

ISSUE

ALTERNITY

14

ACTION CHECK

ONLINE  MAGAZINE

STAR•DRIVE

GAMMA WORLD

DARK•MATTER



Action Check Disclaimers

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

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

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

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

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

STAFF

Publisher/Layout: Jeff Ibach
Editor: Jim Sharkey
Oracle and Submission
Coordinator: Neil Spicer
Cover Design: Daryl Blasi

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

E-Mail: actioncheck@hotmail.com

BACK ISSUES

www.alternity.net

Table of Contents

Cover Art: "Lost Souls" by Dragan Ciric
kvasaclimited@sezampro.yu

Page 3 Editorial [Neil Spicer]
Gaming and the Real World

Page 4 The Reaction Score
Letters from our readers

Page 8 Interview with a game designer [Staff]
The ghost of Rich Baker shares some insights into Althernity.

Page 11 Visions From Beyond [Gary Astleford]
12 new Careers for Dark*Matter games.

Page 20 The Silver Goose [Stephen Dunaway]
Starship stats and deckplans for Star*Drive

Page 22 Zane's Fighting Ships [Gary Astleford]
Starships from the Second Galactic War

Page 26 Gridsites [Dawn Ibach]
Some websites for your Dark*Matter research

Page 27 Ask the Oracle [Neil Spicer]
Your questions on Althernity answered!

Happy Halloween from Action Check!

As a special presentation, Action Check proudly presents Neil Spicer's full-length Althernity Dark*Matter adventure "Of Ghosts and Goblins" available now at [http://www.alternity.net!](http://www.alternity.net)

Action Check On-Line Magazine is published bimonthly by Jeff Ibach
Issue #14, September-October 2001

Editorial: Gaming and the Real World

As I write this in mid-October, very few people are thinking about gaming. Instead, for most of us (especially those living in America), our thoughts are with the victims, families, rescue workers, and soldiers affected by the tragic events of September 11th, 2001. And though this is a Halloween issue of Action Check dedicated to the horror genre, nothing can compare to the horror we've seen played out on the news networks over and over again. I've heard a number of people comment that the act of terrorism seemed like a plot straight out of a Hollywood action thriller. Indeed, I had the same thought myself as I watched the second plane slam into the World Trade Center on TV. But of course, it was all too real. The crash of each and every plane touched us all. For me, it was personal. I lost a good friend and high school classmate at the Pentagon when his office was hit. Lieutenant Eric Cranford joined the Navy straight out of college, enlisting as an officer, and eventually he transferred to the Pentagon to prepare briefings for his superiors. His remains were positively identified two weeks after the attack and, according to the official report, he died at his post that day. I guess that's what brought all of this home to me.

Everyone probably values at least some element of "realism" in our games. I know I do. And I'm sure we've all turned to such storylines in order to make them more "realistic" and captivating for our players. I even know of some gamers who began imagining new plots based loosely on what occurred in New York and Washington just days after the tragedy. They would say, "It makes for such a great Dark*Matter scenario! Maybe the Greys were behind it?" And for me, well frankly, I found such insensitivity saddening. As much as I recognize what occurred on September 11th could make for a good plot, I certainly have no desire to explore it right now. In fact, I recently started work on a new adventure/project myself, intending to publish it in this month's Action Check. The premise involves a Sandman-inspired outbreak of a new cyber-virus. But, with the Anthrax scare that's recently made the news, I don't think it's the appropriate time to explore that particular subject right now. And so, I've set it aside. I'll certainly get around to completing the piece eventually, but for the moment, I need to escape into something different. It just makes common sense. And I know it's important for everyone to get on with their daily lives, not allowing the terrorists to "succeed" by disrupting what we do...but still, it should be clear that we cannot ignore what happened entirely or dishonor the victims by reacting in a flippant manner about it.

As I see it, there are really just four options available to gamers still wrestling with what's happened in real life. One, we can set aside gaming entirely in order to focus upon the non-fictional world. Two, we can keep on gaming and adjust the nature of the plots so they don't reach too deeply into subjects that are still too fresh and painful to explore. Three, we can steer ourselves straight into the wind and explore the subject head on so as to give ourselves an element of release by role-playing a band of heroes against the perceived 'enemy'. Or, lastly, we could ignore the whole incident entirely...not allowing it to affect us, or how we play the games, at all.

I'm sure that not everyone will share my personal view, but I'd like to go for the second option for now. If nothing else, it gives me the time to absorb what's happened and decide how I want to eventually move on to options three and four. In many ways RPG's can be therapeutic, after all. I certainly recognize that, and often use them as a release from "reality." Regardless, I would urge each and every Game-master to assess his or her group and determine just how much realism is appropriate right now. As always, be considerate to your players. Some of them might have been more deeply affected by the events than you realize. It could take some time to progress through the different options or "stages" listed above, but eventually we all want to get back to dreaming about heroes and villains clashing in a far-away, imaginary world. Let's just hope the truly dangerous scenarios stay there, instead of bleeding over into real life.

-- Neil Spicer, Action Check Coordinator

Action Check Submissions

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

www.alternity.net

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

actioncheck@hotmail.com

Regular Features:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reviews: of Alternity or related-use product.

Special FX: New FX/Psi or mutations.

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

EDITORIAL



The Reaction Score

Letters from our Readers

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

OVERSEAS EXTERNALS

Hey, I'm writing all the way from Finland and was wondering about the fate of the *Externals ESD*. Will we ever be able to order it from WOTC or acquire it some other way? Thanks for a great magazine. – Juha.

Hi, Juha. I did a little research for you and the only conclusion I can draw is that the *Externals ESD* won't be made available overseas anytime soon. If you navigate to the following link:

<http://store.wizards.com/product.asp?ProductID=3490>

you can see that the item is still available for sell at Wizards' online store. However, the disclaimer at the bottom makes it clear that the sourcebook still isn't available in your country (or a number of others). Even the United Kingdom and Canada can't get it, two long-time markets for TSR/WotC products.

Having said that, also keep in mind that the Alternity product line is no longer supported by Wizards of the Coast at all anymore. As a result, it's very unlikely that they'll revisit making the *Externals ESD* more widely available. In fact, it was quite difficult to even locate it in their online store.

Despite all of that, I do remember one devout Alternity fan in Canada finding a way to "beat the system" so to speak. The only thing pre-

venting people from downloading the *Externals ESD* is the information that you provide at the time of the purchase request on the online system. If you indicate you're buying the product with an overseas mailing address, that's what will deny you access. But, this particularly clever Canadian faked out the system by giving it an American address instead, I believe. The system allowed him to then download the product as long as he gave it a valid credit card number (Visa or Mastercard, I think). After that, he was in business. We don't necessarily condone that you use that option, but still we felt obliged to inform you that loopholes do exist in the process.

The only other "legal" alternative you have is to wait and see if Wizards eventually makes all of their ESD's available overseas. Jim Butler from Bastion Press is still scanning old TSR publications into Adobe Acrobat format for resale as ESD's...so they're still pursuing the concept of electronic commerce. There's no indication that Alternity products have made his list of material to convert into ESD's yet, but if they do, he might be scanning all of them eventually. The *Externals* is already in ESD format, so hopefully their legal department will get through all the red-tape and finally go international with these products. Hope that helps.

CONTESTS FOR QUALITY SUBMISSIONS

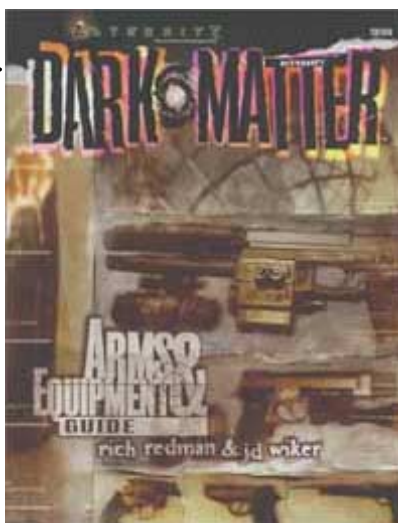
Hi, I'd like to subscribe to Action Check...Also I had an idea. You should run competitions, like who can design the best alien, campaign setting, weapon, etc. Some could be setting-specific and some wouldn't, but it would be a good way of getting some quality Alternity material. The winner(s) could get mentioned in the magazine, or something. – David

This is a great idea, David. Contests of this

kind used to be commonplace when Wizards supported the game, and there's no reason why we couldn't do something similar. If we do conduct such a contest, we'll be sure to advertise it in a special column of Action Check, along with the necessary rules and guidelines. Keep watching and maybe you'll see one soon.

DARK MATTER WEAPONS CHART

Greetings, I'm writing to make a special request. I'm living in Chile and I'm trying to begin a Dark Matter Campaign. I already have the *Dark Matter Campaign Setting*, the *Alternity Gamemaster Guide*, and the *Alternity Player's Handbook*, but I have a little problem. I have been searching for the *Dark Matter Arms & Equipment Guide*, but it is impossible to find. In fact, a friend of mine just came back from a trip to the United States (New York) but he didn't find the manual. I am interested in the manual because of the extended weapons chart inside. I think that the list of weapons included in the *Players Handbook* that are suitable for an Information PL is really poor.



So, I would like to know if maybe in the future, you could edit an Action Check with a weapons chart extension to apply into a Dark Matter Campaign. I really need it! Well that's all. I have to say that I'm really happy about this magazine. I think it is really good. I have been searching for other magazines including Dark Matter information, but I haven't found a good one. For example, the Dark Times 'Zine, doesn't work. When I tried to download the .pdf file, it didn't work. So you are the only ones who provide valuable Dark Matter information frequently. Thanks. - Gustavo

Thanks for your inquiry. We appreciate your suggestion for a listing of Dark Matter arms,

but to provide something like that could be construed as a violation of copyright law. As a result, we can't really reproduce the entire table. A few references to single weapons and their statistics in an adventure are okay, but not the whole thing.

There are two other options you might want to pursue instead. One, we recently reprinted many Information Age weapons in a stand-alone issue of Action Check. It was entitled "Guns, Guns, Guns" and combined a couple of *Dragon* magazine articles which Wizards of the Coast gave us permission to reprint for the Alternity community. These should go a

long way toward expanding the available weapons in the *Alternity Player's Handbook*. Your second alternative would be to visit www.thecastle.com and download J.E. Christgau's excellent Windows Alternity Character Manager software (Walter). It's available as a free download and he has built into it all of the available weapons from the *Dark Matter Arms & Equipment Guide*, including their basic statistics. This should comprise the table that you desire.

ADVERTISING & SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Hi!! I'm a big Alternity fan and while I might not be as hardcore of a fan as others I'm making an Alternity IRC RPG. I was wondering if you could include my website in your E-Zine in the next issue. If you could do this I would be very grateful...thanks for your time and if you will do it please email me back. - JadeFox

I wanted to let you know that we did discuss your request. There are a couple of problems that surround this issue.

First and foremost, we won't be able to include you in the upcoming issue because the

Gridsite column has already been completed this time around.

Secondly, we'd really rather not get into advertising the online games of our readers. If we did this for one person, a flood of them would probably start coming in and Action Check really isn't meant to be an advertising source for that type of thing. We're more of an e-zine that provides interesting articles and resources for the Alternity game itself.

And lastly, we did take a look at your website and the R-rated label you've put up kind of prohibits us from including it. We don't mean to sound prudish. Graphic descriptions or depictions of violence, profanity, and even sexual situations (which would garner an R-rating) are something that all publications try to steer away from.

