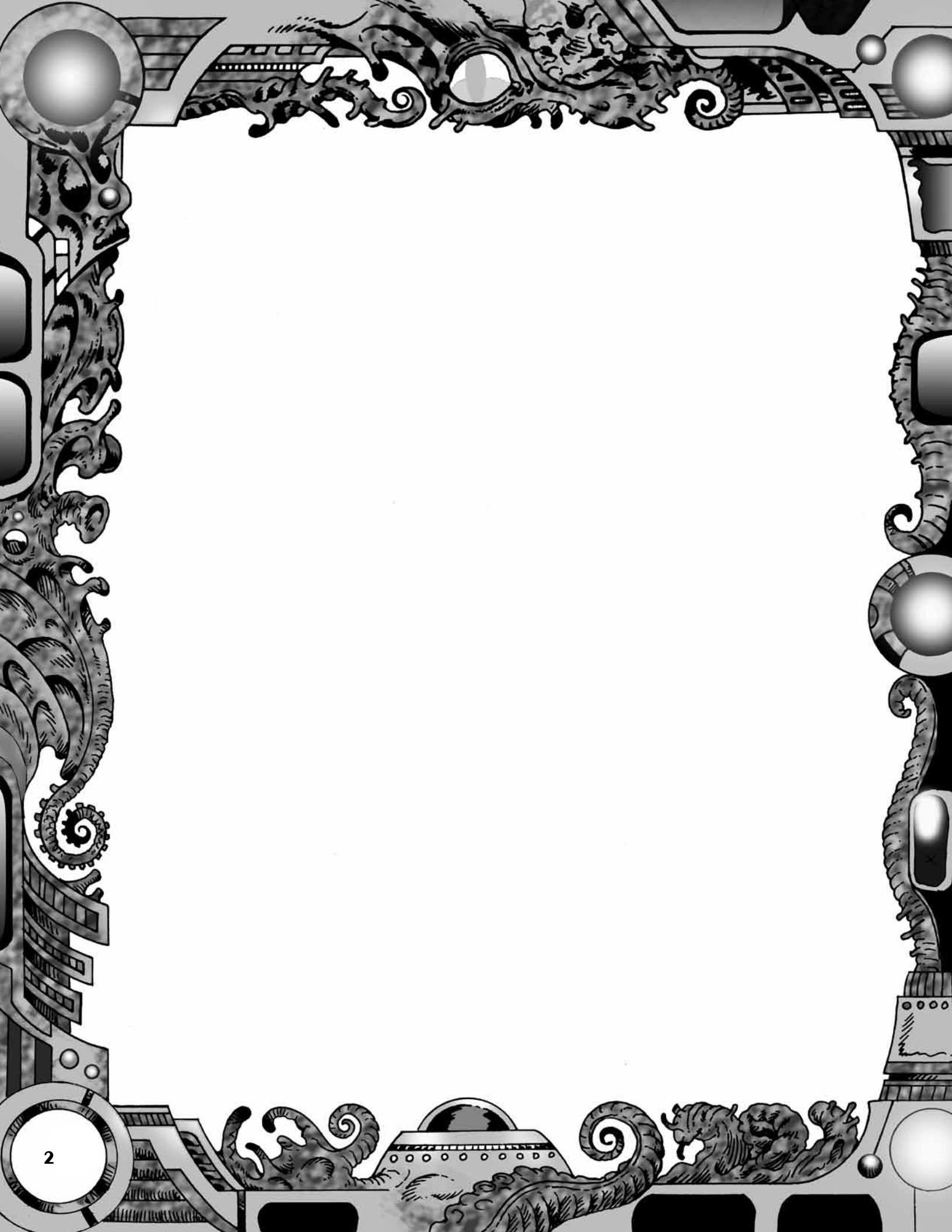


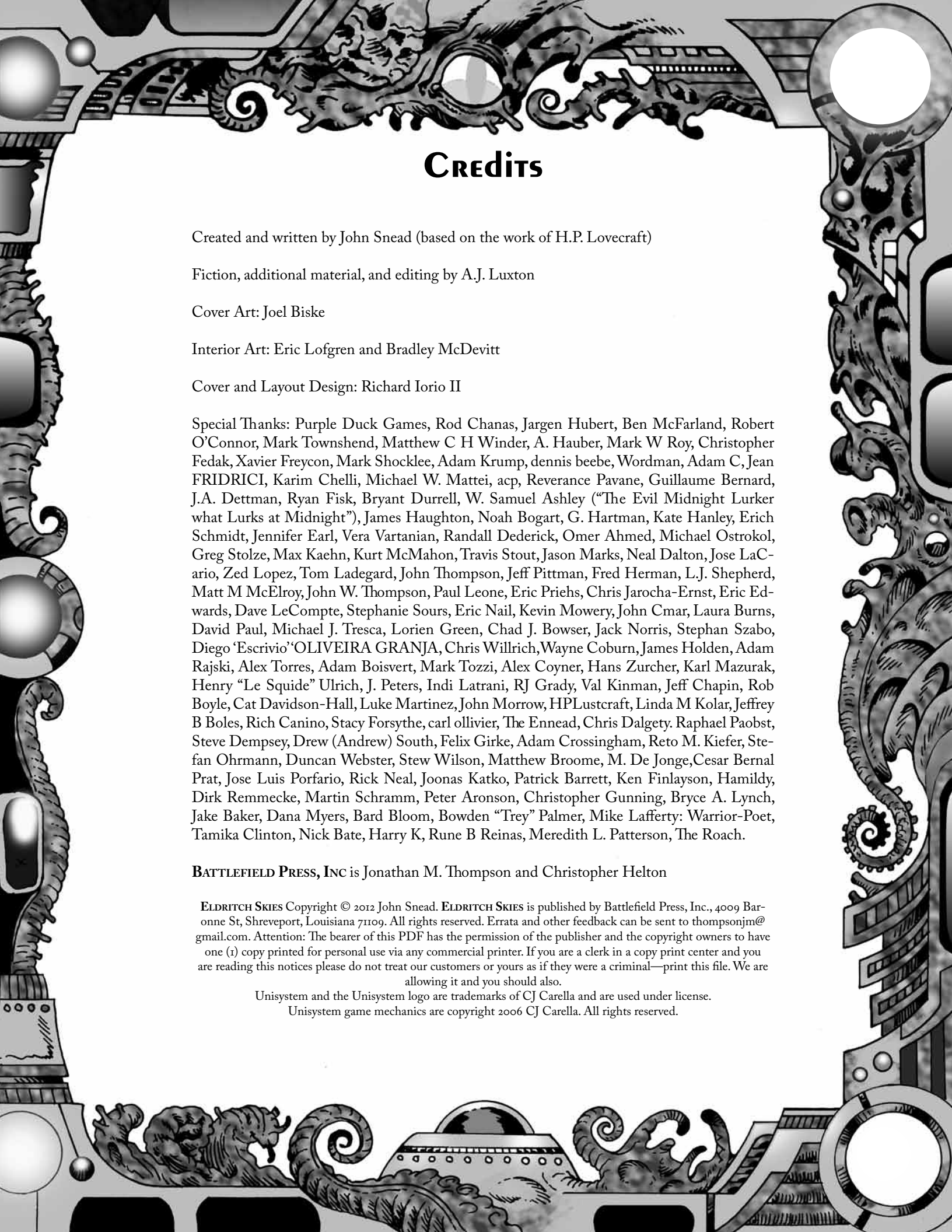
Eldritch Skies





Eldritch Skies





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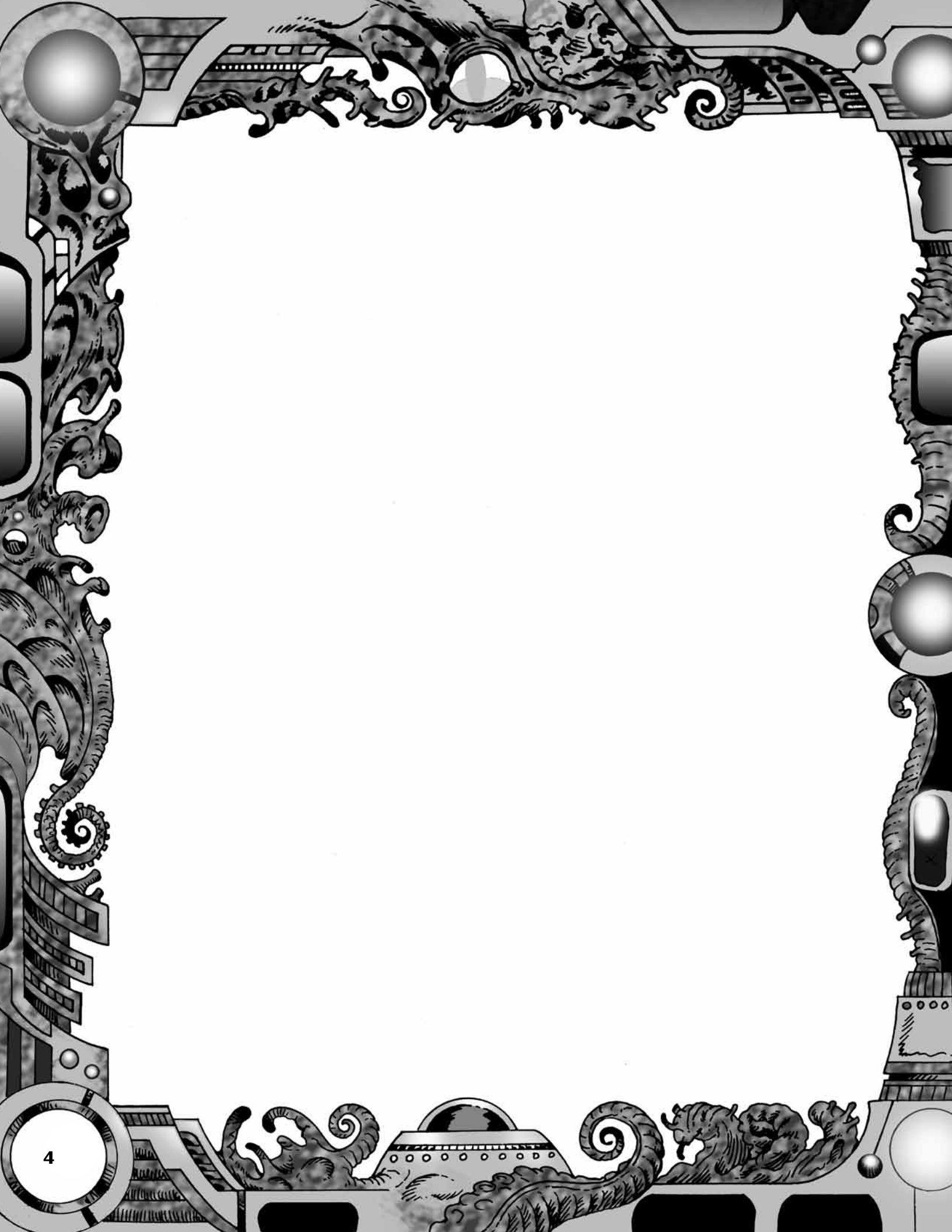
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VECTORS

"THE INVESTORS' MEETING IS FRIDAY." As the other engineers stood up from the table, Robert Barlington turned to Connie. "You will be there, won't you?" A blast of cheap cigar smoke hit her full in the face with his words. The man could afford anything, but he had no taste.

"Oh, I'll be there, all right," she muttered. He was taunting her. As the only woman in his cadre of engineers - he even called them Barlington's Boys - she got held to twice the standard of anyone else: on any given day she was either a genius or a shameful waste of space. The insinuation was that by Thursday, she'd have made a major breakthrough on the Soviet castoff alien tech they were studying, or she'd be the joke of the meeting.

By some standards, Connie thought, she was lucky. Bob *knew* what he had in her; that whatever it took, she had the drive to best the other intellects he'd amassed around her, regardless of the fact that he would always give the credit to someone else. She got paid, and he knew that if he fired her, the company's stock would tank within a year, just as soon as the investors noticed the magic was gone. She'd never be cast aside lightly.

But he knew, too, that she'd never quit. She valued the job too much, and the opportunity to work with materials she'd never otherwise see - grey market pieces that Bob got through contacts she didn't even want to know about. There were moments when the stink of smoke and the humiliation of the way she was treated all faded to nothingness, replaced by the exultation of science and thought, and as long as she had those, it was almost worthwhile: better, at least, than the alternatives.

As she entered her apartment that night, the blinking red light on the answering machine caught her eye. She pressed play, and a man's voice came through the hiss and crackle of the worn tape. He sounded nice, personable, but that didn't mean anything. "Connie Gilman," he said. "If I have reached the correct number, please return this phone call as soon as possible." He gave a telephone

number. "We're not with a competitor, but we have some questions about the research you're doing. It's imperative that you return our call."

She wrote down the number and erased the message. It was too late into the evening to call anyone. The area code was Washington, DC. Now, what was that all about?

The ups and downs of working for Bob took a toll on her health. She never let on about it; every time she saw the bluish circles under her eyes in the mirror or picked up the small bottle of pills from the gleaming white shelf of her medicine cabinet, Connie died a little from embarrassment. She kept her family history of insanity under wraps for the same reason. She knew what the magazines had to say about women under pressure. It was obvious bullshit. She'd met Paul Erdos at a conference and seen the amount of pharmaceuticals he swallowed down, but damned if she could get away with the same without feeling like it was a dirty secret.

The pills beat out not sleeping, so she swallowed one down and got under the coverlet. It wasn't long before the restless thoughts that troubled her mind faded into nothingness.

Connie made it to work before dawn on Tuesday, determined to make a good showing of it. Gilman women didn't give up. Hours passed in the workshop before she remembered that she hadn't eaten breakfast.

Remembered, too, the faintest wisp of a dream from the last night. A voice speaking to her, low and enthralling, a crystal wine glass and earrings to match, that uncanny gleam of light coming through them to strike her eye... Something about that gleam of light...

The printer assailed her with its insistent, repetitive bleating. Connie made a clean tear at the perforated edge of the dot-matrix printout and read the figures on the page. They represented particle emissions from the working prototype; the numbers failed to align with the ones she'd read from the original.

The original, the alien artifact, sat there slick and dark and smooth and unknowable. It looked more born than made. If engineers had contributed to this thing, they had concealed their efforts thoroughly, and though Connie would never say so out loud, she despaired of it. How do you reverse-engineer something if you cannot even imagine what the original engineer was thinking?

Damn it. She'd think better with food in her stomach.

But something about the alien artifact and the dream still nagged at her as she walked out to the Chinese place around the corner and came back with her steaming, sickly-smelling chow mein. Over the nasty sweet-and-sour sauce, she thought she scented the waft of an indescribably sophisticated perfume.

That night, frustration and equations spinning in her head, she barely remembered making it home, barely remembered going to bed. But her dream was clearer than the day itself, clearer than all her hours of toil over her calculator.

It was the same dream as last time, resolved into clearer focus: she was on her way to a conference to see the famous Nyarlathotep, pushing through crowds of scientists, white men whose faces jeered and leered at her and who puffed noxious cigar smoke at her as she passed. The room grew taut with tension as they waited for Nyarlathotep to take the podium. Nyarlathotep passed up the aisle, oozing the poisonous scent of her perfume, and the odor cleared Connie's head of the clouds of smoke with a sort of sudden shock.

The suit on Nyarlathotep's perfect porcelain-doll body was immaculate and designed by the highest-class designer, and she walked as if her feet had been made for high heels: not a wobble, not a moment of uncertainty. Over the faint electric crackle of the PA system, her voice was so cultured it almost hurt to hear, East Coast with a touch of British, and left Connie with a simultaneous feeling of hatred and intense longing, almost sexual. She'd never been lesbian, though constantly accused of it, but this transcended preference. This... exaltation, this horror of what she would never be.

In the way of dreams, the lecture faded away and suddenly Connie was in a hotel suite, amid a crowd of Nyarlathotep's admirers. Nyarlathotep herself was seated on a plush leather chair, her feet perched delicately on the floor, and the sound of her lilting laughter rang out as men told her what a brilliant mind she had. Connie felt jealousy so violent her lip quivered, and then Nyarlathotep turned her face to her, and beckoned Connie closer with a finger gesture and a mocking smile.

Connie woke with Nyarlathotep's words ringing sharp-

ly in her ears: "It's simple, Connie. Give up your illusions."

Give up your illusions... She felt a hunger so deep it almost nauseated her, not for food or sex but for the recognition she would never have. She was not that white woman, and her attempts to play the man's game were half-baked at best. She threw on some clothing, did not bother with makeup, and addressed the California highways in the pallid gleam of pre-dawn.

"Hey, Connie," said Leider. Of course he got a surname, and referred to her by her first name; that was just how it was done around here. "Is the strain getting to you, honey? Need some help with the hard math?"

Barlington's Boys were always posturing, always getting up in her space. For some reason, it didn't bother her today as much as usual. She looked up at Leider, ready to retort, and saw through the skin of his forehead, to the flesh underneath; a skeleton crisscrossed with decaying muscles and fat. Flies crawled through the empty sockets of his eyes, and Connie understood, suddenly, that on some level what she saw was not hallucination. She looked into the rot that was Leider's face, and laughed. This was her competition: walking corpses. The illusions went both ways.

He laughed back, but it was an uneasy sound. An "eh-heh-heh," like he was caught off guard. He'd been expecting a hostile response, she knew, and perhaps he wasn't sure what to do now that Connie hadn't risen to the bait.

Or maybe the expression on her face threw him. Her anger never did. But now she felt calm, amused, like she walked catlike through the world, beyond the eyes of the unseeing. Leider blinked suddenly and walked away, shuffling his feet as if he wasn't sure which way he was going. "I'm... going to go get some coffee," he said. "Want some?" She looked into her full cup and said, "Sure."

The next dream came when Connie was ready for it. She wasn't asleep, but knew that had nothing to do with it.

Some dim protest in the back of her mind said she should have been afraid, having dreams when she was awake like this. It wasn't proper - it was insane...

And that was where it started, an asylum for the negro insane. Her mother and father had fought that day, viciously; Father said the asylum was no place to bring a little girl, and Mother had said that Connie should have a chance to meet Grandma Gilman who was his own mother anyway, and he was terrible to keep his own blood family apart from each other.

That was the first time Connie had heard the words *blood family*. Those words made strange images in her mind, made her fear something stranger than insan-

ity. So: her dream began back there, in a filth-encrusted room, in the smell of diapers and disinfectant. In life, she had gone in with her mother and father, who had settled finally on bringing her; in the dream, she walked in alone, and the door to the corridor vanished behind her once she had moved fully into the room.

Blood ran from Grandma's eyes. But instead of spreading down her cheeks like tears, it danced into the air, vibrant, curling, forming a thousand tiny threads. One of them connected her to Connie. Blood family. Others went outward in other directions.

"Grandma?" Connie said, and her adult voice came out of her mouth, even though she was short, child-sized.

"This is your family tree, child," said Grandma Gilman. "You can follow the paths of blood to find your birthright..."

Blood within blood within blood. The threads and tracteries extended out from her, and the pattern in its intense complexity could have been a graph of waves and forces, could have been the deep knowledges Connie carried in the back of her mind, of particle physics and higher mathematics. Of...

"You forget yourself, and think that because places and times appear to us to be differentiated, that they actually are." Her grandmother's voice again, calm and deep as water.

She focused on a thread, and it grew and grew, sucking her forward, as if it had gravity of its own. At once, alarmed, she drew back from the thread of blood, and turned her mind to another, and another. But it didn't take her back out of it; instead, each thread pulled her forward and outward, in thousands of directions, in an infinity of directions, and her mind shattered into a million pieces.

Pieces of Connie were everywhere at once. Later, when enough of her soul was whole to formulate an observer, she remembered this as being in the minds or the stories of her ancestors.

Connie was a slaveholder, wielding the heavy lash against the back of a slave who was pregnant with his child... Connie was that slave herself, a woman who had had a name so long forgotten and now was named Phoebe... Connie was one of the great builders, guiding slaves of the Pharaoh's, and the world was a massive and perfect geometry and the pyramid a microcosm of it... Connie was her grandmother, participating with others in a secret midnight ritual that honored that perfect geometry the same way the pyramids did...

Flame crackle, whip crack... an unspeakable act on a stone altar... the mathematics of the Gods...

And through all of it the laughter of Nyarlathotep, the Other, the perfect white woman with perfect nails

who could walk on heels because she was not walking at all; she was navigating space in a *different way entirely*. And Connie, and her people: her ancestors: the white man, the black woman, her family, herself, all trapped like flies in amber in this terrible small human reality where people did violence to each other and subjugated one another. Even the rituals and rites and works of human greatness, she saw now, were part of the same pattern, the same dimension, the trap.

Her grandmother's voice again: "Do you want to be this, or do you want to be more?"

The voice became a chord, became interwoven with alien harmonies. Connie could see a thread, now, that went in *no* direction or *every* direction, that was a vector of all her bloodlines. Like torque or a field vector it went straight out of the page. She knew that if she took hold of that thread, she became more than human.

Was she breaking from her people, her family, from their paths and directions? No - she was summing the forces, following the vector. This was right. This was the sum of her. The math worked out, even if it gave her a direction she couldn't see.

And suddenly she could.

For a hellish and heavenly moment, languages she'd never heard before rang in her mind. She understood them perfectly. It was like her dreams as a student, how after nights spent studying the textbooks would recite themselves restlessly in her head while she was sleeping, but sped up and continuous and simultaneous, and yet every single one, all at once, made sense to her. She tried to turn away from the relentless flow of information, but there was no turning away, no tuning out; it was all there, and it all went in, until her mind screamed with the overload and her universe rang with the pain of the sudden transformation.

Connie woke with her heart pounding. Reflexively she touched her head with her hands; it still felt like her head, at least to the touch. Sweat slicked her forehead. She searched her mind for the knowledge she'd just imbibed, the precious burden of it: was it gone, completely ephemeral?

No. She felt the structures and frameworks dimly settled into her mind. But they were unclear now, a half-forgotten derivation leaving only the final equations.

Reconstructable?

She reached for the printout of numbers next to her, and as she did so, saw the clock out of the corner of her eye; it had been only minutes she was dreaming. Minutes before, the numbers had been nonsense; no pattern in them, no way to draw a correspondence to find what might be happening in the heart of the alien device.

Now patterns occurred to her. She had been looking at it from the wrong angle; a human angle.

Now she had an inkling of what the original engineer was thinking.

Quickly, before it faded, she began making sketches, writing out laborious proofs. It was frustrating trying to reconstruct what had been so whole in her mind, but she remembered how much it hurt to have the whole thing there; too much, too soon. And now she knew, too, that she could make it from her basic principles to these multi-dimensional concepts. That the alien tech was - could be - a vector of her human thoughts, a step sideways that she could take on her own.

