

ALTERNITY

ACTION CHECK

ONLINE + MAGAZINE

STAR*DRIVE

GAMMA WORLD

DARK • MATTER



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Table of Contents

Cover Art: The Externals, by Jon Foster

Page 3 Editorial [Jeff Ibach]
 Expanding and adding.

Page 4 Miscellaneous Mishaps [Dawn Ibach]
 Charts to randomize Alien Species in Altermity.

Page 6 New Kadaran Weapons [Derek Holland]
 Even more goodies for the Mad Scientist Externals.

Page 8 Laura Croft [Steve Bartell]
 The video game goddess as Supporting Cast.

Page 9 Tummibleeds [Neil Spicer]
 New creatures for Altermity Gamma World.

Page 10 Tangents Transmission [Benjamin Blattberg]
 A world of bugs for the Altermity Tangents setting.

Page 20 The Zahban Glow Bug [Derek Holland]
 A new creature for Altermity Gamma World.

Page 21 Uplift Article [Jim Sharkey]
 A psionic and shapeshiting race for Altermity.

Page 23 Ask the Oracle [Neil Spicer]
 More amazing questions and answers on Altermity!



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Editorial: Expanding and adding

To an extent, all Gamemasters add a personal touch to each and every adventure they run, either by design (they themselves write the adventure from the ground up) or by choice (in configuring a published adventure for their particular game groups). I'd like to briefly share two instances running Dark*Matter where it was by choice, but for only to help expand the adventure as written.

In Chris Perkins' excellent adventure, *A Kindness to Strangers*, there is a paragraph of narrative about the prelude to the actual action segment of the adventure. This was out of necessity because the adventure appeared in *Dragon Magazine Annual #4* and space was a concern. However, I took it upon myself to play out the whole "boring part." It took a lot more than I expected. The PCs are assigned to escort a particular SCM back to Hoffman. I had to research the country where they were going to pick her up, generate local maps, and read up on local customs. Next, I searched the Internet for faces and color-printed off a few close to the descriptions given in the adventure to show the characters. All in all, this worked to great effect. They all knew it was Dark*Matter, so the entire opening sequence of play they were extra-cautious and paranoid. I actually lulled them into a false sense of security so when *WHAM!* the adventure sprang, they were caught unawares.

The other time I added to an adventure was the recently published *London Calling*, a Dark*Matter adventure in *Dungeon Magazine #83*. Writer Andy Collins did a lot of the legwork by supplying excellent handouts for the adventure, but the opposition needed a little beefing up to challenge my 5th and 6th level PCs. Seeing that there was spell casting involved, I wrote the villain up as an SCM, awarded him skill points, and expanded his repertoire of magic. This led to choosing a few new spells, which in turn presented me with more opportunities to add to the adventure. It added two extra combat scenes to break up the adventure a bit (which is heavy on the investigative side) and kept the PCs paranoid. I've found many times a quick read though *Beyond Science: A Guide to FX* or *Mind-walking* literally builds entire adventures out of the descriptions of some of the abilities therein.

What kinds of expansions have you added to published Alternity adventures?

Action Check Submissions

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Regular Features:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reviews: of Alternity or related-use product.

Special FX: New FX/Psi or mutations.

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

EDITORIAL



Miscellaneous Mishaps

By Dawn Ibach

Miscellaneous Mishaps Alien Species

Populate your campaign with aliens! Roll once on each table and create your own races. Some rolls may conflict with others, so disregard them and roll again or chose another option.

Table 1: Basic Composition

1-3	Flesh
4	Rock
5	Liquid
6	Crystal
7	Air
8	Steam
9	Mud
10	Lava
11	Acid
12	Chemical Compound

Table 1a: Flesh

1	Plates
2	Scales, snake
3	Scales, fish
4	Shell, turtle
5	Shell, clam
6	Feathers, bird
7	Feathers, hairy
8	Skin, smooth
9	Skin, wrinkled
10	Skin, tight
11	Slimy skin, wet
12	Slimy skin, sticky
13	Furred skin, long hair
14	Furred skin, short hair
15	Short horns, one or two

16	Short horns, many
17	Long spines, few
18	Long spines, many
19	Roll twice
20	Roll three times for patches

Table 2: Locomotion

1	None
2	Walk Upright
3	Glide
4	Levitation
5	Flying
6	Slime trails
7	Slither
8	Hops
9	Grab and drag
10	Swim
11	Phases
12	Roll twice

Table 3: Limbs (roll d4 for number of pairs)

For easy reference, arms are considered to have tool-using capabilities while legs are primarily for locomotion.

1	None
2	Pseudopods
3	Arms only
4	Legs only
5	Arms and legs
6	Wings and arms
7	Wings and legs
8	Wings and tail
9	Arms and tail
10	Legs and tail
11	Arms, legs, and tail
12	Arms, legs, tail, and wings

Table 4: Eyes

1	None
2	One
3	One pair
4	Few, d4+ 2 for number
5	Some, d6+ 3 for number
6	Several, d8+ 4 for number
7	Many, d 10+ 5 for number
8	Covered, d12+ 6 for number

Table 4a: Type of Eyes

1	Reptilian, small
2	Reptilian, large
3	Human, small
4	Human, large
5	Solid black, small
6	Solid black, large
7	Reflective, small
8	Reflective, large
9	White, small
10	White, large

Table 5: Size of creature

1	Bacterial
2	Mites
3	Minuscule (2 inches)
4	Tiny (6 inches)
5	Small (3 feet)
6	Average (5 feet)
7	Large (7 feet)
8	Huge (10+ feet)

Table 6: Eating Habits

1-2	Photosynthesis
3-4	Carnivore
5-6	Herbivore
7-9	Omnivore
10	Cannibalistic
11	Scavenger
12	Filters dirt for nutrients

13	Filters water for nutrients
14	Filters air for nutrients
15	Absorbs metal(s)
16	Absorbs Rock
17	Absorbs Electricity
18	Absorbs Liquid(s)
19	Absorbs Heat
20	Absorbs Radiation(s)

Table 7: Habitat

1	Arboreal (inside or on)
2	Cave Systems
3	Aquatic
4	Ground nest sites
5	Cliff nest sites
6	Amphibian
7	Burrows (deep or shallow)
8	Simple Artificial dwellings
9	Advanced Artificial Dwellings
10	Pre-Space travel capabilities
11	Space travel capabilities
12	Space colonizers

Table 8: Average Intelligence

1	None
2	Instinctual
3	Human equivalent (3-14)
4	Beyond human (15+)

Table 9: Communication

1	None
2	Sign language
3	Body language
4	Smell
5	Touch
6	Clicks
7	Whistles
8	Droning
9	Verbal language
10	Psychic



New Kadaran Weapons

By Derek Holland

New Kadaran Weapons

With their ability to manipulate living things into various tools and weapons, the Kadarans have biotechnological items for many uses. The weapons given in the *Externals ESD* are but a handful of what is possible. Here are some weapons that work for both the Kadarans and the Shapers (a cryptic alliance in Gamma World of my own creation).

Goop Gun

The goop gun fires blobs of a sticky adhesive that can immobilize a person in a body tank or small vehicle. Anyone struck by it must make a STR feat check at a +1 step penalty per success (i.e. an ordinary hit inflicts a 1 step penalty, a good inflicts a 2 step penalty and an amazing hit inflicts a 3 step penalty. The shots are cumulative.). If the target rolls a critical failure, it cannot breathe and may suffocate (as per the suffocation rules). If the target rolls a failure it is immobile until freed by others; this also applies to people in bodytanks who roll a critical failure. An ordinary success means the target has a 3 step penalty to its dexterity and strength modifiers until freed; good and amazing successes mean a 2 and 1 step penalty respectively to its dexterity and strength modifiers. A successful dodge increases the result of the strength feat check result by one step (e.g. ordinary becomes good) and an amazing roll is considered a miss. Those that try to use an energy weapon to free themselves will inflict half damage to themselves and will set

the adhesive on fire (as per the burning rules). The adhesive will burn away in 5-10 minutes. High impact weapons have no appreciable affect on the goop. Goop guns are used by Kroath to capture more "recruits."

Stun Generator

This biomass weapon produces a field similar to that of a Klick and is the work of many months study on Lucullus. It is carried like a backpack by a Kroath warrior, and takes so much bioenergy that the soldier can not use it and an energy weapon at the same time. The major advantage is that it can be set to a specific species, and thus used around Bareem and Sifarv troops. It still can not affect Fraal, but the Kadarans are working on that much to the disconcertion of the Thaal. Generally a t-hro of Kroath has one soldier with a stun generator.

Assassin slugs

STR	2	INT	3
DEX	4	WIL	6
CON	4	PER	2
Durability	4/4/2/2		
Action Check	9+ /8/4/2		
Movement	walk 2	# of actions	2
Reaction Score	O/1		

Attacks

Bite	10/5/2	1s/d4s/1w	LI/O
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Defenses

armor none (d4-2/0/0)

Weapon	Skill	Acc	Md	Range	Type	Damage	Actions	Clip Size	Hide	Mass
Goop Gun	rifle	-1	F	10/25/40	LO/O	See text	2	5	-	8
Stun Generator	-	-	-	30	-	See text	-	-	-	-

+ 1 vs melee
0 vs ranged

Skills

Stealth [4]- *sneak* [14]; Awareness[6]- *perception* [12]

Description

Assassin slugs are small mollusk analogs that the Kadarans produce to overwhelm bunkers and other fortified locations. They are .3 meters long and are colored to blend in with local conditions. A variant is the acid snail, which has the armor given in parentheses. Because they have no skeletons, both can squeeze into holes much smaller than they are.