In general, Action Check tries to conduct itself according to the same guidelines for submissions that you'll find for *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines at Wizards of the Coast. It's not that the topics themselves are taboo. Dark Matter alone delves into some very dark subjects. We just have to avoid the direct use of language and description of situations that would explore them too far. Also, we have to consider that many of our readers are probably quite young. And we have to conduct ourselves responsibly when printing articles or providing web addresses that they might read or explore.

Hopefully, you won't take this decision too badly. We actually discussed it at some length and came up with some suggested alternatives for you. 1) You could try advertising the game to the Alternity mailing list with a clear warning about the R-rating. 2) You could visit www.alternity.net and post the same advertisement. Their webmaster is currently working on providing a Play-by-Email advertising board that might suit your purpose. 3) You could try advertising the game at www.pbem.com in their IRC-chat section.

Regardless of what you choose to do, we wish you success with the game. There's certainly a place and an audience for gritty realism out there. We also appreciate your support of Action Check and feel free to contact us about anything else or even submit material for publication, provided it adheres to the appropriate guidelines, of course.

ADVENTURE FORMAT

Your "Just a Few Baubles" adventure is scheduled to be played in December 2001 in my campaign. Euh...I know it's late but the campaign has been running for the last 2 years once a week and...my players are kind of sloooooow. I really appreciate the trouble you went through to give an Alternity look and feel to your adventure. Would it be too much to ask if I requested an MS word template so that we can write our own adventures in the same "Alternity-like" format? Fonts, page header, footer, page frame, etc. -Alain

I checked with our publisher, about the e-zine's format and providing a template. Action Check articles are first put together in Microsoft Publisher then converted to PDF. There's not really a base template that we have available at the moment...and we don't really have the time to put something like this together right now for you.

Our recommendation is that you simply follow the basic outline of the adventure structure (i.e., Intro, Adventure Background, Adventure Summary, Acts, Scenes, etc.) that is taken directly from previously published Alternity modules and adventure articles in *Dungeon* magazine. Then, if you send us your written text, we can incorporate it into a future issue of Action Check using the aforementioned fonts, headers, footers, and borders...either as a standalone product like "Just A Few Baubles" or inside one of our regular bi-monthly publications if the adventure is small enough. Right now, that's all we can really suggest, but I did want to let you know that we at least discussed the subject and considered your request.

VAMPIRES & CYBERPUNK

Hello, I'm writing to find some answers. I have been looking on the Internet to find rules allowing gamers to play Vampire: the Masquerade with the Alternity rules but I haven't found anything. Also, I have been searching for a Cyberpunk campaign with Alternity rules. If you have any other suggestions about homemade settings, I would appreciate your suggestions. I like settings where the players have to survive...that's my primary goal as a GM...but I dislike Gamma World. - Gustavo

One of the *Dragon* magazine issues contained rules for playing Vampires in Alternity and hopefully we can put together a reprint containing that information soon. Also, I believe the Dark Times explored the same topic in their first issue. You might want to consult both of those resources if you can find them.

As for Cyberpunk, the basic Alternity rules should function quite well with that sort of campaign setting. I don't think you need to find any new material for it. It should simply require some work on your part to define your own campaign setting supporting that kind of Progress Level. But, just to give you some other possibilities, check the internet again for any ShadowRun-to-Alternity conversions or GURPS-to-Alternity conversions. Those two games can be heavy on the Cyberpunk genre at times.

Last possibility: Check www.alternity.net and browse through their articles and message boards. You never know if a GM out there has already explored these same questions and might be willing to share his or her ideas with you. We hope that helps.

PRINTER-FRIENDLY ART

All the art in AC #12 looks great! Other magazine layouts are decent, but AC is more tasteful in my opinion (well, after you removed that ghastly green border that is...). Action Check today actually looks pretty good on black-and-white printers. The only improvement you could do with Action Check's layout is to give the large color pieces a full page, so people low on ink or with a crappy printer can print the text and leave out the art. This is a minor point really. You are way ahead of the competition when it comes to printer-friendliness. -Pal

Thanks. We've recently started soliciting a number of amateur sci-fi artists as well as our own Action Check readers to provide new art for the e-zine. We feel that it adds an element of professionalism to each issue. In addition, the old adage that "...a picture is worth a thousand words..." is definitely true when it comes to invoking the imaginations of Alternity gamers everywhere. Hopefully, you'll see more images of this kind in the future. Some of these artists also have some great art galleries on the web that we featured in issue #13's Grid-sites column.

From a layout perspective, our publisher Jeff Ibach gets to decide on what images to place on which page. Issue #12 just happened to have a number of larger images that probably made it easier to exclude them when a printer was low on ink. Though printer-friendliness wasn't one of our primary considerations early on, we're coming to realize that a number of Alternity gamers actually do print off each publication rather than refer to it online or via a laptop computer at their gaming table. As such, we'll try to keep that in mind as we produce each issue. There will be times however, that a really neat graphic will probably find its way onto a page with some important text. We hope no one holds it against us.



Interview With a Game Designer

By Action Check Staff

A couple of months ago, the Action Check Staff thought it would be a great idea to use our one-year anniversary as an excuse to do some retrospective exposés on the game of Alternity. We could think of nothing better than to contact a few of the original A-team and see if they would be willing to participate in a little interview session with us. Richard Baker, co-creator of Alternity and all-around nice guy, generously agreed to do so. The following is a transcript of our email conversation with him:

Action Check: Thanks so much for agreeing to an interview...assuming of course that an email can actually be construed as an interview. We understand and appreciate the workload you've probably got with GenCon (not to mention all the other stuff you have in the works). Welcome back from vacation! Hopefully it was a good one...

Rich Baker: Sure, happy to help out.

AC: The following is simply a list of questions that the Action Check staff dreamed up to ask you on behalf of the Alternity community-at-large. Take your time answering them. We're really interested in whatever you can share with us...in as much detail as you have time to provide.

AC: So Rich, what have you been up to lately (professionally-speaking)? You've had some involvement with D&D 3rd Edition and Star Wars, right? What recent projects have you undertaken? And what projects are in the works?

RB: My current job title is Creative Director for D&D Worlds. Mostly that entails looking out for the Forgotten Realms, and one of my biggest tasks over the last year was the effort to put out the brand-new Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting 3rd Edition. Before that I worked as the Creative Director for Alternity, and before that I was a member of the 3rd Edition design team. I didn't work on the final versions of the three new D&D core books, but I participated in all of the preliminary discussions and helped to produce two of the early playtest documents. I also wrote first-draft versions of a number of spells and character classes for the *Player's Handbook*. A lot of that stuff went through the whole 3rd Edition process

mostly intact. Sorry, I didn't do anything for Star Wars.

AC: Do you still take advantage of opportunities to play Alternity, and if so what particular campaign settings? Any favorite characters, adventures, fond memories, etc.?

Rich: I haven't played much Alternity lately, simply because it's an imperative of my job that I immerse myself in D&D. Fortunately, that's not a particularly odious requirement, since I like the new D&D rules a lot. I still tinker with the ship construction rules in *Warships* from time to time, just because I like that kind of thing. As far as favorite characters from playing the game or fond memories, well, there are two: Mad Dog Morgan and Pyotr Sokolov. I wound up writing a book about Sokolov after playing him as a character in a Star*Drive campaign.

AC: Now that Alternity has fallen into the hands of the fans, what are your thoughts, feelings, and comments on the community efforts to keep it alive?

Rich: Like old soldiers, out of print games never die, they just fade away. Actually, scratch that — they don't even really seem to fade away. For cinematic action, I still think Alternity is one of the best games ever done. It's alive as long as people are playing it.

AC: Have you ever actually reviewed a copy of Action Check before, and if so, what did you think about it?

Rich: Sorry, I haven't had the pleasure.

(Editor's Note: Rich asked to see a copy of the issue containing this interview, and we assured him we'd get it to him as soon as it hit the internet.)

AC: Two of the most recent and popular Alternity products that you worked on were the Star*Drive novel *Zero Point* and the online product *Warships*. Tell us a little bit about what they meant to you, where you got your inspiration, and in the case of "Zero Point" how you interpreted Sokolov's homeland and upbringing in the Nariac Domain.

Rich: Funny, I just mentioned both of these a minute

The Action Check Staff is composed on an infinite number of monkeys working over an infinite period of time.

ago. As you've guessed, both of these are near and dear to my heart. I'll talk about *Warships* first, since that's a little easier. I used to love the old Traveller products *High Guard* and *Trillion Credit Squadron*. Before I got my start in the game industry, I served in the United States Navy as a surface warfare officer, and I've always been an armchair historian, particularly military (and naval) history. All of this impelled me to create the capital ship construction and combat rules that I, personally, would want to see in an SF game like Alternity. In a sense, *Warships* is a vanity product, although I understand that many thousands of people have taken advantage of the free download.

Regarding *Zero Point*, well, I wanted to write fiction in the Star*Drive universe from the moment we sat down and started to design it. *Zero Point* is heavily inspired by the game. For example, many of the details of the Lucullus system — Shanassin and Icewalk, the Jamaican Syndicate, the Picts, and so on — came right out of the *Star*Drive Campaign Setting* book. Sokolov, as I mentioned before, was a character I played in our playtests of the Star*Drive setting. (He was even more of a ruthless bastard in our games.) As far as the inspiration of the Nariac Domain, that should be pretty obvious. Take everything the West thought and feared about Russia behind the Iron Curtain, mix it with the suffering and upheavals of Eastern Europe in the last days of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, and you'd have the Nariac Domain that Sokolov grew up in. He grows up in a labor camp, after all.

AC: While we're on the subject of Star*Drive, share a little with us about how you and the other game designers put together such a vast and intricately detailed campaign setting. What creative process did you go through? Are there any funny stories about how particular ideas sprang into existence? Any favorite stellar nations that you or the others had? What ideas went into shaping them?

Rich: The initial concept for the Star*Drive setting came from Bill Slavicsek and was part of the first Alternity proposals. Bill's first vision included the Orlamu, the Rignumors, the Thuldans, and the Concord, as well as the mechalus, fraal, weren, and Externals. The other stellar nations and races grew around this seed. I contributed the t'sa and sesheyans to the core rules, and the Orion League and StarMech to the Star*Drive universe. Dave Eckelberry and Jim Butler came up with most of the Verge, although I wound up writing Jim's systems (Lucullus,

Algemron, and Corrivale) when Jim took over as Creative Director for Alternity (he had the job before I did).

As far as funny stories, well, StarMech might qualify. I came up with the name (and nothing else) for use in an Alternity playtest I ran. But Dave and Jim picked it up and incorporated it into the rapidly expanding universe based on one night's adventure. For favorite nations, well, everyone knows that Jim Butler just grooved on VoidCorp. Eck had a soft spot for the Regency of Bluefall, and I was always rooting for the Orions.

AC: The *Externals ESD* was clearly one of the most eagerly awaited Star*Drive products to come out, especially since it revealed so much about the External races, history, and plans for the Verge. But even that release only goes so far in explaining how the Star*Drive universe fits together and how it arrived at its current state. For those of us who are eager to understand more, what can you tell us about the Precursor societies that seem to be the driving force behind centuries of evolution, world-building, and conflict? How did you and the other game designers perceive the Glassmakers, the Stoneburners, and their relationship with all of the lesser races over the course of millennia?

Rich: It was my intent to reveal the conflict of the Glassmakers and the Externals' secret masters as the "big story" of the Star*Drive setting. The idea was pretty simple: Many hundreds of millions of years ago, the Glassmakers and the Externals' own precursors were engaged in a war of extermination that raged across most of the Orion Arms. The Glassmakers knew they couldn't win and set the stage for subsequent races to rise in the time of Star*Drive who could defeat the Externals. They were the monolith-raisers of Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, or the Arisians of Doc Smith's Lensman stories. Star*Drive draws inspiration from a number of science-fiction universes, but in some ways the Lensman books might be the most influential of all in laying the building blocks of the universe. That's pretty ironic, considering that the Lensman books are 60 years old. Playing in Star*Drive doesn't feel anything like playing in a Lensman setting, but the big ideas are there.