Knowing she could make that step was more satisfying than any conference, any business lunch, any bevy of admirers. She wrote out numbers until her eyes itched and her fingers ached, doing the square roots in her head, not even bothering to use a calculator.

All that day and the next, she worked steadily. It was strange: she slept barely three hours that night, but she felt sure she was better rested in the morning than she'd been in months. Bob came in periodically to ask for results and blow cigar smoke in her face. "I'll have it ready for the investors' meeting," she said, "get out." Her insubordination turned his face red, and she laughed at him, gently. In her ears it sounded like the cultured laugh of Nyarlathotep, the laugh of the Other, of the one who knows what others do not.

No more illusions.

The phone rang only once before the nice-sounding man picked it up. "Connie Gilman?" he said. Another day it might have shocked her that she was such a priority to these people; today, it did not.

"The same," she said.

"We have some things to ask you about."

"Something to do, no doubt, with the Barlington corporation and grey-market tech?" She barely let him get through the beginning of 'yes' before she went on. "Well, I can give you an earful," she said. "And I'd like to make a deal."

"We're listening."

There was respect in that voice. It was gratifying.

When Bob Barlington came into the conference room, Connie was already there. He looked at her, puzzled, and sniffed the air deeply. "What's that perfume you're wearing? It's..." He sounded as if he were about to make a crude remark, then trailed off, for a moment utterly speechless. Expressions flickered across his face: startled, impressed, confused.

She wasn't wearing any perfume.

Men and women in dark suits filed in through the door. Bob opened his mouth and almost asked what the hell was going on, but he was smart enough to hold his silence. Instead he gave Connie a look. She just smiled.

Her suit seemed to fit her better than it ever had, and before anyone else could make a move, she took the head of the table. She overheard disquieted whispers from the Boys - "What the fuck is she doing?" "Where are the investors?"

Through a haze of smoke and warm ceiling lights she looked out across the conference table, and she heard a crackle of static and a laugh that belonged to a woman who wasn't there.

"Boys," she said. "I'm pleased to introduce you to my new associates." The company men began shouting over the half-empty table, and the suits flanked her, then, their body language like Secret Service men guarding the president. It sent a hush over the room. "The investors' meeting is postponed. They have all been uninvited - politely, don't worry about that. I trust you'll have fun explaining next week exactly what has happened with the project, particularly given that it has become classified."

Bob looked up at her, eyes wide, and made a faint choking noise. "You can't-"

"No, Bob," she said. "It's you who can't. You knew this was bigger than you when you took it on. My research is now government property. This is bigger than any of you," Connie said. "Maybe bigger than the US, too, speaking plainly - but they're better equipped to handle tech that changes the nature of space. They're giving me the staff of mathematicians I need."

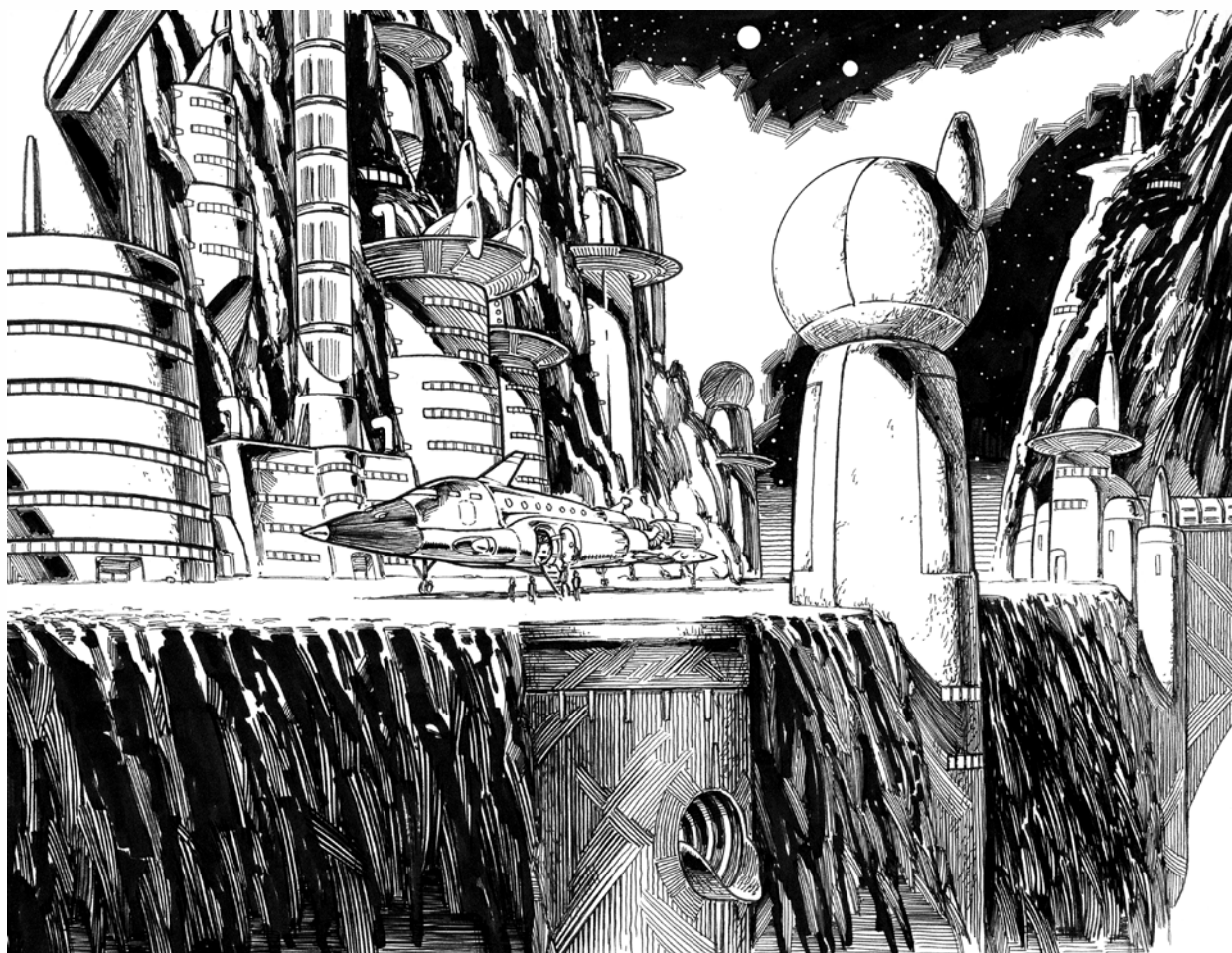
He started babbling. Offers came out his mouth, staff and resources and facilities he should have given her years ago. "I can give you funding priority - newer computers -"

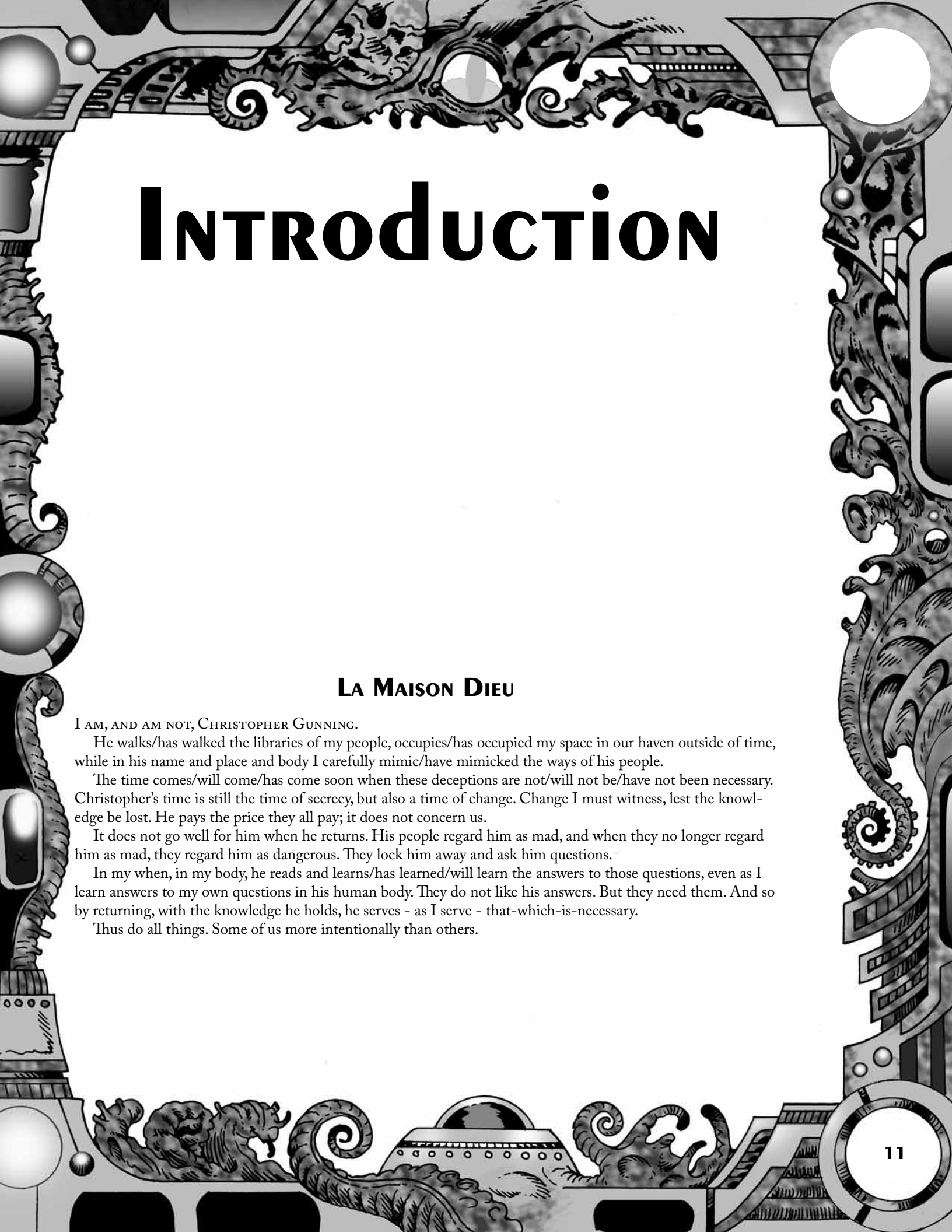
"You can't give me any of that. It's not yours any longer," she said, gently. In the light of her voice, Bob looked like a spoiled child being denied a toy. "Go home. Be grateful you had your golden goose as long as you did. If you're lucky, you won't remember what you've lost."

Silence and smoke hung in the room.

"I believe I've said enough," Connie said calmly, and walked out into the fresh air. The might of a nation followed her.

The Gilman Velocity Multiplication Drive was completed that year under the auspices of the Special Physics Agency, a subsidiary of the U.S. Bureau of Xenological Investigations.





INTRODUCTION

LA MAISON DIEU

I AM, AND AM NOT, CHRISTOPHER GUNNING.

He walks/has walked the libraries of my people, occupies/has occupied my space in our haven outside of time, while in his name and place and body I carefully mimic/have mimicked the ways of his people.

The time comes/will come/has come soon when these deceptions are not/will not be/have not been necessary. Christopher's time is still the time of secrecy, but also a time of change. Change I must witness, lest the knowledge be lost. He pays the price they all pay; it does not concern us.

It does not go well for him when he returns. His people regard him as mad, and when they no longer regard him as mad, they regard him as dangerous. They lock him away and ask him questions.

In my when, in my body, he reads and learns/has learned/will learn the answers to those questions, even as I learn answers to my own questions in his human body. They do not like his answers. But they need them. And so by returning, with the knowledge he holds, he serves - as I serve - that-which-is-necessary.

Thus do all things. Some of us more intentionally than others.

THE GAME IS AFOOT

So, what exactly is the *Eldritch Skies RPG*? It's a role-playing game of somewhat cinematic Lovecraftian SF. Let's start with the first half of that sentence first. A role-playing game is basically shared storytelling. You get together with several friends and create a tale. In the case of *Eldritch Skies*, you've got heroes defending the Earth and its off-world colonies from the monsters and foes of the Cthulhu Mythos, but that's not all. Unlike any other kind of game, your group's story can take you, the characters, and the mythos universe anywhere you want it to. The action takes place in your imaginations, and the story is told through your interactions.

CHARACTERS

Each of you creates a character, an alternative persona that becomes your "in game" role. This is your Hero. You choose the character's strengths and weaknesses, abilities and limitations, and—in particular—personality. During the course of the game, you make this Hero's decisions, utterances, and actions.

You could base your character on a well known character from the Cthulhu Mythos. Maybe you're playing Randolph Carter's great granddaughter, or you might base your character on one you've seen in a movie or read in a book. There are plenty of overly curious FBI agents, reformed criminals, and newly recruited intelligence operatives in TV, movies, and books to provide you with a wealth of inspirations. Alternately, you can create a totally unique character.

You may never have encountered a character who was a brilliant and insatiably curious misfit that fights the forces of the Cthulhu Mythos with amazing computer skills and technosorcerous devices, but that doesn't mean that such a character won't be wonderful to play. Whatever you do, you've got an edge. You're one of the good guys, the Heroes—you are fighting the good fight. Of course, some characters also have dark secrets or serious problems. Dealing with mythos dangers can take a toll on anyone.

THE DIRECTOR

All the players and Heroes are important, but one of you is the linchpin, the person who makes it all work. That key player is called the Director. The Director sets the scene, plots the plot, and details the descriptions.

The Director casts and speaks for the other characters—anyone that the Heroes meet in their adventures.

If these folks are neutral or even helpful to the Heroes, they are called Guest Stars. A Guest Star could be the run-away teen running right into the arms of an evil cult, an administrative assistant searching for a way to blow the whistle on superiors who are making illegal deals with the mi-go for advanced weapons, the conspiracy nut looking for proof and respect, or someone more mundane ... or more twisted. These folks come into the Hero's lives, do their part for the plot and leave. Unless, of course, they are recurring types. Some recurring Guest Stars can even become Heroes—if both a player and the Director like the idea.

If the Director-controlled characters oppose the Heroes, they are called Adversaries. These include cultists, hyperspatial mutants, aliens, and other nasties—up to and including Cthulhu itself. Some Adversaries merely wish to cause trouble for the Heroes, others want them dead, and some are looking to end the world.

All rules decisions are handed down by the Director (usually with some discussion from the other players). He or she figures out how and when to use the game mechanics and decides the outcomes of certain rolls.

GAME SESSIONS

Game sessions in the *Eldritch Skies RPG* can take anywhere from a couple hours to an entire weekend (if you have both the time and the stamina). There is no formal start or end—that's up to the Director and players to decide. Also, in roleplaying, no one gets to brag about being the winner. The flip side is that no one has to be the loser. The objective is to create a story, engage in some spontaneous conversations, and have a good time with friends. And no electronics of any kind are necessary – just you, some friends, some dice, and your imaginations.

That's not to say that there isn't any structure. The game is divided into Episodes, resolved in one or more multiple-hour gaming sessions. These are plotlines or linked subplots that make up a single story. Episodes and their related story arcs may be strung together to form a Season, and several Seasons lead into the Series, the whole story created by the interaction between the players' Heroes and the Director.

Or you could just play one session and have a rip-roaring race to locate and obtain a powerful artifact before an evil cult can obtain it or save an interstellar colony from being overrun with flying polyps. We suspect that, once you get started, you'll want to play again.

GETTING STARTED

So, what's next? Well, the Director should read through a couple portions of this book (particularly Chapters One, Two, Three, and Seven). Then he or she gathers some friends and everyone should get paper, pencils, and some dice.

Standard cubical dice are called six-sided dice. Most gamers refer to them as D6s. D6s are useless for the *Eldritch Skies RPG*. What you need are D10s, or ten-sided dice. These are usually stocked in hobby game stores where copies of this game can be found. They are also found in some bookstores or department stores.

Finally, you might want to gather some markers or poker chips. These can help you keep track of how many Drama Points your character has. Drama Points are a very important part of *Eldritch Skies*. We'll look at Drama Points in **CHAPTER THREE: RULES & GEAR**.

CARDS

If you just can't get your hands on some D10s, an easy substitute is playing cards. Just grab a deck, separate out the four suits, hand one set of Ace through 10 to each player, and you are ready to go. When it's time to "roll", simply shuffled your ten cards quickly, and draw one. Ace is one...the rest match up pretty clearly.

WHAT IS LOVECRAFTIAN SF?

Now that we've got all the info about roleplaying games out of the way, something else you might be wondering: what exactly is Lovecraftian SF? *Eldritch Skies* is a science fiction RPG based on the works of H.P. Lovecraft and is set in the Cthulhu Mythos, which is a setting that he created, and which dozens of authors have been using for the last 70+ years. However, all interpretations of the Cthulhu Mythos are not the same. In the 1920s & 30s, there were the original Mythos horror stories like "*The Thing On The Doorstep*" and a science fiction story like "*The Shadow Out of Time*". However, genre boundaries were far less rigid 80 years ago, and so there were many stories like "*The Dreams in the Witch House*" or "*The Shadow Over Innsmouth*" that were equal parts science fiction and horror. At the time, there were no bookstore regulations placing an anthology containing one story in the horror section and the other in the science fiction & fantasy section.

When most people today think of Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, they think solely of horror, in large part because later mythos authors like August Derleth & Ramsey

Campbell wrote their stories as horror and these later horror stories influenced the way that most readers see Lovecraft's Mythos. *Eldritch Skies* is a game that specifically looks at Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos as science fiction. To do so, all of later stories, written after Lovecraft's death are ignored. Instead, this is a game that focuses on the works of H.P. Lovecraft. Like Lovecraft's own work, *Eldritch Skies* contains Mythos elements that H.P.L. borrowed from other writers of his time, such as Robert E. Howard's serpent people and Robert W. Chambers' *The King in Yellow*. In short, this is the Cthulhu Mythos as Lovecraft saw it, but viewed as science fiction, rather than as horror or fantasy, and written from a modern perspective.

So, what does the term Lovecraftian SF mean? The most obvious answer is to be found in Lovecraft's most classic SF story – "*At the Mountains of Madness*". In this story, the mysteries of the Cthulhu Mythos are explained or at minimum are considered fully comprehensible. The "ancient aeons" of the other mythos stories become known geological epochs, the utterly inhuman aliens are (as one of the characters declares) "*not evil things of their kind. They were the men of another age and another order of being*". The alien beings like the elder ones, the great race

THE UNISYSTEM

The game part of the *Eldritch Skies RPG* is handled by the UNISYSTEM. The UNISYSTEM helps players and Directors decide what options are available at any given moment in the game, and the success or failure of any character's actions. These rules are presented in detail in **CHAPTER TWO: CIVILIANS AND OPERATIVES** and **CHAPTER THREE: RULES & GEAR**.

Although the UNISYSTEM is designed to handle any kind of roleplaying game—in any setting, with any theme—each particular game has its own flavor. For the *Eldritch Skies RPG*, a somewhat cinematic tone is recommended, but you can also do grim and gritty or gonzo pulp action – the choice is up to you. However, this book is largely written assuming that the feel will be similar to that common in somewhat action-oriented SF. Regardless of your exact approach, the point is to have fun and not sweat the details too much. We are not even going to talk about trajectories of fire, or the scatter patterns of grenades.

The UNISYSTEM is also the heart of several other games covering magic and horror themes. You can also find out more about them at www.edenstudios.net.

The page is framed by a complex, dark grey decorative border. It features a mix of mechanical elements like gears, pistons, and pipes, intertwined with organic, tentacle-like or vine-like structures. The overall style is reminiscent of a steampunk or industrial horror aesthetic. At the top, there's a large, circular mechanical component on the left and a similar one on the right. The bottom of the page also features these mechanical and organic motifs, with a large circular element on the left containing the page number.

of Yith, the mi-go, and others like them are not bizarre monsters, they are biological alien entities with thoughts and desires, and with civilizations that were filled with art, science, and technology.

Treating the Cthulhu Mythos as SF also means that even magic is explicable. As Walter Gilman discovered in *"The Dreams in the Witch House"*, magical visions and also the apportations to distant places and perhaps even distant times or dimensions were shown to not be occult mysteries, but the deliberate uses of advanced science to manipulate the structure of space-time. In short, the creatures and magics of the Cthulhu Mythos are explicable natural phenomena and not unknowable mysteries. Along with this point of view comes the more general viewpoint common to almost all science fiction; knowledge is always superior to ignorance and that new knowledge can then be applied to solve problems.

In the stories *"At the Mountains of Madness"* and *"The Shadow Out of Time"* as well as in *Eldritch Skies*, the universe of the Cthulhu Mythos is a universe filled with both terrors and wonders, but it is also a universe where intelligent, civilized beings can have thriving advanced civilizations that last for aeons. Although even the greatest of these civilizations cannot destroy Cthulhu or any of the other Great Old Ones, some of civilizations can defeat and imprison even these terrible beings. This is not a universe where humanity or intelligent life is doomed, but it is also not one where intelligent beings automatically triumph over adversity. Of course, all this also means that the universe of *Eldritch Skies* is a perfect universe for characters to have all manner of exciting SF adventures.

Eldritch Skies is also a game about extrapolation. In Lovecraft's stories, the FBI dynamited Devil's Reef in 1928 and in 1931, a team of scientists discovered the ruins of the city of the elder ones in Antarctica. *Eldritch Skies* uses the fact that these and various other mythos mysteries have been known and studied as the basis for a timeline extending into the early 21st century. This is a timeline where various governments learned that alien beings visited and in fact still inhabit Earth. This is also a timeline where the various investigations into the various alien ruins have yielded numerous advances in science and technology. Discoveries about the Cthulhu Mythos have affected world history and the development of technology – to the point that humanity began traveling to the stars in the late 1990s and psychic powers are in common use.

Eldritch Skies also makes one other radical departure from most later mythos fiction. Most authors and readers of the last 50 years have seen the Cthulhu Mythos as

one where humanity is not just doomed, but in imminent danger of extinction or horrific transformation. In many of these stories and RPGs, Great Cthulhu may rise at any moment and erase all civilization or even all of humanity. Many people consider this sort of bleak nihilism as an essential characteristic of the Cthulhu Mythos. However, looking at Lovecraft's own work shows that his own interpretation was different. In *"The Shadow Out of Time"*, we have a description of the narrator's memories of talking with people and aliens from the past and the future, including an Australian physicist from the 26th century, a philosopher from the 50th century, and a magician from the 160th century. While the brief fragments of description of the 160th century looks fairly bleak, at least the next 3,000 years of human history seem devoid of returning Great Old Ones or the destruction of humanity. According to Lovecraft, humanity is clearly not in immediate danger.

One of the essential truths of Lovecraft's cosmology is that entropy and the other cosmic forces (as personified as the Other Gods and Great Old Ones) are far greater than any civilization or species, including humanity. Although humanity may be ultimately doomed to becoming extinct and eventually forgotten, this fate may not occur for tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of years. Lovecraft's cosmic horror is horror on a cosmic timescale, not the immediate horror of impending destruction.