Encounter

Assassin slugs are used in huge numbers to infiltrate a target and poison all organic objects in it (which does include prisoners and unliving objects like cotton shirts). They have no sense of pain and will keep attacking until death. They can bite, but it is their mucus that contains a neurotoxin (+ 3 step penalty, 5-second onset time and a duration of 1 hour). Acid snails are used to burn holes in sealed targets to allow troops in. Acid damage is up to the GM. They can not be used with slugs as the poison of the slug will kill off the snail.

Bioweapons

Then there are those bioweapons that are more "conventionally" in use today. The Kadarans have produced several plagues, and are working on a version that creates Kroath. Some of the more commonly used ones are:

Red plague (strength + 2 penalty; incubation period d4 days)

The red plague is blood disease aimed at humans and thus affects no others. It causes the blood to congeal and blood

thinners give a 1 step bonus to all of the constitution feat checks.

Blisters (strength +1 penalty; incubation period d4 weeks)

Blisters is aimed at the Weren. It produces many small, painful blisters all over the body and inside the mouth. While in effect, the Weren must make a *resist pain* check (or endurance at half value) to do anything more strenuous than reading, eating or sleeping.

Mindblaster (strength 0; incubation period d6 days)

This disease is aimed at the T'sa. It causes their nervous systems to overload and creates an effect like epilepsy when the T'sa is under any stress.

There are no diseases aimed that the Fraal, as the Thaal have forbidden it. That just means some Kadarans are working on them in secret.

But the most worrisome weapon in the Kadaran arsenal is not one of their own creation. They have found a way of breeding mote swarms (from the *AC2*). They only use them in systems as traps or in "slash-





Laura Croft

By Steve Bartell

This is Lara Croft in Alternity stats. I introduced Lara into my current adventure as a Supporting Cast Member in a Tangents campaign.

Those of you who have played the Tomb Raider computer/video game know that Lara Croft is synonymous with high adventure. Lara could fit in well as an SCM in almost any PL 5 Alternity campaign. In a Dark*Matter game, she may help spark an adventure to obtain an ancient artifact of the Greys or the search ruins of Kinori civilization. In a Tangents campaign, she may help drive the search for a relic that allows superspace travel, such as a gateway similar to the one found in the movie *Stargate* and television series, *Stargate SG-1*.

Lara Croft

Level 8 Free Agent

STR: 9

DEX: 14

CON: 9

INT: 9

WIL: 9

PER: 11

Action Check: 14+/13/6/3

Actions: 2

Last Resort Points: 3

Durability: 9 / 9 / 5 / 5

Perks: Heightened DEX, Ambidextrous, Great looks

Flaws: Competitive

Skills: Athletics [9] - *Climb* [14], *Jump* [16]; Melee Weapons [9] - *Blade* [10]; Vehicle Operation [14] - *Land* [15]; Modern Ranged Weapon [14] - *Pistol* [17]; Manipulation [14]; Acrobatics [14] - *Dodge* [15], *Fall* [16]; Stamina [9] - [12]; Movement [9] - *Race* [11], *Swim* [11]; Knowledge [9] - *First Aid* [10]; Demolitions [9]; Awareness [9] - *Intuition* [10], *Perception* [11]; Investigate [9] -

Search [11]; Interaction [11]

Equipment: 9mm pistol (x2), combat knife, compass, boots, backpack, holster (x2), watch, first aid kit

Background:

Lara Croft was born in England in 1968, daughter of an English Lord, Heshingly Croft. Lara was always an adventurous soul, leaving her home for entire days to explore the Crofts' estate and surrounding areas. While she excelled in her education, her instructors often reported that she was distracted and unfocused in her classes. When she was 16, her parents decided to send Lara to live with her Aunt, a local schoolteacher, to be educated in European history. Young Lara was excited at the travel, but was not happy to be chaperoned by her stuffy aunt.

Lara confronted her parents with an alternative proposal. The famous archaeologist Professor Werner Von Croy was planning an expedition across Asia, traveling alone due to financial limitations. Studying under Von Croy in school, Lara was fascinated by his work and suggested she accompany Von Croy in his travels in exchange for her assistance and a generous financial contribution by her family. Her parents and Von Croy agreed, and thus began Lara's career as an adventurous archeologist.

She then has since traveled across the world, delving into exotic and dangerous locations in search of ancient treasures.





Tummibleeds

By Neil Spicer

Tummibleeds

Tummibleeds, or Tumblers, are a dangerous form of mobile plant-life existing in the deserts and barren lands of Gamma Terra. They are commonly mistaken for tumbleweeds, but are composed of living plant-tissue as opposed to dry, dead grasses. Tummibleeds are carnivorous, hunt in packs, and constantly roam the desert in search of prey, posing a significant threat to travelers in such regions.

Description:

A fully grown Tummibleed weighs only 40kg or so and has an overall spherical shape, usually up to one meter in diameter. The plant's body is composed of a solid, scarlet-colored bulb about the size of two fists, surrounded by a tangle of flexible roots and spike-like branches going off in all directions. All of these appendages are a dry, dusty brown in color and often pick up bits of debris (grass, leaves, twigs, and other assorted trash) as the plant rolls along the ground.

A Tummibleed can also stand upright by uncurling from the spherical shape it uses to travel about. This allows it to reach a height of 1.5 meters and form crude arms to manipulate objects, pull itself over obstacles, or viciously attack its prey.

Encounter:

Because they can pass themselves off as harmless tumbleweeds, most Tummibleeds are able to close to within melee range very easily. In fact, they often stay close to real tumbleweeds in order to carry off such a deception. In addition, Tummibleeds are adept at camouflaging themselves with the loose debris they pick up as they roll along the ground. In game terms, they receive a -1 step bonus to all of their Stealth skill checks, allowing them to hide in plain sight when using these advantages.

The creature moves itself about by using its prehensile roots to push off one at a time. Sometimes, the wind will help to carry it at a faster pace, or more often, a steep incline will do the trick. By building up speed in such a manner, Tummibleeds can use their branches to impale their prey. If successful with the maneuver, they follow up by using their flexible roots to soak up the blood that's released from the wounds. The roots fasten themselves around each puncture and actually bore into the victim automatically inflicting damage on each subsequent round (see below).

Aside from their fierce charge attack, Tummibleeds can also stand upright in order to engage an opponent. They do so by forming arms with their flexible roots containing the sharp spikes of their branches. The Tummibleed then uses the natural weapons just like short thrusting spears. The creature cannot employ its roots to siphon away a victim's blood while it fights in this manner, but once the prey is defeated, the Tummibleed quickly reforms and fastens itself to the slain body in order to feed.

If Tummibleeds have one weakness, it's in the form of fire or open flames. The outer layer of their skin is quite dry and flammable. This causes a major phobia in the creature and it will definitely stay away from campfires at night or any opponent that waves a torch or flaming brand in its direction. Flaming arrows or ranged energy weapons that ignite their target can easily drive them away entirely.

Tummibleeds are also cautious around large bodies of water, lacking the ability to swim at all. They prefer to keep themselves dry at all times. Fleet-footed prey that escapes across a river or deep creek can often leave a pack of Tummibleeds behind.

Habitat/Society:

Tummibleeds can be found in any dry region

of open plains or even the streets of ruined Ancient cities. They don't react well in wet environments since moisture causes them to move sluggishly (half their normal movement rates). Also, they don't like areas that hem them in, like forestland or the confines of an Ancient building.

The largest concentration of Tummibleeds known exists in the grassy heartland of the Knighted States of Meriga. In that region, they compete against all other plants and animals for the necessary resources to survive, traveling in wild packs in order to coordinate their efforts to bring down prey. They are both male and female, mating about twice a year.

Offspring are born about three months later and take at least a month before developing the necessary spikes and root-siphons to feed themselves.

Until that time, the small children ride along with the mother to feed on the scraps of whatever prey she manages to bring down.

Tummibleeds do have a limited form of intelligence, somewhat higher than the average animal. Occasionally, pack leaders can display a level of cunning that rivals a fully sentient being, and rumors exist of a truly evil Tummibleed that organizes herds of the beasts to decimate entire villages in the heartlands.

Ecological Data:

Biome: Arid
 Encounter chance: Possible
 Group size: 4-10 (2d4+2)
 Organization: Pack
 Niche: Carnivorous Plant
 Intelligence: Low-Level Sentient

Game Data:

STR 11 (2d4+6) INT 6 (2d4+1)
 DEX 9 (2d4+4) WIL 10 (2d6+2)
 CON 11 (2d4+6) PER 3 (d4)

Durability: 11/11/6/6 Action check: 11+/10/5/2
 Move: sprint 20 run 12 walk 4 # Actions: 2
 Reaction Score: Ordinary/2

Mutations: Improved Natural Attack (spikes), Dermal Reinforcement.