AC: What direction did you and the other game designers plan to take for the Star*Drive setting? What did you guys envision that simply never got a chance to be created?

Rich: Well, at the height of the External War, we figured that two things would happen. First, the Thuldans, disgusted with the Concord's inept conduct of the war (a harsh and somewhat unfair judgment, as the Concord is doing the best it can with the resources at its disposal) would withdraw from the Concord in order to defend their colony in Algernon as they see fit. Secondly, we figured that VoidCorp would switch sides. VoidCorp, seeing an opportunity to take over all of human space, cuts a deal with the Externals and turns on the other human powers. This would effectively shatter the Concord, as the two strongest powers among the stellar nations abandon the league. So, the big story coming after the External War was the shattered Concord and the effort to put things back together.

AC: How involved did you get with later Altermity settings like *Dark Matter*, *Gamma World*, *Star Craft*, and *Tangents*? Were any of those campaigns specifically interesting to you, and why or why not?

Rich: I was very involved with *Dark Matter* and *Gamma World*, somewhat less so with *Tangents* and *Star*Craft*. I really liked the new spin we did for *Gamma World* (the big secret there is a wonderful twist on the *Gamma World* story), and what's not to like about *Dark Matter*? I wrote the *Exit 23* adventure in the beginning of the book, and contributed a few critters to *Xenofoms*. The fun thing about *Dark Matter* is the research — there's an incredible amount of source material out there on various conspiracy-theory websites just waiting to be tapped. For the *Faders* in *Xenofoms*, I read through a set of great Philadelphia Experiment websites. Very interesting stuff!

AC: *Dark Matter* really seems to strike a chord with a lot of the new gamers, particularly with the popularity of shows like the *X-Files*, *Dark Angel*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, etc. How do you see this phenomenon and its impact on the gaming industry?

Rich: Pop culture is a funny phenomenon. I think we missed the crest of the "conspiracy" wave by a couple of years, to be honest. If we'd done *Dark Matter* in 1996, maybe 1997, we would have done a lot better. If you want my guess on the next big phenomena, I strongly suspect it's going to be a resurgence in classic fantasy properties, driven by the *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* movies. But who knows?

AC: Now that a year or more has passed since Wizards dropped support for Altermity, what are your thoughts looking back on the products that you cre-

ated and how do you see *Star Wars* and *D&D* differently in their marketing approach and appeal to the general public? Why do you think Altermity "failed" whereas other games continued?

Rich: We should have done Altermity in one book, with a campaign setting included -- in particular, the *Star*Drive* setting. Obviously, we couldn't have gone into as much detail, but I think the game would have sold a lot better as a complete game. We wanted to tap into the *D&D* model for our SF game, but *D&D* has an implicit setting — knights, wizards, and dragons — that a generic SF game does not. I think that hurt Altermity more than we could have guessed at the time.

AC: What kind of long-lasting impact do you expect Altermity and its various campaign settings will have on the role-playing community in the years to come?

Rich: For TSR/WotC, Altermity signaled a shift away from minimalist systems that has continued through the new editions of *D&D* and *Star Wars*. And the art and layout for *Dark Matter* raised the bar for the whole industry (it won an *Origins* award for best graphic design, after all). *Dark Matter* is a beautiful production that's going to be hard for other games to live up to for a long time.

AC: How likely do you think Hasbro/Wizards will be to revisit Altermity in the future, either as a conversion to the d20 system or simply as a new revised edition in light of growing interest among the gaming community?

Rich: I'm afraid I can't comment on that, other than to say that at this time we have no plans to do such a product. That said, I think that we're not done with SF games or properties created in-house (as opposed to licensed, like *Star Wars*). The field's too big for us to decide we never want to be a part of it again.

AC: Any additional comments, thoughts, or final words on Altermity?

Rich: I've found that my experience with Altermity instilled in me a new appreciation of good science fiction. My tastes in fiction these days run to hard SF, much more so than fantasy or more speculative SF. It's a great game, and it's brought a great deal of enjoyment to many thousands of players all over the world. In that respect, Altermity has been a very successful game.



VISIONS FROM BEYOND

By Gary Astleford, with Artwork by Dragan Ciric

Twelve New Careers for the Dark*Matter Campaign Setting

Horror/Conspiracy is a genre rich in colorful stereotypes. Such characterizations help to establish the appropriate mood, and range from the federal agent who knows too much, on down to the hysterical mother of six who was abducted from a trailer park by aliens. As players, it is our job to take these clichés and to choose a new palette with which to paint them, thereby adding variations to enrich our own personal vision of how the game world should be.

We must also invent new archetypes with which to populate our world. This both adds depth to the game, and gives those players who wish to use careers new concepts to choose from. In time, these archetypes may become as much a staple of the genre as the ones that came before them.

What follows are twelve new careers designed for Dark*Matter. The entries follow the style of those in the Dark*Matter campaign sourcebook. Remember that these careers are tools for both players and administrators looking to add something new to the game. Feel free to alter them to suit the style of your campaign, or use them as-is.

Combat Spec Careers

Animal Control Officer

You'd finally managed to catch the little mongrel, and it took three darts to sedate him. One tough mutt, you'd thought, as you hoisted his limp body into the back of your truck and slammed the door. The call had come in that morning. Some old lady had been bitten by a stray dog, and she was fearful the animal might be rabid. You drove out, talked to the old lady, and then went looking for the dog. Despite years on the job, you felt sorry for the animal. Once back to the shelter, they'd have to kill it and test it for rabies.

After about twenty minutes, you pulled into the shelter parking lot. The omnipresent barking of the dogs in the shelter's kennel was shrill and anxious. Odd, but not entirely abnormal. Walking around to the back of your truck, you inserted your key into the lock and turned the handle. Opening the door, you started to reach for the dog but stopped, stunned. In the spot you'd thrown the unconscious dog lay a naked, filthy child, a dart from your rifle sticking awkwardly from his shoulder...

The animal control officer, more commonly known as the "dog catcher," spends his working hours catching both stray and wild animals before they can pose a danger to the populace at large. Not your typical policeman, he is usually in the employ of the Humane Society or similar organization. People call him to report stray, sick, or wild animals (such as bears, cougars, or wolves) that have wandered onto their property, and he is trained to apprehend them alive if possible, and dead if necessary.

Any of the Athletics specialty skills are appropriate, especially *climb*, which is necessary to get animals out of trees. Stealth specialty skills, such as *sneak*, have obvious use, as does *Awareness-perception* (for noticing hidden animals) and *intuition* (for determining what an animal might do next). In the field, *Survival* and *Navigation-surface* can be lifesavers. *Investigate-track* has obvious uses, and *Life Science-zoology* can provide valuable information about the officer's quarry.

Signature Equipment: Tranquilizer rifle, several darts, heavy leather gloves, uniform.

Skill Package: Movement; Modern Ranged Weapons-*rifle*; Vehicle Operation-*land vehicle*; Law-*animal control laws*; Animal Handling-*animal training*. Cost: 24 points.

Suggested Perks: Animal Friend, Danger Sense, Observant.

Suggested Flaws: Code of Honor, Old Injury.



Big Game Hunter

You were hunting bears in Alberta when you came across that thing in the woods. You'd heard the stories about Bigfoot, of course, but you never thought you'd see one. After all, these were simple fireside tales told to frighten children and intoxicated campers. How could such a thing exist? It suddenly occurred to you what a trophy this beast would make, and how rich you might become if you could drop the creature in its tracks.

Raising your rifle slowly to your shoulder, you lined up the monster, held your breath a moment, and squeezed the trigger. Lowering the barrel, you blinked in surprise. The creature was gone, vanished without a trace. You know what you saw that fateful day, and you made yourself a promise. You're going to find that thing some day, or another one like it, and you're going to bring it down...

The big game hunter lives for the hunt. His life is spent in search of the most dangerous and elusive quarry. He's hunted everything from cape buffalo in Africa to tigers in the steamy jungles of southeast Asia, yet this has only made him hungrier for more dangerous game. Some hunters are conservationists, hunting animals that aren't on the endangered list. Others are no better than poachers, breaking laws far and wide in order to bring down the rarest and deadliest prey.

Skill selection for a big game hunter is pretty straightforward. Athletics specialty skills, such as *jump* and *climb*, are useful when pursuing prey, or evading dangerous or enraged animals. Stealth specialty skills, especially *sneak* and *hide*, have similar applications. Some hunters prefer to hunt with weapons other than modern rifles, and so might substitute Modern Ranged Weapons-*pistol* or any of the Primitive Ranged Weapons specialty skills for *rifle*. Life Science-*zoology* can provide insight into the habits and abilities of the hunter's quarry. Big game hunters sometimes hunt from jeeps or helicopters, and Vehicle Operation-*land* or *air* specialty skills are totally acceptable. For those big game hunters who operate outside the law, Street Smart and its specialty skills are a necessity.

Signature Equipment: Camouflage overalls, hunting rifle with a scope.

Skill Package: Movement-*trailblazing*; Survival; Modern Ranged Weapons-*rifle 2*; Stealth; Investigate-*track*. Cost: 40 points.

Suggested Perks: Filthy Rich, Good Luck, Well Traveled.

Suggested Flaws: Infamy, Obsessed, Temper.

Historical Re-Enactor

You met Joseph Phelps while camping at the Gettysburg National Military Park. You assumed he was just another enthusiast, like yourself, but you'd never met him before. The two of you talked for a while, and he impressed you with the amount of realism he expressed in his speech and his recollection of historical details. Joseph told you that he was sure he'd die in battle the following day, and the statement chilled you to your very core.

The next morning, while the ranks were forming, Joseph was nowhere to be found. You asked around, but no one knew anything about him. Once home, you did a little research. To your shock and horror, you discovered that Joseph Phelps was one of the thousands to have fought and died at Gettysburg in 1863...

The historical re-enactor is part historian and part actor. Embracing a time long past, he plays the role of a combatant in historical engagements and events. Whether he wears chain mail and carries a sword like a knight of old, or dresses in authentic revolutionary style and carries a musket, it is all a matter of personal preference. The re-enactor's hobby takes him to many important locations that are brimming with history and strong emotion. His knowledge of specific historical facts can make a great deal of difference when researching the events or time period with which he is familiar.

For the re-enactor who chooses the medieval timeframe for his hobby, Armor Operation - *combat armor* can be a necessity. Depending on his hand-to-hand weapon of choice, the medieval re-enactor might specialize in either *blade* or *bludgeon*. Well-rounded individuals will take ranks in both. If the character is an archer or crossbowman, he will need to learn the intricacies of Primitive Ranged Weapons-*bow* or *crossbow*.

The character that favors Revolutionary or Civil War re-enactment will need to be familiar with black powder weapons, and this can be reflected by learning Primitive Ranged Weapons-*flintlock*. Sabers and bayonets were popular in both eras, and expertise with them can be reflected in Melee Weapons-*blade*.

For any re-enactor who will see mounted action, the value of Animal Handling-*animal riding* is plainly evident. Additionally, all re-enactors can find use with the Investigate-*research*, Movement-*trailblazing*, and Entertainment-*act* skills. Those with authority and rank may want to take a rank in Leadership-*command*.

Signature Equipment: Uniform and historical military paraphernalia, historical library.