However, the Cthulhu Mythos is also not an ultimately hopeful cosmos. There is no benevolent deity acting as the champion of humanity and humanity has no grand destiny to colonize or conquer the galaxy. Instead, we are merely one of hundreds or perhaps thousands of intelligent species throughout the galaxy who evolve, develop civilizations of various sorts, and then die off, leaving behind only weathered ruins and inscriptions in lost languages to mark their passing. In this universe, non-human species have all manner of exotic body plans and physiologies and there is nothing remotely special or impressive about the human form or the human mind. Ultimately, this is essentially the same view that modern geology and astrophysics has been revealing about the universe around us for the past century or so. Humanity is simply another intelligent species of many. Humanity is special and important to us because it is our species, but it is no more cosmically relevant than fruit flies, giraffes, or any of the many intelligent and non-intelligent alien species found throughout the galaxy.

While humanity is not particularly impressive, in *Eldritch Skies*, the universe as a whole is wondrous. *Eldritch Skies* is set in a universe far richer, stranger, and consid-



erably more dangerous than our own. Swift and even instantaneous travel to other star systems is not only possible, but occasionally happens by accident. Also, there exist exotic hyperspatial dimensions, inhabited by strange and often dangerous creatures, as well as exceptionally powerful entities, such as the Other Gods and Great Old Ones, which have capabilities so far beyond our own. Humanity is like insects in comparison to the greatest of these beings. In *Eldritch Skies*, these beings are not actual deities, but simply beings of extreme power. Nevertheless, if someone is unfortunate enough to encounter one of these entities, they are unlikely to care or even notice this distinction.

As is true of all good science fiction, *Eldritch Skies* is most of all about humanity. It's a game where humanity faces great challenges, but, like several of Lovecraft's own protagonists, and most especially the renowned sorcerer Randolph Carter, humanity is learning the truth about the cosmos and making their place in it. Humanity is in the process of learning how to use the various natural and preternatural laws of the universe they live in to their advantage.

So, what is *Eldritch Skies*? It's a game about humanity on the threshold of the stars, where it is starting to explore the wonders and terrors of the cosmos. It is a game where the characters defend humanity against various terrible threats, including both malevolent aliens and equally dangerous humans. It is also a game where the characters will help humanity take its place in the cosmos alongside the other important species, such as the mi-go or the great race of Yith. In your hands, this game can be the story of the triumph of humanity over adversity or it can be the story the doom of humanity, not because this doom is inevitable or unavoidable, but because the cosmos is dangerous and sometimes there are no second chances for sufficiently serious mistakes.

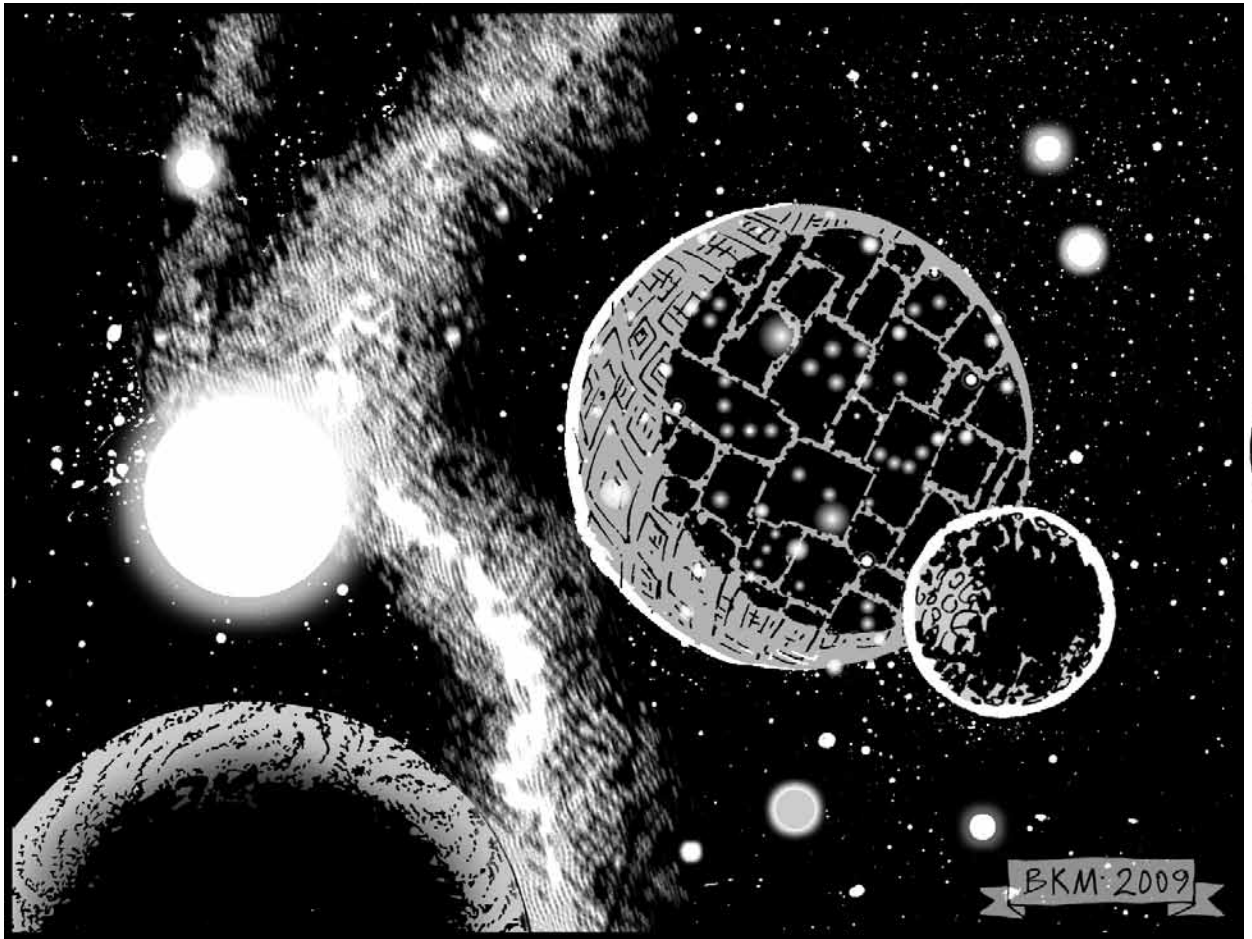
CINEMATIC SF

This is SF where impressive and determined heroes and heroines can accomplish impressive feats that are more at home in action movies than real life. *Eldritch Skies* is a game of pulp, heroic, action-oriented SF. It uses the **CINEMATIC UNISYSTEM** rules, which are designed for fast, cinematic, rules-light play. **CHAPTER THREE: RULES & GEAR** contains the rules for Drama Points, the most cinematic and pulp-oriented aspect of the rules. This game includes three options for play, from gritty realism to high-action pulp, to a more intermediate option called cinematic play, which is the default. See p. 85 for information on **DRAMA POINTS**.

If run in a gritty and realistic fashion, *Eldritch Skies* is a game that focuses on the dangers of the mythos cosmos. Heroes who face inhuman monsters or deadly cults can easily be killed. Nothing but a mixture of luck and careful planning stands between characters and utter disaster. Characters risk their lives in every encounter with a dangerous monster and anyone who goes on missions to fight mutants, hostile aliens, or hyperspatial beings stands an excellent chance of giving their lives to safeguard humanity. If you wish to run or play *Eldritch Skies* as SF horror, then this mode of play is likely to be a good choice. Run as gritty realism, *Eldritch Skies* will have a feel similar to somewhat grim TV shows like the new *Battlestar Galactica* or the *Alien* films. In such films, characters regularly die and few victories come without a heavy price.

Run as pulp, characters are very likely to not only succeed, but to triumph. In such a Series, the Heroes are larger than life characters who can regularly face exceedingly dangerous foes and perilous situations and survive with at worst minor wounds. The overall feel of a Series run in this manner will be similar to many somewhat over-the-top action-oriented TV shows or movies. The characters take risks and occasionally one of them may be seriously injured or even killed, but most of the time the characters will both survive and triumph. Series will have a feel similar to SF shows like *Farscape*, or films like the recent *Star Wars* films or *The Chronicles of Riddick*, where two or three Heroes can repeatedly fight a dozen or more foes and triumph every time.

Run in the recommended fashion as cinematic SF, *Eldritch Skies* is a game where heroes typically survive, but where that survival can be difficult and characters may sometimes face the choice between assured failure and at best an exceedingly high chance of death. Run like this, *Eldritch Skies* has a tone similar to some of the more realistic, but also cinematic SF action TV shows, like *Babylon 5* or *Stargate SG-1*. In these stories, characters are occasionally killed or injured and careful planning is essential. There are foes that even the toughest hero must flee from and fights where the odds are six to one against the characters are very dangerous and to be avoided if at all possible. For more information on different Series styles, see **PULP VS. GRITTY SERIES**, p. 245.



A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE WORLD OF ELDRITCH SKIES

Eldritch Skies is set in the year 2030, in an alternate world where H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos is true. In the first half of the 20th century, several governments learned some of the truths of the Cthulhu Mythos, and in the 1980s, most of these truths became public. For the past 40 years, humanity has been living with the knowledge that the universe contains a multitude of alien species, all of which are exceptionally different from Earthly life, and that several of these species have visited Earth. It is also a setting where humanity now uses exotic alien-derived technologies to travel to other planets and even the stars and is now in the process of colonizing other worlds. Psychic powers, and more recently hyperspatial sorcery are also publically known and some people make their living as professional psychics.

BEYOND THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE

Eldritch Skies is also a game where both several non-physical realms and various paranormal abilities exist. The existence of psychic powers, sorcery, hyperspace and the dream realm are important features of this setting. Humanity is now in the process of learning to make use of all of these wonders.

Hyperspace: The known universe is in continual proximity to a multitude of far stranger universes that are (in most cases) completely separate from it. These other universes are collectively referred to as hyperspace. In all of them, the known physical laws are radically different from those in the normal physical universe. One common theory is that the hyperspace universes make up what is known as dark matter.

Except in a few exceptional circumstances, these universes and their inhabitants are completely invisible and intangible to the inhabitants of the normal universe and the only way the hyperspatial universes can interact with the physical universe is via gravitation. However, it is possible to travel from the physical universe to the various hyperspatial universes. Also, in at least some of the universes of hyperspace, inertia is a tiny fraction of that in the normal universe and a speed of light is many millions or even billions of times greater. As a result, it is possible to create shortcuts through hyperspace that can allow intelligent beings, including humanity to move millions of miles or even dozens of parsecs by stepping a few feet. Knowledge

of hyperspace has given humanity access to the stars.

Unfortunately, the various universe of hyperspace are far from empty. No one knows what any of these universes looks like, whether there are planets, stars, but many of them are clearly inhabited. The inhabitants of these universes are completely beyond human comprehension. At least some of these hyperspatial beings are intelligent, but humanity cannot communicate with any of these beings in more than the most rudimentary fashion, nor can humans destroy or even significantly harm any but the weakest hyperspatial entities. Instead, humans can only observe them, and this must be done at a safe distance.

When the spatial and gravitational alignments between the physical universe and one of the hyperspatial universes are correct, hyperspatial entities can enter the normal universe and they all seem to be attracted to planets, especially inhabited planets. Regular visitation by hyperspatial entities can have a catastrophic affect on an ecosystem. The Permian-Triassic extinction event, 251 million years ago, caused 96 percent of all marine species and 70 percent of terrestrial vertebrate species to become extinct. This extinction was caused by a being commonly known as Great Cthulhu and its star spawn. Much of this destruction was caused by the fact that these beings both fed on the psychic emanations of various life forms and other life was destroyed simply because it spent too long in the vicinity of these hyperspatial entities

Not all of the inhabitants of hyperspace are so great or terrible. Just as insects and bacteria are far more numerous than humans or elephants, most creatures in hyperspace are far smaller and less deadly than Great Cthulhu. Various technologies have allowed humanity to peer into hyperspace. Although utterly alien, many of these creatures are completely harmless. However, some of these seemingly mindless creatures will attack humans and such attacks are usually deadly. As a result, the nations of the world have created a worldwide network dimensional sensors to keep track of any deliberate or accidental openings between the two universes.

Hyperspatial Exposure: One of the problems in interacting with hyperspace and hyperspatial entities is that exposure to hyperspace is damaging to human minds and eventually it also warps human bodies. Unlike species that are more intelligent or more advanced, humanity is somewhat protected from and blind to the presence of hyperspatial entities or their attempts to communicate with humanity. However, sufficient exposure to hyperspatial energies renders humans more sensitive to these beings and to all other hyperspatial phenomena. Unfor-



tunately, perceiving and communicating with these beings is always dangerous and is never a good idea.

Exposure to high levels of hyperspatial energies and hyperspatial beings twist human minds so that they become utterly inhuman as those of actual alien species. Exposure to the highest levels of hyperspatial energies eventually transforms humans into twisted and insane caricatures of humanity. The ab-human like the deep ones and ghouls were originally created when groups of humans were exposed to hyperspatial energies many thousands of years ago. Today, moderate hyperspatial exposure causes humans to produce inhuman offspring, and intense exposure causes humans to become unique and terrible monsters.

Hyperspatial Sorcery: Humanity and various other intelligent beings have learned to manipulate hyperspace. This process can be accomplished either mentally, by means of focusing the complexities of an intelligent brain on certain complex patterns, and using these thought processes to alter the local fabric of hyperspace, or by building advanced technological devices to accomplish the same goal. Mental manipulation of hyperspace appears to untrained individuals as if it was some form of magic, and it is usually referred to as sorcery, but it is a precise, if exotic science that relies upon the fact that precisely patterned thoughts and advanced electronic devices can exert an effect upon space, time, and the various hyperspatial universes.

Psychic Powers: Although some mystics and would-be magicians have used psychic powers for many centuries, the details of how these abilities function only became clear in the 20th century. In 2030, psychic research is a well-established and respectable discipline, psychics play an important role in business, and psychic devices are frequently used in courts of law. Researchers learned that psychic powers are common to all intelligent species, and in fact almost every species other than humans is innately psychic. The same blindness that prevents most of humanity from perceiving hyperspatial entities also seems to render most of humanity non-psychic and resistant to psychic contact. By the same token, developing psychic powers automatically produces a small degree of exposure to hyperspatial energies.

The Dream Realm: Humanity's exploration of psychic powers soon led to the discovery of the psychic dimension known as the Dream Realm. Many people regularly, but unknowingly visit this realm when they sleep, but they remember only brief and exceedingly vague fragments of what occurs there. However, psychics and those with some degree of exposure to hyperspatial energies become aware of their visits to this realm and can choose to deliberately

and knowingly visit it when they sleep. This realm consists of a series of separate dream worlds that seem to be in some way related to psychologist Carl Jung's concept of the "collective unconscious". However, the Dream Realm also includes the dreams of various alien species, including the dreams of ghouls and deep ones.

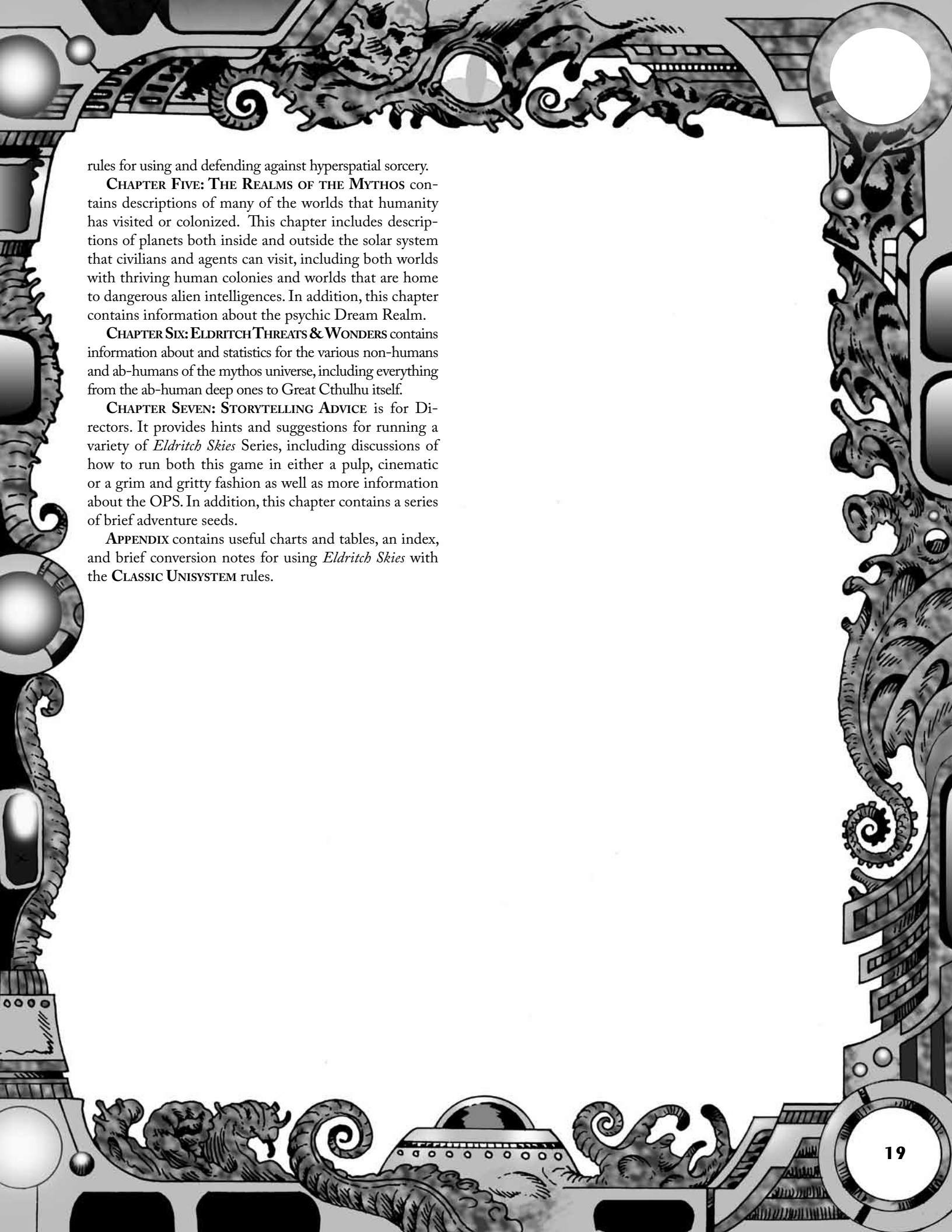
SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

CHAPTER ONE: THE ELDRITCH PAST & THE MYTHOS PRESENT describes the setting of Eldritch Skies, including the true history of the Earth and the various species that have inhabited it, as well as more recent history, up to the year 2030, when the game is set. This chapter contains a timeline of events and an overview of history from 1930 to 2030. In addition, it contains information about the various nations of the world and information about how humanity has reacted to the various revelations about mythos phenomena. The chapter also introduces the OPS – the UN Office of Paranormal Security. This is the international, and now interstellar agency charged with protecting humanity from mythos phenomena and dangerous advanced technologies.

CHAPTER TWO: CREATING CIVILIANS AND OPERATIVES provides rules for creating characters. This chapter contains information for creating both intrepid civilians who get caught up in the Cthulhu Mythos as well as professional OPS operatives charged with protecting humanity from mythos threats and dangers. This chapter contains details of attributes, skills, and qualities, including exotic qualities like psychic powers, hyperspatial sorcery, and various biological augmentations, including a few created by the alien mi-go. This chapter also includes six ready-to-play characters that just need a name and maybe a tweak or two.

CHAPTER THREE: RULES & GEAR is the rules chapter. It provides Players and Directors all the information they need to play or run Cinematic Unisystem and *Eldritch Skies*. This is where you learn how to play the game as well as rules for advancement. Rules for Drama Points are explained as is combat, including information about conventional weapons and armor. This chapter also contains a list of the various gear that characters may need, including exotic weapons and armor, as well as surveillance equipment, space suits, and vehicles.

CHAPTER FOUR: ARCANES SECRETS provides information about the wonders and dangers of hyperspatial sorcery, as well as details of sorcery use by various sorts of inhuman beings. This chapter includes a list of spells as well as complete

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rules for using and defending against hyperspatial sorcery.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE REALMS OF THE MYTHOS contains descriptions of many of the worlds that humanity has visited or colonized. This chapter includes descriptions of planets both inside and outside the solar system that civilians and agents can visit, including both worlds with thriving human colonies and worlds that are home to dangerous alien intelligences. In addition, this chapter contains information about the psychic Dream Realm.

CHAPTER SIX: ELDRITCH THREATS & WONDERS contains information about and statistics for the various non-humans and ab-humans of the mythos universe, including everything from the ab-human deep ones to Great Cthulhu itself.

CHAPTER SEVEN: STORYTELLING ADVICE is for Directors. It provides hints and suggestions for running a variety of *Eldritch Skies* Series, including discussions of how to run both this game in either a pulp, cinematic or a grim and gritty fashion as well as more information about the OPS. In addition, this chapter contains a series of brief adventure seeds.

APPENDIX contains useful charts and tables, an index, and brief conversion notes for using *Eldritch Skies* with the **CLASSIC UNISYSTEM** rules.