Defects: Environmental Sensitivity, slight (wet), Major Phobia (fire), Susceptible to Damage (En - incendiaries only)

Attacks:

Punch (spikes) 14/7/3 Personal d4w/d4+1w/d4+2w LI/O
 Charge (spikes) 14/7/3 Personal d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m LI/O
 Siphon (roots) 14/7/3 Personal d4s*/d4+2s*/d4-1w* LI/O

*Note: This attack is only available if a charge successfully impales a victim and cannot be employed until the following round. Siphon damage cannot be reduced by armor and occurs automatically on each round (not phase) following a successful charge. The Tummibleed must still make an Unarmed-*brawl* skill check to determine the amount of siphon damage. On a victim's action, he can attempt a STR feat check to break free of the deadly embrace. Any success does so but forces an immediate *Resolve-physical resolve* skill check with the following results: Critical Failure, victim suffers another d4 wounds; Failure, victim suffers d4+2 stun; Ordinary, victim suffers d4 stun; Good or Amazing, victim suffers no damage.

Defenses:

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 -1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: d4+1 (LI), d4 (HI), d4-1 (En)

Skills

Athletics[11]-*jump*[12]; Unarmed Attack[11]-*brawl*[14];
 Stealth[11]-*shadow*[12]; Movement[11]-*race*[12]; Stamina[11]-*endurance*[12]; Awareness [10]-*perception*[12]; Investigate[10]-*track*[12];
 Resolve[10]-*physical resolve*[11]

By Benjamin Blattberg

Inspired by Chris West's Tangents Transmissions from the August 2000 Issue of Action Check (p. 19).

Introduction: Thomas Jones was an explorer of “inhospitable” regions and the indigenous people of those regions in the early part of the Twentieth Century. In the 1930s, when he was most active, he stayed primarily in the area of the Amazon basin. He is little known outside of certain academic circles, primarily because he was not very interested in making himself known. He made a life hiring himself to other travelers and explorers who were more interested in making their own names; most of those who hired him were either too egotistical or too respectful of his wishes to mention him in their published memoirs. Among certain circles there were rumors that he had gone completely native. There were also rumors of a journal that he had kept, though nothing was found until last year. Now I hear rumors that there is even talk of a biopic. As long as others are dragging him, kicking and screaming, into the spotlight, I thought it would not hurt him much by excerpting a part of his journal here. Though he has many interesting anecdotes, I thought this one would be of particular interest. It concerns one of his patrons, a rather unusual man. Alan Kastor, as he called himself, was paying Jones and the native crew to take him up the Amazon River, but he was not paying them to take him down, and he was paying in gold coins. This excerpt begins as the party, settled around a fire for the night, was beginning to tell stories. (Earlier in the journal, Jones mentions how he always made a story-time for the travelers, and pretended that it was native custom, which entertained the travelers, and amused him.) This excerpt is a record of what Alan Kastor said; whenever Thomas Jones needs to interject something, it is

marked by parentheses.

“Right, well, let’s say, once upon a time, yes, that’s it. Once upon a time there was an emperor of the entire world, and he was called Kestari, which meant King in that place. Kestari had the whole world under his command, because he had won it from his brothers and sisters in the Game after his father had been sent to be born again. Now Kestari was, well, he was an honest man, a man who could not bear to see dishonesty and disloyalty in others. Yes, especially disloyalty to the Kestari. As Kestari he could do anything he wanted to these oath-breakers, and as Kestari he did not want to help along those he despised to be born again. But as Kestari he had access to something that was as old as the first soul, which was already old when the mountains and the seas were young. This was a strange doorway. Things could go in, but nothing ever came out. The court advisors, perhaps what you might call a cabinet, Tom, these old men said that this doorway, whatever else it might be, was a way to banish people forever. So the Kestari used it, and used it, and used it. But the number of oath-breakers did not go down. No. Their numbers grew and grew. Until one day there were more oath-breakers than there were loyal servants of the Kestari, and the Kestari himself was forced through the doorway, and into another dimension, as he called the place to which he was exiled. These dimensions were worlds just like his, but different. On this first strange world though the Kestari discovered a doorway just like the one in his palace. He stepped through and found himself on another strange world, but on that one, too, there was a doorway. He has come to think of this doorway as a persistent object, one that exists in all dimensions, in some form or other. And in each dimension he searches for the

doorway, hoping that he will find his way home, and will reign triumphantly again, as is his destiny.”

(Here Alan paused, I thought for introspection. It turned out that he was in fact looking at a mosquito, which he presently crushed.)

“These insects bring back memories. I’ve heard people saying that insects have the advantage numerically, and I’ve heard people say that they were surprised insects did not run the Earth already. The truth is, in other dimensions, these bugs are more important than you might be able to believe. Let me tell you about two of the dimensions that the Kestari visited.

“One of the first that the Kestari visited was a world of peace. In this world, as far as the Kestari could tell, there had been an amazing leap in science and progress. Instead of dwelling on alchemy in the Middle Ages these people quickly went on to explore genetics. Tom, stop making that face, this isn’t a new word, not even for you here in the jungle.”

(I hadn’t realized I was making a face, but he went on. I might note that later he said that alchemy was not something that should necessarily be passed by, and that on other dimensions homunculi and the philosopher’s egg were real. He was full of these sorts of stories.)

“Apparently, in this dimension there had been significant breakthroughs in genetic engineering, and because of a labor shortage some people had the bright idea of recruiting certain members of the animal kingdom for their workforce. The voters eventually decided on ants. And why not ants? They’re strong, capable, efficient, hardworking, and, most importantly, they’re loyal. Workers don’t turn against their queens. All the people had to do was make the ants think that humans were their superiors.

“More surprising than they’re choice of ants was the fact that it took so little time for them to actually create a viable worker, and the fact that the worker seemed to have accepted the conditioning. Making an ant, not just bigger – after all, with mixing in a bit of their own human DNA, getting a larger ant with a skeleton and lungs and a heart was only a matter of time – but actually to make an ant intelligent is something worth marveling at. Yes, because, whether they had intended to or not what they had gotten was a race of sentient ants. And these ants still lived more or less the way ants have always lived, with the workers feeding the queen whose sole job was to make more workers. But these ants were able to feed their queens a little differently. They got jobs, and they made money, and they bought food. When this Earth entered the industrial age, they did it with the combined muscle-power of a million ants. The ants lived for at most thirty years, and they were mostly kept separated from the rest of the population, in special labor areas, and they were in some places treated as second-class citizens, but they did not seem to mind that. And that’s the way things went.

“Who knows how long it would have gone on like that too, except that a race of aliens came to this Earth, calling themselves the Fraal, talking about some great menace in the depths of space. These Fraal offered all they had to their new allies and according to human sources they nearly begged for the protection the Earth could provide. What they offered most of, though, was technology, including space flight. One of the fastest techniques they had for travel was incredibly dangerous to all life. It was called space-folding, I think, and they said the greatest danger of it was that it exposed the travelers to high amounts of radiation. Radiation causes genetic damage. But it was instantaneous travel across millions of miles. Imagine, messages could be sent instantly from the most distant stars, but if those messages

said “Help,” help couldn’t get to them for years in most cases. If only some way could be found to use space-folding to send help.

“The humans of this Earth knew what was at stake, and so they investigated. After some experiments it was clear that the ants were immune, or at least highly resistant to radiation. Using these space-folding techniques, and the Fraal’s own records of the coordinates of other friendly or neutral species, several delegations were sent out, all of which included a human negotiator and a Fraal interpreter, both of whom were dead within months of their travels. Delegations also included an example of the army that the Earth could contribute, which was a legion of ant-soldiers, outfitted with Fraal technology. These delegations were sent to the homeworlds of the Fraal, and the Aleerin, and the T’sa. These species welcomed the Earth into their own defensive organization. The Earth, whether or not it was ready for it, was thrust into intergalactic matters, and as a united front, something this Earth knows nothing about. In fact, the Earth was not quite as united as it appeared to these other species. The Earth had been separated into several companies by the mid-Industrial era, and when the Fraal came it seemed natural to them that the most powerful businessmen should deal with the aliens, and for the Earth.

“Soon, ant-soldiers, with their near-telepathic connections, absolute loyalty to the world they were from, and using technology specifically designed for them by three technologically superior races, were the only army in this galaxy. The enemies that the Fraal had originally feared were beaten back, and the Fraal, Aleerin, and T’sa paid the Earth well for its mercenaries, which is what they in fact were. The ants themselves did not revolt. In fact there was something in them that seemed to love combat. And there was something in the rest of the humans that seemed to love the profits of war.