Skill Package: Melee Weapons; Stamina-



endurance; Primitive Ranged Weapons; Social Science-*history*; Tactics-*infantry tactics*. Cost: 30 points.

Suggested Perks: Fortitude, Tough As Nails, Vigor.

Suggested Flaws: Clueless, Dilettante, Phobia.

Diplomat Careers

Charlatan (Secondary Profession: Free Agent)

A lot of people believe in ghosts, and you do your best to take advantage of them. You speak to their dead relatives, pass on messages from beyond the grave, and hold seances for grieving relatives who want to make sure Daddy (or Mommy or Junior or whoever) is resting and at peace. Things never got out of hand, and business was always good as long as you kept moving.

You did a reading for some bereaved widow in Tulsa one Sunday afternoon, pulling in bogus messages from her dead husband, Harold. The widow, a sweet young lady, looked like the kind of client who might need a little personal reassurance after the seance. Everything was going smoothly, just the way you liked it, up until the table you were sitting at actually started to levitate...

The charlatan is a swindler who preys on humanity's preoccupation with death and the after-

life. Is there life after death? Is mom in Heaven? The charlatan claims to know all the answers and, best of all, he can give you a direct line to your dead relatives...for a price, of course. While some charlatans are gifted with the ability to speak with the "other side," the vast majority of them are unscrupulous con men looking to make a quick buck.

Just about every Interaction specialty skill has value to the charlatan. Manipulation specialty skills, such as *lockpick* and *pickpocket*, can be used to supplement a charlatan's income with petty theft, or to acquire personal effects and information from under the noses of his clients. If he runs his own palmistry shop or psychic hotline, *Business-small business* is a good skill to have. Researching potential victims via the Internet will require *Knowledge-computer operation*, or any of the Computer Science specialty skills (especially *hacking*). If a charlatan intends to be a member of his local criminal community, he may want to invest in any of the Street Smart specialty skills.

For those charlatans who actually have a bit of paranormal ability, any of the ESP specialty skills is appropriate. *Sensitivity* can be used to sense ghostly activity, *mind reading* is useful for picking bits of information from the brain of a client, *psychometry* can divulge valuable information from objects once possessed by the deceased, and *postcognition* can give valuable insight into a specific area or location. Furthering his knowledge in Lore specialty skills, especially *occult lore* and *psychic lore*, can give a charlatan that much more credibility.

Signature Equipment: Nice suit, the obituary section of the local newspaper, business cards.

Skill Package: Medical Science-*psychology*; Awareness-*intuition*; Lore-*psychic lore*; Deception-*bluff*; Entertainment-*act 2*; Interaction-*charm*. Cost: 34 points.

Suggested Perks: Great Looks, Psionic Awareness, Second Sight.

Suggested Flaws: Bad Luck, Criminal Record, Possessed.

Museum Curator (Secondary Profession: Tech Op)

You'd spent most of a year cataloging and re-

storing artifacts for the Metropolitan Museum when you discovered a long-forgotten shipping crate beneath a flight of steps. The crate was old, covered in dust, and the date stamped upon it, March 15th, 1937, was barely legible. Inside, nestled amid scraps of old newspaper and excelsior, was a stone tablet carved with strange pictographic symbols that you could not identify.

When you mentioned it to your friend Earl, a linguistics professor at Harvard, he asked you to fax him a copy of the pictograms. After a week without word from Earl, you tried calling him at home. His wife answered, her voice choked with tears when you asked to speak with him. "Earl's dead," she sobbed into the phone, "Something attacked him...they still haven't found the entire body..."

A curator is often responsible for the maintenance and care of exhibited artifacts in a museum, as well as acquiring new pieces for possible restoration. Although a curator has a wide variety of administrative functions, he must also be familiar with modern security systems in order to keep valuable artifacts secure.

To keep a museum's day-to-day activity running smoothly, it is important that a curator have some experience with Business specialty skills. Similarly, knowledge of Law-*import/export law* is handy, especially when the legality of transporting some artifacts is in question. Not all artifacts are recovered in good shape, so a curator should invest a few ranks in either Technical Science-*repair* or Creativity-*artifact restoration*. To find out more about an artifact or document, the curator might employ Investigation-*research* or any one of the Lore specialty skills. All museums need funding, so the curator hungry for grant money is likely to need several ranks in both Culture and Interaction specialty skills.

Signature Equipment: Tools for restoration of artifacts, a good-sized reference library, cell phone.

Skill Package: Knowledge-*computer operation*; Security-*security devices*; Social Science-*anthropology, history*; Administration; Interaction-*bargain*. Cost: 22 points.

Suggested Perks: Alien Artifact, Concentration,

Networked, Reputation.

Suggested Flaws: Alien Artifact, Forgetful.

Shock Rocker (Secondary Profession: Combat Spec)

You found Mr. Stone lounging in your dressing room after the Orlando show. The last thing you wanted to deal with after a show was some pencil-neck in a suit, but there was something about the guy that kept you from calling security. Mr. Stone explained that he was a talent scout of sorts for one of the larger recording companies. He laid out his offer in very clear, exact terms, and showed you the contract. "It will be very beneficial to your career," he said, his voice like snake scales sliding over gravel.

After you'd signed, he folded the contract very precisely and placed it in his jacket pocket. His eyes, gleeful in the fluorescent light, danced over you. "One question. You don't really believe in the things you sing about, do you? The Devil, and all that, I mean." You told him you didn't. "Good," he said, a smile on his pale lips. "We'll be in touch."

The shock rocker is an artist who relies on his controversial image and music to sell records. Whether or not he actually believes what he preaches on stage is a matter of conjecture. The dark semblance he creates for himself is his most valuable asset, often accented with make-up and bizarre costumes. Society at large may find his music to be repulsive and blasphemous, but misguided and rebellious youth are often attracted to the unconventional messages it conveys.

If he plans to perform spectacular and daring feats on stage, a shock rocker should consider buying a rank or two in *Acrobatics-daredevil*, *Athletics-jump*, and *Entertainment-dance*. Keeping up his energy while performing, especially after being on the road for hours or days, may call for ranks in *Stamina-endurance*. Business specialty skills are important for making sound financial decisions, and rockers who enjoy illegal narcotics will need *Street Smart* specialty skills in order to keep a consistent supply of them flowing in. Some shock rockers take an interest in elaborate pyrotechnics displays, and

may learn the details of *Demolitions-scratch built* and *set explosives*. Those shock rockers with real connections to the dark side might pick up on a magical path, especially *Diabolism*.

Signature Equipment: Electric guitar, leather clothes, make-up, lots of tattoos and piercings.

Skill Package: *Unarmed Attack-brawl*; *Creativity-songwriting*; *Lore-occult lore*; *Entertainment-musical instrument 2, sing*; *Interaction-intimidate, taunt*. Cost: 32 points.

Suggested Perks: *Celebrity, Filthy Rich*.

Suggested Flaws: *Infamy, Poor Looks, Rebellious, Temper*.



Free Agent Careers

Goth Wannabe

Throughout high school, you knew you were different. You made no attempt to disguise the fact, which made you a prime target for all sorts of teasing and degradation. The clothes you wore, the books you read, and the music you

listened to marked you as an outsider. You didn't have many friends, but those that you did have shared your interest in the macabre. After high school, you did what you had to do to make ends meet. You'd play it straight while on the job, but after dark you were a different creature entirely.

When you met Elsbeth in a smoky bar, you knew instantly that she was different than the rest. She tried to ignore you at first, her bloodshot blue eyes drifting over the crowd as if searching for a victim. You kept after her, enamoured with the paleness of her skin and the sharpness of her teeth. Finally she relented and went home with you. You learned too late, however, that it wasn't Elsbeth who had fallen into your trap, but you into hers...

The Goth wannabe lives his life with the full realization of his eventual death foremost on his mind. He's read every single one of Anne Rice's novels, joined her fan club, and he dresses up like a vampire and smokes clove cigarettes with a group of live-action gamers every Saturday night. When he isn't sucking imaginary blood, he's hanging out in a suitably gloomy coffee shop or nightclub, grooving on morbid music and wondering what absinthe must taste like.

Those who follow the "typical" Goth mindset come from all walks of life, and just about any other skills outside the basic career package are appropriate depending on the character's overall concept. In addition to those skills that reflect his day job, just about any Personality-based skills are acceptable.

Signature Equipment: Black clothes, make-up, clove cigarettes and lighter, gaudy silver jewelry.

Skill Package: *Stamina-resist pain*; *Lore-occult lore*, *psychic lore*; *Street Smart-criminal elements*; *Deception*; *Entertainment-dance*. Cost: 27 points.

Suggested Perks: *Observant*, *Second Sight*, *Willpower*.

Suggested Flaws: *Bad Luck*, *Delicate*, *Obsessed*.

Smuggler

Crossing the border at night had never been easy. The DEA made routine flights along the American side, not to mention the Federales on the Mexican side. The weather wasn't good, with a heavy crosswind and sporadic light fog. On top of that, the plane was heavy, loaded down with five hundred kilos of Peruvian flake. Flying with sweaty palms under these conditions and maintaining an altitude of less than 500 feet was near suicidal. Of course, you loved every second of it. The fog started to clear, and your heartbeat slowed slightly. Fifteen more minutes and you'd be landing on a rough desert airstrip somewhere near Roswell, New Mexico.

It was then that a funny light caught your eye. Another plane or a helicopter coming straight for you from the starboard side. For an instant you feared the jig was up, until you realized that those lights weren't quite right, and the thing wasn't moving the way a plane or a helicopter moves. As the saucer came closer, your radio and electronic instruments died, and the only sound you could hear was the sputtering of your plane's dying engine...

The smuggler uses his small one- or two-engine plane to bring small quantities of prohibited goods across national borders. His potential cargo includes anything deemed illegal by the powers that be, including narcotics, automatic weapons, bootleg media, and the occasional passenger. Necessity dictates that he fly in areas that are off the beaten path in order to avoid detection by the authorities.

There are several skills that will come in handy for the smuggler. Ranks in *Technical Science-juryrig* and *repair* can keep an old junker of a plane running smoothly. When dealing with both law enforcement and criminals, most Interaction specialty skills are quite valuable (especially *charm*, *intimidate*, and *taunt*). *Deception-bribe* can make getting caught less painful than it needs to be, as long as the smuggler is on the right side of the border. If he intends to keep a legitimate business as a front, such as a guide service or import/export company, then he should take ranks in *Business-*

small business. When things get really bad, just about any combat skill can be a blessing.

Signature Equipment: An old single-engine airplane, leather flight jacket, 9mm pistol.

Skill Package: Vehicle Operation-*air vehicle 2*; Business-*illicit business*; Navigation-*surface navigation*; Street Smart-*criminal elements*; Interaction-*bargain*. Cost: 35 points.

Suggested Perks: Concentration, Reflexes, Well-Traveled.

Suggested Flaws: Abductee, Criminal Record, Divided Loyalty, Rebellious.

Vagrant

Living on the streets, you've seen stuff. There's these things that live in the sewers, see? And sometimes they get hungry and they drag people off. People like you. People who won't be missed if they happen to disappear. You can count twelve people you know of, some friends and some not, who've vanished without a trace. If you're not careful, you might be next.

You've told the cops, but they don't listen to you. You've told the people you meet on the sidewalk, but they look at you like you're crazy. The only good thing to come out of it is that sometimes people give you a few dollars so that you'll stay away from them...