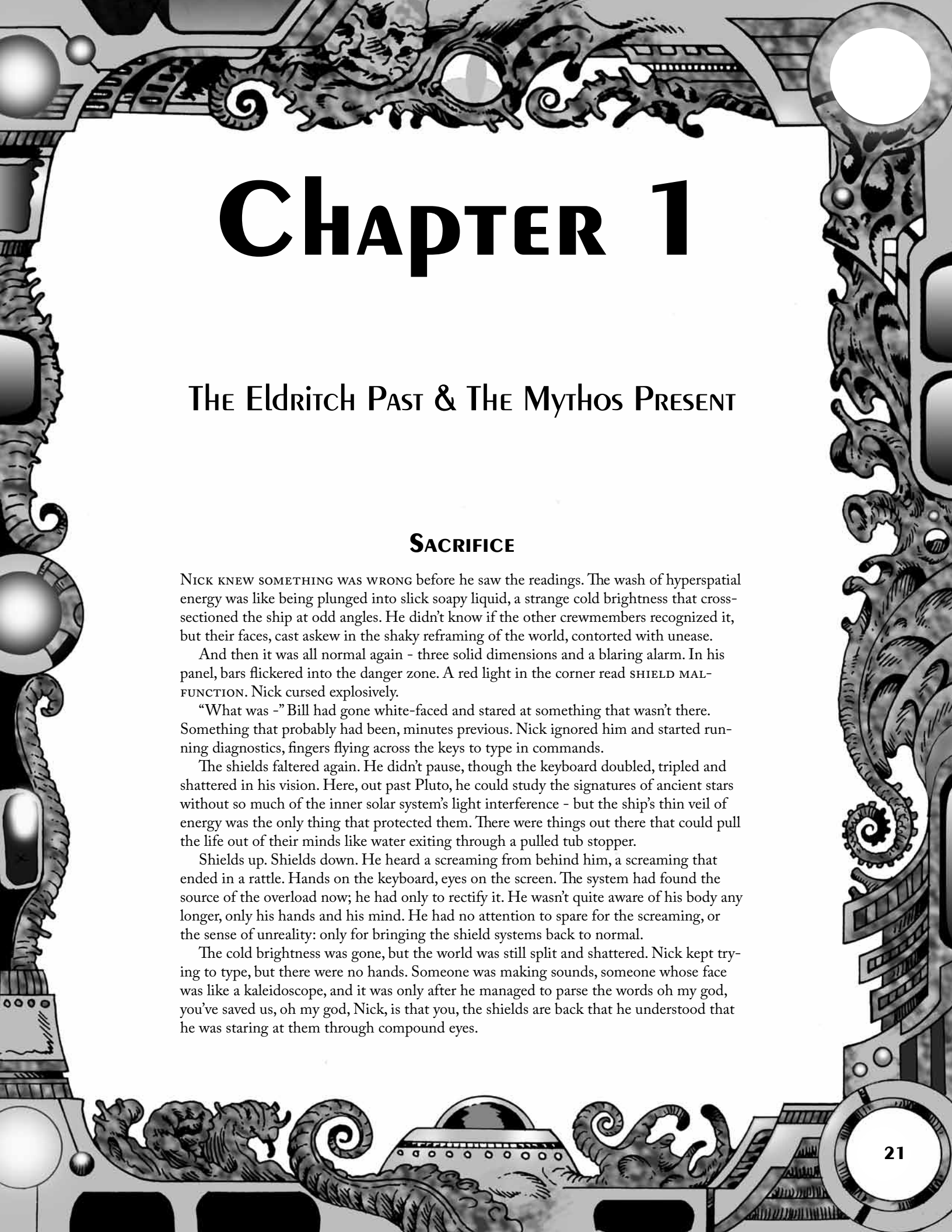


During the winter of 1927-28 officials of the Federal government made a strange and secret investigation of certain conditions in the ancient Massachusetts seaport of Innsmouth. The public first learned of it in February, when a vast series of raids and arrests occurred, followed by the deliberate burning and dynamiting - under suitable precautions - of an enormous number of crumbling, worm-eaten, and supposedly empty houses along the abandoned waterfront. Uninquiring souls let this occurrence pass as one of the major clashes in a spasmodic war on liquor.

Keener news-followers, however, wondered at the prodigious number of arrests, the abnormally large force of men used in making them, and the secrecy surrounding the disposal of the prisoners. No trials, or even definite charges were reported; nor were any of the captives seen thereafter in the regular gaols of the nation. There were vague statements about disease and concentration camps, and later about dispersal in various naval and military prisons, but nothing positive ever developed. Innsmouth itself was left almost depopulated, and it is even now only beginning to show signs of a sluggishly revived existence.

Complaints from many liberal organizations were met with long confidential discussions, and representatives were taken on trips to certain camps and prisons. As a result, these societies became surprisingly passive and reticent. Newspaper men were harder to manage, but seemed largely to cooperate with the government in the end. Only one paper - a tabloid always discounted because of its wild policy - mentioned the deep diving submarine that discharged torpedoes downward in the marine abyss just beyond Devil Reef. That item, gathered by chance in a haunt of sailors, seemed indeed rather far-fetched; since the low, black reef lay a full mile and a half out from Innsmouth Harbour.

H.P. Lovecraft - *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*

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Chapter 1

THE ELDRITCH PAST & THE MYTHOS PRESENT

SACRIFICE

NICK KNEW SOMETHING WAS WRONG before he saw the readings. The wash of hyperspatial energy was like being plunged into slick soapy liquid, a strange cold brightness that cross-sectioned the ship at odd angles. He didn't know if the other crewmembers recognized it, but their faces, cast askew in the shaky reframing of the world, contorted with unease.

And then it was all normal again - three solid dimensions and a blaring alarm. In his panel, bars flickered into the danger zone. A red light in the corner read SHIELD MALFUNCTION. Nick cursed explosively.

"What was -" Bill had gone white-faced and stared at something that wasn't there. Something that probably had been, minutes previous. Nick ignored him and started running diagnostics, fingers flying across the keys to type in commands.

The shields faltered again. He didn't pause, though the keyboard doubled, tripled and shattered in his vision. Here, out past Pluto, he could study the signatures of ancient stars without so much of the inner solar system's light interference - but the ship's thin veil of energy was the only thing that protected them. There were things out there that could pull the life out of their minds like water exiting through a pulled tub stopper.

Shields up. Shields down. He heard a screaming from behind him, a screaming that ended in a rattle. Hands on the keyboard, eyes on the screen. The system had found the source of the overload now; he had only to rectify it. He wasn't quite aware of his body any longer, only his hands and his mind. He had no attention to spare for the screaming, or the sense of unreality: only for bringing the shield systems back to normal.

The cold brightness was gone, but the world was still split and shattered. Nick kept trying to type, but there were no hands. Someone was making sounds, someone whose face was like a kaleidoscope, and it was only after he managed to parse the words oh my god, you've saved us, oh my god, Nick, is that you, the shields are back that he understood that he was staring at them through compound eyes.

THE HISTORY OF EARTH'S PRIMORDIAL AEONS

Earth was formed like many similar planets throughout the galaxy. Life evolves on less than one in fifty potentially habitable worlds; Earth was one of those lucky few, and life arose over the course of under a billion years. Over time, this life grew slightly more complex and the evolution of cyan bacteria a billion years later set the Earth on the path of developing an oxygen atmosphere and complex life forms. Eventually, this young life-bearing world was noticed by an already ancient species known later to humans as the elder ones (see p. 213).

THE TIME OF THE ELDER ONES

The elder ones always took an interest in worlds with their own native life. A group of several hundred thousand elder ones came to Earth 620 million years ago, in the late Precambrian. Their arrival coincided with the era when free oxygen in Earth's atmosphere began climbing to modern levels after a long period of stagnation. Genetic engineering by the elder ones played an important role in the transformation of Earth's atmosphere, and they are also responsible for the adaptation of primitive plants to living on land, which is one of the steps that led to Earth's atmosphere taking on its modern form.

For the next several hundred million years, the elder ones were content to build their cities and to watch and in some cases direct the course of Earthly evolution. In most cases, they limited their efforts to creating a few new species and then observing their interactions with the existing biosphere. The most well known modern examples, including the bizarre hallucigenia, are preserved in the famous Burgess Shale fossils. Paleontologists and xenobiologists believe that competition with these created life forms sped up the evolution of life on Earth. Although claims that the elder ones were responsible for life on Earth are false, they were a significant force in Earthly evolution until the end of the age of dinosaurs.

THE ARRIVAL OF CTHULHU

Cthulhu (see p. 233) and its thousands of so-called star spawn first appeared on Earth 265 Million Years ago. These beings dwell in hyperspace, but visit life-bearing planets in our universe to feed upon them. The Cthulhoids' appearance was the cause of the Middle Permian Extinction, which killed off much of the life on Earth. Cthulhu and the rest of its species fed on the primitive minds of the

various types of animals that then lived on the land and in the sea, absorbing their psychic energies. This process maddened many of Earth's species, causing them to lose their natural behavior, and eventually killed them.

These activities conflicted with the elder ones' biological projects, and the elder ones also resented alien invaders on a planet they had claimed. The elder ones fought back. The Cthulhoids initially killed thousands of elder ones as they turned their psychic feeding on the creatures that opposed them, but the survivors used psychic technology to shield themselves from Cthulhu's feeding and then began to fight back. The technology of the elder ones was at its height at this time, but they were almost defeated in their battle to fend off Cthulhu and its race. After a war lasting 20,000 years, a tense truce was forged, where the Cthulhoids controlled the supercontinent of Pangaea and the elder ones occupied the seas and the various islands.

This state of affairs endured for the next 15 million years. During this time, the Cthulhoids were joined by an allied lesser species that was partially hyperspatial in nature. This species, known as the flying polyps (see p. 230) was mortal and far less powerful. The treaty between the Cthulhoids and the elder ones endured until psychics of the great race of Yith (see p. 217) made contact with a group of Earth's elder ones, seeking help to free the bodies they wished to inhabit from the control of the flying polyps.

THE FLYING POLYPS AND THE GREAT RACE OF YITH

The flying polyps used controlled hyperspatial mutation to engineer an abandoned mobile fungus created by the elder ones into a semi-intelligent food and servant animal. However, these creatures also proved to be ideal for the great race of Yith to transfer their minds. The elder ones aided the great race in their efforts to inhabit these animals and free them from the flying polyps. Within 500 years, the flying polyps were imprisoned in deep warded caverns. In return, the Yithians worked to help the elder ones prepare to attack the Cthulhoids. These two species worked together to construct a device that has become known as The Elder Weapon.

THE ELDER WEAPON

The Cthulhoids discovered the elder ones' plans before their weapon was complete and the result was a terrible war. Visible in the geological record as the Permian-Triassic extinction, this war raged for a quarter of a million years, causing the single worst mass extinction in Earth's

history. The elder ones and the great race of Yith worked to complete their weapon, while fending off deadly attacks by the Cthulhoids. To fuel their potent hyperspatial powers, the Cthulhoids began devouring the minds of all unprotected life. Between the madness and death caused by these feedings, and the devastation produced by the potent weapons used by both sides, almost 90% of all life on Earth was destroyed during this war. The Cthulhoids poisoned the seas, and the weapons of the Yithians and elder ones blasted the land. During the final battle, the elder ones were at last able to use the Elder Weapon. The Cthulhoids were imprisoned in the furthest reaches of hyperspace (see *The Elder Weapon*, p. 233) and the battle was finally over. At this point, the Earth belonged to the elder ones and the great race of Yith.

The next challenge to the elder ones was the arrival of the mi-go (see p. 221). These beings were unable to dwell at any but the highest altitudes, but they coveted various minerals and biological materials abundant on Earth. As a result, the next several hundred million years was marked by a mixture of trade, raiding, and outright warfare between the mi-go and both the great race of Yith and the elder ones. On several occasions, alliances shifted and the mi-go managed to temporarily turn the elder ones and the Yithians against one another, allowing the mi-go to mine and raid the Earth with impunity. The elder ones were exceptionally protective of Earth and its life forms and at times the more extreme factions of the elder ones promoted the idea of not allowing any other alien intelligences on Earth.

This xenophobia drastically increased 200 million years ago, after the mi-go aimed a comet at one of the largest non-Antarctic elder one cities, killing more than one million of these exceptionally durable beings and seriously affecting the course of life on Earth. By this point, the elder ones on Earth had lost the ability to travel through space and were forced to make a treaty granting the mi-go access to Earth. Skirmishes between the mi-go and the great race of Yith continued.

The next chapter of Earth history began 80 million years ago, when the first native sentient life on Earth evolved. This species is now called the serpent people. For the next 15 million years, they shared the land with the great race of Yith, while the increasingly xenophobic elder ones retreated to Antarctica and the oceans around it. The wars between the serpent people and the great race of Yith never reached the scale of those between the various star-faring species. These battles ended 66 million years ago, when the Yithians all sent their minds 230

million years into the future, to inhabit intelligent beetles that are to evolve more than 100 million years after humanity vanishes from Earth.

The huge meteor that ended the age of dinosaurs seems to have been a natural event, and the Yithians were able to foresee it with their facility at psychic time travel. This meteor further devastated the elder ones and caused the survivors of the serpent people to retreat into caverns deep underground. In the aftermath of this catastrophe, the surviving elder ones dwindled in numbers and lost much of their advanced technology. Now confined solely to their Antarctic city, they had to increasingly rely upon biological machines called shoggoths to keep their civilization running. Eventually, these shoggoths gained limited intelligence and a malevolent free will. Approximately 40 million years after the end of the Cretaceous, the shoggoths rose up and killed the elder ones.

As the only surviving intelligent beings on Earth's surface, some groups of serpent people attempted to reconquer the surface world at various times, but none of these attempts lasted more than a few tens of thousands of years. The most recent attempt began 40,000 years ago, when a group of serpent people spread across Europe and Africa and enslaved the early humans living there. They built a large civilization where nine million humans served the every need of less than a quarter million serpent people. Although these serpent people were skilled in the psychic arts and various inhuman sciences, eventually human rebels who learned to make use of these magics and technologies eventually overthrew their ophidian masters.

The next 3,000 years were the Thurian Age, humanity's first civilization, a Bronze Age civilization that also used sorcery, psychic powers, and surviving artifacts of the serpent people. The last remnants of Thurian Age civilization were destroyed by the most recent ice age. After that ice age ended, the few fragments of this civilization that remained in Africa were buried by relentless advance of the Sahara desert. Other than continued high altitude mining and specimen gathering expeditions by the mi-go, by 10,000 years ago, the Earth belonged to humanity and the obvious traces of alien visitation could only be found in the most remote and hostile portions of the globe. At the dawn of recorded human history, therefore, the vast majority of humanity believed that they were the original and only intelligent inhabitants of the Earth.

RECENT MYTHOS HISTORY

Human knowledge of magic, psychic powers, aliens, and hyperspatial entities goes back many thousands of

years and can be found in all manner of ancient texts and esoteric tomes. However, both deliberate and accidental usages of hyperspatial energies were rare and before the modern era were largely either accidental or accomplished by semi-sane would-be wizards. In addition, the exotic and non-causal laws of hyperspace fit poorly with the regular and constant laws of nature first conceived of by several ancient civilizations, built upon by medieval Muslim scientists, and brought to full fruition during the European Scientific Revolution. Reports of hyperspatial “magics”, the Great Old Ones, the Outer Gods, and their inhuman allies and servants were dismissed by scientists as being noting more than myths or stories, like those about Atlantis, faeries, or ghosts.

Psychic powers also remained unknown to modern science because most scientists were disinclined to believe in them. Their effects are often fairly subtle, especially on people who have not been exposed to any hyperspatial energies, and the only people who were at all skilled in their use tended to be eccentrics and the residents of remote lands that had kept knowledge of these techniques alive for centuries. In the 18th and 19th centuries, travelers and ethnographers recorded accounts from all over the world of hunters sending telepathic messages back to their villages, shamans having precognitive visions, and mystics and witches performing various incredible feats. However, these accounts, just like similar accounts by similar mystics and eccentrics in Western nations, were dismissed as hoaxes, delusions, or impossible fantasies.

Everything changed in the 20th century. For the first time, humanity was able to explore the entirety of the planet and to sense and analyze previously unknown forms of energy. These explorations yielded unexpected results and humanity began to learn something of the true nature of the universe. The US government gained first-hand knowledge of the affects of hyperspatial radiations in 1928, when the FBI was called into Innsmouth Massachusetts, where they quarantined much of the town's population and bombed Devil's Reef in an effort to destroy the large colony of hyperspatially mutated aquatic humans living there. Almost a quarter of the population of Innsmouth was then removed to special facilities, where their unusual physiology was carefully studied.

By the mid-1930s, reports of the Miskatonic Antarctic Expedition and the discovery of previously unknown and incredibly ancient ruins in Australia prompted an intensive investigation by the US and British governments into these and similar archeological anomalies. The discoveries of ancient alien ruins and the recovery of a few

fragments of alien technology resulted in the formation of the formation of the Bureau of Xenological Investigations (BXI) in the United States and the Secret Research Service (SRS) in Britain.

The 1938 German Antarctic Expedition claimed an area known as *Neuschwabenland* and thoroughly ransacked a ruin which had not been excavated by the US and British expeditions; what they would do with it was a deep fear for the Allies during World War II. Nazi scientists and sorcerers used some of the relics they found there to build the *Überverwüstung*, a horrific hyperspatial weapon that was a predecessor to later hyperspatial disruptors. The weapon required a trained sorcerer to operate it and always killed its operator. Nazi Germany had no qualms about spending human lives, but they had few enough sorcerers that this cost thankfully kept the weapon from its full potential.

By 1949, the BXI and the SRS were secretly traveling the globe searching for sites and relics left by inhuman beings. In addition to its ostensible research purposes, the International Geophysical Year declared in 1957-58 was part of a major effort by both nations to local and study all accessible paleo-extraterrestrial sites. During this time, there was also limited cooperation with similar secret investigations by the Soviet Union and discussions of these issues by the UN Security Council. In 1960, these discussions lead to the formation of a secret UN Office of Paranormal Security (OPS), which answered directly to the UN Security Council.

Various governments were also coming to know that aliens still visited Earth. In July of 1947, a mi-go ore transport carrying uranium secretly mined in the New Mexico hills crashed in Roswell New Mexico, killing the single mi-go on board. The US government covered up the crash as they began to study the mi-go and their technology. Studying the remains of the ship recovered from this crash was the beginning of a long-term effort to analyze and reconstruct this technology, as part of an effort to protect Earth from such intrusions. In addition, the US government began making plans of ways to make contact with the mi-go.

PREHISTORIC MYTHOS TIME LINE

620 Million Years BP: The elder ones arrive on Earth. They land in the Antarctic Ocean and build their first city there.

600 Million Years BP: Elder one cities spread across the oceans of Earth, and the elder ones create their semi-sentient shoggoth servants.

295 Million Years BP: A cataclysm raises numerous new land masses, such as Ponape and R'lyeh. The disaster also destroys several marine elder one cities. Cthulhu and his kin arrive from the depths of hyperspace, and settle on the newly risen landmasses. The elder ones war with Cthulhu, but they eventually make peace. Cthulhu controls the supercontinent of Pangaea, and the elder ones retain control of the rest of the planet.

258 Million Years BP: The Flying Polyps arrive on Earth, and build their basalt towers on the land. They also create servants, whose bodies the Yithians later inhabit.

255 Million Years BP: The great race of Yith, fleeing catastrophe on their home world, transmit their minds into a race of cone-shaped creatures on Earth. With the help of the elder ones, the great race freed their bodies from the thrall of the flying polyps and imprisoned the flying polyps in deep caverns.

250 Million Years BP: An alliance of elder ones and Yithians use the Elder Weapon on Cthulhu and its star spawn. This weapon caused R'lyeh to sink beneath the waves. It also imprisoned Cthulhu and its star spawn in a well warded region of hyperspace, only accessible through this sunken city.

80 Million Years BP: The serpent people evolve from dinosaurs and become the newest intelligent inhabitants of Earth.

65 Million Years BP: A comet impacts Earth, ending the Cretaceous, and destroying the bodies of the great race of Yith and causing them to send their minds forward 230 million years. This commentary impact also devastated the civilization of the serpent people.

25 Million Years BP: Intelligent and murderous shoggoths rise up and destroy the last citadel of the elder ones.

41,000 BP: The serpent people create a large empire where the rule over primitive humanity. A small group of humans flee domination by the serpent people and hide in deep and stygian caverns. Over the next few centuries, these humans mutate into the first ghouls.

27,000 BP: Humanity overthrows the yoke of their serpent people rulers, who retreat underground. The Thurian Age – the first human civilization begins.

24,000 BP: During the end of the Thurian age, several thousand humans from an ancient city in Africa colonize Galatea I. Encroaching glaciers and the dawn of another ice age end the Thurian Age and reduce humanity to Neolithic savagery. Glaciers, climate change, and more than 20,000 years hide almost all traces of the Thurian Age from later civilizations.

5,000 BP: Early humans settle a now-vanished pacific island near the location of the sunken city of R'lyeh. A brief fluctuation in the elder one's hyperspatial ward allows Great Cthulhu to have slightly more mental contact with Earth than normal, causing a small portion of R'lyeh to rise above the waves, and drawing several dozen of these primitive humans to this temporary island. Mental contact with, and hyperspatial emanations from, Great Cthulhu causes these humans to mutate into the first deep

MODERN TIME LINE

- 1928: The FBI discovers the deep one and deep one hybrids of Innsmouth Massachusetts.
- 1931: The Miskatonic Antarctic Expedition discovers the elder one city.
- 1947: A small mi-go ore transport crashes in Roswell New Mexico. The wreckage is recovered by the US military.
- 1948: The US and UK governments release limited amounts of information, including a few photos of the elder one city in the Antarctic and the Yithian city in the Australian desert. Both governments deny the existence of any more recent contact with aliens.
- 1949: Deep ones from the Atlantic city of Y'ha-nthlei make contact with the UN Security Council. This meeting leads to the secret 1950 treaty between the UN Security Council and the deep ones.
- 1956: The UN Security Council accidentally discovers a Yithian spy and makes contact with the great race of Yith.
- 1958: The first US Mars expedition visits the red planet using a hyperspatial gateway.
- 1959: The third US Mars expedition vanishes and is presumed dead when their attempt to return to Earth fails. The US cancels future attempts to use hyperspatial gateways for space travel.
- 1960: The UN Security Council forms the UN Office of Paranormal Security (OPS) to deal with mythos derived threats and problems.
- 1966: US Astronauts achieve the first public moon landing, in an advanced rocket propelled by monatomic hydrogen.
- 1967: The existence of psychic powers is publicly confirmed, but their potential is downplayed.
- 1969: US and Soviet astronauts on the moon work together to return to Earth using a sorcerously created hyperspatial gateway and describe having discovered this gateway amongst alien ruins.
- 1973: The first permanent Lunar base is established at the site of the Yithian ruins on the moon.
- 1981: Soviet cosmonauts secretly visit Mars using a mechanically created hyperspatial gateway.
- 1982: US astronauts return to Mars in a hyperspatial spacecraft.
- 1984: A joint US-OPS mission establishes a top-secret long-term base on Mars to study alien ruins there.
- 1985: First contact with the intelligences of Europa leaves 5 of the 8 members of the first Europa expedition dead. Following psychic contact made with the mysterious Europeans, the OPS places Europa off limits for all human-made vessels.
- 1986: The USSR collapses due to political and economic troubles.
- 1987: The Great Revelation: After the fall of the USSR, information about the existence of psychic technologies, recent alien contact, hyperspatial technologies, and advanced space travel all become public, rocking public confidence in many governments.
- 1994: The Gilman-Hawking hyperspatial drive, also known as the "dragonfly drive", gives humanity the freedom of the stars.
- 1996: The Daedalus, the first crewed starship, visits Alpha Centauri and returns safely.
- 2002: The first extrasolar colony is founded on Eridanos. Also, the introduction of the first mobile link revolutionizes personal electronics.
- 2012: Moonbeast raiders attack a mining station on Epsilon Eridani II and kill and capture its inhabitants.
- 2015: Moonbeast raiders attack the colony on Eden and are driven off
- 2017: The Thurian colony of Galatea I is discovered by the OPS.
- 2021: The UN declares a state of war between humanity and the moonbeasts. Given the infrequency of moonbeast attacks and the fact that humanity has not found any moonbeast colonies, this declaration is largely symbolic.
- 2028: Brazilian space explorers discover the exotic planet Prodígio, inhabited by a species that seems on the verge of transcendence.