“The ants were amazingly reproductive, and within a year of being hatched an individual ant would be ready for combat-training, which took at most another year. Twenty years in the service would emancipate the ant from its oath to the company that hatched it, and the ant would have a little less than a decade in which to enjoy its life as best as it could. After serving their terms, some would seek further work as bodyguards, or escorts for the rich and powerful, some would serve as trainers to the new batch of soldiers. There were even ant-artists doing strange new things, making works that CEOs were spending millions on. Now on this Earth, there is a wealth that is almost unimaginable, though it is true that the wealth is not shared equally by all. (Perhaps I had earlier said something about my revolutionary ideas, and this was meant as a sort of recognition of them, though it certainly was not approval.) By and large, though, the major cities of this Earth are clean, prosperous and cosmopolitan. In them one can find the wealthiest executives talking with Fraal advisors, or Aleerin engineers, or T’sa, though I could never figure out what the T’sa do. And there were others, many other client-worlds, and colonial hostages – the kings and princes of foreign worlds sent to make sure that those foreign worlds paid their taxes on time. And though the main hives for the ants are still located in certain sparsely inhabited regions, there has been a recent surge in pro-ant feeling. Ants are accorded equal membership with humans in the corporations that order life. Walking down the street of their version of New York, the Kestari even saw those famed ants.

“They are quadrupeds, but quite as tall as a human, and they still have those utterly alien eyes. People say that they have their own culture, though mostly they seem to have adopted the martial training given to them, but there was talk of a well developed literature, and even a religious system. But there

is always talk, you know. There was even talk that some of the free ants had built up cities underneath the major human ones.

“You might love it there, Tom. They were just about sending in anthropologists to study all of the alien species – including not only the Fraal, Aleerin, and T’sa, but also the ants, and all the other species, several of whom I did not even recognize. That’s how important insects are on one dimension – they allowed Earth to conquer the stars. And in some ways, I mean that literally. It is a good thing that they did not know about the dimensional portal there, because then they might perhaps have tried to conquer all the dimensions out there. And with their ant-soldiers they just might have had a chance. But will things always be so good for that Earth? I do not know. What if one day the ants realize how important they are, and decide that they should be the sole rulers of the galaxy?”

Game Information:

Pax Terra Fomori

-4.593, 11.956

PL 7

G2 / R1 / A2 / P3 / H2

Attributes: Aliens Conquered by Earth, Humanoid Insects, Plutocracy

This is a world in which two coincidental occurrences – the development of a client-species, and the alien refugees – combined to allow this Earth to assume a premier role in all of known space. Perhaps in this tangent all the threats from beyond have been neutralized, or perhaps they did not exist. Perhaps only some have been beaten, and others are only now appearing. But among many of the most well known worlds, Earth is dominant. This dominance is not absolute; in fact, except for enforcing peace between worlds (normally just by having negotiators mediate), and for collecting the probably very reasonable taxes, Earth has no effect on the universe. There are a few ant-sentries patrolling the limits of known space, but their

first priority is to send an instantaneous message to Earth in the case of an attack. This message, or any activity deemed dangerous will summon at least a fraction of the Earth navy, which at any time is a large number of ant-soldiers flying small attack ships that are made by the combined efforts of the Mechalus (whom are only called Aleerins here) and Fraal.

However, most of the action is happening on Earth due to two things: firstly, interstellar peace has been the norm now for a few years, and secondly, drivespace engines are only now being invented. Previously, except for the few negotiators who knew the journey was a death sentence, no humans have seen the universe beyond Earth. Only now is one of the main corporations, Matshushta, putting most of its resources into space travel technology, hoping to create a booming tourist trade.

One of the important repercussions of the extant interstellar peace is that more ant-soldiers are living to retirement, which means more ant-soldiers are returning to Earth. Many are returning to their old hives, which had before been breeding sites only. The main hives are legally corporations themselves, and are located in the North American mid-west (Ohio), Manchuria, the Sahara (not a desert on this world), Eastern Europe, and Australia – and they are massive structures, and growing each year. One smaller hive to take note of is the one buried under Siberia, which is the newest to incorporate, and is attracting a lot of newly returned veterans. There are a few interesting things to note about the ants – while they do have some sort of low-level telepathy, and do think often in species terms (i.e., a few ants die so that the hive can live), they are individuals.

Sometimes, the humans who have never met an ant find that hard to imagine. Also, among humans the term “ants” is still wide-

spread and acceptable; there is no other way to refer to them as a species. There is no accepted way among the ants to refer to the entire species, and each hive has a preferred term, be it Myrmidons, Formorians, Sixes (for their number of limbs), People, or Ants. (To an ant, the term Terran refers to humans and ants, and has recently begun to incorporate their oldest allies, the Fraal, and Aleerin.)

The ants are also somewhat naïve; after all, they have one year of adolescence to learn about all the things that might hurt them, whereas humans have decades (or longer) of adolescence to learn the way the world works. Also, contrary to popular belief, the ants have as yet no literature to speak of, though they do enjoy reading. (Among their favorite [Baseline] works are the Iliad, Beowulf, Don Quixote, and On the Origin of Species [as if you didn't see that one coming].) Actually, only now is a real ant culture being created among the veterans. Newly hatched ants, now as before when they were strictly industrial laborers, are taught primarily through fables the virtues of loyalty and hard work. There is a strange blossoming of religious and philosophical works among the ants themselves (and only among certain ants – primarily focused on the Siberian hive). Ants have the benefit of direct knowledge of their creators, and know also that they themselves are partly made from the creators. Certain ants view humans and the genetic line as divine, but others wonder if perhaps there could be better Terrans created. Siberia is actually the center of a genetics research lab, one that has a library of harvested genetic material from every known species that has recognizable genetic material. This includes all of the species that the ants have subjugated. What some of these ants plan to do with this information is yet to be seen. Some Siberian ants also have begun to regret their short-lifespan, and are researching ways to prolong it, including botanical-chemical methods (herbs and spices), and electronic methods (transfer into

a computer). Only a few ants are attempting these matters, while most of the others are engaged in rigorous debate about these topics. Other veterans have gone to work for the private sector, usually as bodyguards, since they have the training to do that. Some though have gone into other fields, including medicine, biology, and art.

The cities of the Earth are similar to Baseline cities, though almost all have skyscrapers for the leading corporations. (Thanks to the earlier and recurring epidemics that caused the labor shortage mentioned by the Kestari these Earth cities are only now having to deal with the first growing pains of overpopulation.) Except for the already mentioned lack of effective and safe space-travel for humans, and an almost complete lack of cybertech, Earth has reached PL 7, thanks to the technology of the other species. The major corporations in this world also believe in mutual cooperation, and for the most part believe in taking care of their citizen-employees, though no CEO forgets whose on top. Many new projects are joint operations between corporations, and many corporations still maintain ties to the hives of which they used to be owners. All in all, it is a mostly peaceful, and cosmopolitan world.

(FX does not exist in this world, and Psionics is not a known skill except for the Fraal's accepted ability with Telepathy.)

Ant Game Data

STR 10 (d4 + 8) WIL 9 (d4 + 7)
 INT 9 (d4 + 7) CON 12 (d4 + 10)
 DEX 10 (d6 + 7) PER 8 (d8 + 4)

Durability: 12/12/6/6
 Action Check: 10+ / 9 / 4 / 2 #Actions: 2
 Move: sprint 24, run 12, walk 4
 Reaction Score: Ordinary/2
 Last Resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed 10 / 5 / 2 d4s/d4+ 1s/d4+ 2s LI/O
 Jaws* 10 / 5 / 2 d4+ 4s/d3w/d4+ 1w LI/O
 Melee Weapon 12 / 6 / 3 varies varies

Ranged Weapon 12 / 6 / 3 varies varies
 *Ants have developed almost human facial features, at least as refers to their mouths. They have human chins, teeth, lips and tongue, but they have retained the ant's horizontal mandibles to an extent. The mandibles are nearly vestigial, providing no benefit in eating. But they can be brought together and used much like a tusk. Ants are hesitant to do this for two reasons: firstly, the mandibles remind them of their animal ancestry, which many are trying to get away from, and secondly, once an ant killed a human that way, and that is still considered a shaming part of their history.

Defenses

Natural Armor (Ordinary): d4 (LI), d4 (HI), d4 (En)
 + 2 Resistance to Fraal Telepathic Powers

Skills

Armor Operation [10]– *powered armor [10]*, Athletics [10], Melee Weapons [10]– *powered weapon [12]*, Unarmed Attack [10]– *brawl [10]*, Modern Ranged Weapons [10]– *pistol or rifle [12]*, Vehicle Operation [10]– *space fighters or light freighters or medium freighters [16]*, Stamina [12]– *resist pain [13]*, Knowledge [9]– *computer operation [9]*, *first aid [9]*, Navigation [9]– *space-folding astrogation [12]*, System Operation [11]– *one at [15]*, Tactics [10]– *space tactics [11]*, Awareness [9], Resolve [9]– *physical resolve [9]*

These are the skills of an average ant in the navy, though many have forsaken learning several of the skills listed in order to concentrate on a one or two, (i.e., a fighter pilot may ignore System Operations and Weapon skills in order to concentrate on Vehicle Operation). Other ants that may have gone AWOL before induction into the navy may also have lower skill ratings (for missed training sessions). Veterans will likely have higher skill ratings, and some will have completely different specialties – Life Sciences, and Computer Science being the two most popular of

the non-combat skills.