The vagrant is a homeless man or woman. All too common in this day and age, these unfortu-



nates scratch out an existence on the fringes of society. Often overlooked and avoided by most people, vagrants can easily fall victim to the harsh realities of homeless life. Some steal what they need to survive, or find an escape from their lives through drug or alcohol abuse. Many fall victim to insanity and delusion. A few travel from place to place, earning money at odd jobs, while others pick a city or town and settle down.

Homeless people don't always start out that way, and any skills that relate to a vagrant's past are perfectly acceptable. In order to survive on the street, a vagrant might pick up any of the Melee Weapons specialty skills. Some vagrants make a living through petty larceny using the Manipulation-*pickpocket* skill. Stealth specialty skills are useful for remaining out of sight, and *shadow* or extra ranks in *hide* can go a long way towards increasing a vagrant's survivability.

Signature Equipment: An old shopping cart filled with various bits of trash, worn and dirty clothes.

Skill Package: Unarmed Attack; Survival; Stealth-*hide*; Street Smart; Interaction-*bargain*. Cost: 25 points.

Suggested Perks: Animal Friend, Fortitude, Hidden Identity.

Suggested Flaws: Dirt Poor, Illiterate, Rampant Paranoia.

Tech Op Careers

Archaeologist

You remember Harris shrieking as you fled the tomb, his voice echoing along the limestone walls like a muezzin calling the faithful to pray. He'd tripped over some rubble as the two of you ran blindly from the burial chamber, frightened out of your wits by what you'd seen rising from the freshly-opened sarcophagus. Instinct and blind terror combined as you turned to run, leaving Harris to his doom. Feelings of guilt ebbed above your dread for a moment, but were instantly put to rest as Harris suddenly ceased his screaming. Whatever it was had gotten him, and would soon be coming for you...

The modern archaeologist studies the ruins and artifacts of past civilizations to learn more about the people who lived in ancient times. Much of his time is spent in research, or at excavations the world over. His pursuits are less physically oriented than Hollywood would have you believe, though there is occasionally an element of danger in his work. By necessity, an archaeologist is often exposed to ancient artifacts that might have a greater significance than he might realize at first.

For the archaeologist, combat-oriented skills can be useful for staying alive, as many historical sites are located in far-flung and politically unstable countries. Extra ranks in Athletics specialty skills are a worthwhile investment, as are Survival specialties related to the lands that the archaeologist frequents (typically *survival training: jungle* or *desert*). Traveling in foreign landscapes can be a task unto itself, so *Navigation-surface* is invaluable unless you enjoy being lost. Reliable transportation isn't always available, and *Animal Handling-animal riding* could be useful when pack animals and beasts of burden are used to transport personnel and equipment. An archaeologist in the Dark*Matter universe is likely to pick up one or two of the Lore specialty skills, particularly *conspiracy theories* and/or *occult lore*.

Signature Equipment: Excavation tools, a notebook and pen, off-road vehicle.

Skill Package: Athletics-*climb*; Survival; Vehicle Operation-*land vehicle*; Social Science-*anthropology, history 2*; Awareness-*perception*; Investigate-*research, search*. Cost: 34 points.

Suggested Perks: Danger Sense, Observant, Powerful Ally, Well-Traveled.

Suggested Flaws: Bad Luck, Obsessed, Powerful Enemy.

Arctic Researcher

As part of an arctic research team, you discovered it while taking core samples. Who knows how long that thing had been buried in the ice? A hundred years? A million? It hardly matters, now that your colleagues have all been killed or driven insane by the evil force that was unleashed.

If such a thing could exist between the boundaries of explainable science and inexplicable religion, what other horrific surprises does the universe hold? That question alone, more than the terrible things you've seen, nearly breaks your already weakened hold on reality...

Like any scientist, the arctic researcher is a highly trained professional with one or more fields of expertise. He plies his skills in the sub-freezing climates of the north or south poles, some of the most remote, inhospitable, and desolate landscapes on the planet. Contact with the outside world is infrequent and subject to the whims of Mother Nature. Complications or injuries that would be deemed routine elsewhere in the world can threaten an entire research team.

The north and south poles offer a wide variety of challenges, and the arctic researcher would do well to invest some skill points into Athletics-*climb*. The only mode of transport in such regions is often a snowmobile or tracked vehicle, which can be driven by those with the Vehicle Operation-*land* specialty skill. Helicopters and light planes are also in common use, so Vehicle Operation-*air* might be useful. Demolitions-*set explosives* is useful when planting thermite charges in order to melt ice, or for employing high explosives in order to generate artificial avalanches.

More studious researchers will likely put points into Investigate-*research*. Since important things break at the worst possible times, Technical Science specialty skills should be taken. Given all the spare time someone in an arctic facility might have, it's reasonable to assume that any other skills might be picked up over time. The inaccessibility of the polar regions have given them prominence in modern conspiracy theory, as well, so researchers stationed in these areas might pick up one or more Lore specialty skills, especially *fringe science*, *conspiracy theories*, and *UFO lore*.

Signature Equipment: A cold-weather parka and gloves, polarized goggles, maps and charts.

Skill Package: Movement-*trailblazing*; Survival-*survival training: arctic*; Knowledge-*computer*

operation; Physical Science-any physical science specialty skill 2; Investigate-research. Cost 34 points.

Suggested Perks: Alien Artifact, Fortitude, Vigor.
Suggested Flaws: Obsessed, Phobia, Rampant Paranoia.

Horror Author

It was a dark and stormy night when two strange men dressed in black suits came knocking on your door. Without so much as a please or thank-you, they barged in and began to search your house. You tried to call the police, but found that your line had somehow been cut. One of them cornered you, his eyes hidden behind dark glasses. "Your manuscript. Where is it?" he asked, the threat in his voice casual and familiar.

You gave them the manuscript. What the hell else were you supposed to do? You'd spent the last six months writing it after sending the first two chapters to your agent in New York. Your agent had loved the themes you'd expressed in those first forty-four pages, mixing government conspiracy, an alien invasion, and bizarre cults to form a compelling basis for a damn good story. You'd finished your novel the night before, called your agent to tell him, and then celebrated with a good bottle of Chardonnay and White Castle hamburgers.

The men turned to leave, the pages of your work held roughly in their cold, white hands. The second turned to look at you for a moment. "Take my advice, Mr. Williams," he said before walking into the rain, "and find another line of work."

Like many writers, the horror author makes his living writing fiction. The macabre tales he tells are designed to thrill, chill, and terrify his audience. It's a tough living, and rare is the author who is successful enough to write his books and

stories full-time. While doing research, the horror author is likely to stumble across obscure facts and lore that he might then incorporate into his current project. Of course, this lore is as likely to get him into trouble as make a good story. While some authors are firmly grounded in conventional reality, others are quite eccentric and hold to unusual beliefs or lifestyles.

A horror author more than likely works a day job in order to make ends meet, and this should be reflected in the additional skills he picks up. Some writers have degrees in English and literature, and might work for a school as a teacher, which would necessitate the Teach skill. Staying up long nights in order to meet a deadline might require ranks in Stamina-endurance, and the Resolve specialty skills may give him the additional physical and mental fortitude needed to get the job done. When negotiating contracts with publishers and agents, Interaction-bargain and charm are very useful. A horror author's interests might take a detour into the unusual, and this can be reflected in one or more Lore specialty skills.

Signature Equipment: Desktop computer, small research library, pocket notebook and lots of pens.

Skill Package: Knowledge-computer operation 2; Creativity-writing horror stories 3; Investigate-research; Lore; Interaction-interview. Cost: 30 points.

Suggested Perks: Celebrity, Concentration, Filthy Rich.

Suggested Flaws: Dirt Poor, Forgetful, Phobia, Slow.

Author Gary Astleford can be reached at penangallan@home.com

The artwork in this article is by Dragan Ciric, who can be reached at: kvasaclim-ited@sezampro.yu



THE SILVER GOOSE

By Stephen Dunaway

The *Silver Goose*

Goliath IIIb-class Military Scout

COMPARTMENTS: 6 DURABILITY: 30
 MANEUVER RATING: -2 ACC: 3 Mpp
 CRUISE SPEED: 2 AU/hr Berthing: 6

ARMAMENT: Mass Cannon (05,10,15):
 1d6+2s, 1d6+1w, 1d6+3w (L/p)

DEFENSES: Point-defense gun, Jammer

ARMOR: Polymeric (Light):
 1d4-1(L), 1d4-1(H), 1d4-2(E)

COMPUTER: Good computer core, good
 dedicated battle, defense, engineering,
 navigation, and sensors

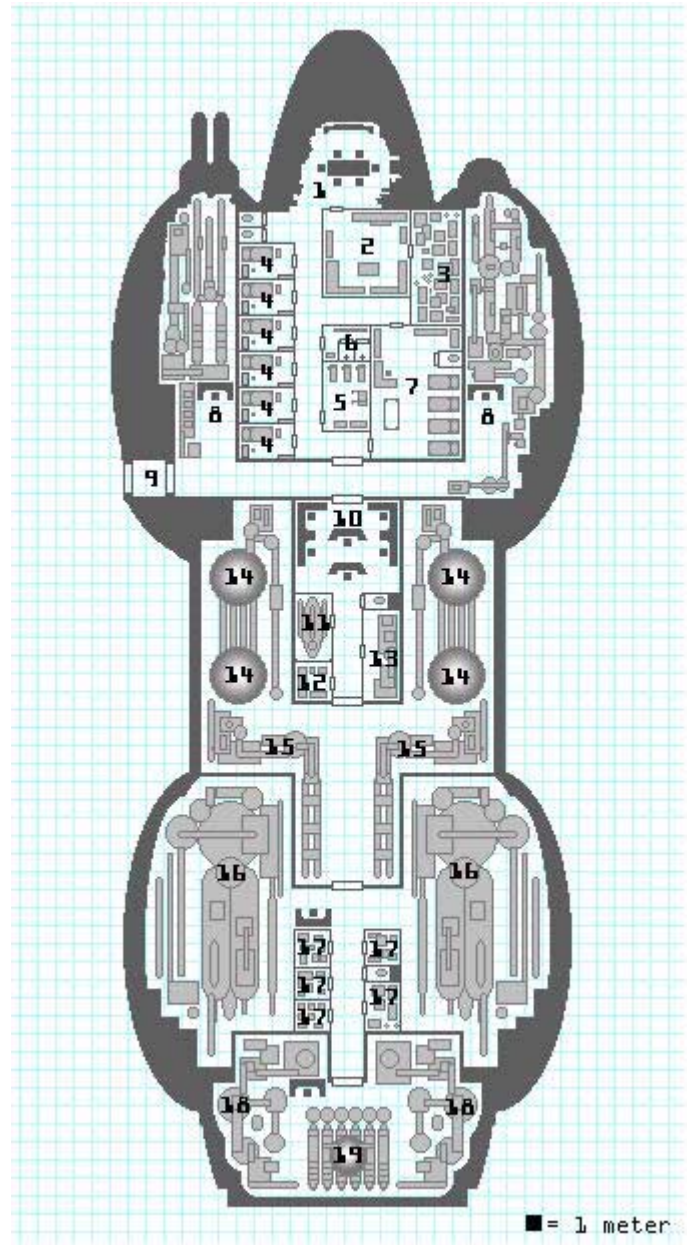
ENGINES: Stabilizer, Induction engine

POWER: Mass reactor rated at 20 power factors

DRIVE: 5 light-years per starfall

HATCHES: Security (0dur)

