Early Years?*

Neil: Something like that...but it wouldn't have to exist within the Star*Drive timeline. A lot of Altermity gamers try to place Dark*Matter as PL5 Star*Drive, but it pretty well stands on its own, too. So there's no reason why this PL6 setting couldn't do the same.

LR: *With all the back history this would be a very rich setting, although it could have some twists from the established setting.*

Neil: We've actually explored a lot of concepts for the early stellar nations (i.e., pre-GW1) and they could easily figure into a PL6 setting if you wanted to stay within Star*Drive.

LR: *Now I'm going to grill you on a couple of your personal contributions to the Altermity community.*

Neil: Fire away!

LR: *What projects have you worked on in the past for Altermity? Which has been the most rewarding?*

Neil: Wow. It might be easier to list the ones I haven't worked on. :)

LR: *Just a smattering then...*

Neil: The most rewarding would have to be Action Check.

LR: *How did you get hooked up with the guys at Action Check?*

Neil: Ah...well, that's a funny story. Initially I was slower to jump into the online world of Alternity than a lot of others. I grabbed the game, but had few people to play with in my area. And those I did find weren't really interested in sci-fi. So I started paying attention to the ListSers coming out of Wizards. I subscribed to the Gamma World list first, just because it was an old favorite and I knew they planned to do an Alternity version of it. That prompted me to create a couple of things for the list members, particularly the carbon-copy of Andy Collins "Gamma Squirrels, Mutant Moose" article on how to play mutant animals in Gamma World 5th edition. Only I did one for playing mutant plants. Jeff eventually asked me if he could print the article, because I was hoping to shop it around to Dragon magazine, but Wizards never took me up on the offer. So it was printed in Action Check. From there, it grew and grew. I enjoyed the feedback with the stuff I submitted to Action Check. Folks seemed to enjoy it. Jeff and Jim ultimately saw me as a big supporter of the e-zine and asked me to take on the recurring Oracle column. And it just kept on for 16 straight issues.

LR: *Very nice job you did.*

Neil: On explaining all of that...or as the Oracle? ;)

LR: *Oracle of course.*

Neil: That was a scary position to find myself in...

LR: *Being the "Source" for Alternity knowledge?*

Neil: Yes, exactly. It seems awfully pretentious to get set up with that kind of moniker. I felt pressured to have "all the answers"... So I researched like a madman on anything that came my way. I know for a fact that there's dozens of other guys out there that could have done the same thing.

LR: *Did you ever change your mind about a subject after discussing with others?*

Neil: Usually, I took my time in answering some of the questions submitted to the Oracle column. I let some of them linger in my inbox for a month or two. Often I'd feel out an issue by discussing it in forums or on the A-list...anywhere I could

gather a consensus.

LR: *That sounds like a good method. You are currently working on the Stellar Nations project as editor. How do you feel this project will impact the Star Drive community when it releases?*

Neil: I have mixed feelings about the NetBook. It's languished for so long as an incomplete community project. And those things are bound to happen when you try to involve so many cooks in the kitchen, so to speak. And even once it comes out, it will only represent about one-third or one-fourth of the stellar nations. We have plans to bring out the remaining "volumes" as soon as we can.

LR: *Do you think the first release will inspire others to jump on the wagon for the remaining material?*

Neil: From a content perspective, I hope people like it. The writing represents the imaginations of a great many people...often with different ideas and approaches to the material. Hopefully, it all makes some sense and people find it useful. Heh. People always jump on the bandwagon in a moment of inspired determination. It's much more difficult to run the long race of seeing it across the finish-line, though. We've had a number of folks burn-out. Some dropped before they even provided anything at all. So you take what you can get.

LR: *I hear the StarMech material is superb. ;)*

Neil: Yeah...I've heard that too. The guy that worked on it really held us up on our release date, though. He's such a procrastinator. ;)

LR: *He should be punished. Seriously, do you feel the project will mesh nicely with the canon Star Drive material?*

Neil: Well, if it doesn't...then it's completely my fault. They asked me to do continuity-checking for the team. So I tried to keep an eye towards including material that supported Star*Drive canon rather than re-interpret it or contradict it. For now, I'd say it supports Star*Drive and should mesh very well with any Star*Drive GM's campaign.

LR: *I believe the fans will be pleased with the new material. What concepts from other writers did you find the most interesting or exciting? Something you might*

not have done yourself but liked it when you saw it.

Neil: Well, I have to give props to John/Oneagle. He took over the project team and has done yeoman's work in throwing together the Rignumor Star Consortium, Orlamu Theocracy, and a good portion of the Union of Sol. He's come out with a number of really great ideas and interpretations for those stellar nations. I can't think of any single item to call attention to...it's all good.

LR: *He is a major reason the project continued as it did.*

Neil: I think he's a major reason the project continued at all, to be honest. He deserves a lot of credit for picking up the banner in my estimation.

LR: *Okay now some more pointed questions regarding your current projects that you are working on. What are you doing with your free time?*

Neil: What free time?! I'm swamped!

LR: *How about the time you squeak out for Alternity. What are you working on?*

Neil: The most visible things all involve Star*Drive...as it's definitely my favorite campaign setting. You can find my online Star*Drive game "Verge of Extinction" over at Tequila Starrise. I'm still a very active poster over there. And I'm closing in on 50 TVN reports at the website. I recently began a project to compile those TVN reports into a collection of ten at a time, with additional material in sidebars to highlight a new SCM, piece of equipment, career, etc.