After World War II, the discovery of the Antarctic ruins could no longer be suppressed, and a joint commission organized by US, UK and Australian governments publicly admitted the existence of alien ruins in the Antarctic and in the central Australian desert. They also gave the public access to a limited number of photographs and reports of the expeditions. All of these reports stressed that these aliens departed from Earth or became extinct tens of millions of years ago, near the end of the dinosaurs' age. All published reports kept the existence of the shoggoths and all other evidence of more recent alien visitation carefully secret.

Of course, aliens were not the only wonder discovered at this time. One of the major technological breakthroughs of the 20th century occurred in 1952, when electronics researchers working for the US government discovered the notes of a psychiatrist who had developed a crude radio-telepathy transceiver in 1901. Utilizing the newly developed transistor technology, engineers who were part of a secret government program created a variety of psychic technologies. Meanwhile, researchers in the Soviet Union were equally busy working on techniques to train humans with the potential for psychic powers in how to better use these powers. Much of the Cold War between the US & USSR and their allies consisted of covert struggles between psychics and users of psychic technologies to uncover secret information and foil the efforts of each other's agents.

In 1966, the passage of the Freedom of Information Act in the US combined with the growing counterculture interest in psychic powers, the occult, and extraterrestrials began the gradual process of revealing some of this knowledge to the public. During this same era, Joseph Rhine founded the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man, at Duke University, where he began to openly explore psychic phenomena using some of the recently declassified information about psychic phenomena. In 1973, Rhine's foundation announced conclusive proof of psychic phenomena, which caused renewed public interest in the paranormal across the world. However, the various psychic devices and more in-depth knowledge of psychic powers remained top-secret.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, private researchers in both the US and Western Europe gradually learned to study, use, and train psychic powers in those few people with natural gifts. These groups then began learning how to awaken psychic power in people who had latent psychic potential. From the late 1960s to the mid 1980s, belief in both recent extraterrestrial contact with Earth and psychic

phenomena remained high and many people were convinced that the various governments of the world knew far more than they were admitting about both. However, the official line from all major world powers remained that all proven alien contact with Earth occurred many millions of years ago and that psychic powers were a mere curiosity with little potential for practical use.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1986 ushered in an era of unprecedented openness about psychic phenomena and alien life. As secrets known only to researchers and a few high Soviet officials became public, purposely or inadvertently, the other member nations of the UN Security Council were forced to acknowledge that psychic powers and technologies had played a major role in the Cold War, and that the world had possessed evidence of recent alien contact for many decades. At this time, early psychic devices were declassified, as were more of the images taken at the Antarctic ruins of the elder one city as well as more images from a variety of other ancient sites of alien visitation and of the Roswell crash. In addition, the general public also learned that hyperspatial technologies derived from alien artifacts played a major part in humanity's exploration of space.

THE GREAT REVELATION

When the world populace learned that aliens continued to visit Earth and that governments had experimented with hyperspatial technologies to warp space and travel to all parts of the solar system, the impact was immense. The most religiously and socially intolerant sects of several faiths, including both Christianity and Islam, denounced all aliens as incarnate demons and claimed that various governments, including that of the US had been making demonic pacts. Meanwhile, other less extreme voices denounced the governments involved in this cover-up as being completely irresponsible and profoundly authoritarian. Public confidence in government reached new lows in across the US and Western Europe, and in 1988, elections in the US and several other first world nations showed clear evidence of this dissatisfaction and distrust. Incumbents with knowledge of this information were almost universally voted out and replaced with candidates who favored policies of openness and public disclosure.

While much public opinion was furious at governments keeping knowledge of aliens, exotic technologies, and a secret space program from them, people also feared these new revelations about aliens. Once many of the politicians and other officials who had known about the cover-up had been voted out of office, confidence in gov-

ernments returned faster than expected simply because most of the populace needed to believe that their governments could protect them from alien threats. In this troubled time, the revelation of the existence and mission of the OPS and of some of its previous efforts at safeguarding humanity helped reassure many people.

In what was later recognized as an extremely clever ploy that worked exceptionally well, the UN Security Council initially provided journalists with a high degree of access to the OPS. OPS representatives also made it clear that the OPS' former policy of total secrecy was due to orders from the governments of the nations on the UN Security Council and did not originate in the OPS. By 1989, while trust in various governments was still recovering, the OPS was already publically seen as a vitally important organization charged with safeguarding humanity.

SOCIETY CHANGES: 1990 AND BEYOND

Before the late 1980s, psychic powers were odd parlor tricks and minor talents that private investigators, criminals, and stage magicians used to make their work easier. They were also quite rare, since techniques for reliably training them were still classified. However, the fall of the Soviet Union released large amounts of information about psychic powers and psychic technology. During the 1990s, the Western world embraced these new talents. Psychic pop stars and psychic characters were featured on dozens of movies and television shows, and psychic devices gradually began to make their way into common use.

The difficulty of lying when using mental communication caused a large amount of debate about using mental link crowns in court as the ultimate lie detector, but the general public soon learned that anyone sufficiently skilled or sociopathic can lie in mental communication as well as verbal. By 1996, in both the US and the EU, link crowns were acceptable in legal proceedings, but were almost exclusively used to corroborate eyewitness testimony. They soon became merely another tool and did not provide definitive answers or exact images. While professionals do sometimes use link crowns to verify truth or sanity, someone with sufficient control over their thoughts and feelings can alter the results.

Instead, the major impact of psychic technologies came from the ability to record and play back recordings made from link crowns. Because even a few minutes of a full sensory link crown experience requires a large amount of

data storage space, this medium did not come into its own until the very end of the 1990s, when devices capable of storing sufficient amounts of data became commercially practical. Sensory recordings rapidly became an important new medium, used for everything from recordings of unusual experiences like dinner at one of the world's finest restaurants or scaling Mount Everest, to hyper-realistic first person dramas recorded from a protagonist's eyes, allowing people a chance to temporarily "be" an action hero, rather than simply watching the action.

THE SECRET HISTORY OF SPACE EXPLORATION

The space race of the 1960s, the moon landings that began in 1966, and the space shuttle launches of the 1980s were only the public face of a larger and considerably more complex and dangerous effort. Scientists and engineers involved in secret government projects were aware that several species of aliens had visited Earth in prehistory and, after the Roswell crash, that the mi-go continue to do so. Research teams working for the US and the UK worked to duplicate some of the various alien means of interplanetary and interstellar travel. Meanwhile, working from similar evidence, the Soviet Union launched their own program of hyperspatially powered space exploration. Unfortunately, all of these efforts proved both difficult and dangerous because the methods involved working with barely controlled or understood hyperspatial energies.

The first efforts at hyperspatial space travel were performed in the 1950s in both the US and the USSR. All of these attempts relied on the posthumously published work of mathematician and dimensional physicist Walter Gilman. In both nations, a series of physicists and mathematical savants were schooled in visualization and meditation techniques and learned to open portals through hyperspace using what eventually became known as "hyperspatial sorcery". Despite many successes, this method of travel remained a minor part of a larger effort due to the serious risks to the sorcerers. In addition to the risk of progressive insanity in practitioners, such missions required at least one human to pass through to the other side. The only way to return was either for a sorcerer on the mission to open a portal to Earth, or for a member of the team to be in telepathic contact with a sorcerer back on Earth. Otherwise, the portal could appear in an unpredictable location, often many kilometers from its intended location and portals created using hyperspatial sorcery could be maintained

for less than a minute. There are still families who do not know the reasons for the posthumous medals awarded to sorcerers who gave their all.

In 1958, the US expedition to Mars succeeded several years before any rocket carried a person into orbit. Two subsequent US missions to Mars were performed in 1959. In all three cases, trained hyperspatial "sorcerers" were present both at the departure site and in the Mars expedition, to allow expedition members to return in the case of an emergency. Also, the expedition included a trained psychic who kept in telepathic contact with another psychic on Earth. Disaster struck in the last of these missions, when several members of the expedition, including the sorcerer were injured after a cavern they were exploring collapsed. When the sorcerer back on Earth attempted to open a hyperspatial portal to allow them to return, something went wrong and the entire expedition was instead transported to some unknown and presumably fatal destination. The third Martian expedition was the last US hyperspatial expedition for more than a decade.

THE RACE TO THE MOON

In addition to the various secret efforts, both the US & the USSR were eager for the publicity gained in sending a rocket to the Moon. Starting in the late 1950s, both nations began to invest large amounts of time and money in this effort.

After World War II, the US Operation Paperclip raided the Nazi brain trust, and made a few prize catches such as Wernher von Braun. His work on the *Überverwüstung* made his welcome in the United States controversial with those few personnel who knew, but he brought with him advanced chemical knowledge deciphered from the elder one ruins in Antarctica, and with the scientists of the US space program used this knowledge to create the first monatomic hydrogen rocket. More powerful than any chemical rocket, this advanced allowed US astronauts to reach the Moon in 1966. In August 1969, the second US mission found ancient Yithian ruins in an ice cave near the Moon's South Pole. August 1969 also marked the landing of the first Soviet expedition on the Moon.

The most notable news came from the US expedition, which after discovering the alien ruins, also found that their lunar module had been damaged during landing and could not safely take off. The Soviets offered to rescue two of the three astronauts, but lacked the space and fuel to carry all three. In a daring move, the US and Soviet crews worked together to create a sorcerous portal back to Earth. The effort succeeded, and in an effort

to avoid revealing the existence of hyperspatial sorcery, the US then revealed that the US and Soviet astronauts had explored the great race of Yith's ruins and discovered a hyperspatial portal connecting to ruins in northern Canada. The Soviets went along with this deception to keep their own efforts secret, and in return for a promise that both nations could explore the Lunar ruins. By 1971, both nations were working together to build a permanent Lunar base at the site of these ruins. This base was first occupied in 1973 and remains in use today.

THE EXPLORATION OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM

Using technologies scavenged from the Roswell crash, US researchers began attempting to build their own hyperspatial vehicles. By 1968, researchers had managed to duplicate the basics of hyperspatial movement and velocity multiplication, allowing them to make small objects levitate and move rapidly under laboratory conditions. The first piloted vehicles were completed in 1972, and were only useable in a gravity field, with a maximum unmultiplied velocity of 1,000 kph. The greatest advance at this time was the velocity multiplication field that allowed these vessels to travel at high speeds without additional thrust or fuel by reducing the vessel's inertia. Velocity multiplication required the vessel to shift partway into hyperspace, which was risky, but far less dangerous than using hyperspatial gateways.

The first vehicles could only achieve velocity multiplication ratios of 10:1, giving them a top speed of 10,000 kph. Greater velocities would await improved electronics. In 1981, the velocity multiplication ratio was improved to 1,200:1, with a maximum unmultiplied velocity of 1.2 million kph. Although interstellar travel remained impossible, these new craft gave the US the freedom of the solar system. A breakthrough in 1989, achieved by a scientist whose name was, rather uncannily, also Gilman (rumors speculate that the distant relationship to Walter Gilman in the genealogy of her family was somehow significant, though how this could be so is uncertain) improved the velocity multiplication ratio to 250,000:1, allowing vehicles to attain 20% of the speed of light. However, the most important breakthrough came in 1994, with the development of the Gilman-Hawking drive, named for both Gilmans and the mathematical work of Stephen Hawking, which allowed unmultiplied speeds of up to 5,000 kph and velocity multiplication of up to a factor of half a billion, giving humanity the freedom of the stars, allowing starships to travel 2,000 times the speed of light.

Well before the development of faster than light travel, one of the hyperspatial drive's advantages was that it could be modulated to cause absorption of long wavelengths, rendering these secret vessels largely invisible to radar and microwave detection. By the mid-1980s, ships had explored both Mars and much of the outer solar system, with their take-offs and landings hidden by their invisibility to radar.

Hyper-ships also faced other deadly dangers. Before 1983, the shielding used to protect the ships from hyperspace was fairly rudimentary and even after the introduction of improved shielding, occasional failures in the shielding generators allowed brief or partial contact with the raw fabric of hyperspace and occasionally with various minor hyperspatial entities. The results of such contacts ranged from some or all members of the crew suffering from severe mental strain to hyperspatial entities devouring the entire crew, or occasionally even the entire ship. Eventually continued advances in hyperspatial shielding largely eliminated the risk of hyperspatial attack or inadvertent exposure, except when a ship is badly damaged.

In 1984, several large US hyper-ships visited Mars and set up a long-term base there to explore the ancient ruins discovered there. To prevent the public from learning about either this base or the Martian ruins, US hyper-ships secretly diverted or destroyed unmanned spacecraft that NASA, the ESA, or the Soviets sent to Mars, if these spacecraft looked likely to land near or take pictures of either the US base or the ruins. These efforts were continued until the public revelations of 1987.

Meanwhile, after their own experiences with the dangers of hyperspatial sorcery in the 1960s, the Soviets had abandoned all efforts relating to human-generated hyperspatial portals and instead sought to create electronic hyperspatial gateways. They created the first electronic portal in 1972. These early generators could only produce small portals that remained open for four or five minutes, but they were ideal for short-term robotic probes. Initial tests were limited to Earth, but by 1976, they sent a probe to the Moon, to photograph the 1965 landing site of the Eagle lunar lander. Throughout the 1980s, these mechanical hyperspace portals were refined, with each new version offering improvements in portal size or duration, precision of portal placement, or range. By 1981, just a few years before the fall of the Soviet Union, Soviet hyperspatial researchers opened a portal onto Mars, allowing humans to walk there for the first time in 22 years. By this time, Soviet remote probes had also visited every planet in the solar system.

SPACE TRAVEL IN THE POST REVELATION ERA

In 1987, one of the most impressive revelations was the actual extent of space travel. After some of the initial outrage over the UN's secrecy had passed, interest in space travel soared. In 1991, the US government and several other governments launched the first hyperspatial drive space ships specifically designed to carry civilians. By 1993, short trips to orbit and even to the Moon were possible for the wealthy and in 1994, the first film made on location at the ruins of Mars was released in theaters worldwide.

Brief contact was made with the vast and ancient intelligences living in Europa's ice-covered oceans, but these beings proved both vastly alien and uninterested in contact with the relatively primitive humans. After the death of several astronauts, Europa was placed off-limits to exploration in 1992.

With the discovery of the dragonfly drive in 1994, humanity publicly entered the interstellar era and access to both Lunar and Martian bases became even easier. Since that time, the settlements on Luna and Mars have both grown into large and thriving colonies. Other than the Lunar and Martian colonies, the various bases throughout the solar system are exclusively used for research and limited amounts of mining. Although memory records or videos of Saturn's cloud-wrapped moon Titan and the large asteroid Vesta are quite popular, most people see no reason to visit such hostile environments.

BEYOND THE SOLAR SYSTEM

The dragonfly drive has given humanity the stars. Humanity has discovered a number of habitable worlds outside the solar system and has colonies on six of them and permanent research bases on several more. The existence of habitable extrasolar planets continues to capture the public imagination. Also, stories of alien contact and the various alien ruins found on less habitable worlds continue to be wildly popular.

Joining the OPS space force or signing up as an extrasolar colonist are things millions dream about. Every year, eager and motivated people take highly competitive examinations to qualify. Humanity is in the earliest days of interstellar travel and everyone understands that interstellar missions and extrasolar colonies are greatly risky, but many people are interested in settling other worlds, especially the various habitable worlds outside the solar system. Although both Luna and Mars have had colonies that are

now more than 30 years old, most colonists now immigrate to one of the seven extra-solar colonies. The first of these worlds was opened for colonization in 2002 and since then, five additional worlds have been opened for colonization. OPS explorers have declared all seven of these worlds as devoid of obvious threats and safe for human habitation. On five of these colony worlds humanity has found no evidence for current intelligent native life. One world has minimally advanced natives who are isolated from the colonies, and another has alien intelligences that humanity has not yet discovered. Four of the six worlds contain alien ruins, all of which are more than 14,000 years old. In addition to human habitation, alien archeology is another reason for the existence of these colonies.

Since these worlds were opened for colonization, the fleet of several hundred large dragonfly drive transports has carried more than six million colonists to their new homes among the stars. Current estimates indicate that both the success of the larger colonies and the increasing size of the starship fleet means that the total population of all off-Earth colonies should increase to more than 12 million by 2040.

The two oldest and largest of the extra-solar colonies each are now home to a few million inhabitants, with additional shiploads of colonists arriving every few months. Although each colony world is quite different, the colonization process has mostly become standardized. Before settlement begins, OPS places in orbit a network of sensor and weather satellites, communications satellites, and GPS satellites. Hundreds of robots and prefabricated parts are sent ahead of colonists, to build easily serviceable power stations using renewable local resources, like solar, wind, wave, or tidal power, and construct important public buildings like hospitals and emergency services. After these preparations, the first colonists arrive.

The robots that help construct the colonies are then used by the colonists as factory labor to build vehicles and other useful items. The level of technology and standard of living on even the oldest colonies is slightly behind that found in the most developed nations on Earth, but is still quite advanced. In addition, several thousand colonists have become exceptionally wealthy due to discoveries they made, ranging from new biologically derived drugs to valuable artifacts pulled from alien ruins.

The Colonists: Space colonies have more than their share of diversity. Any country that shares economic interests with the establishing nation usually participates in its colonies to some extent, and smaller nations' space programs "hitchhike" on the starships of larger ones. Adventurous people in Latin America who wish to im-

migrate to the United States often apply for settlement in a US colony, where they can live and work towards citizenship, while Nigerians working for Chinese companies often travel to Chinese colonies, and so on. While living on an extra-solar colony is desirable, it's also dangerous. Most of the countries that hold the strongest shares of space technology are also relatively stable, and their populations relatively content: people from less stable countries tend to be more zealous about applying for colonization, seeking their freedom, their fortune or a new horizon. Currently, almost one fifth of the residents of the various colonies work preparing the colony for the arrival of new colonists.

Colonization requirements depend on the demands of life and work on any given planet. Colonists must generally pass safety exams and go through a hiring process before they can emigrate. This can involve both skill suitability and psychological stability tests. Education is important. Nonetheless, along with in-demand jobs, every human home also retains some support staff: where people work, they also drink and eat, play music and enjoy art. European colonies, especially, hand out a certain number of short-term creative or service work visas to young adults. Language teachers are always wanted in any place where human cultures come into contact with each other; psychics come in handy in any place where intelligent aliens abide. Each colony has different needs. Scientists, researchers, explorers, engineers, food producers, resource miners, OPS personnel, medics, and support staff are everywhere; smaller colonies and research stations don't have much crime, but Eridanos has its share of tech-smugglers.

In many cases, colonists must pay their own fare for the journey through hyperspace. In other cases, it's included as part of a signing bonus for particularly sought-after professions. Several organizations also have funds set up to assist prospective colonists, akin to scholarships. Those fleeing persecution in their home countries often qualify.

ALIENS AND THE PUBLIC

The general public first learned of the existence of alien life when the details of the various Antarctic expeditions were made public in 1948, in the aftermath of the US Navy's massive post-WWII expedition to the Antarctic known as Operation Highjump. Photographs of the elder one city on the Plateau of Leng taken by Navy personnel were accidentally released and were soon followed by an official US government statement about the discovery of an ancient alien city. In response to this revelation, Brit-

ish and Australian archeologists revealed they had been excavating the ruins of the Yithian city of Pnakotus in Australia's Great Sandy Desert since 1937. Expecting the two cities to both be the work of the same alien species, both archeologists and the general public were shocked to discover that two alien species had inhabited Earth tens of millions of years in the past.

These revelations fueled a growing fascination with aliens, accompanied by a decade-long period of UFO hysteria following the 1947 sightings of UFOs around Mount Rainier and the Roswell crash during the same year. The UN and the various governments of the world attempted to reassure the populace that aliens were not known to have visited or dwelled on Earth more recently than 50 million years ago, but belief that aliens were still visiting Earth persisted among various fringe subcultures. This belief in present-day alien visitations was eventually confirmed when dealings with the mi-go and the treaty with the deep ones (see p. 221) were both made public in the late 1980s, as part of the Great Revelation. Among its other cultural impacts, the Great Revelation made the population more credulous of conspiracy theories for decades thereafter, a legacy which has mostly passed but still carries some influence.

In the late 1980s, much previously classified information about aliens and ab-humans on or visiting Earth was made public, but some still remains secret. Flying polyps are now known to be dangerous aliens, found on rare occasions in ancient underground ruins, while the deep ones are known to be mutated aquatic offshoot of humanity and the mi-go are alien beings that humanity has limited trade with. Since the deep ones and the mi-go have little interest in contact with the general public, visiting alien or ab-human dignitaries are very rare occurrences, but when treaty negotiations occur, the press is always in close attendance.

The initial public reaction to the various aliens was shock followed by horror. The deep ones are disturbing inhuman and the mi-go almost incomprehensibly alien. However, the fact that the deep ones were originally an offshoot of humanity and that they only inhabit the ocean depths was used to reassure the populace that their presence changed nothing about the world. Also, the deep ones' lack of conventional technologies due to their underwater homes has led most of humanity to regard them as primitives, which soon caused most people to believe them to be absolutely no threat to anyone living on land. Until it became widely known that most deep ones had no interest in contact with humanity, there were

even several organizations working on extending various international development efforts to the deep ones.

Similarly, while the mi-go are fungoid crabs with a partial telepathic hive-mind, the fact that they cannot live on Earth's surface for more than a few days helped reduce fear of a mi-go invasion. More importantly, the fact that they are willing to trade advanced biotechnology with humanity gradually transformed them from a source of fear and horror to a disturbing source of life-saving medicines and other useful technologies.

In 1992, the first human trade mission to the mi-go colony on Pluto was an enormous public relations coup for OPS and the discovery of the dragonfly drive in the early 1994 also drastically changed the widespread feeling of inferiority much of humanity felt with regard to the mi-go. Humanity could now venture out among the stars and while the mi-go remain far in advance of humanity in terms of knowledge and technology, most of humanity either ignores this fact or does not fully understand it. Even in 2030, most people still assume that humanity will be able to surpass any and all mi-go achievements within a few decades.

Since the late 1980s, there have been no further revelations about alien contact on Earth. The OPS and the various member nations of the Security Council continue to keep a few secrets from the public, but other than the truth about the ghouls, (see p. 190) all of the rest of these secrets are known only to a tiny handful of people and are difficult to prove. Instead, all of the recent discoveries of alien life and alien ruins have come from human interplanetary and interstellar expeditions. The first of these discoveries were the reclusive Europeans in 1992, followed by the discoveries of the remains of four long-extinct alien species on four separate extra-solar planets, and then in 2012, the first encounter with the hostile moonbeasts (see p. 222).