ROLL	COMPARTMENT	SYSTEM (DUR,POW)	DUR
1-2	Command	Laser transceiver (0,1) Radio transceiver (0,1) Computer core (G) (2,0) Ded. Battle (G) (0,0) Ded. Defense (G) (0,0) Ded. Engineering (G) (0,0) Ded. Navigation (O) (0,0) Ded. Sensors (O) (0,0) Damage control (O) (1,1) Jammer (0,1) EM detector (0,0) Multiband radar (0,0) Reentry capsule (0,0)	(6,6,3)
3-4	Auxiliary	Mass reactor (8,0) Autosupport unit (0,2)	(16,16,8)
5-7	Engineering I	Stardrive (3,0) Stabilizer (2,0)	(10,10,5)
8-10	Engineering II	Induction engine (6,6)	(12,12,6)
11-14	Weapons	Point-defense gun (1,1) Mass Cannon (4,6) Airlock (0,0)	(10,10,5)
15-20	Crew	Sick bay (2,0) Crew Quarters (1,0)	(6,6,3)



Ship Key

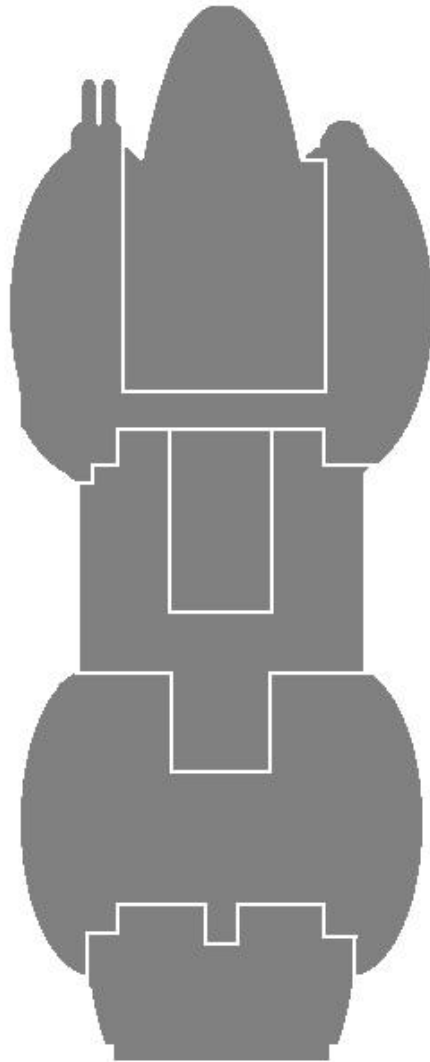
- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Mess Deck/ Lounge | 11. Reentry Capsule |
| 2. Galley | 12. Weapons Locker |
| 3. Food and Water | 13. Shipboard Computer |
| 4. Crew Quarters | 14. Mass Reactor |
| 5. Fitness Room | 15. Auto Support Unit |
| 6. Showers | 16. Induction Engine |
| 7. Sick Bay | 17. Storage |
| 8. Weapons Control | 18. Stabilizer |
| 9. Airlock | 19. Stardrive |
| 10. Command Deck | |

The Silver Goose

Maneuver rating: -2
Acc: 3 Mpp
Cruising speed: 2 AU/hr

Hull size: 30 Durability
Hull type: Military Scout
Starfall distance: 5 light years

THE SILVER GOOSE



6	S (6)	□□□□□□■	Hit on: 15-20
	W (6)	□□□□□□■	
	M (3)	□□□■	

5	S (10)	□□□□□□□□■	Hit on: 11-14
	W (10)	□□□□□□□□■	
	M (5)	□□□□■	

1	S (6)	□□□□□■	Hit on: 1-2
	W (6)	□□□□□■	
	M (3)	□□□■	

2	S (16)	□□□□□□□□□□□□■	Hit on: 3-4
	W (16)	□□□□□□□□□□□□■	
	M (8)	□□□□□□■	

4	S (12)	□□□□□□□□□□■	Hit on: 8-10
	W (12)	□□□□□□□□□□■	
	M (6)	□□□□■	

3	S (10)	□□□□□□□□■	Hit on: 5-7
	W (10)	□□□□□□□□■	
	M (5)	□□□□■	

Weapon Data					
System	Acc*	Range (Mm)	Type	Damage	Actions
Mass cannon	-2	5/10/15	LI (p)	d6+ 2s/d6+ 1w/d6+ 3w	3
Point-defense gun	-2	1/2/3	HI (p)	d4s/d4w/d4+ 2w	4
* Accuracy includes Good battle computer system					
Armor: Polymeric (light): LI 1d4-1/ HI 1d4-1 /En 1d4-2					
Defenses: Point-defense gun, Jammer					
Computers: Battle, Defense, and Engineering, (-2 bonus to related skill checks)					
Navigation and Sensors receive a -1 bonus to related skill checks.					



ZANE'S FIGHTING SHIPS

By Gary Astleford

Zane's Fighting Ships of the Second Galactic War

This issue, Professor Nathaniel Zane will take a look at two vessels used primarily by members of the Expansion Pentad in the latter years of the Second Galactic War – the Voidcorp *Tarantula*, and the Thuldan *Drake*. Although both are venerable designs, they still see use in modern days, especially in the Verge.

VOIDCORP *TARANTULA*-CLASS CUTTER

One of Voidcorp's more flexible cutters, the *Tarantula* first saw service in late 2418. Designed in 2413 by LS492 228RE, designer of the *Moray* and *Okapi*-class frigates, the *Tarantula* didn't see production until early 2416. It was held back by bureaucratic red tape for two years, yet has the dubious distinction of being the only Voidcorp-designed vessel to pass all initial safety protocols right off the drawing board.

Once in service, the *Tarantula* performed exceptionally well in massed engagements, but typically did poorly when numerical odds were in the enemy's favor. The complaints of officers of the line were that the *Tarantula*, while sturdy and capable in its own right, was slow and ponderous compared to many of the smaller vessels employed by the Rignunmor Star Consortium. Many ships were recalled to port in 2454, and deflection inducers were installed in hopes that the ship's survivability would increase.

Although flown exclusively by Voidcorp, many *Tarantulas* were serving in Insight's navy after it seceded from Voidcorp in 2460. Additionally, a cache of *Tarantulas* and spare parts were captured by Freespace Alliance forces in 2463. Many of these were pushed into service, while others were sold on the open and black markets prior to the Treaty of Concord being signed in 2472. Today, Voidcorp still employs *Tarantulas* as scouts and picket vessels. It is especially popular with Voidcorp forces in the Verge, due in part to the range of its stardrive.

Four models of the *Tarantula* have seen extensive service in the galaxy. The 2A, or attack configuration, is by far the most common, amounting to nearly sixty percent of all *Tarantulas* in service. The escort configuration, or 2E, is the next most common. Designed as a light escort for destroyers and frigates, it trades in its mass converter and forward-firing mass cannons for three turret-mounted mass cannons. In addition to its role as a light escort, the 2E is also used by Voidcorp's Law Enforcement Division as a patrol craft. The 2M, or missile configuration, is merely a *Tarantula* 2E that has had one of its mass cannons replaced with a rapid recovery launch tube, typically loaded with plasma missiles. The least common *Tarantula* by far is the 2I, or interdicator configuration, which is equipped with two turret-mounted plasma cannons and a forward-firing drivespace inhibitor.

Name: Voidcorp *Tarantula*-class Cutter (2A: Attack configuration)

Cost C\$9,775,000

Compartments: 7

Dur: 40

Maneuver Rating: +1

Acc: 1 Mpp

Cruise Speed: 1 AU/hour

Berthing: 10 crew

Armament: Mass converter in turret, two linked forward-facing mass cannons

Defenses: Deflection inducer, jammer

Armor: Moderate neutronite armor

d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6 (En)

Computer: Good Computer Core, Good dedicated battle, defense, navigation, sensors, and tactical computers

Engines: Induction engine
 Power: Mass reactors rated for 35 power factors
 Drive: 10 light years

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1	Command	Crew Quarters (1/0) Multiband Radar (0/0) Radio Transceiver (0/1) Good Computer Core (2/0) Security Hatches (0/0) Reentry Capsule (0/0)	8/8/4
2-3	Engineering	Induction Engine (4/4) Stardrive (3/*) Self-Destruct Device (0/0)	14/14/7
4-5	Electronics	Deflection Inducer (2/4) Jammer (0/1)	
6-8	Auxiliary I	Mass Reactor (8/*) Autosupport Unit (0/1)	16/16/8
9-11	Auxiliary II	Mass Reactor (6/*) Autosupport Unit (0/1) Airlock (0/0)	12/12/6
12-15	Weapons I	Mass Converter (4/6) Turret (1/0)	10/10/5
16-20	Weapons II	Mass Cannon (2/3) Mass Cannon (2/3) Weapon Link (0/0)	8/8/4

Weapon Data

System	Acc	Range (Mm)	Type	Damage	Actions
Mass Converter	0	3/6/9	En (e)	d6+ 3s/d6+ 3w/d6+ 2m	2
Mass Cannon	0	5/10/15	LI (p)	d6+ 2s/d6+ 1w/d6+ 3w	3

Modification: Tarantula-class Cutter (2E: Escort configuration)

Cost C\$9,125,000

Armament: Three mass cannons in turrets

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
12-15	Weapons I	Mass Cannon (2/3) Mass Cannon (2/3) Turret (1/0) Turret (1/0)	12/12/6
16-20	Weapons II	Mass Cannon (2/3) Turret (1/0)	6/6/3

Weapon Data

System	Acc	Range (Mm)	Type	Damage	Actions
Mass Cannon	0	5/10/15	LI (p)	d6+ 2s/d6+ 1w/d6+ 3w	3

Modification: Tarantula-class Cutter (2M: Missile configuration)

Cost C\$9,025,000

Armament: RR launch tube, two mass cannons in turrets

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
12-15	Weapons I	RR Launch Tube (3/1) Mass Cannon (2/3) Turret (1/0)	12/12/6
16-20	Weapons II	Mass Cannon (2/3) Turret (1/0)	6/6/3

Weapon Data

System	Acc	Range (Mm)	Type	Damage	Actions
RR Launch Tube	-1	As Load	As Load	As Load	3
Missile, PLA	0	15/30/45	En (g)	d6+ 3w/d8+ 3w/d6+ 2m	0
Mass Cannon	0	5/10/15	LI (p)	d6+ 2s/d6+ 1w/d6+ 3w	3

Modification: Tarantula-class Cutter (2I: Interdictor configuration)

Cost C\$9,225,000

Armament: Two plasma cannons in turrets, one forward-firing drivespace inhibitor

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
12-15	Weapons I	Plasma Cannon (3/3) Turret (1/0) Drivespace Inhibitor (1/4)	10/10/5
16-20	Weapons II	Plasma Cannon (3/3) Turret (1/0)	8/8/4

Weapon Data

System	Acc	Range (Mm)	Type	Damage	Actions
Plasma Cannon	0	4/8/16	En (e)	d6+ 2w/d8+ 2w/d6+ 1m	3
DS Inhibitor	-2	5/10/30	En (e)	See Description	1

THULDAN IMPERIAL INDUSTRIES *DRAKE*-CLASS ESCORT CUTTER

The *Drake*-class escort cutter was pushed into service in 2372, making it one of the oldest designs still in use with the Thuldan Empire's navy. Designed as an escort, it instead saw duty disrupting shipping within the Solar Union. Small groups of *Drakes* were instructed to use pack tactics and hit-and-fade strikes in order to whittle away at enemy supply lines. The operation was incredibly successful, with many "packs" of *Drakes* operating as far away as Orlamu space.

Historically, the *Drake*-class performed well. While the great majority were assigned to harassment and interdiction missions deep in enemy space, a number of them were active along the Thuldan frontier. It is an unsubstantiated rumor that half of the missiles that damaged the Kendai relay were fired by a pack of *Drake*-class cutters during the Battle of Kendai in 2375.