Psionic Skills

Telepathy [8]– because of their nature as a hive the ants have retained an innate link with other ants. This cannot be improved by teaching, though some Fraal have tried, and this skill is not the most fantastic. Ants from the same Hive (laid by the same Queen) and ants within a certain area (a city, or a battlefield in space) have an automatic Ordinary Contact success (brief questions, one-word answers), but may try for a greater success. Stressful situations do not adversely affect this roll, and may in fact boost their innate powers. Also, because the ants can at any time open their minds to any other ants in the vicinity (a few at least in most situations), they can make contact by Fraal mindwalkers difficult (actual resistance modifier to be adjudicated by GM. The more ants, the more difficult the contact. Contact in a Hive would be impossible).

Notes on ants as Heroes

Ant-heroes are perfectly understandable, and could as easily be veterans of the navy, or draft-dodgers (and these latter could be single ants on the run, or smuggled away by the Siberian Hive for its own inscrutable reasons). The six broad skills that are underlined above (Athletics, Vehicle Operation, Stamina, Knowledge, Awareness, and Resolve) are the six free broad skills for an ant. Space has been peaceful for a while, so veteran ants may not have had the opportunity to see much action and their skills might very well be represented by those of a beginning character. Ants also have the natural armor, natural resistance to Fraal telepathy, natural telepathic contact with the Hive, and a maximum lifespan of 30 years (though they don't show any signs of aging until they fall down dead).

“The second insect world the Kestari visited, after many more jumps between dimensions,

was a world of war.

“On this Earth, insects and mammals had evolved nearly simultaneously, though of course the simple change of standing up which made humans was accomplished somewhat sooner than the more complex changes which resulted in sentient insects. You would imagine that humans would, because of their almost innate xenophobia, and advanced technology, wipe out the competing insects, but then you would not be able to imagine this Earth.

“You’ve lived in this jungle for years, so you know the people here, Tom. They have had as many years here as the people have had in Europe, but their technology is not what Europe’s is. There are many reasons why that is. You don’t have to defend this way of life, Tom, I’m not calling the natives inferior.”

(I had probably made a disapproving face, which is what he was referring to when he said that I didn’t have to defend this way of life. I guess it did show my feelings, but I’d hardly call making a face a defense of a way of life.)

“To me, Tom, everyone here is equally expendable.”

(He gave me the oddest look when he said this, but quickly passed on, to his story.)

“Imagine a world like Earth, but covered only in jungles. No real mountain ranges to speak of, no deserts, no plains. Just rain forest. How would that come about? Well, maybe the lack of mountains allows wet air to go everywhere, maybe it’s closer to the Sun. I don’t know. That’s not important. The important thing is to know what a world-wide jungle is like. It’s dangerous. All the items that we take for granted are almost unknown there. Metal, for one thing, is scarce; and a world without metal is not a world for technology, not as we know it. Most tools in a

jungle world are made of wood, and stone, and plant-fibers, and bone – and it is a good thing for those people that those resources are seemingly unlimited. And they make do with what they have, as people do on nearly all the Earths they are born on. The people in the jungle pound plant fibers, and some even use tree pulp, into paper. Fire is a well-known element, and is used judiciously more often than not. Agriculture is known, but most people plant only small family gardens. Domesticated animals are more often pets than food-sources, though many villages have a few goats, or sheep, or – in the far northern and southern areas, where the rain forests are temperate – deer, which they usually just keep for milk.

“Most of the people, however, don’t live that far north and south, but rather inhabit a wide band of jungle that runs along the middle of the continent. Oh, that is a difference I did not think to mention before, but there is in fact only one major continent. Streams heavily crisscross this inhabited area, and the people on this world are experts on the water. Though I earlier compared them to these people here, their ships are more like the sorts of ships that would sail your own Mississippi. They are wide and long, but not high, and not very deep. The people also use canoes for personal journeys, and in fact there is a wide network of people who travel the waterways to spread information. One of the greatest advantages that these people have is that they are a tightly-knit group. There is no world government, like the League of Nations on this Earth. Each small village has its own government – some are dictatorships, while others are ruled by a council, or by their elders, or even by the dreams of a child. But these villages know that the survival of the human species is more important than petty squabbles. Humans rarely, if ever, kill humans, though, of course, they do sometimes end up hurting each other. Usually difficulties in agreement are settled with a game. That is one of the strangest things the

Kestari had to get used to. On his world there is just one Game, and it is only played once a lifetime; it is the Game the Kestari played to become the Kestari. But on this jungle Earth people played games all the time, not just when they were trying to settle a disagreement. There were many games, but there was one that they played particularly when they had to make a decision between two people. This game had several variants, but I think it is generally closest to what you might know as chess.

“The second great advantage that these people have is that they are resistant. I mean that the Kestari saw no disease among them. He had been to worlds where disease was unknown, and where the people could be crippled with a simple cold, simply because their own immune systems had been so long unused. On this world though, diseases were everywhere. It was because they had been living with them forever that most people had developed not only an immunity to these diseases, but also a very strong resistance to any unknown, foreign or dangerous material. The Kestari learned this when trying to poison a man. The man didn’t even know that he was being attacked, because he felt nothing. And that was a very powerful toxin. The people there were fast healers.

“The third and final advantage of these people is that they know much more about herbs than the people of almost any other Earth. Not only were diseases almost unknown to the people there, but death was hardly a frightening proposition, because in addition to widespread belief in reincarnation within the family, people rarely died of natural causes before their two-hundredth birthday.

“But all these advantages are needed. I did say, natural causes, just a moment ago. Because the insects on this world are not only sentient and giant, but they are also hostile. And there are many more of them. No one knows much about them, except that some of

them live in hives. No one really knows if they are sentient either, because they speak their own languages – and no one knows how many different types of them there really are, or how many languages there are. I know that they are sentient though, because I saw a group of beetles attack a village, and they moved so smoothly that I knew it was planned. Perhaps they speak with pheromones? I do not know, I only know that I saw mosquitoes there that killed men for their blood, and beetles that used dead shells for armor, and sharpened sticks for spears. I saw a sort of dragonfly stalk a ship, and at night it stole one of the crew. What was worse than all of that though, were the wasps, and the screams of the men whom they stung, and laid eggs in. Remember when I told you that these men had great resistance to diseases? Well, the paralytic toxin of the wasp did not work long on them. They soon regained consciousness, and knowing that they held the beginning of their greatest enemy, these men would drown themselves. They fed the fish that would later feed the villages. In its own way, their sacrifice was one of the most beautiful things the Kestari had ever seen.

“But he still left that world as soon as he found the portal.”

Game Information:

Endless Armies

-2.953, 26.501

PL 0/1

G2 / R1 / A2 / P3 / H2

Attributes: Jungle World, Humanoid Insects

The people of this world have many advantages that just might let them survive the insect onslaught. They are also very different from other humans of other Earths. First of all, unmentioned by the Kestari, they have brown skin, with some almost being tinted green. Secondly, they have a great amount of cultural herbal knowledge. Giving even the children Life Science – *Botany*, and First

Aid would not be unreasonable. Others may be more skilled, and may be able to brew specific concoctions – insect repellents and poisons are the most common items asked for. As to how easy these are to make, and how effective they are, is a choice that could change this world. Easy-to-make repellents and instantly fatal poisons could quickly safeguard many human settlements, and allow expansion; a world where the search for repellent ingredients are epic quests could easily be a world where humans will die out. The fight against all odds may very well be the tone that one wants for this. Then again, the extinction of the human race might not be as easy to accomplish as it sounds.

The humans of this world also have an ingrained distaste for violence against other humans. They know that they have to stick together to survive. The humans of this world are very species-centered, and very family-centered; for the majority, their first thoughts are of the village, and only when the village is safe will their thoughts be of themselves. Most importantly perhaps is that they have what amounts to the Amazing mutation of Hyper Immunity, which in their case also includes a resistance to toxins, and poisons. If the GM deems it appropriate, the blood of these people can be so dangerous to other life forms that it can even be termed a poison to much of the insect life of this world. It probably would act as an insinuating necrotoxin to most insects; warriors would paint their arrows and spears with their own blood. However, not all insects might be susceptible to the poison; wasps should probably be immune for no other reason than to make them very dangerous, and very scary.

Anyone who is not from this tangent and ends up on this world will probably be subjected to a number of uncomfortable, debilitating, and possibly deadly combinations of diseases and toxins. The one benefit that they will have is their advanced technology, which may be quite hard to keep clean in this environment. Of course, if they are able to befriend an herbalist native to the tangent, most diseases will be uncomfortable until diagnosed and treated, but rarely fatal.

Of the insects there is not much to be said. Game information is not provided here, primarily because from the little I've seen of them, I think several of the Gamma World monsters could be easily adapted to this world, and because I do not have that book. I envisioned most of the insect species as being fairly independent of each other, as well as being, for the most part, loners, or at most small families. The exception to this are the beetles, whom I see as being the most like the humans in their organization and tool use. But if the GM wishes it, underneath a seemingly disorganized front could be a whole civilization of six legs and compound eyes.

(This whole world could be turned around – a jungle world where the insects have to protect themselves from the dangerous and poisonous human beings.)