Currently, popular opinion holds that humanity is in various ways inherently superior to all the known aliens. Some aliens like the mi-go are widely known to have technology well in advance of humanity, but such facts are widely considered to be only temporary obstacles. Although more accurate information is widely available, the mass media does its best to reinforce the idea of innate human superiority and eventual human dominance, in large part because most commercial firms believe that a widespread belief in human inferiority or a true understanding of humanity's place in the galaxy could lead to a serious economic disruption. Thus a conflict exists between subconscious awareness of the truth and the reassuring falsehood of human superiority.

EARTH IN 2030

The year is 2030. Humanity has traveled to the stars and several million people now live off of the Earth. Humans trade publicly, in a limited fashion, with several species of aliens, and humans have begun augmenting themselves with advanced biotechnology. The world is vastly different from the one that most people lived in during the 1980s, before the revelations about aliens, sorcery, and space travel, before the internet, ubiquitous microelectronics, and the widespread use of electronic telepathy. Energy is abundant and clean, with a mixture of solar power and fusion reactors providing most of Earth's electricity.

TECHNOLOGY & DAILY LIFE

The average first world citizen of 2030 has never been off-planet, except perhaps in a tourist getaway to Luna, but their life has been transformed by psychic technology and the various advanced technologies derived from alien artifacts and trade with aliens. The single most widespread of these technologies is the psi-link. This device is a modern version of the telepathic link crown developed in the 1970s and is used in many modern computers, mobile devices, and electronic games. Rather than requiring screens, headphones or display glasses, psi-links allow the user to control devices by thought and to receive a full range of sensory impressions, including touch and smell. From console games to nature documentaries, from off-planet travel to recorded experiences of food and sex, psi-links offer users the chance to experience sensory impressions recorded by others, as well as ones that are computer generated. Virtual meeting rooms and other gatherings now allow dozens or even thousands of people to meet and interact online in much the same way they could in person.

Psi-links also allow a level of interpersonal communication previously available only to two or more telepaths who were in communication with one another, a level of communication that can even transcend language. Psi-links have been available for the last 27 years and more than 85% of the inhabitants of economically developed countries and slightly more than half of the entire human population have at least tried a psi-link once. However, a substantial minority of people still regard psi-links as unholy, dangerous, or otherwise deeply suspect and refuse to ever use them. Nevertheless, the widespread use of psi-links has done much to reduce and largely end anti-psychic prejudice among most of the population. Now,

anyone can experience at least some of the advantages of being psychic. An increasing amount of the internet is specifically designed for use with psi-links. The popular site SenseAll has been marketing both professional and amateur-made clips of both actual and digitally created sensory experiences for the last 20 years and remains one of the most commonly visited sites on the internet.

Robotics is another field that has transformed daily life. Starting with simple single-purpose devices like the vacuuming robots developed in the early 1990s, home robotics has now progressed to the point that many high end kitchens come with built-in cooking and cleaning robots. Kitchen robots typically consist of several complex robotic arms equipped with cameras and other sensors. These robots can cook and serve many simple meals, and can also take dirty plates and other items left anywhere in the kitchen, clean them, and place them in designated cupboards. Similar appliances now perform tasks ranging from laundry to home and commercial cleaning and home and automotive maintenance. Although robotics has not yet achieved the dream of factories that need only two or three human employees, most manufacturing is now heavily automated and is becoming more so every year.

As a result, worldwide manufacturing jobs have declined over the last few decades, despite an overall increase in manufacturing. The number of low-end service jobs, like hotel cleaning and fast food work, has also declined – although everyone still wants to interact with human workers in fancy restaurants and bars. The world economy has begun to change. The value of handcrafts has increased somewhat, and for many wealthy and upper middle class people, the cachet of having personal servants has increased. However, these changes in the economy have produced a moderate amount of economic disruption that has helped fuel the desire for an increasing number of people to move off world.

Automation has also affected transportation. For the last 18 years, almost all automobiles sold in anywhere in the first world have been capable of automatic driving. Most nations still require a licensed driver in a vehicle's driver's seat, and this driver is still legally responsible for the operation of the vehicle. However, the vast majority of the time, these drivers can relax, certain that the car's automated systems will instantly notify them in the event of a problem. Several nations have introduced laws removing the requirement for cars to have a legal driver, but all such proposals have been rejected. In most countries, automated driving is required to be active on major highways; however, compliance is not perfect, and many people will

risk a fine for a joyride. Laws have passed that require autopilot to be active for operating helicopters and the recently developed ducted-fan aerodynes (see p. 128) over urban areas. No one other than official emergency personnel can legally pilot air vehicles over urban areas, except in case of systems failure. Instead, all air vehicles must have their own automated control systems, backed up by a ground-based automated control system.

BIOTECHNOLOGY & AUGMENTATIONS

Starting in 2001, trade with the mi-go, combined with advances in Earthly biotechnology, finally began to produce results beyond laboratory curiosities and a few truly hideous experimental failures. Several new medical techniques were introduced, including cures for diabetes and most forms of cancer. Advances in organ growth and regeneration soon followed and predictions about the average lifespan soon climbed over 100 and are now around 125, with many researchers believing that anyone less than a century old is likely to make it to 140. This number is still climbing. In addition, the discovery of ways to regrow damaged limbs and organs including eyes, and to repair severed nerves, means that there are far fewer disabled people in 2030 and conditions like blindness are now largely confined to the poorest parts of the world.

While many doctors and other healthcare personnel celebrated these advances, the general public was also entranced by stories of augmentations that could now be performed on human bodies. Using techniques ranging from radical gene therapies to implanting vat grown tissues and organs, humanity now has the capability to alter people by giving them enhanced capabilities, including some capabilities never before possessed by humans.

The majority of augmentations remain both relatively minor and expensive, but are increasingly popular among the middle class and wealthy of most nations. Minor augmentations like increased disease resistance or improved memories are legal in almost all developed nations, and a few are even have their costs covered by various forms of health insurance. Many nations have found that paying the cost of having citizens become increasingly resistant to disease and toxins is well worth the price. Except for a few theocracies and autocratic nations, these augmentations are legal across the world, although members of a few religious groups consider them to be unacceptable.

Today, almost 12% of the world's population has at least one minor augmentation, and this number is growing every year. However, social researchers fear that these augmentations may increase the division between rich

and poor, with the richer now becoming smarter and healthier than the poor. The EU recently added a few health-related augmentations to the list of procedures fully covered by national health plans. Much of the first world has been taking steps to do the same, and some countries to include at least some mental augmentations. Increasing physical and mental inequality between residents of countries with greater and lesser economic power seems inevitable, although an increasing number of wealthy residents of developing nations are also purchasing augmentations.

As various minor augmentations become increasingly common, the mass media has increasingly focused on the flashier and more impressive augmentations: those that give people cat-like claws, allow people to cling to a wall like a gecko, or even breathe water. There is little popular demand for these augmentations, and many people consider anyone with them to be freakish and unnatural. Reports by OPS and other international organizations also indicate that if widespread these radical augmentations could be socially destabilizing; the technology also has not been fully tested for safety. As such, OPS research and public opinion have combined to make performing these augmentations illegal in most first world nations. However, possessing them is not, and they can be illegally obtained back-room clinics in China, Mexico, and the United States. For the right price, such augmentations are also easily available in Russia, Pakistan and in several other third world nations. There are numerous news reports of clinics that perform fake augmentations, as well as of botched procedures that leave patients dead or disabled. As a result, individuals who seek out these clinics are usually either desperate or exceedingly driven.

Although simply possessing an unlicensed augmentation is legal, most government keeps track of people who have them. In addition to criminal penalties being more severe to someone who uses one to commit a crime, many employers check national databases to see if prospective employees possess unlicensed augmentations. (Visible augmentations, regardless of their utility or legality, also sometimes lead to job discrimination in more conservative professions.) In vivid contrast, individuals who obtain advanced augmentations legally, as part of OPS or various other organizations are widely regarded with a mixture of awe and mild distrust, since such people are both heroic and potentially no longer entirely human. Current estimates indicate that at least two million people have unlicensed radical augmentations and this number continues to grow.

ALIEN DERIVED TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES BY DECADE

The following is a list of the most notable technologies that appear in the world of Eldritch Skies but not in our world. Most of these advances are derived or inspired by alien knowledge or technology.

1940s

Nazi hyperspatial weapons known as *Überverwüstung* kill hundreds of Allied troops and warp areas of land. Only the fact that they must be set off by a trained suicidal operator who is within the UVW field and the difficulty of producing them prevents them from being a major force in the war.

1950 & 1960s

Advances in all fields of materials technology. The development of stable monatomic hydrogen rocket propellant greatly advances space travel. The introduction of transistors also permits the first reliable link crowns.

1970s

Cost reductions due to improved material processing, while the first politically driven oil shortages spur the development of high efficiency solar cells and the first superconducting batteries for cars. The spread of these batteries also allows the first affordable electrical weapons.

1980s

In 1981, the introduction of the velocity multiplication drive enables humanity to send crewed missions to both Jupiter and Saturn. Artificial hibernation is also discovered. Inexpensive solar cells are increasingly used for power generation.

1990s

In 1994, the introduction of the dragonfly drive makes travel throughout the solar system and to the stars possible. Advances in genetics allow treatment for most cases of Innsmouth Syndrome and cures or treatments for most other inherited conditions. Improvements in link crowns and advances in brain scanning technology give rise to the psi-link, first introduced in classified research.

2000s

The psi-link arrives on the public market in 2002. A combination of modern genetics and mi-go derived biological knowledge allows humanity to create the first reliable bio-augmentations. Diabetes and most forms of cancer are cured. Regrowing organs and nerves cures most disabilities; blindness and most forms of paralysis become very rare in the first world. Automobile automation is perfected, and cars can now drive themselves. The dream of fusion power becomes a reality and the first commercial fusion reactor is constructed in 2006.

2010s

The first human-created augmentations become available to the general public. The ability to purchase physical and mental improvements changes mass culture, while also widening some of the gaps between the rich and the poor. The first commercial ducted fan aerodynes go on sale – the flying car is now a reality, made possible by the automated driving systems now mandatory on all new cars sold in almost every developed nation.

2020s

The mi-go introduce the first hyperspatial augmentations to humanity, but they remain carefully regulated and are only available to government agents and a few criminals. The first reliable and affordable general purpose 3-D printers become commercially available. An increasing number of people can purchase them and create everything from clothes to consumer electronics in their own home.

HYPERSPATIAL AUGMENTATIONS

The most infamous and extreme of the radical augmentations are the hyperspatial augmentations created by the mi-go. These augmentations allow humans to perform near-miraculous feats like flying or telekinesis. These augmentations are well beyond current human understanding and can only be

acquired though illegal trade with the mi-go. Individuals who possess them are widely considered violent criminals, a belief affirmed by the fact that many of these people have a tendency to go dangerously insane. These augmentations can only be acquired by people who have connections to various criminal or terrorist organizations or by special agents of especially unscrupulous governments, like North Korea or Russia.

There have been a few pilot programs with OPS and various national intelligence agencies to attempt to see if these augmentations can be safely installed in operatives. However, the risks of hyperspatial exposure inherent in their use has kept such programs small. While displaying ordinary augmentations is widely regarded with a mixture of awe and either fear or envy, seeing someone use a hyperspatial augmentation can cause a public panic. There are also widespread conspiracy theories that anyone who possesses these augmentations can either be taken over by the mi-go or will eventually transform into some hideous human-mi-go hybrid.

PSYCHICS & SOCIETY

Psychic powers have been publicly known since the mid 1970s and are now an accepted part of life. This acceptance was aided by the swift passage of laws, in almost all nations, making mind reading without the prior consent of the target a serious crime. Most people understand now that psychics can only read minds by touch or obvious eye contact, but suspicion still persists on the fringes of society. Some people are nervous around psychics still, and there are always the occasional rumors of undetectable mind-control powers – though the recent widespread use of psi-links has further reduced the distrust of psi-powers; indeed, some people consider psi-links superior and regard psychic powers as a bit old-fashioned.

Shortly after psychic powers were revealed to the general public, there was a wealth of speculation about how psychics would transform trials and law enforcement. The reality has proven to be somewhat different. Psychic evidence was not acceptable in court during the 1970s and the early 1980s. By 1990, link crowns were regularly used for collecting all official psychic evidence, since they are far easier to test for reliability. However, psychics and link crowns can only be used to read thoughts currently passing through the subject's conscious or unconscious mind. As a result, any process of gathering psychic evidence requires the subject to be questioned about the desired memories or to be exposed to images or other stimuli that cause the subject to think about the events in question. This and the fact that most trained psychics and a few others can deliberately shield their thoughts from a link crown mean that in most of the first world psychic evidence is considered compelling, but not definitive without other proof. Psychic evidence gathered without a subject's consent is only admissible in a few of the most repressive nations.

For the last 30 years, psychics have been most in de-

mand in certain counseling specialties and in important business transactions. Many business people avoid using link crowns during business transactions, because their output can easily be recorded. However, the possibility of knowing if a prospective business partner is being honest in their offer is exceptionally tempting. As a result, in some business deals, psychics are employed as negotiation facilitators, who listen to the thoughts of each party in a negotiation when offers are made, and then reports to one or both parties about the other's thoughts when discussing the proposed business deal. There are several international organizations which license psychics as impartial commercial facilitators who undergo regular psychic examinations for honesty and are bound by exceedingly strict non-disclosure agreements. However, most businesses are more comfortable hiring psychics who work only for them and who only read the minds of the other party in business negotiations.

HYPERSPATIAL SORCERY

Hyperspatial sorcery performed using complex devices is a mainstay of space exploration, regularly used by many governments. However, the details of how to perform sorcery remain highly classified and information about performing sorcery using rituals is also classified. During the 1950s, the UN Security Council adopted a large body of secret laws governing the uses of hyperspace, and the various member nations and the OPS was ordered to enforce them. The most important among these was keeping the existence of hyperspatial sorcery secret.

While OPS and various governments were far from happy when the existence of psychic powers and later of aliens became public, they found the idea of most of humanity learning about sorcery far worse. The fact that anyone with access to the correct training and documents could theoretically learn to create hyperspatial gateways or summon hyperspatial entities terrified many OPS operatives. The potential for crime, terrorism, and asymmetrical warfare were all far too great to ignore. As a result, prior to the late 1980s, anyone who learned of sorcery and who attempted to either use it for any purpose or to make knowledge of it public was either recruited, discredited, or subjected to memory erasure.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, when much information about hyperspatial sorcery became public, OPS changed its mandate from keeping hyperspatial sorcery and the existence of hyperspace a secret, to keeping information about how to perform hyperspatial sorcery secret and attempting to make certain that no unauthorized

personnel learned how hyperspatial sorcery or hyperspatial devices actually worked. Although the existence of sorcery is now public knowledge, the details remain classified and most people believe that it requires the use of complex, expensive and highly specialized equipment to perform. In actuality, this equipment is not necessary, but does allow sorcerers to perform their rituals and construct their devices far more safely.

In addition to preventing public disclosure of information about performing sorcery and occasionally disseminating false information about sorcery, the OPS and various national occult security organizations also investigate dangerous occultists and offer them a choice: memory suppression or recruitment. The first option involves having all memories of actual occult knowledge suppressed, leaving the individual with some lost time and what seems to be a multitude of failed occult experiments. All materials and information are confiscated, sometimes altered and returned to the occultist bearing bad data. Alternately, the sorcerer can join OPS or a local occult security organization. Potential recruits must undergo psychic examination to determine if their willingness to join these organizations is sincere.

Individuals who have already mastered various occult abilities when they are discovered, but who have not used these abilities to harm others or to threaten the safety of humanity are often given a third option. These sorcerers go on an OPS watch list. Their occult activities are monitored, but they are otherwise free to pursue their lives and their occult practices. The OPS acknowledges that there have been human sorcerers throughout all of recorded history. Some were dangerous and destructive, but others were not. Also, completely suppressing all non-classified sources of information about sorcery has proven to be impossible; there are simply too many old books. Although their activities are technically illegal in many nations, private sorcerers are tolerated. These sorcerers are allowed to exist as long as they do not reveal any knowledge of sorcery to anyone other than one or two apprentices and colleagues who already know about sorcery (who also go on the watch lists) and do not use their knowledge to perform criminal acts.

The OPS is aware that high levels of occult ability are rare and that many of the most skilled occultists are not willing to be recruited. The OPS tolerates and encourages member governments to tolerate the existence of careful and discreet sorcerers because skilled sorcerers can be a remarkably useful resource. In addition to the watch list, these sorcerers must also agree to occasion-

ally accept commissions for OPS or local occult security agencies. This option is usually only used when this OPS or local government is facing some form of particularly mysterious or deadly sorcerous or hyperspatial threat, but the use of skilled sorcerers has proven to be invaluable, and so they are always well paid for their efforts.

Most of the general public believes that private sorcerers are either criminals or frauds. The news media and portrayals of sorcerers in popular culture support this idea. However, almost all cities contain small groups of occultists, most of whom are not sorcerers, but who are either scholars of the occult or simply curious. This occult underground serves to direct people with various needs to professional sorcerers who might be able to help them. Such services can range from hyperspatial spying and other forms of occult information gathering, to creating a gateway to aid with some form of theft or escape from pursuit, to providing sorcerous protection from some mundane threat, or even various forms of exceedingly discreet murder for hire. Some unscrupulous sorcerers provide all of these services, but the ones who wish to avoid undue attention from either law enforcement or the OPS may be willing to bend the law, but stop well short of murder, mind control, or similar acts.

THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations is far from being a world government, but it remains very powerful. In large part, its power comes from the fact that humanity is now in contact with several non-human species and the United Nations provides a forum where the nations of Earth can present a unified front to these various alien intelligences.

In 1958, the nations of the Security Council unanimously voted not to allow individual nations to make their own deals with alien intelligences without UN oversight. Although most members of the Security Council supported the idea of their own nation making advantageous deals with the mi-go and the other aliens humanity was in contact with, the leaders of the member nations did not want to risk letting rival nations gain unilateral access to alien technology. To prevent any one nation from gaining a substantial advantage over all others, the UN oversees all deals with aliens. When news of Earth's contacts with aliens became public in 1987, the nations of the UN initially lodged dozens of protests with the Security Council, denouncing the secrecy involved. However, an understanding of the dangers involved with this knowledge, combined with a pledge of

openness and frank discussion of the complexities of the Cold War eventually helped to mollify these protests.

Today, the UN has both unprecedented power and severe limitations. The UN is the sole body allowed to make treaties and trade agreements with alien species. Also, the OPS now has the right to investigate incidents that may violate the Dangerous Technologies Treaty (DTT) in the vast majority of the nations of the world, and DTT violations are grounds for serious UN action, including deployment of UN peacekeeping forces. However, all other forms of UN intervention are far more limited. Any nations can request UN humanitarian or military aid, as can either side in a civil war. In the absence of a direct request for aid, though, the UN cannot intervene in political or military incidents that do not cross national borders. Most nations now regard the UN as a vital body that protects them from both alien dangers and from people and nations who would misuse dangerous technologies. Since no nation wishes to have UN troops inside its own borders, UN rights to interfere in the sovereign affairs of a nation are both substantial and strictly limited.

THE DANGEROUS TECHNOLOGIES TREATY

The cornerstone of the OPS' current mandate is the Dangerous Technologies Treaty. The Security Council proposed the original version of the DTT in 1988, shortly after the truth about the presence of aliens on Earth and in space was revealed. This treaty originally only served to regulate hyperspatial technologies, including sorcery. The nations of the General Assembly who had not previously had access to knowledge of aliens or hyperspatial technology felt betrayed by the nations of the Security Council and demanded a more powerful treaty, which also governed potential weapons of mass destruction, including all chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. As a result, the DTT also allows the UN to interfere in cases of potential nuclear terrorism, and, most controversial of all, unprovoked use of nuclear weapons by national governments. In the wake of massive protests both inside and outside their borders, the nations of the Security Council reluctantly agreed to this revision of the DTT in 1990. The OPS now has the authority to investigate a wide range of potential threats to the safety and security of humanity as a whole, including all unauthorized research or manufacturing of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons and any theft or potential misuse of these weapons.

THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

The Security Council is the branch of the UN charged with maintaining international peace and security, and dealing with hyperspatial and extraterrestrial threats and dangers. Included in this power is the sole right to negotiate treaties with alien species and governments. The Security Council has three permanent members and four temporary members. The permanent members are representatives of China, the EU, and the US. The four temporary members are each elected for a two year term, and are selected by the UN General Assembly, composed of representatives of all of the member nations of the UN. Each of the permanent members can veto any proposed Security Council resolutions completely; the temporary members merely vote.

THE OPS

Empowered by the UN Security Council, the OPS is a large international agency that seeks to protect humanity from alien threats. It has connections to all of the intelligence and law enforcement agencies of the UN Security Council member nations. The OPS can work closely with members of these intelligence and law enforcement agencies, and on certain occasions they can demand the cooperation of such personnel.

OPS has three primary missions:

- Protect humanity from alien threats
- Prevent alien technology, hyperspatial sorcery, or weapons of mass destruction from being used to harm humanity.
- Help humanity safely expand throughout the galaxy

THE PUBLIC FACE OF THE OPS

As its primary mandate, the OPS monitors alien-derived and other hyperspatial technology and protecting off-world settlements. In addition, it also investigates sorcery, mythos cults, and conventional weapons of mass destruction, including chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. This broad mission provides agents with a large amount of freedom, but in most nations, OPS agents are specifically forbidden from investigating any incidents that are not directly related to their mandate and in many, OPS teams must be accompanied by members of local law enforcement or security organizations.

Almost anywhere across the globe, when an OPS operative shows their badge, most ordinary people un-

CONSPIRACY THEORISTS & THE TRUTH

Most of the general public has some knowledge of hyperspatial sorcery. Rumors of ghouls are found across the world. Great Old Ones and other hyperspatial entities are the stuff of vague urban myths; though stories about them persist, they are dismissed as conspiracy theories. So far, OPS has successfully kept these phenomena from the general public. However, there are always a few people willing to accept unlikely truths.

Fortunately, such people also often believe various paranoid fantasies, including ideas that various important political figures are disguised aliens. Stories of the serpent people and how they are secretly running the world are especially popular, as are stories about how various government leaders are part of exotic and terrible cults. There is a persistent rumor that Michael Jackson's death was actually a cover story for his transformation into a deep one. In their effort to keep certain truths from the general public, the OPS disinformation department makes careful use of the more outspoken conspiracy theorists, feeding them unattributed tidbits of information both completely false and sufficiently fantastic that no one who is not a dedicated conspiracy theorist will take it the least bit seriously. Discrediting conspiracy theory is harder than it used to be since the revelations of the 1980s, but enough bogus information fed in makes it impossible for most seekers to distinguish signal from noise.