Fast for its size and equipped with formidable weaponry, the *Drake*-class truly lived up to its name-sake. So successful was it that, when the Treaty of Concord was signed in 2472, both the Union of Sol and Orlamu Theocracy unsuccessfully lobbied to have all remaining *Drakes* scrapped. As a result of the class's bad reputation, the Empire continues to build *Drakes* for purely psychological reasons.

The most famous *Drake* in the history of the Second Galactic War was the "*Maelstrom*," piloted by Captain Theodore Cannes. Cannes was a military genius, with over fifty confirmed kills to his credit, nearly half of which were Orlamist merchant ships. Cannes and the *Maelstrom* made their last report at the Battle of Songham in 2401. No one is sure where the *Maelstrom* went, but rumors abound that a vessel matching its description has been seen in the Tychus system, attacking Orlamu vessels out of Yellow Sky.

The *Drake* looks imposing, with two outstretched “wings” circling up and around the vessel’s forward section. Prototypical ships of war, *Drakes* do nothing to hide their weaponry from prying eyes. As evidenced by the role they played during the Second Galactic War, they excel at piracy, and many ships of this class have found their way into the hands of pirate and mercenary groups. Although no longer produced in significant numbers, the Thuldan Empire still employs *Drakes*, especially in the Verge.

Name: Thuldan Imperial Industries *Drake*-class Escort Cutter (Thuldan)

Cost C\$7,205,000

Compartments: 8 Dur: 45
 Maneuver Rating: 0 Acc: 2 Mpp
 Cruise Speed: 1.5 AU/hour Berthing: 20 crew (4 officers, 16 enlisted)
 Armament: Two linked forward-firing mass cannons, forward-firing plasma cannon, launch tube
 Defenses: Point defense gun, chaff
 Armor: Moderate neutronite armor
 d6+ 1(LI), d6+ 1 (HI), d6 (En)
 Computer: Ordinary computer core, Good dedicated battle and defense computers
 Engines: Induction engines
 Power: Two mass reactors rated for 20 power factors
 Drive: 5 light years

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
0	Command	Multiband Radar (0/0) Radio Transceiver (0/1) Ordinary Computer Core (1/0) Sick Bay (2/0)	6/6/3
1-2	Engineering I	Stardrive (3/*) Induction Engine (4/4) Auto Support Unit (0/3)	14/14/7
3-4	Engineering II	Induction Engine (4/4) Recycler Unit (1/1)	10/10/5
5-6	Auxiliary I	Mass Reactor (4/*)	8/8/4
7-9	Auxiliary II	Mass Reactor (4/*)	8/8/4
10-12	Weapons I	Launch Tube w/15 Missiles (4/1) Plasma Cannon (3/3)	14/14/7
13-16	Weapons II	Mass Cannons (4/6) Weapon Link (0/0) Point Defense Gun (1/1) Chaff (1/0)	12/12/6
17-20	Crew	Crew Quarters (2/0) Extra Stores (2/0) Brig (1/0) Extension Airlock (0/0)	10/10/5

Weapon Data

System	Acc	Range (Mm)	Type	Damage	Actions
Mass Cannon	0	5/10/15	LI (p)	d6+ 2s/d6+ 1w/d6+ 3w	3
Plasma Cannon	0	4/8/16	En (e)	d6+ 2w/d8+ 2w/d6+ 1m	3
Launch Tube	0	As Load	As Load	As Load	1
Missile, CHE	+ 1	8/16/24	LI (g)	d8s/d6+ 1w/d4+ 1m	0
Missile, SMP	-1	8/16/24	HI (g)	d6+ 2s/d6+ 2w/d6+ 4w	0
Missile, ARN	-1	10/20/30	LI (g)	d8s/2d4+ 1s/d4+ 2w	0
Missile, MRB	-1	10/20/30	En (g)	2d4+ 1s/2d4w/d8+ 1m	0

Gary Astleford can be reached at penangallan@home.com



GRIDSITES

By Dawn Ibach

Spooky Locales and Mysterious Places

Here is a list of web sites I found while I was in research mode. I tried not to overlap most information and was very surprised at how much there was to find. They are in no particular order. My research was done on September 5, 2001 so these sites should still be accessible. I also included some sites that had some good stories attached to them to spark adventure ideas.

<http://www.nightorchid.com/aftermath/spooky.html>

<http://ghoststudy.com/>

<http://mysteriousplaces.com/>

<http://www.pantheon.org/areas/>

General Locations: <http://www.sff.net/people/kevin.a.murphy/horror.html>

Haunted Inns: <http://bandb.about.com/travel/bandb/cs/haunted/>

Haunted Hotels: <http://www.pathfinder.com/travel/TL/806/haunted.html>

Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, PA: <http://www.multiline.com.au/~mg/>

Legionnaires_Disease_Bellvue_Stratford_Hotel.htm

Haunted Castle: <http://www.celticcastles.com/castles/comlongon/ghost.htm>

Celtic ghost sites: <http://www.afallon.com/pages/whiterabbit1.html>

USA Ghosttowns: <http://www.ghosttowns.com/ghosttownsusa.html>

USA Ghost sites: <http://www.haunted-places.com/paranorm.htm>

Loch Ness: http://www.lochnessguide.com/html/the_tour.html

Ohio University: <http://www.viscom.ohiou.edu/halloween/hauntedathens.html>

Athens, Ohio: <http://www.athenslegends.org/athens.html>

<http://www.realhaunts.com/>

Bermuda Triangle: <http://www.castleofspirits.com/bermuda.html>

<http://www.castleofspirits.com/>

Chicago Sites: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Shadowlands/2007/index2.html>

Longendale, UK: <http://www.hauntedvalley.com/>

American Haunts: <http://www.prairieghosts.com/mosthaunted.html>

http://www.zuko.com/weird_and_spooky_places.htm

<http://members.aol.com/zybec/scary.html>

Ghosts in England: <http://www.derbycity.com/ghosts/ghosts.html>

Haunted Library: <http://www.willard.lib.in.us/>

Oregon Stories: <http://www.hevanet.com/heberb/ghosts/ghosts.htm>

Ohio Sites: <http://www.greenapple.com/~jas1746/>

North Umbria, UK: <http://www.ntb.org.uk/n-files/haunted.asp>

Haunted Places: <http://www.fortunecity.com/roswell/shelly/43/haunted.html>

NY/NJ Site: <http://www.midnightsociety.com/>

Check here for a bunch of ghost hunter group sites: http://dir.yahoo.com/Science/Alternative/Paranormal_Phenomena/Ghosts/Organizations/



ASK THE ORACLE

By Neil Spicer

ASK THE ORACLE

Q: If the hull of a fortress ship has a basic total of 12,000 hull points and a bonus total of 6,000 hull points, how many points would the hull of a cathedral ship have? Also, what would its toughness rating be, how many crewmen does it carry, what is the maximum number of durability points in each compartment, and how much would it cost?

A: I had to go to the source for some assistance on this particular question (i.e., Rich Baker himself, the author of *Warships*), and I think you'll be pleased with his much more official answer than my own. Cathedral ships often invoke this image of being bigger than big...and until they came along, fortress ships were viewed the same way. Rather than get into the long drawn out argument of whose ship is bigger, let's recognize that there has to eventually be a limit to what can be constructed in a PL7+ campaign setting. There are no super star-destroyers, a la Star Wars fame in Star*Drive yet. Of course, your individual campaign might explore such possibilities, however.

Here's how the numbers break down. In terms of sheer firepower, a cathedral ship enjoys a 20,000 combat rating (+3,500 for its hangar bay craft), while a standard fortress ship has a 10,000 combat rating (+2,000 for its hangar bay craft). Numerically, one might be led to think that a cathedral ship is twice the size as a result, but greater firepower doesn't always mean greater size. In fact, due to their superior technology, the Externals can cram a lot more into a smaller package. Good things come in small packages. It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog. Yada-yada-yada. I think you get my drift.

Despite all that, the sketchy information the Verge Alliance has regarding the existence of cathedral ships leads them to believe it is still somewhat larger than a fortress ship. How much larger? According to Rich, about another twenty-five percent. This would put a cathedral ship at 15,000 hull points plus a bonus of 7,500 hull points. As a result, the maximum number of durability points in each compartment would compute out to 2,250. Its toughness rating would stay the same as that

of a fortress ship (i.e., it's still in the Super Heavy class). The number of crewmen carried by a fortress ship is listed as 12,000 on pg. 55 of the *Warships* supplement. The text description on pg. 57, however, indicates such a ship could carry over 100,000 crew and passengers combined, including 600 troops. Extrapolating from that, a cathedral ship probably employs a crew of 15,000 and might also carry as much as 125,000 crew and passengers in addition to its 1,500 troops.

As for the cost of a cathedral ship...well, no one really knows. You can't put a price on technology that humanity doesn't have yet. And who knows what form of currency they use in External space anyway? For GM's that just want a rough estimate, a figure of \$90000 M Concord dollars might suffice. But in reality, it's priceless to the Verge Alliance if they should manage to capture one.

Q: In *Alternity*, can a creature attack more than once per phase if it uses both claws in combat (i.e., the old claw/claw/bite routine)?

A: I had to do a little research on this one. In general, I've heard players and GM's make the argument that the *Alternity* rules only allow a hero a single Unarmed Attack per phase...i.e., they don't get two punches in a single phase. And, since that is basically the same as a claw/claw/bite attack, the same logic should hold true for beasts with multiple attacks...i.e., only one attack per phase, even if they do have two claws and a bite available.

The problem with this interpretation is that it doesn't harmonize well with AD&D or D&D3e's style of combat, which the majority of gamers out there are used to using/abusing. You basically have to buy into the *Alternity* style of combat in order to swallow the idea that beasts aren't going to get multiple attacks in every phase. Of course, some creatures are just naturally quicker and more vicious than the average boxing champ, though.

This question actually came up awhile back on the *Alternity* mailing list as there was some confu-

Oracle Neil Spicer can be reached at purestrain@hotmail.com

sion over the different attack modes of a Klick warrior. Could a Klick attack with its claws while simultaneously firing a blacklaser at someone? Originally, the answer was yes, which made the Klicks an even worse nightmare than they already posed. But later, Rich Baker, Dave Eckelberry, and Jim Butler clarified it for everyone. Here's an excerpt from that discussion:

"Unless otherwise stated in the creature's description, consider each line in the "Attacks" section to be a self-contained sequence that all uses the same base modifier. If a creature can and does use multiple "lines" of attacks, the number of "lines" determines any penalty for multiple attacks.

Thus, for the dimensional horror, we have:

Attacks:

Claws (x2) [this is considered one line of attacks]

Bite (x2) [this is considered a second line of attacks]

If the dimensional horror attacked with only its claws (or its bites) in a single phase, the claw (or bite) attacks would not incur any penalty. If it attacked with one or two claws AND one or two bites, each attack of one type (probably the claws) would be at a +2 step penalty and each attack of a second type (probably the bites) would be at a +4 step penalty.

Note that this reverses the earlier statement regarding the Klick's attacks. Under this ruling, a Klick attacking with one or two pincers OR with a blacklaser would suffer no penalty, though if it combined these two "lines" of attack in the same phase, one type would suffer a +2 step penalty and the other a +4 step penalty.

Remember, of course, that not all creatures are able to use all possible attacks in any given phase; generally, the creature's description will state how many attacks are available to it in any one phase."

This means that previously published creatures from the *Alien Compendium*, *Alien Compendium 2*, and *Xenofoms* should be analyzed for how many attack "lines" exist under their statistics. Each "line" can be used in a single phase without incurring a penalty. Multiple "lines" can be used with the regular penalty for multiple actions in a

single phase.