(Shamanism FX may be appropriate to this world; psionics are not inappropriate, and may help humans against the insects. Of course, psionics may also help insects against humans.)





Zahban Glow Bug

By Derek Holland

Zahban (Glow Bug)

STR d4+2 INT d2+1
DEX 2d4+6 WIL d6+3
CON d6+1 PER d3+1

Durability as CON

Action Check 12+ /11/5/2

Movement: walk 2, fly 40 # of actions 2

Reaction Score: O/2

Mutations: Radiating eyes (variant), radiation tolerance, enhanced senses, size change (larger)

Defects: Thermal intolerance (cold only), severe phobia (bats and birds), photogeneration (variant), nocturnal

Attacks

Bite 4/2/1 1s/d2s/d3s (LI/O)

Radiating eyes as per mutation

Defenses

Armor: none

-1 vs. melee

+1 vs. ranged

-6 step bonus vs. radiation checks

Skills

Unarmed attack (4); Acrobatics (10)- flight (16); Stealth (10)- hide (14); Awareness (6)- intuition (8), perception (9).

Description

Zahban are a mutant form of the common firefly (or lightning bug) and are about .3 meters long. They have a faulty bioluminescent gene that causes them to glow when ever they move. Because of this, their food needs, especially protein, have increased dramatically. Instead of feeding on other small animals, swarms of zahban usually hunt animals the size of

sheep and larger. They ignore plants and fungi. Birds and bats feed on the swarms.

Encounter

To compensate for their revealing glow, zahban swarms usually wait hidden in foliage until suitable prey passes within 20 meters of them. Then they swarm the prey using radiation and mandibles to bring it down. They emit the radiation not from their eyes, but also from organs on their front legs. If attacking a group, they will only take a slow, weak or young animal and let the rest run.

Habitat

Zahban are found in any low land habitat in the southern part of Meriga. The cold kills off the eggs and overwintering adults.

Society

Zahban are found in huge swarms. When prey is scarce, they feed on each other after sweeping the area clean of other insects and small vertebrates. A swarm has a territory of 1 square kilometer per 5000 zahban.

Biome: warm climes

Encounter chance: unlikely

Group size: 1000-100,000

Organization: swarm

Niche: low level carnivore

IQ: low order animal





The Tymbrimi

By Jim Sharkey



The Tymbrimi A New PC Race for Uplift

The first race Earthclan made contact with when they went to the stars was the Tymbrimi. They have been the Terrans staunchest, closest allies, even at some cost to themselves, helping the human *wollfings* survive in a hostile universe.

The Tymbrimi are probably the least alien of the species Earthclan has seen regularly in terms of appearance. Tymbrimi are tall, slender, long-limbed humanoids with wide-set eyes, a ruff of brown fur that starts at the spine and ends in a widow's peak above the nose, and a crown of silvery tendrils that tops the head. These tendrils allow them to create *empathy glyphs* (see below) and are also the primary heat releasers when the Tymbrimi have to exert themselves, or cool down after a *gheer flux* transformation (see below).

The Tymbrimi, much like their Earthclan allies, believe that knowledge does not begin and end with the Galactic Library. Indeed, they too have a tendency to question the information contained in it, an act that raises the ire of the more conservative races in the Galaxies.

The Tymbrimi have only a moderate standing in Galactic society, at least in part because they have one quality which is almost universally reviled in the Galaxies: a sense of humor. In truth, the Tymbrimi, along with their clients, the Tytlal, a race that resembles four-foot tall otters, are easily the universe's greatest jokesters. They will go to almost any lengths, taking as much time as is needed and using all manner of convoluted plans to craft elaborate practical jokes. This causes other clans to refer to them as juvenile delinquents at best, "devil tricksters" at worst. The race's sense of humor has created no few enemies for them, but they seem not to be terribly troubled by that. The Tymbrimi would likely rather die as a race than compromise their culture.

Tymbrimi have a great esprit de corps, and unlike many other clans, fight very little among themselves. Their humor rarely falls into the realm of slapstick; they prefer their jokes be less direct than

that (Though their Tytlal clients, on the other hand, love a good pratfall). They have a refined aesthetic sense, and are rarely crude or crass. In spite of their affection for their Earthclan allies, there are times they despair of the blunt, uncouth Terran behavior they see.

The Tymbrimi truly enjoy having the Terrans as allies. They respect Earthclan's belief in treating client species as equals, how it questions the Library, and human unpredictability. Perhaps most astonishing to them, humans have proven able to create rudimentary *empathy glyphs* of their own, suggesting that perhaps there is psionic potential in Earthclan after all.

While the Tymbrimi have many enemies, they are fortunate enough to have certain innate advantages that have allowed them to stay one step ahead of those who would harm them. When combined with their ability to think original thoughts (rare indeed in Galactic society), it makes them more formidable than their unassuming appearance would indicate.

Special Abilities:

All Tymbrimi have a limited form ESP, based on the *empathy glyphs* they generate with their head tendrils. These *empathy glyphs* bring together a handful of normally unrelated psionic skills under a new PER broad skill, *Glyph crafting*. More details are provided below.

The most impressive, but also most dangerous ability the Tymbrimi possess is called the *gheer flux*. It allows the Tymbrimi to adapt to their surroundings, either slowly or at a moment's notice.

An example of a slow transformation might include a female Tymbrimi spending a great deal of time among humans. She may find her second and third sets of mammary glands decreasing in size, while the uppermost pair increases in size to more closely resemble human women, or her eyes moving closer together and hips widening, again to emulate a more human appearance. This transformation is subtle, and poses no danger to the Tymbrimi, though it may make her uncomfortable,

even somewhat of an outcast among her own people.

The second transformation is made under stress, for example during combat or while fleeing an enemy. The round after the stressful situation starts, a Tymbrimi gets a Resolve - *mental* check to suppress it. If the check fails, the Tymbrimi gains a -1 step bonus to action checks and whatever task he is doing. After three rounds, this bonus goes to -2 steps. If the stressful situation causing the *gheer flux* lasts less than a minute (5 rounds), the Tymbrimi suffers one point of Fatigue damage at the end of the encounter. If it lasts more than a minute, but less than five minutes, the Tymbrimi suffers two points of Fatigue damage. If it lasts longer than five minutes, but less than an hour, it causes three points of Fatigue damage. Each additional hour causes another Fatigue point. In addition, repeated use of the *gheer flux* in a day cause the time periods to be cumulative. That is, if it occurs for three minutes in the morning, then another four minutes in the afternoon, the effect at the end of the afternoon flux will be three points of Fatigue.

To stop the *flux* once it's started requires a Resolve - *mental* check once the stressful situation is over. The test may be made every round until passed, and may put the length of the *flux* into the next time category. Tymbrimi are loath to give in to the *gheer flux* because the repeated changes in their body enzymes caused by it shorten their lives. As a result he *flux* is only allowed to happen unchallenged under very rare circumstances.

Tymbrimi are hated by many powerful clans. As a result, they receive a +2 step penalty to Interaction and Deception checks with them, since few other clans trust them at all.

Actual Tymbrimi Mindwalkers are not as common as might be expected. Most of the race's psionic ability is geared strictly towards the creation of empathy glyphs, and few Tymbrimi take the time to expand their skills beyond Glyph Crafting. Non-Mindwalker Tymbrimi gain psionic energy points equal to their WIL score. Mindwalker Tymbrimi gain psionic energy points equal to 1.5 times their WIL score.

Ability Scores:

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIL	PER
4/11	6/14	4/12	7/15	7/16	7/15

Free Broad Skills:

STR - Athletics

DEX - Vehicle Operation

INT - Knowledge

WIL - Awareness

PER - Interaction, Glyph Crafting

Glyph Crafting, Broad skill, 6 points

The Glyph Crafting psionic skill brings together several normally unrelated psionic specialty skills under one broad skill. Because the skills are related to empathy, they are not as effective as regular psionics. Glyphs are often used by Tymbrimi to communicate and express themselves. Between two Tymbrimi who are familiar with each other, the *Contact* specialty skill does not cost any psionic energy points, though *empathy glyphs* cannot be used for complex communication. They are more intended for the sharing of emotions.

That is, other races are affected by these skills to a greater or lesser extent, depending on their psionic acuity. A Tandu will usually shrug off an *empathy glyph*, simply because it is not capable of empathy, as will a Thennannin because they are completely unable to use psionics, while a human is more receptive to it and can be affected more easily than those races. The actual modifiers are up to the GM's discretion. The specialty skills in Glyph Crafting are as follows:

Contact

Empathy

Mind Reading

Precognition

Sensitivity

Suggest

Certain commonly used glyphs have names in Tymbrimi. They include the following:

fornell - uncertainty

kenning - the sensing of another's glyph

la'thsthoon - intimacy

lurrunanu - a penetration glyph, when trying to suggest something to another

nuturunow - a glyph given off when resisting a *gheer flux*

syluff-kuonn - anticipation, particularly of a practical joke

The Uplift War has a number of additional glyphs and Tymbrimi expressions spelled out. Please refer to it for additional ideas.