Understand that there may be a serious threat that they are unprepared to handle. A few police officers or other emergency service personnel are willing to help the OPS operatives, but most work to help evacuate all civilians from the area and let the OPS operatives handle mythos dangers. The one downside of the publicity surrounding OPS efforts on Earth is that OPS agents openly investigating some location are widely regarded as evidence that there is some significant danger and OPS agents often must attempt to reassure the people that they are interacting with in order to prevent widespread panic.

REMAINING MYTHOS SECRETS

OPS's most secret and most controversial efforts are those aimed at keeping the few secrets that remained after the fall of the Soviet Union. Despite many other revelations, humanity as a whole does not know of the existence of the ghouls or of the hyperspatial intelligences

often referred to as the Great Old Ones. The public has read stories of the war between the elder ones and the Cthulhoids hundreds of millions of years ago. However, only those with a certain level of security clearance and a few skilled and secretive occultists know that the Cthulhoids are anything more than another alien species, or that they still maintain a very limited contact with Earth.

Also, while sorcery is publicly known, much of the public information about it is incorrect and OPS attempts to keep limit the spread of further information about sorcery. The motives for the OPS disinformation campaign are simple. The governments of the UN Security Council fear that revealing the truth would produce widespread panic and make the public curious about exceptionally dangerous topics. It's clear that ghouls attempt to kill or otherwise silence anyone who tries to publicize their existence, the Great Old Ones are both terrifying for most and horrifyingly tempting for a few, and as long as most people assume that sorcery requires large laboratories and complex devices, they are far less likely to experiment with it on their own.

Researchers into hyperspatial phenomena have repeatedly informed the UN Security Council that the fact that more than 90% of the world's population have no degree of Hyperspatial Exposure is one of the factors that helps to protect humanity from hyperspatial entities and phenomena. Some things cannot be unseen once seen, and OPS officials fear that informing the populace more thoroughly about hyperspatial entities or sorcery would create a tipping point. More people would investigate these phenomena, and thus significantly increase the exposed percentage of the population.

As a result, the OPS does not just protect humanity from alien interference; it does its best to keep some of the phenomena that it investigates and deals with secret. OPS agents use a variety of tools to maintain this secrecy. Although only used when absolutely necessary, the hypnoscope has proven very useful at helping to suppress information. This device is derived from Yithian technology that causes targets to forget various events and experiences. Agents do their best to conclude any interviews of civilians who have had contact with ghouls or hyperspatial intelligences with a hypnoscope session designed to suppress all of the subject's memories of unusual events, replacing these memories with various cover stories involving illegal alien-derived technology, hoaxes, and misperception. Hyperspatial Exposure cannot be reversed this way, of course, but people can go back to their daily lives.

In addition, some governments have provided OPS

with covert access to a wide variety of electronic databases, including the files of news organizations. As a result, OPS is sometimes able to erase electronic information on any story that it would prefer to not become public. When this happens, in the event that the breach was minor, reporters are fed information suggesting that their story was pulled for some innocuous reason; more major breaches lead to use of the hypnoscope. This level of electronic access also allows OPS agents to learn the location of most non-electronic pieces of evidence that they wish to suppress. Armed with this knowledge, OPS field agents can break into locations where this evidence is held and either steal it, or whenever possible, replace it with false evidence that points to another more mundane answer or is obviously fake.

Since OPS has such a serious ability to tamper with the population, the main check on its influence is the decision of when operatives are permitted to invoke these rules. Situations are reviewed before an ethical committee made up of former field operatives. If the situation is slow-moving, the committee gets to make a judgment call as to whether the OPS can employ disinformation and memory blocking; in more obvious or fast-paced cases, field operatives act now and account for their actions later. There are serious consequences for OPS operatives caught employing secrecy maneuvers for improper uses, and the organization is very careful about deciding which missions require these technologies and policies.

THE WORLD IN 2030

Advancing technology, contact with aliens, and the beginnings of interstellar exploration have all transformed world politics. As a result, 21st century politics are substantially different from 20th century politics. The following is a brief description of the most important nations in this setting.

MAJOR NATIONS

There are three major powers in 2030, China, the EU, and the United States. All three have space programs, all three are permanent members of the UN Security Council, and all three command a large share of the world's economic and military power. In addition, these three nations also have the three largest space programs.

CHINA

The severe poverty that afflicted China before 1990 is now a distant memory. China experienced a high degree

of economic growth during the 1990s and the early 21st century, and by 2020 was a fully developed nation. The quality of life in China from 2020 onward has been on par with the United States or the EU. However, China remains an authoritarian nation, where the government is largely non-democratic. The elected National People's Congress has more power than it did in the 20th century, but China's true leader remains the Premier, chosen by what is still called the communist party, but is no longer remotely communist in its policies.

The essentially authoritarian nature of China's government does not mean that the will and desires of the populace are ignored. The government uses everything from software that monitors the overall tone of online public opinion to websites where citizens can comment on government policies and major local and national issues. The result is a measure of public opinion that is relatively accurate and that the Chinese government takes into consideration when considering new policies, though the average citizen can only exert indirect influence.

Today, Chinese citizens remain guarded in their public discussions of politics, but have all of the lifestyle freedoms found in other developed nations, as well as a moderately high standard of living. Past pollution still plagues the land, but China has become a leader in sustainable energy. The government has imposed strict controls on factory emissions and runoff, and has taken heroic measures to remediate the underground coal fires which once pumped smog into the sky. China is also a major power in space colonization. They have a major colony on Mars and several large settlements outside the solar system. China's space program is in large part driven by the overall technological optimism of the populace. These colonies also serve as a useful social and political safety valve. As long as they pay modest taxes to China and respect the authority of visiting Chinese officials, once a Chinese off-world colony is fully established, the inhabitants have the right to elect their own government and make most of their own laws.

This policy has made the Chinese colonies a haven for dissidents and would-be rebels. The fact that individuals who have been convicted of all but the most minor crimes are not eligible for immigration to these colonies is widely believed to be one of the major reasons that so few Chinese dissidents openly defy their government. China also keeps crime and dissident activity in check through the use of ubiquitous public surveillance, which is recorded and monitored by sophisticated software to look for evidence of wrongdoing or unauthorized forms of dissent.

Unlike similar surveillance in the EU, recordings from the cameras and microphones found in most public locations are only accessible to authorized personnel, and unauthorized access to this data is a serious crime.

China is a member of the UN Security Council and is a strong supporter of OPS. The Chinese government is exceedingly strict when dealing with unlicensed sorcery, unauthorized contacts with aliens, possession for forbidden technology and similar crimes and have their own investigators who work closely with OPS agents to uncover any such problems. However, Interpol, OPS, and other international law enforcement personnel who enter China on official business are all required to wear miniature recording equipment to monitor their activities. While the Chinese government does not interfere with OPS activities within its borders, the government wishes to keep carefully track of OPS activities and does not hesitate to expel and censure OPS agents who involve themselves in local politics of any sort.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

Without question, the most prosperous world power is the EU, a confederation of most of the nations of Europe, as well as Turkey. The EU remains a leader in human rights as well having the highest overall standard of living in the world. However, the EU also has a relatively low birthrate and the median age of its population is higher than that of any nation except Japan. Although the EU is a leader in space exploration, it is well behind the US and China in colonizing space, and possesses only two extrasolar colonies.

Like China, the EU has embraced ubiquitous surveillance in all public places. However, unlike in China, most of these surveillance feeds are freely available to the public, although records are kept of who monitors what surveillance feeds, and OPS still has their back door. Law enforcement personnel throughout the EU are required to wear miniature cameras and microphones, which broadcast all of their activities and conversations on a secure band while they are on duty. Removing or tampering with these cameras is a serious crime. These recordings are only made public if there is an arrest or any sort of violent incident involving the law enforcement officials, and only after the case has been fully resolved. Although the EU has occasional problems with illegal sorcery, dangerous hyperspatial experiments, and secret corporate deals with aliens, most are swiftly resolved by local law enforcement before they become serious enough to require the presence of OPS agents. The EU is considered by OPS to be the most secure of the world powers on Earth.

THE UNITED STATES

After the dissolution of the former Soviet Union in 1985, the US was the most powerful nation on the planet, but by the end of the 20th century, its power had significantly waned. Problems began shortly after the Great Revelation of 1987 and the disillusionment and turnover of elected officials that followed. The American public was shocked and horrified to learn that the US government had been concealing the existence of alien beings for decades and that the US had signed a secret treaty with one of these alien species.

Even as the new policy of openness regarding alien life began, public trust in the government had suffered a major blow and though revolutions in electronics, medicine, and space travel created a global economic boom, the US economy grew less than that of most other developed countries, in large part due to a lingering lack of public confidence. Known as the post-revelation malaise, this distrust shaped US politics for the next 15 years. The US became more isolationist in its international affairs and while its space program continued to thrive, the US reduced its involvement in world affairs until the 21st century.

Today, the US is one of the few developed nations with significant restrictions on ubiquitous public surveillance, a resistance driven by the continued existence of, and public interest in, various anti-government groups ranging from libertarians and anarchists opposed to all privacy infringement to conspiracy theorists and "patriotic" rural white supremacists. These later groups tend to stockpile weapons; many of them strongly oppose the UN and OPS operatives, and the most extreme recruit sorcerers and attempt to make contact with aliens and ab-humans in an effort to obtain exotic weapons.

Fortunately, many of these efforts are sufficiently careless that they actually end up making contact with FBI or OPS agents posing as sorcerers or humans with connections to rogue aliens. However, these efforts occasionally pay off. OPS believes that some of the larger nationalist factions possess potentially dangerous alien artifacts or sorcerously created hyperspatial devices. In addition, there have been a few major incidents of terrorism, some directed against the US government and the rest against the UN and OPS agents in particular. Most involve conventional attacks with bombs, but two major incidents, one in 1995 and another in 2010 involved the use of hyperspatial weapons. In 1995, a government building in Oklahoma was opened to hyperspace using a Tillinghast device and a third of the workers were devoured. In 2010, half a dozen

servitors of the other gods were sent to wreak havoc in New York city's financial district.

Most other developed countries regard the US as a violent nation, with a murder rate five times the average for developed countries. In both Chinese and European media, American fanatics using hyperspatial weapons are common villains. However, OPS regards the various American radical groups as considerably less dangerous than the Russian criminal gangs.

Of US threats, corporations pose the greater danger to world security. Senior personnel from certain mid-sized US corporations have been arrested for making unlicensed deals with the mi-go. Also, although OPS has not been able to prove that several US-based transnational corporations regularly use sorcery to spy upon and on rare occasions to sabotage their competitors, many senior OPS officials are certain that these practices are frighteningly common.

Today, the US remains a large and powerful nation, but no more so than the EU, or China. Politically, the US remains slightly isolationist. Economic problems in the US contributed to the fact that both the EU and China have both taken the lead in new technologies since the beginning of the 21st century. However, the US space program remains a major source of national pride and NASA played a major role in the construction of the first dragonfly drive starship. Rivalry with the Chinese space program is intense and although trade and political relations between the US and China are extensive, many Americans regard the Chinese space effort as a threat to what they perceive as US dominance in space, a dominance that in actuality doesn't exist. The US does control the largest lunar colony as well as several large extra-solar settlements. All of these off-world settlements are regarded as US territories, with the same status as the earthly territories of Guam and Puerto Rico.

OTHER REGIONS

Countries of the rest of the world, while somewhat overshadowed by the nations which drive the world economy and space exploration, have their own influences and special qualities. Some of them are up-and-coming world powers in their own right.

AFRICA

The 21st century is when first-world prosperity finally began to reach the rest of the world. This statement is widely true, except in sub-Saharan Africa, which remains the poorest and least politically stable region on the planet. Large-scale Chinese investment has enabled Kenya,

Ethiopia, and South Africa to become significantly more stable and prosperous than they were in the 20th century, but they remain relatively poor nations, and most of the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa is far worse off. Most of the civil and international wars of the past 30 years have occurred in Africa. Several African nations have limited illegal contact with the mi-go, but OPS has no proof of these allegations and continues to investigate.

Continuing warfare in northern Sudan, as well as a brutal dictatorship in Liberia and a repressive Christian theocracy in Uganda have led to many calls for UN action in these nations. However, there is no clear evidence of OPS violations by any of these three governments. In the absence of such international crimes, the OPS is prohibited from taking action these either nations. Sending in a conventional UN peacekeeping force would require a vote by the General Assembly that was also passed by the Security Council, which is a far more difficult effort. So far, the only UN involvement in any of these three nations has been to send in medical aid, food, and relief workers. Some of the Northern parts of Africa are connected with the Islamic culture of the Middle East. Researchers believe the historical Sufi sorcery tradition may survive in Morocco and Egypt, in particular, though if so, it is largely underground.

BRAZIL & SOUTH AMERICA

South America is growing rapidly in political and economic power, and the local leader of this growth is Brazil, which is fairly economically advanced and has a small but growing space program. The Brazilian space program is less than 15 years old, with a single small extra-solar colony. However, Brazilian engineers and technicians form an important part of the far larger UN space effort. Brazil is a strong supporter of OPS and OPS rarely has reason to investigate problems in this nation. However, some of the less peaceful nations of Central and South America are a very different matter. The neighboring nation of Peru continues to be plagued with rebellions that verge on civil war, and the most powerful group of rebels have purchased hyperspatial weapons from Russian criminal gangs and North Korean arms dealers. These weapons have been used in almost a dozen separate attacks on Peruvian forces and on government buildings and officials. The troubles in Peru have been going on for the last 21 years and it remains both a hotspot for OPS activity and a general bogeyman in Brazilian mass media. Peru is also home to radical groups who continue to preach that aliens are demons and both sorcery and

psychic powers are tools of evil. These groups have been responsible for several attacks on Brazilian psi-link factories and aerospace firms.

INDIA

Like Brazil, India is a large, populous, and powerful nation that is not yet in the top tier of world powers. A decade ago, India launched its first starship and now has a single small colony. However, India is also deeply divided. Two thirds of the Indian populace have a middle class of living. The remainder live in dire poverty, including urban poor found in every Indian city and struggling rural populations in areas too remote and devoid of useful resources to be given significant aid by the Indian government. The Indian government would need to divert some resources to raise the standard of living for these people, and while progress is slowly being made, the decision-makers usually have more interest in supporting their local communities than in building new infrastructure, due somewhat to pragmatism and somewhat to the persistent influence of the caste system.

As a result, significant tensions arise between the poor and the rest of India's populace. These tensions are exacerbated by the fact that India is bordered on the east and west by Bangladesh and Pakistan, two nations that are much poorer and whose residents are jealous of India's wealth. Tensions between India and Pakistan remain high, and while Pakistan has no access to hyperspatial devices, there is evidence of at least two local terrorist groups using sorcery for attacks on both India and the Pakistani government. OPS carefully watches the situation between India and Pakistan, but all incidents involving proscribed magic and technology have been relatively minor.

JAPAN

Japan is unique in many ways, with the oldest average population on Earth, a negative birthrate for more than 35 years, and an intensely isolationist society that restricts almost all immigration. However, Japan also maintains a small space program. Japan is also the world leader in robotics, and almost all new Japanese houses and apartments come equipped with a wide array of complex commercial robots. Japanese extra-solar colonies are widely popular in Japan and are seen as a source of national pride. A substantial number of Japanese young people regard their nation as overly bound by tradition and politically rigid, and while some immigrate to other nations, most compete to immigrate to one of the Japanese extra-solar colonies. The examinations to obtain a place in one of these colonies are exceptionally difficult and

competitive and less than one in 100 people who takes these exams obtains a grade necessary to be approved for extra-solar immigration.

THE MIDDLE EAST

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran are the three wealthiest and most influential nations in the Middle East. Religious tensions between the first two and Iran are a major feature of Middle Eastern politics. This rivalry is made stronger by the fact that since the mid 1980s, oil has been increasingly less important to the global economy and the Middle East has sought other sources of income. Today, Saudi Arabia and the UAE largely rely upon a mixture of luxury tourism and outsourced jobs for their income.

Illegal mythos activity is relatively rare in the Middle East, because in most of the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, any use of sorcery or alien-derived biotechnology is a capital crime. Unfortunately, this policy also means that criminals, cultists, and dissidents who work with alien technology or hyperspatial sorcery openly enough to be caught are especially desperate and violent. Psi-links are legal in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE, but are regarded with suspicion by much of the population.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE engage in extensive international trade and thus are forced to fully cooperate with OPS investigations inside their borders, both nations require that all OPS agents be accompanied by at least one member of local law enforcement who serves to both limit and report on the activities of the OPS agent. The relatively liberal nations of Lebanon and Egypt both freely allow the use of psychic powers and all non-hyperspatial implants and both nations cooperate fully with the OPS. However, these nations must also deal with occasional religious violence from local and Saudi-funded opponents to these practices.

The only Middle Eastern nation with a space program is Iran, which has managed to combine a strict adherence to Islam and a religiously based democracy with a culture that has embraced psychic powers, augmentation, and hyperspatial technology. Since the Shah's death in 1980, Iran's government has been a coalition of progress-oriented engineers and Muslim religious figures who wish to place a Muslim nation at the forefront of scientific and technical achievement. Iran is a moderately wealthy nation, but its space program remains relatively small because regularly threats by Saudi Arabia and the UAE force it to spend large amounts on national defense. Iran has a single extra-solar colony, and is preparing to found a second colony.

There is some evidence for a Sufi historical tradition of sorcery: certain famous grimoires appear to originate in Arabic, though their exact provenance is uncertain. OPS monitoring has observed that most independent sorcerers in the Middle East remain in less restrictive countries and keep their work private. Most of these sorcerers seem to regard sorcery as a spiritual endeavor rather than a quest for power, meaning both that they are less likely to pose trouble as miscreants and that there may be a larger underground here than the OPS knows.

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

The decline in wealth of most Middle Eastern nations significantly reduced their defense budgets, and thus Israel has faced few military threats since the late 1980s. Instead, their economy underwent a strong but controversial push toward the goal of extra-solar colonization, and with the help of the United States space program, Israel founded a small, semi-independent colony on Eridanos in 2007. Many Israeli youth immediately immigrated to the colony, known as Emek Emet: “the valley of truth.” The old-guard regard its inhabitants somewhat derisively for their *yerida* or “descent” from Israel. The colonists, on the other hand, arrived at another position after much rabbinical debate: Israel may be the homeland of the Jewish people on Earth, but Adonai created all the worlds, and other sacred cities have existed in the past, so what is to say that the valley they now occupy is not a new sacred homeland?

Emek Emet’s founding took much pressure off. Today, Israel is a divided nation that includes a small and impoverished Palestinian homeland, which is nominally independent. Israel is now a moderately isolationist nation that maintains significant commercial ties to the United States, but has little force in international politics.

RUSSIA

The USSR fell in 1986. Some of its smaller countries took on EU membership or independent governance; any hope of a renewed Russian empire is long gone. Russia today is a relatively poor nation, with a rigid authoritarian hierarchy engaged in a complex struggle with local organized criminal gangs. The largest of these gangs regularly challenge government authority and openly flaunt laws governing smuggling, possession of military hardware, and taxation. However, equally often, the larger of these gangs work with the Russian government, helping the government uncover and suppress dissidents and would-be reformers. The Russian government also regularly attempts to play

the larger criminal gangs against one another.

The result of all of these struggles is a nation where the central government is harsh, but often ineffective. In some towns and city neighborhoods, the populace bribes the local criminal gangs for protection from rival gangs and also to force tax collectors to accept lower payments. In other towns and city neighborhoods, residents pay bribes to representatives from the central government for protection from the criminal gangs. The bleak industrial cities located in the more remote portions of Siberia have essentially no central governance and must occasionally contend with small bands of rural bandits.

Russia’s urban upper class is relatively large, wealthy, and insulated from these troubles. Everyone else suffers various forms of oppression by both the criminal gangs and the central government. In order to recruit foreign investment and allow residents to gain technical education not available locally, Russia has relatively open borders, and a relatively large number of residents emigrate both to other nations and to interstellar colonies. Russia started several small extrasolar settlements and one Martian city, all of which have since declared their independence from Russia and often allied themselves with other nations.

The Russian government claims to support the OPS. To avoid the sort of international censure that would harm international investment, the government reluctantly cooperates with OPS agents. However, Russia is also widely known to be a haven for rogue sorcerers, mythos cultists, and especially for people making illegal contact with aliens and performing unlicensed experiments with hyperspatial technologies and alien artifacts. Several of the large Russian criminal gangs are believed to have contacts with migo or deep one criminals, and a few smaller gangs have limited deals with the local ghouls.

In the more lawless regions of Russia, sorcery is just another commodity available for the right price. As long as the Russian government is paid off appropriately, cities are not over-run with servitors of the other gods, and OPS doesn’t obtain sufficient evidence to charge the Russian government with crimes against humanity, this situation continues. Every year, OPS agents are sent on more missions to Russia than to both the EU and China combined, though most of the problems in Russia are either relatively minor or portrayed as minor by officials of the Russian government. Some of these officials are brutally efficient at cleaning up mythos “situations” in advance of OPS intervention.

PAST AND PRESENT DANGEROUS NATIONS

Myanmar was the first major test of the power of the OPS and of the UN as a whole, while both North Korea and Pakistan are considered by the OPS to be the two greatest current threats to world peace and safety. Both North Korea and Pakistan forbid all UN personnel, including OPS agents from entering and both nations deny that they have ever had any trouble with mythos entities or dangerous technologies.

MYANMAR/BURMA AND THE UN INVASION

This small Southeast Asian nation has been a test case for the power and effectiveness of OPS and the UN in general. In 1999, OPS investigators gained evidence that the so-called "Generals" in charge of Myanmar were using hyperspatial weapons against mountain rebels, in an effort to gain control of the nation's thriving heroin trade. Satellite photos revealed that several mountain villages in the remote Shan State had been utterly destroyed, and a single blurry image revealed a servitor of the other gods crawling into the jungle. At this point, more than two dozen large, heavily equipped OPS teams infiltrated Myanmar. Half of them neutralized the sorcerous threat in the mountains of Shan State, while the rest used a mixture of advanced technology and hyperspatial gates to abduct most of the leaders of the ruling military junta and bring them to trial before the United Nations court.

Immediately after the "Generals" were apprehended, 50,000 UN troops marched into Myanmar on a mission to restore order, prepare for the creation of a new national government, and finish arresting the previous leaders. Almost half of Myanmar's army joined forces with the UN troops, while the rest fled into the nation's eastern jungles, led by the nation's remaining military leaders. The UN organized a military campaign to capture the remaining leaders and defeat their forces. The Myanmar War was fought using a combination of conventional weapons and sorcery, with the most powerful and dangerous magics all being used by sorcerers working with the remaining junta members.