One could probably argue that a human (or other humanoid race) could benefit from the same logic by gaining two Unarmed Attacks with its own natural claws or fists. It's up to the individual GM to decide whether natural weapons are afforded that advantage, but considering that a dagger in each hand is quite similar in concept to two claws, it's unlikely that such attacks would be granted in the same phase without being penalized. After all, the whole purpose of penalties for multiple attacks in a single phase is centered around the idea of two-weapon fighting styles. It just so happens that the two weapons are natural in this case.

Q: A player of mine wants to start the game with level 6 in his native language (i.e., 3 Free and 3 paid for). He is a Diplomat (Free Agent). I run a trading campaign in the Star*Drive setting. He also wants to know if multiple skills can yield multiple bonuses (e.g., business bargain skill with an outright lie to yield a better bonus on the bargain roll). Or any other combo.

A: Beginning heroes are limited to the purchase of UP TO rank 3 in any skill...and are not guaranteed the opportunity to purchase an ADDITIONAL 3 ranks to an existing skill, even if it's a free skill like their native language or knowledge of their homeworld or system. So, a starting hero would not usually be capable of buying an additional 3 ranks to pump up his native language skill to rank 6. It would have to be accomplished over the course of time.

Some GM's may choose to interpret this differently, as a good case could be made that a hero receives 3 ranks for simply growing up...and then could have augmented those ranks with up to 3 more as a result of focused study down the road. That's entirely allowable, if a GM wants to let his players spend their starting skill points that way. But, an equally strong case could be made that the free 3 ranks actually do comprise the focused learning that is mandated by the education system in that hero's homeland. We all had to take classes in our native tongue during grade school anyway, right? And it didn't leave us a lot of time to somehow learn it more deeply.

I'm more inclined to view it this way because pre-

sumably, a particular starting hero only has enough time in his initial years to master skills up to 3 ranks. They are essentially learning their native language at the same time they're studying so many other things. Due to the competing interests between different subjects, it kind of explains the 3 rank limitation. Besides, the native language ranks come free, and there's no reason to seek to boost those any higher at 1st level. The free skills were really assigned as a way to enhance the diversity of the Star*Drive campaign setting more than anything else.

Furthermore, rank 3 in a particular language skill signifies fluency. Skill checks for everyday communication are not really necessary for someone with that level of skill, especially if it's his or her native language. So, additional ranks are mostly useful for heroes that wish to write especially moving literary pieces, put together a rousing speech, or embark on a career as a teacher of languages. The only other times that a language skill check would be deemed necessary is if the hero found himself in a high-pressure situation... where the wrong inflection or enunciation could have dire results. In those moments, language skill checks might come into play by providing a -1/-2/-3 step bonus to Culture-*diplomacy* in much the same way as -*etiquette*. Or, it could also provide a bonus to the various Interaction, Entertainment, or Creativity skills. But that's really stretching it, in my own opinion.

And that brings me to your second line of questioning: multiple skills providing multiple bonuses to another skill check. There's really a fine line that a GM must walk with regards to how various skills interact in the Alternity system. Clearly, a case could be made that Business-illicit and Interaction-bargain might be combined to enhance a Deception-bluff skill check. But so could a lot of other things. In fact, a Deception-bluff and Business-illicit might be more likely to impact the Interaction-bargain check, if you turn it around. The problem here is that there's always going to be a certain amount of Interaction involved in all of those skills...but when is it necessary to actually roll the dice? Here's how I would envision the scene playing out:

Wiley Bob saunters into the highly illegal Gun-Runner's Paradise owned by Jake 'the Snake' Sanchez. Bob has some hot merchandise he'd

like to pawn for that 24-kt gold-chain necklace he's had his eye on for awhile now. He opens up the negotiations by trying to lie about the origin of the handgun with which he wants to rid himself. He then mentally calculates what a pistol with filed-off serial numbers would be worth on the black market, and opens the bidding by telling Jake he'll accept nothing less than a cool \$60 cash for the weapon.

Jake the Snake is of course an experienced veteran at these kinds of games. He handles the pistol and looks it over, immediately noticing the filed-off serial numbers plus the fact that the gun hasn't been cleaned since it was last fired. He pops the clip and can see that it's already missing a few rounds, and while he's doing all of that, he visually assesses the way Bob is dressed and how he's conducting himself. He smells a rat. In addition, Jake knows the illicit business of handguns like the back of his hand, and there's no way a gun of this model and manufacturer is worth more than \$45. So he counters with an even lower figure of \$30 in order to make a profit on the deal.

Okay, so how should an Alternity GM handle this situation? My recommendation is to allow the player to describe all of the actions he wishes for his hero to initiate. There's no need to do this by rounds because he's not in combat or anything... yet. So, breaking down the sequence of events, the first thing Bob tries to do is lie about the origins of the handgun. Before simply making the roll to see if Jake believes it and agrees to the initial offer, the GM should allow the experienced gun-runner to look over the entire situation.

Then, ask the player to make a Deception-*bluff* check with whatever penalties or bonuses seem prudent. Clearly Jake's resistance modifier will come into play. And, how the player chooses to have Bob phrase the lie, Bob's physical appearance, and any other circumstances that are apparent to Jake, should affect the situation at this point. Also, if the GM determines that Jake has been really strapped for business lately and/or has an immediate buyer in mind for the gun or an arrangement with the local authorities to look the other way, that could also be taken into account. If Bob succeeds, then file that result away for future reference...and proceed as if Jake is unaware or unconcerned that the weapon is hot. If

he fails, and Jake knows he's lying, then that could alter things immediately by the gun-runner refusing to do business at all. Or it might simply make Jake more resistant to Bob's attempts to influence the final price. It's up to the GM to decide how important a role the deception will play in the final negotiations.

Now, on to the deal-making. It's obvious that both men have some knowledge of the illicit side of business dealings that occur with respect to guns on the street. Bob wants to use that information to enhance his *bargain* skill...and so does Jake. This really breaks down to an opposed Interaction-*bargain* session in which both men get to use their Business-*illicit* knowledge to provide a bonus to their individual rolls.

The GM should also consider an additional modifier to Jake's roll, on top of the Business-*illicit* check, based upon whether he fell for Bob's deception earlier. This sets up an initial modifier for the bargaining session in much the same fashion as range and movement can influence Modern Ranged Weapons. If Jake knows Bob is lying, or just feels uncomfortable because of how he looks and conducts himself, then it's going to affect how hard of a bargain he drives. This could be a positive or negative modifier...and entirely up to the GM to interpret the size of it. The typical situation modifiers that can be imposed as a result of a supporting skill check are 1-, 2-, or 3-steps depending on an Ordinary/Good/Amazing result. Critical failures usually result in at least a +3 step penalty.

The bottom line to all of this is how much detail do you want to get into as a GM when determining situation modifiers? Potentially, a host of supporting skill checks could be heaped upon a situation that many GM's choose to handle with a single roll for a single skill. The above scenario could just have easily denied a Business-*illicit* and Deception-*bluff* check to enhance the Interaction-*bargain* session. But, that could lead to the frustration of your players who spent their hard-earned achievement points and initial skill points on the other skills.

You don't want to devalue the importance of having ranks in Business and Deception. But, at the same time, you don't want to overdo the number of situation modifiers that a player gets to take

into account for his hero on every Interaction check. Go with what you're comfortable with... and make it clear that it's a decision the players will need to accept. Sometimes the best thing to do is separate some of the other 'so-called' supporting skill checks into their own resolution and then keep them in mind for what kind of starting situation modifiers you want to bring into play on the skill checks that come later.

Q: Does the Gamma World version of power gloves give a person a Strength score of 15 (forearm strength only)?

A: Like a lot of things that appear in the *Alternity Gamma World Campaign Setting* sourcebook, the description of power gloves leaves something to be desired. According to the text on pg. 93, it states "...power gloves consist of elbow-length gauntlets of fabristeel weave ending in heavy fighting gloves that cover the user's hands. Gravity technology allows the wielder to strike blows of astonishing power with a gloved hand, adding +3 damage to any strike made with Unarmed Attack-*brawl* or *-power martial arts*."

Compare this statement with the description of a power cestus from the Gravity Age in the *Alternity Player's Handbook* on pg. 173. "The power cestus consists of an elbow-length gauntlet of CF (carbonate fiber) weave, ending in a heavy fighting glove that covers the user's hand. Gravity technology allows the wielder to strike blows of astonishing power with a gloved hand." Note that there's no reference to a +3 damage bonus in the *Alternity Player's Handbook* version.

Instead, a power cestus is simply given a damage rating of $d4+2s/d4w/d4+1w$, which can be further modified by a hero's strength, of course. The damage track for power gloves in Gamma World simply relies on the user's normal unarmed damage, typically $d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s$ for the *-brawl* skill and $d6s/d6+2s/d4w$ for *-power martial arts*, which can be modified by the hero's natural strength AND the +3 bonus from the power gloves' gravity technology at the same time. Some GM's disagree with this interpretation because a Combat Spec with a 13 Strength and power gloves could easily get a +5 damage bonus to each blow. They choose to interpret the power gloves as a replacement for a hero's natural strength, assuming that the gloves never actu-

ally make contact with an opponent. Rather the gravity field does the work instead. Thus, this interpretation would have the +3 damage bonus override any natural bonus from strength, effectively giving everyone that uses them the damage bonus of a 15 Strength.

Also, in many ways the Gamma World power gloves make more sense than the power cesti that appeared earlier in the *Alternity Player's Handbook* and the *Arms & Equipment Guide*. Since a power cestus comes with a built-in damage rating, there's no distinction between someone using *-brawl* or *-power martial arts* with them. Gamma World's version allows a different damage track depending on which skill a hero uses. As a result, many Alternity GM's have replaced the power cestus with the power gloves' description instead.

In addition, neither weapon implies a true enhancement to a hero's Strength score. Just because a Strength of 15 grants a +3 damage bonus, doesn't mean that the +3 damage bonus built into power gloves grants a 15 Strength. None of your skill scores change, for instance. Basically, the small gravity fields projected by the gloves can only be used to smash and damage things. If a hero with power gloves wants to lift a heavy object and depends on the gloves to help him, he'll be sorely disappointed. Only a hero's natural strength comes into play in such a situa-

tion. If the same hero wishes to break down a door, however, the gloves can certainly be useful. They still don't grant him a higher Strength score, but they will allow him to inflict more damage against the barrier without necessarily harming his hands in the process. Rules for breaking through such objects can be found in the *Alternity Gamemaster's Guide*.

Lastly, a note to keep in mind about true strength-enhancing devices such as MusclePlus and Cyberarms is that they only contribute to a single arm. For safety purposes, they are also fitted with enough biofeedback information, via a hero's cytronic circuitry, to let him know when he's putting too much strain into any particular feat of strength. It's not that the cybernetic devices can't hold up to the stress. It's that the points on the hero's natural body, where the cybernetic devices are anchored, cannot. A hero that ignores these warnings and attempts a feat of strength that goes too far beyond what his natural body can accommodate could literally tear the cyberarm from its connecting joint, leaving it attached to whatever heavy object he was trying to lift instead. What this means in game terms is that a Strength score enhancement from a Cyberarm or MusclePlus is only going to alter skill scores that depend upon its use. Melee Weapons, for instance, would use the higher Strength score, but not Armor Operation.



Of Ghosts and Goblins is a new Alternity Dark* Matter adventure by Action Check's own Neil Spicer!

Download your *free* copy of "Of Ghosts and Goblins" today at www.alternity.net!