ASK THE ORACLE

By Neil Spicer

ASK THE ORACLE

Q: I have a question about partial armor- i.e. mail that does not cover arms or legs. If a weapon only does damage to an unarmored person, what are the chances of hitting an unarmored spot? What about an open helm or no helmet?

A: Alternity doesn't exactly have a Hit Location resolution component to its combat system. Instead, Alternity employs a variable armor value based on the type of weapon that strikes someone (Low-Impact, High-Impact, or Energy). This value is always represented as d4+1, d6-2, etc., indicating that a random amount of damage will be blocked (and sometimes no damage will be blocked in the case of a negative adjustment to the roll). This is done so as to represent the differences in partial or weaker forms of armor. For instance, on pg. 188 of the *Player's Handbook*, you will find a listing under PL2 for Full Plate and Partial Plate armor. Full Plate has a damage rating of d6+1/d6-3/d6-3 and Partial Plate has an obviously weaker rating of d6/d8-5/d6-4. These numbers are meant to represent the inherent chances of hitting an unarmored spot as well as the potential weakness of the armor's material against a certain kind of attack.

Also, just because a weapon strikes an armored portion of your opponent, it doesn't mean all the damage is blocked. In the high-tech world of the future, most weapons will damage someone even if they *are* wearing armor. The degree of protection provided depends on the amount and quality of the armor itself. For instance, the PL7 CF Softsuit provides d6 points of protection from Low-Impact damage, d6 points of protection against High-Impact damage, and d6-1 points of protection from Energy-based damage. Add-ons, such as shields or helmets can increase the amount of protection, though some armors already come with an integrated helmet or hood and cannot be further enhanced except by a shield. A PL5 Riot Shield, for example, gives an additional point of protection to all three categories...but a Riot Helmet only gives +1 point to the Low-Impact and High-Impact categories. Both of these could benefit someone wearing a CF Softsuit, but only a shield could be added to a Battle Jacket (since it already comes with an integrated hood). And remember, the more armor

you pile onto your hero, the less agile he or she will tend to be. Too much armor can have an adverse effect on your action check (i.e., initiative) and your Dexterity resistance modifier (i.e., ability to dodge out of the way).

So what about the intentional targeting of an unarmored spot on your opponent in order to bypass his armor and deal more damage? There are rules to cover this on pg. 50 in the *Gamemaster's Guide*. Such an attack would be a Called Shot of the "Dead-Eye" variety. All Called Shots incur at least a +4 step penalty to the skill check, and in the case of a Dead-Eye shot, grant you an automatic increase to the grade of success achieved...but only if the attack hits. This means you're more likely to achieve a Good or Amazing success with your skill check, thereby allowing you to roll the higher damage rating of your weapon. Also, don't forget that if you get lucky enough to achieve an Amazing success on any attack (Called Shot or otherwise), your opponent will have to make an immediate Stamina-endurance check to remain conscious. This can be a powerful incentive to try such attacks, even in the middle of melee. Finally, at the Gamemaster's discretion, he should declare that a successful hit upon an unarmored location denies any armor roll to absorb the damage of the attack. The full amount of the damage should take effect upon your opponent.

Q: In Warships, the max size of the power systems was left out. Have any unofficial stats for them?

Actually I think we have some official stats for you. According to a member of the Alternity mailing list that participated in the play-testing of the Warships rules, the following sizes were given at that time. Apparently they just never made it into print (or download, as the case may be).

Power Plant:	Max Size:
Solar Cell	40
Fission Generator*	100
Fusion Generator	120
Grav-fusion Cell	180
Fuel Tank	-

Tachyonic Collider	100
Antimatter Reactor	200
Mass Reactor	400
Dynamic Mass Reactor	500
Matter Converter	200
Quantum Cell	250
Singularity Generator	800

Q: If the Aegis system enjoys a combat strength rating of 25,000 in the abstract combat system and fortress ships only have a rating of 10,000, why does pg. 68 of the *Externals ESD* refer to the system as having “defensive firepower equal to two fortress ships...”? Is this because Verge Alliance fortress ships are considered to be improved versions like the *Phlegethon* with a rating of 12,500?

A: The abstract combat system is really designed for the easy resolution of large-scale combats without getting into the nitty-gritty details of the supplemental rules provided in *Warships*. Although no specific combat strength ratings were ever given for ships in the Verge Alliance, presumably they stand on somewhat equal footing with their External counterparts. On pg. 63 of the *Externals ESD* it states that, “...in game play the organic nature of the External fleet matters little. They can be assumed to function very similarly to human-built craft in all ways.” Later, in that same section of text, it mentions that “...while a battleship of human design might be very different from one of External manufacture, the two have roughly similar capabilities.” This would seem to indicate that a *Tyrant*-class battleship from the External fleet would share the same 1,500 combat strength rating as an *Admiral*-class battleship from the Verge Alliance. Or, that a Verge Alliance fortress ship would share the same 10,000 combat strength rating as the External fortress ship, *Styx* and not *Phlegethon*.

Obviously, this doesn't add up to the same math on pg. 68 where the defensive systems of Aegis are given a rating of 25,000 (System Defense Rating of 5 multiplied by itself, times 1000) and then declared to be equivalent to two fortress ships. That figure is really just an estimate. The combined power of two Verge Alliance fortress ships should amount to 20,000. But, after adding in the extra 2,000 combat rating of the fighter-craft carried on each ship's hangar bays, the total comes to a more respectable figure of 24,000. In essence, the Aegis system does enjoy a level of pro-

tection comparable to two non-improved fortress ships, and that only represents their orbital and planetary defenses. The number is even higher once the Regency's stellar navy is factored into the equation. These system defenses are really the only reason the Verge Alliance fleet has lasted as long as it has against the External armada. Ship for ship, the Verge Alliance can't possibly match them unless the Stellar Ring sends help soon.

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

A: In an effort to clarify an answer from the previous Action Check (March Issue #10), this question needs to be re-addressed. Last month's answer just touched on the specific statistics of what a Dreth capacitor might provide to a starship in terms of additional power factors, etc. The heart of the question really deals with the abstract combat system as presented on pgs. 63-64 of the *Externals ESD*.

In general, Dreth capacitors should provide a slightly higher combat strength rating. Although Dreth capacitor technology, which stores twice as much power, doesn't necessarily equate to twice the combat effectiveness, clearly such technology should allow a ship to remain combat capable for longer than average and thereby increase its strength rating somewhat. The easiest way to signify this in the game is to have Dreth capacitors provide a 5% bonus to their ships. Anything higher than that tends to portray the Dreth ships as being too powerful. And, given that the Rigunmors were able to shatter the Dreth fleet single-handedly in 2380, this is unlikely. Thus, a light cruiser patrolling the Dewi system on behalf of the New Dreth Commonwealth would do so with a 5% enhanced strength rating of 263 instead of the normal 250. And, a fortress ship from the old Dreth commonwealth would have enjoyed a rating of 10,500 in the days of GW2.

For the time being, it's probably safe to assume that the four cruisers in the Dewi system enjoy the superior Dreth capacitors, and as such have a higher combat rating than other Verge Alliance cruisers. Remember however, that the four ships are incredibly old and beyond the capability for the shipyards to repair. Over time these vessels might become damaged and lose the edge provided by their superior capacitors. This could

also be true for any Verge Alliance or External ship that falls behind the times in terms of technology, etc. Today, the private shipyards of the Drethcan only build new capacitors for scout- or trader-class vessels. This means that new Dreth ships rolling out of the Dewi system will be scout-sized, which according to the External *Augila*-class would only have a combat strength of 20. So, the maximum combat rating attainable by Dreth scout ships would be 21 (i.e., 20 plus 5%)... and that's not a significant difference really. Unless your campaign manages to enhance the production capacity of the Dreth shipyards or somehow merge their capacitor technology with larger Verge Alliance ships, don't expect to field an enhanced fleet of significant power anytime soon.

Q: What combat strength rating (in the abstract combat system) should Armored Cruisers and Battlecruisers receive?

A: According to the *Externals ESD*, a heavy cruiser has a combat rating of 500. Since the *Warships* supplement indicates an armored cruiser has 20% more hull points than a heavy cruiser, a combat rating of 600 makes sense (i.e., 120% of 500).

A battlecruiser is much the same as a pocket-battleship and might have a combat rating of 1,000 or more. If we examine the *Warships* supplement, we can see that it indicates battlecruisers have twice the hull points of an armored cruiser and four-fifths the hull points of a battleship. If we use those fractions to do the same math on the combat strength ratings for an armored cruiser and a battleship, they both come out to a rating of 1,200. This means a battlecruiser has a combat strength rating of 1,200, slightly more firepower than a pocket-battleship, but still less than a full battleship (i.e., 1,500).

Q: What is the largest type of ship in the Verge Alliance navy?