LR: *This will make a nice addition to the Star Drive universe. Almost a magazine dedicated to Star Drive in its own right. So do you plan on writing any adventures like your "Baubles" piece?*

Neil: My players are encouraging me to write the actual adventure module for "Verge of Extinction". They've been very supportive. I have almost twenty other adventure outlines languishing on my hard-drive that I never seem to finish. I'm terrible at following through on things. My creativity comes in bursts and I work furiously at something until suddenly I get sidetracked by a new inspiration. My best work comes in small, manageable pieces like Action Check articles, TVN reports for Tequila Starrise, etc.

LR: Besides the current projects being worked on what would you like to see most for the Star Drive universe? As far as setting or gaming material

Neil: A revival, to be honest. I just want to see the Star*Drive campaign setting get used. A lot of gamers have found Alternity, but I don't know that many that have consciously chosen to do something with Star*Drive. And even those who do, often modify the setting with things that take it away from what I would consider canon material. Therefore, it becomes specialized and more difficult for others to incorporate into their own games. As for new creative material...I'd love to see more adventure hooks, character concepts for SCMs, and so on. Publications like the Stellar Ring NetBook will aid in that goal, I think. Your efforts with Last Resort can do the same. And some of the things I'm trying to produce hopefully will as well. One idea I've been tinkering with is the thought of a Star*Drive contest reminiscent of the Robot and Starship contests held at A.net recently. I'd like to see something done for submitting new star systems in the Verge.

LR: That would be an excellent idea. Maybe even setting up a template for people to fill in the blanks.

I don't mean to lead the question here but do you feel the Externals pdf (as a book) should have been released earlier? This would have gone a long way in getting people excited about the setting.

Neil: I don't know that an early release for Externals would have saved Star*Drive by getting people excited up front. Some of the ideas for Externals didn't come into being until the A-team continued to work on the setting throughout its existence. It's a fine balance that you have to strike with keeping people hooked on your setting. You want to leave enough mystery to keep them coming back for your products. And I think that's what the primary Externals publication represented...all those mysteries they hadn't unveiled yet.

LR: They did an excellent job setting it up. How about some more "frivolous" questions?

Neil: Shoot!

LR: Like what is your favorite sci fi/fantasy movie?

Neil: Favorite sci-fi...I'd have to say the early Star Wars trilogy just because of the impact it had on my life as a kid. And favorite fantasy movie is definitely Lord of the Rings, not only because of what Peter Jackson has done with his re-telling of Tolkien's classic, but also because of the profound impact the books had on me...yep, when I was a kid.

LR: What movies have inspired you in your campaigns? Star Wars?

Neil: Inspiration for my campaigns really spring from any movie that involved a great storyline or plot. It doesn't even have to be sci-fi.

LR: How about favorite books?

Neil: All kinds of stuff. Lord of the Rings, as I said earlier. The Mars series by Kim Stanley Robinson. Old Edgar Rice Burroughs stuff. Andre Norton. A.E. Van Vogt. Ray Bradbury. Arthur C. Clarke. Poul Anderson. I'd even have to include all my fathers Westerns by Louis L'Amour.

LR: Although you stated you preferred original settings for your gaming, what book or movie would you most like to role-play in if you had the chance?

Neil: Hmm...tough question. The Matrix is probably the popular choice nowadays just because of the cool factor. But I'd probably go with a little known post-apocalyptic setting in the Pelbar Cycle by Paul O. Williams. The books are out of print now, but they were great reads.

LR: A couple more questions and I better let you get back to your Real Life.

Neil: Yes, you're taking away all my "free" time... :)

LR: What character from a movie/book/tv show would you most like to be? (this will give us a great insight into your psyche)

Neil: I knew this question would be coming up...just based on the previous Spotlights in the earlier issues of Last Resort. I wanted to come up with something snappy, but I don't really have one. Is that a cop-out?

LR: Yes it is. A big cop out.

Neil: I think the character I would most like to be is always something different. I move from one concept to another. It always depends on what character I most feel like slipping into at the time...or the

story I most want to explore through a certain character's development. Thus, I like Neo's transformation from nerdy geek to all-powerful Matrix god. I like the maturing journey that all four hobbits experience in different ways during the Lord of the Rings. And I like Vader's redemption through his son's unwillingness to bend to the Dark Side in Star Wars.

LR: How about favorite stellar nation from Star Drive?

Neil: Easy answer...the Borealis Republic. Creativity focused on entertainment with a great respect for history and knowledge. Also very tolerant of differing philosophies. My kind of people. Now...if they could just get a little more organized...

LR: One last question (Actually a two-for-one). What profession and level are you in Real Life and what is your highest skill rank?

Neil: I'm most certainly a Diplomat...for all my longwindedness. And my secondary profession is likely that of a Tech-Op...as I work with computers and came from a programming background before moving into management. I suppose I'd place myself at 5th level, maybe? It's tough to determine that. I still have a lot more to learn, so I'm not way up the achievement track yet.

LR: Highest skill rank?

Neil: My highest skill ranks would have to be in two main areas. Investigate-search...just because that's my mentality and what I'm asked to do in my everyday job as a quality-assurance analyst. And secondly would be ranks in some kind of Creativity specialty. That's for sure. I also think it's quite likely that I'm a psi-talent with a reasonable level of ESP-empathy.

LR: Not a bad talent to have.

Neil: I agree. Maybe I can nurture it enough to go up a few more ranks... :) Right now, I think it's more of a Wild Talent.

LR: Thanks for giving me your time tonight, Neil. It was good talking to you.

Neil: You too.

LR: Signing off.