A: Obviously, the largest ship in the Verge Alliance navy is (or was) the *Lighthouse*. It tops 1,400 meters in length. Sheer size doesn't necessarily equate to combat strength, however. On pg. 10 of *The Lighthouse* accessory it states, "As a capital-class ship itself - the military equal of a heavy cruiser - the *Lighthouse* is largely impervious to the attacks of small space vessels." This would

mean that the *Lighthouse* carries an effective combat rating of 500. It could actually be higher than that, since the *Lighthouse* accessory clearly was written prior to the *Warships* product. As such, it could really be the equivalent of an armored cruiser or even a battlecruiser. Because of the descriptions of the *Lighthouse's* firepower in the Battle of Aegis, it seems clear she was more capable than the traditional heavy cruiser, and a combat rating of 1,200 would sound more plausible. Of course, that figure is certainly supplemented by all the fighter-craft the space station carries along with it. And, the real military value of the *Lighthouse* lies in its ability to ferry so many other combat vessels over such a large distance. The space station's stardrive range is exactly the same as most fortress ships (i.e., 50 light-years). Regardless of these facts, the military value of the *Lighthouse* has been reduced to zero by the end of the Battle of Aegis. On pg. 92 of the *Externals ESD* it states, "The battle is won. The enemy has quit the system. *Lighthouse* lost." Other than the *Lighthouse*, the largest ships actually mentioned in the *Externals ESD*, and those with the heaviest firepower, are the dreadnoughts *Sanctuary* of the Regency stellar navy, *Gandolf* of the StarMech Collective, and the *Decisive*, which is presumably from the Galactic Concord. There is also an erroneous reference to Admiral Raastad piloting a dreadnought in the initial defense of Hammer's Star on pg. 78, but the statistics for his flagship, the *Vition*, in the Star*Drive Campaign Setting manual on pg. 208 clearly describes it to be an *Admiral*-class battleship. In terms of size, dreadnoughts are between 800 and 1,200 meters, but they carry a much higher combat rating of 2,500. Three or four dreadnoughts could probably handle a single fortress ship, but unfortunately the *Externals* brought three of them into the Verge (*Phlegethon*, *Styx*, and *Acheron*). In addition, the Exeat force has at least twelve dreadnoughts, twenty battlecruisers, and of course the Ython Kadar's cathedral ship available. This could explain why the *Gandolf* was lost in the Battle of Tendril and the *Sanctuary* had to retreat from the Battle of Aegis in order to affect emergency repairs at the Thuldan base on Lhop. Only the *Decisive* seems to have survived the conflict relatively in tact so far and, in fact, appears to be the remaining flagship for the Verge Alliance following the loss of the *Lighthouse* (though that distinction may fall to the newly repaired *Sanctuary* instead).

Also, the Externals haven't escaped the war unscathed either. They lost the fortress ship *Ach-eron* in the Battle of Ignatius, as well as numerous dreadnoughts and battlecruisers to the system defenses of Hammer's Star, Aegis, and other sites. It's these planetary defenses (rather than the mobile battlefleet) that has allowed the Verge Alliance to last this long. Aegis and Hammer's Starcarried firepower in the form of orbital platforms and planetary cannons equal to four fortress ships. Tendril probably equaled another fortress ship and a half by itself. These defenses are the critical component to the survival of the Verge colonies. The days of seeking out the External fleet in order to engage it in open space are numbered unless the Verge Alliance receives more ships with heavier firepower.

By the end of the Battle of Aegis, the four original Verge Alliance battle groups have been reduced to just three. The flagships for each probably break down as follows:

- First Battle Group – the dreadnought *Decisive*
- Second Battle Group – the repaired dreadnought *Sanctuary*
- Third Battle Group – the combat-hardened battleship *Pittsburgh*



- Other notable survivors include:
- The *Philadelphia* (2nd Battle Group battleship)
 - The *Monarch* and *Patriarch* (2nd Battle Group carriers)
 - The *Bonnie Brae* (a long-range destroyer, formerly of the 4th Battle Group and most likely reassigned to the *Pittsburgh*)

The *Boron Wind* (2nd Battle Group intelligence and long-range sensor ship)

The *Birmingham* (light cruiser under the command of Ramil ibn Beighur in the Lucullus system)

Q: What are the member governments of the Verge Alliance?

A: According to pg. 81 of the *Externals ESD* and other references throughout that product, the Verge Alliance is comprised of the following governments:

The Galactic Concord (or at least all elements of that stellar nation inside the Verge)

The Regency of Bluefall (including its colonies at Rinstoke and Terivine)

The Independent State of Alaundril (including its colony at Terivine, although they retain their allegiance to StarMech while sailing under the Verge Alliance colors)

The Thuldian Empire (or at least their representative acting on his own to seize power while separated from his superiors)

The Orion colony at Mantebtron (though the Externals are firmly in possession of that system)

The dual governments of Corrivale (both the Hatire Diocese and the native Sesheyans)

The Independent Nation of Argos (and presumably the remnants of the Verge Confederation)

The Technospiders of the now defunct United Lucullan Defense Force (originally all of Lucullus agreed to support the alliance, but most of the barons betrayed them when the Externals arrived to do battle in that system; the Technospiders now support Solar Captain Ramil ibn Beighur's guerilla efforts)

Notably absent from the list of governments that joined the Verge Alliance were the bitter enemies of the Algemron system: Galvin and Alitar. The rest of the Verge voiced support, but not necessarily direct military assistance. Also, there is no indication that the New Dreth Commonwealth of the Dewi system joined the alliance, but the prophecy mentioned on pg. 39 of the *Star Compendium* would seem to indicate they have an individual role to play in the conflict, whether they realize it or not.

Lastly, it might also be important to note the Stellar Nation governments that are making every effort to come to the aid of the Verge Alliance. So far, VoidCorp is the only nation to sell out human-

ity. They have done so by directly striking a secret deal with the I'krl Theocracy. Many other nations have remained neutral, most likely because they wish to rebuild their infrastructure following GW2, and secretly hope to gain an advantage on the others while they expend resources to fight the Externals. Those nations that have been most willing to carry the fight to the Verge are: The Galactic Concord, StarMech, the Orion League, and Austrin-Ontis Unlimited. The first three are mostly concerned about the safety of their colonies in the Verge. However, Austrin-Ontis believes the Verge is a lost cause in terms of saving those that remain. They simply want an all-out assault against the aliens in order to push them back and defend humanity against any further incursions. Currently, these four stellar nations are forming a huge relief effort in the Kendai system called *Operation Rache*. The fleet has been constantly delayed through VoidCorp's sabotage and bureaucratic maneuvering. Only time will tell if they'll reach the Verge in time to make a difference.

Q: Does the Verge Alliance have a flag, just as the stellar nations do?

A: Probably so, although no official flag was ever drawn in any of the Star*Drive products. The text in the *Externals ESD* does make reference to such a flag's existence when it says the "StarMech allied government of Tendril, while refusing to break its ties with its distant parent state, announced that its fleet would now sail under the Verge Alliance colors."

Q: Ever since the External War began, does the Verge Alliance have any technology captured from External forces?

A: Certainly, although most of those devices don't tend to be very usable to the Verge Alliance. The biotechnology of the Kadarans, which comprises 65% of the entire Theocracy's arsenal, is really made up of nothing more than fragile living organisms. There are references to the fact that personal weapons of the Externals tend to fall apart after being separated from their owners. Refer to pg. 23 of the *Externals ESD* where it states that, "all External tech dissolves and decays soon after separation from its wielders." This happens primarily because such weapons and technology are biological lifeforms that feed on the bioelectrical energy of their wielders.

Since they are adapted to External lifeforms, they don't work quite right in human hands. There are versions of weapons that do work with humanity's bioelectrical signature, but these are grown on Lucullus during the External War in 2503 in order to arm those that are loyal to the Exeat (see the sidebar on pg. 23).

Even if the Verge Alliance does manage to obtain External weapons or other technology that is adapted to work with their physiology, such weapons could still dissolve on them. External biotech is susceptible to heat and cannot continue to survive at room temperature without constant contact with its host or wielder. This is why most External sites are kept very cool and their weapons lockers are mostly refrigeration units. Some of their holsters even provide the very same cooling function.

Also, External ships and weapons formed from biological organisms tend to have a cunning intelligence behind them. Not all of the devices are fully sentient, but many of them are at least self-aware. On pg. 62, the *Externals ESD* makes it clear that, "the massive brains and nerve clusters that serve to guide their living starships...are fully sentient creatures in their own right. They understand their lot and follow orders much as any other member of the crew is expected to do." This means that External ships that are captured somehow by the Verge Alliance will most certainly resist its captors. Coercing such a ship to take you somewhere would involve just as much intimidation, charming, and even psychological brainwashing as actual computer-based reprogramming...the equivalent of convincing a captive soldier to betray his army.

Lastly, not every piece of External technology comes from the Kadarans and suffers such limitations. The Sifarv, for example, share many of the same technologies as humanity. Items that are captured by the Verge Alliance that once belonged to them could stand the test of time much more easily. And, although the *Externals ESD* never references any specific capture of Sifarv weapons and equipment, the Battle of Ignatius was a total disaster for the Exeat and should have provided ample opportunity for the Verge Alliance to study their opponents in detail. Even the Kadaran biotechnology can be preserved and examined as long as it is kept in a cool place. So, the basic answer to your question is 'yes', but there are a lot of issues to consider if you plan to actually be able to use the captured devices.