The war continued until mid 2002, when the last member of the Junta was captured and the remaining local military forces surrendered. The name "Myanmar", associated with the former rulers, was abandoned at this point. From 2002 to 2006, Burma was under UN rule, and

then in 2007, the UN helped the nation hold its first free elections held since the military take-over in 1962. The Myanmar War remains a divisive issue to many people across the planet. The overall mission was a success, and today Burma is considerably more free and prosperous than it was before the war. However, more than 70,000 people died in the three year war to defeat the remaining junta loyalists. Also, radical nationalist groups across the planet, especially those in the United States, look upon the UN invasion of Myanmar as a possible harbinger to other efforts at national conquest by the UN. Partly due to this incident, most nations are reluctant to authorize the use of UN troops except when OPS laws are being violated by a national government.

NORTH KOREA

North Korea is ruled by the absolute dictator Kim Jong-Il, who at 89 is widely believed to be kept alive through the use of advanced medicines that are otherwise illegal in North Korea. All psychic powers and psychic technologies are illegal in North Korea, except when used by the government, which is known to employ both sorcerers and psychics. Much of North Korea's small amount of foreign trade consists of illegal shipments of conventional weapons. There are also many rumors that this nation manufactures nuclear, chemical, and hyperspatial weaponry, but in the absence of any proof, the OPS cannot act. North Korea is known to use sorcerous wards to prevent any sort of hyperspatial spying on various installations, which is one factor that has prevented the OPS from obtaining sufficient evidence to act against this nation. Covert OPS reconnaissance teams periodically attempt to infiltrate various installations in North Korea, but most fail, and the rest simply vanish and are presumed dead.

PAKISTAN

In contrast to North Korea's authoritarianism, Pakistan is a fragmented nation locked in perpetual conflict. The central portions of the nation are ruled by a brutal military government and the rest of Pakistan is controlled by more than a dozen feuding warlords who are united only by their hatred of the central government. This state of affairs has continued for the last 28 years. There are many rumors that both sides possess hyperspatial weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, but neither side wishes any foreign interference.

The only thing that the warlords and the central government hate more than each other is India. The OPS and Indian intelligence agencies carefully monitor possible

threats of hyperspatial weapons or other weapons of mass destruction being readied for use against India. Both the Pakistani government and the warlords are suspected of various acts of terrorism against targets in India. However, lack of proof, combined with the fact that these acts have so far only involved the use of conventional weapons keeps the OPS from being able to act against Pakistan, just of fear of open warfare with Pakistan keeps the Indian government from any form of direct retaliation.

THREATS AND DANGERS IN 2030

The OPS strives to protect humanity from dangers like the following. Although the OPS is regularly called to deal with threats of chemical, biological, or nuclear terrorism or unapproved research into such weapons, much of their work involves dealing with alien threats, mythos cults, hyperspatial sorcery, or threats to the off-world colonies.

ALIEN THREATS

OPS agents are responsible for keeping the treaties with the deep ones and mi-go. They also investigate possible incursions by the other aliens and ab-human beings. This enforcement largely amounts to making certain that humans and aliens who are willing to defy existing treaties and make illegal deals are swiftly found and punished. OPS agents are sometimes called upon to deal with especially problematic bands of ghouls. These efforts usually require killing the ringleaders while also making certain to avoid anything that draws attention to the ghouls' existence and to avoid killing more ghouls than is absolutely necessary. OPS knows that ghouls tolerate attacks on the most ambitious and aggressive of their number, but fears that excessive violence could lead to a wave of disappearances among humans in the area, as the ghouls retaliate.

OPS agents must also occasionally deal with simpler and more direct alien threats. Some are obvious, like flying polyps that break free from the ancient wards containing them and seek to feed upon humanity before departing for the far reaches of space. When evidence of such activity is discovered, an OPS strike team is not far behind. The OPS deals with humans who have been mutated into mad and dangerous monsters by high-level hyperspatial exposure in the same fashion.

Armed with powerful weapons and occasionally hyperspatial sorcery or hyperspatial devices, the OPS can deal with most alien or ab-human foes, but some such foes cause significant destruction and loss of life before they can be destroyed or forced to flee the planet. OPS strike teams that

attack dangerous aliens and ab-humans have the highest mortality rate among Earth-based OPS groups. Discovering some aliens and ab-humans can be at least as difficult as defeating them. Serpent people are rare, but use illusions to pass as human. The smartest and most dangerous serpent people excel at avoiding cameras, and use their powers to secretly control the people around them.

Also, in space, OPS agents must deal with incidents where moonbeast (see p. 222) activity is suspected. As experts at hiding and working through intermediaries, moonbeasts are difficult foes to face. Fortunately, they are also the only species that humanity is engaged in ongoing active hostilities with. Regardless of the type of alien or ab-human threat, OPS strike teams work to evacuate civilians from the location, while also either destroying the threat or containing it until additional strike teams can bring in larger and deadlier weapons.

MYTHOS CULTS

One of the most destructive and dangerous ways that humanity can interact with aliens or hyperspatial entities is by forming cults and worshiping or serving these beings. Although aliens are now common trading partners, in the past humans who encountered aliens often worshiped them because they assumed that all non-humans must be divine or demonic. While this is no longer the case, hyperspatial entities still have a strong power differential in their interactions with humans, usually leading to conditions of servitude.

Today the vast majority of mythos cults serve various hyperspatial entities rather than commonplace aliens. Cthulhu, in particular, periodically maintains sufficient wakefulness and connection to the physical world to be able to send dreams and visions to sensitive individuals. Other hyperspatial entities, including Flying Polyps and other Great Old Ones, also occasionally attempt to suborn humans in the same fashion. Most sane individuals ignore dreams and vision sent by hyperspatial beings. At most, the majority of humans would either seek therapy or take up the use of sleeping pills. However, someone with a mildly unstable mind can become fascinated with visions of ancient and terrible wonders and inhuman dimensions. Others are filled with the hope that the monstrous being that contacted them can fulfill some difficult or impossible desire, or become terrified of these visions and the beings sending them and do their bidding in an effort to attempt to appease the entity.

Some people join mythos cults not because they have had any direct contact with any alien entities, but simply

because they are convinced to do so by existing members of the cult. Cults that grow large enough to recruit people with no direct connection to mythos entities are rare, but are also the most powerful and long lasting of these cults. Often, the leaders of such large cults have had extensive contact with the being the cult worships, and may no longer be fully human.

These leaders often have ways to introduce new members to the worshiped entity, either via telepathic contact, where the leader imparts visions and their often insane motives to the recruit, or via forbidden and blasphemous rites that summon the being into the minds of new members. The most dangerous cults of all are where the leader or leaders are not merely in close contact with hyperspatial entities, but are also skilled sorcerers. Occasionally, careless sorcerers succumb to the call of various hyperspatial entities, and equally often, such entities teach sorcery to their favored servants to increase those servants' effectiveness.

NON-RELIGIOUS SERVANTS

The term cult can be misleading. Actually worshipping hyperspatial entities or aliens is far from the only way to interact with them. Some individuals feel no reverence for these beings and are not attempting to free Cthulhu or otherwise allow various hyperspatial entities to attempt to conquer the Earth or rule humanity. Instead, these people seek to serve their own selfish ends, and find the aid that mythos entities provide to be invaluable. In most of these cases, a single individual is contacted by a hyperspatial entity or an alien, which asks the person for help. These requests can be anything from vague and disturbing dreams of R'lyeh, to a chance meeting with a rogue mi-go. Regardless of the nature of the encounter, the entity requests aid and offers some payment in return. A deep one might sink a ship or provide sorcerous aid. A ghoul might break into an underground structure and steal something or kill someone. The mi-go often offer useful technology. A hyperspatial entity could drive a rival insane, or could provide precise visions of some location or time, providing the person with information that they otherwise could never obtain.

However, to attain this reward, the person must first perform some useful service: stealing or unearthing some ancient artifact and presenting it to the mythos entity, performing some exotic rite to help Cthulhu temporarily gain more awareness and ability to influence humanity, helping cover up evidence of forbidden activities by deep ones or mi-go, or some similar action.

Occasionally, the service is a onetime affair, where the

entity needs some immediate assistance and offers to pay for it. More often, both the mythos entity and the person find the arrangement to be useful, and so the mythos entity now has a human servant. OPS always describes these deals as the human serving the mythos creature, because in almost all cases that is precisely what happens. Humans who make deals with Great Old Ones or even lesser hyperspatial entities like flying polyps are dealing with creatures who regard humans as at best useful, non-sentient vermin and which excel at using vermin as their pawns. Physical beings like deep ones, ghouls, or mi-go are obviously on a more human level. However, deep ones and mi-go willing to break their treaties with humanity are especially inclined to view humans as lesser beings worthy only of being used, and many ghouls regard humans who work with them as potential prey who may outlive their usefulness at any time.

Over time, these transactions make people willing to go increasingly far in aiding their inhuman masters, and commit serious and sometimes heinous crimes in return for useful rewards. This is especially true when the person is serving a hyperspatial being, since repeated exposure to this being changes the person and may eventually destroy their sanity and transform their mind and even their body into something completely inhuman.

This relationship can also expand to include others. While most servants of mythos entities prefer to keep the nature of their motivations secret and to hire unknowing assistants to help them accomplish their master's commands, sometimes the requests are sufficiently unusual that the only way to gain assistance is to find others willing to serve their inhuman master. The resulting cabal consists of the board of directors of a powerful corporation or the members of an alliance of politicians or business owners more often than it resembles a religious sect. However, the group's actions are quite similar to those of an actual mythos cult; only the reasons and rationalizations are different. Instead of enacting the will of their deity or the directives of an unchangeable fate, these "cultists" seek to serve their own ends, but are more than willing to provide aid to malignant inhuman creatures in order to accomplish their goals.

Some of these individuals justify their behavior because they refrain from committing murder or other severely immoral acts. When the OPS discovers the servant of a mythos entity who has not committed serious crimes, they may erase the person's memory of the incident, but are unlikely to impose more serious penalties. Occasionally, such individuals have been recruited into OPS if psychological

testing proves them to suitable candidates. The desire to deal with nonhuman creatures is not itself evil, after all; the particular entities a person deals with, and their motivations, may be, but not everyone who follows such a path does it in full knowledge of the consequences.

When individuals are found to be complicit with deep ones or mi-go who are breaking the treaties that both species have with humanity, OPS agents also attempt to apprehend, or at least identify, the deep one or mi-go criminals and their superiors, then share this information with representatives of the appropriate species. On a few occasions, OPS agents have been in the odd position of working with deep ones or, more rarely, mi-go agents who are also charged with apprehending treaty-breakers. This extended cooperation is rarely easy or comfortable, but can lead to the OPS agents learning far more about the species involved; some especially curious agents sign on for this work preferentially.

Even the most moral individuals can find their morality changing along with their psychological stability when they work with hyperspatial entities, however. Continued exposure to hyperspatial energies, especially if the person is in regular psychic contact with the entity, eventually transforms the individual into an insane and inhuman monster. When the OPS apprehends a cultist or servant of these entities who has committed serious crimes, the person is subject to either imprisonment or lengthy psychological rehabilitation – if it is not too late for them entirely.

THE GOALS & ACTIVITIES OF CULTS

Regardless of whether people serve mythos entities from selfish greed, misplaced reverence, or fear, these entities find a variety of uses for human cultists and servants. Ordinary aliens and inhuman beings like the deep ones, mi-go, or ghouls all have relatively simple and obvious needs. They order or pay their human cultists or servants to acquire useful artifacts or eliminate individuals who interfere with their plans. Hyperspatial beings are far less comprehensible. Great Cthulhu has the obvious goal of wishing to regain its freedom, while others wish for greater power, domination of the Earth, or similar goals, but their methods of accomplishing these goals rarely seem straightforward.

Some hyperspatial entities seek to cause large-scale catastrophes like earthquakes or nuclear explosions in order to either feed off the power of the event and the energy of the deaths caused – or because these events in some way alter the local structure of hyperspace in ways that benefit the entity. Other hyperspatial beings order their human servants to acquire powerful magical arti-

facts, assemble at some magically potent site, and perform an exotic ritual. While some of these rituals have obvious goals like allowing the creature, or more often one of its servants to temporarily manifest, other rituals have no obvious effect, but may eventually grant the creature greater access to Earth.

The most terrible and ambitious plans involve several large cults performing rituals at widely separated locations, with the goal of changing the local structure of hyperspace in profound and occasionally lasting ways. Even without intervention by OPS agents, most rituals designed to make permanent or long-lasting effects on the structure of hyperspace have little or no chance of success. Restructuring hyperspace is exceptionally difficult and even the most powerful hyperspatial beings have great difficulty in reliably making such changes. However, the OPS attempts to stop these rituals, both because of the terrible consequences of an unlikely success and because the rituals involved often involve human sacrifice and other equally unpleasant activities.

Sometimes these rituals have short term effects as well. One ritual performed in 1916 caused hundreds of thousands of people in Europe and America to fall prey to a mysterious illness that produced coma-like sleep, sometimes for decades. Occult scholars now know that the minds of these victims drifted into hyperspace, where they were gradually devoured or fed upon by Cthulhu. Similarly, a group of very powerful servitors of the other gods was summoned in San Francisco in 1953. The actions of these beings caused a temporary ripple in the local fabric of hyperspace that for the next two days caused more than 300 people in the city to accidentally wander into hyperspace, where they were devoured by its hungry denizens. Many OPS researchers also worry that if repeated often enough, some rituals designed to make major changes in hyperspace might actually succeed.

According to one theory, Cthulhu is working to undo the effects of the Elder Weapon by periodically contacting minds and inducing cultists to perform various rituals. Each ritual has no noticeable effect, but hundreds of these rituals performed over the course of thousands of years may give Cthulhu greater access to the Earth. OPS researchers have no proof that this theory is true, but most operatives tend to act as if it were, since ignoring this possibility could be disastrous.

OPS RESPONSE TO CULTS

Human cooperation with aliens or ab-humans outside the boundaries of appropriate contact is a serious problem, but

most humans involved are regarded as ordinary criminals or misguided dupes and dealt with accordingly. The result of most illegal human-alien cooperation rarely amounts to more than theft, and perhaps some property damage. Murders happen, but are relatively rare. The OPS is eager to stop such efforts, especially if lives are at risk, but considers a single team of operatives more than sufficient to handle most such problems. However, cases where humans serve major hyperspatial entities are considered to be among the most serious threats that OPS faces.

Because of the great danger posed by any interaction with hyperspatial entities, and the fact that humans working with them may include powerful and possibly deranged or mutated sorcerers, OPS moves swiftly and cautiously when dealing with these groups. Unless they suspect a group to be on the verge of a major effort, OPS protocols dictate that any such cult be observed carefully, to determine the group's size and influence, how serious a threat it represents and whether it has ties to any other similar groups.

SAFEGUARDING SPACE

OPS also operates away from Earth. Some off-world OPS operatives spend most of their time exploring new worlds, identifying those that are safe for colonization or other forms of use. They also determine which worlds and which alien species pose threats for humanity. Others monitor and protect off world bases and colonies. These operatives visit the various human colonies and investigate any problems or threats that fall within their mandate. They examine newly discovered alien artifacts, look into evidence of unlicensed contact with alien intelligences, and track the use of sorcery or alien technology by the inhabitants of the colony. However, all off-world OPS operatives must be prepared to perform any and all off-world duties.

OFF-WORLD CULTS

One of the most difficult aspects of OPS off-world operations is uncovering and dealing with mythos cults on alien worlds. That fact that many settlements are both small and isolated means that given the correct circumstances, a mythos cult can rapidly spread to most or all of the inhabitants, and it may have done so weeks or months before any OPS operatives arrive. Full-size colonies are mildly at risk; the danger of such cults appearing is highest in remote bases like biological research stations, archeological sites, and mining and resource extraction facilities, most of which have a total population of less than 100. Many of these bases are located on recently discovered worlds which have not been fully explored. In such circumstances,

the discovery of an alien artifact with psychological effects, contact by a hyperspatial entity, or the presence of a secret sorcerer who already has begun worshipping some mythos entity can cause a small off-world settlement to become entirely caught up in the cult in a few weeks or less. If the cult spreads to enough of the inhabitants, those who oppose it can be imprisoned or killed.

The appeal of these cults is the same as the appeal of mythos cults to people on Earth: wealth, power, protection, revenge, and safety remain the most common motives. However, such cults can arise in isolated off-world settlements more easily than they can on Earth. The profound isolation of living on an alien world for months or years at a time, combined with the fact that the inhabitants have few protections from contact with hyperspatial entities, renders smaller settlements and bases uniquely vulnerable to such problems. When such incidents occur, the story released to the general public usually tells of a research base destroyed by natural disaster; any who have survived undergo rehabilitation and usually have their memories altered.

POLICING THE STARS

One of the unofficial duties of OPS agents who visit off-world colonies is general law enforcement. Officially, every off-world settlement is supposed to take care of its own law enforcement. The large permanent colonies have their own courts, while the many small temporary settlements, like research bases, are supposed to send serious offenders back to Earth for trial. However, the dynamics of isolated settlements are well known; prejudice and the urge towards frontier justice can cause serious problems. Powerful and popular residents of small settlements can easily have their offenses overlooked, while unpopular and low status inhabitants make convenient scapegoats for various crimes and misfortunes.

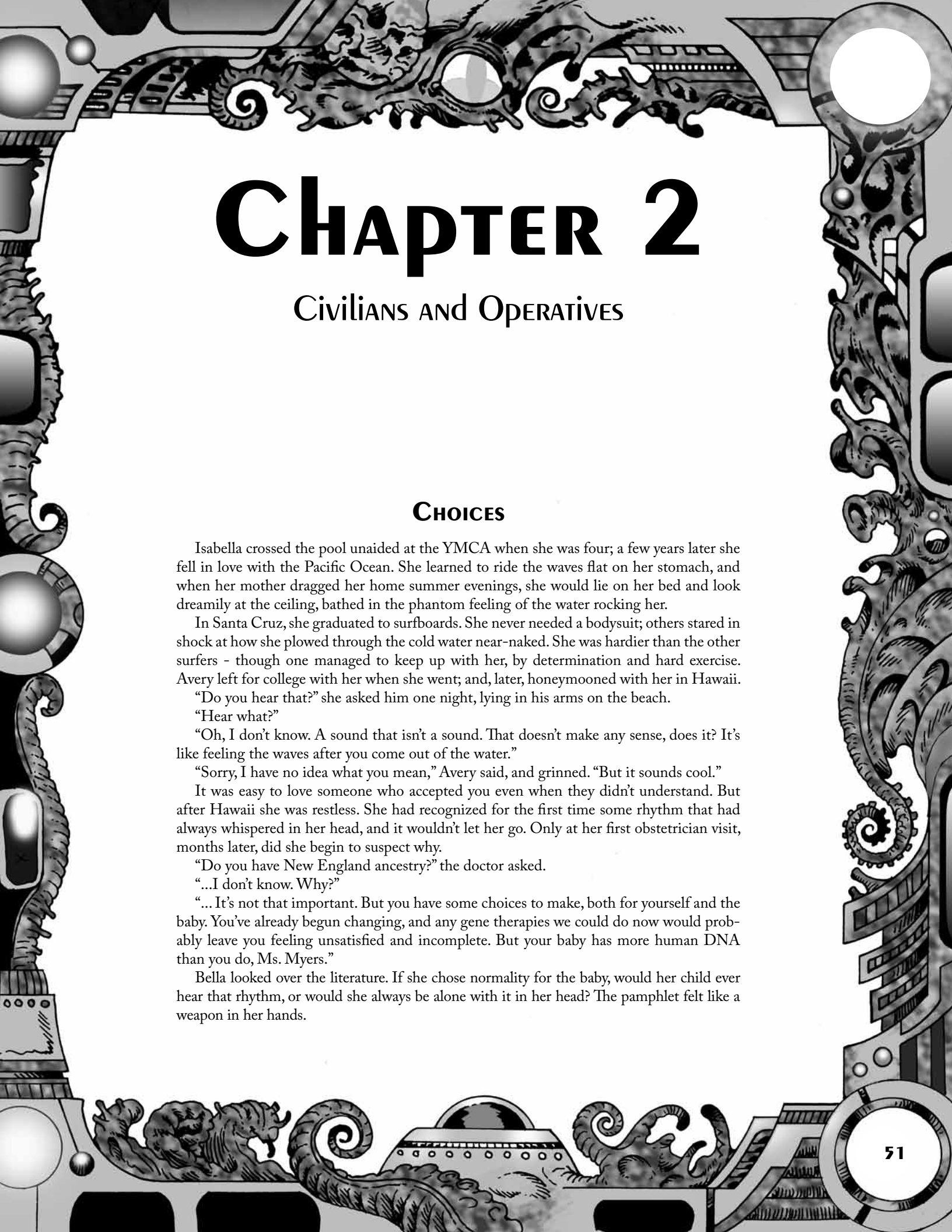
Because such problems occasionally arise, OPS agents visiting off-world settlements typically take on the unofficial responsibility of attempting to prevent gross miscarriages of justice. Although OPS agents have no official power to enforce their decisions, OPS agents can carry reports back to the proper authorities and can make citizens' arrests. More importantly, only the most desperate or hardened criminals are willing to harm or kill OPS agents, and faced with the possibility of their actions being reported, the inhabitants of many settlements go along with the OPS agents' recommendations to avoid a full-scale investigation by Earthly authorities.



I learned of chapters in human history whose existence no scholar of today has ever suspected. Most of these writings were in the language of the hieroglyphs; which I studied in a queer way with the aid of droning machines, and which was evidently an agglutinative speech with root systems utterly unlike any found in human languages.... On waking, I could recall only minute and meaningless scraps of the unknown tongues which my dream-self had mastered, though whole phrases of the history stayed with me...

I talked with the mind of Nug-Soth, a magician of the dark conquerors of 16,000 A.D.; with that of a Roman named Titus Sempronius Blaesus, who had been a quaestor in Sulla's time; with that of Khephnes, an Egyptian of the 14th Dynasty, who told me the hideous secret of Nyarlathotep, with that of a priest of Atlantis' middle kingdom; with that of a Suffolk gentleman of Cromwell's day, James Woodville; with that of a court astronomer of pre-Inca Peru; with that of the Australian physicist Nevil Kingston-Brown, who will die in 2,518 A.D.; with that of an archimage of vanished Yhe in the Pacific; with that of Theodotides, a Greco-Bactrian official Of 200 B.C.; with that of an aged Frenchman of Louis XIII's time named Pierre-Louis Montagny; with that of Crom-Ya, a Cimmerian chieftain of 15,000 B.C.; and with so many others that my brain cannot hold the shocking secrets and dizzying marvels I learned from them.

H.P. Lovecraft – *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*



CHAPTER 2

CIVILIANS AND OPERATIVES

CHOICES

Isabella crossed the pool unaided at the YMCA when she was four; a few years later she fell in love with the Pacific Ocean. She learned to ride the waves flat on her stomach, and when her mother dragged her home summer evenings, she would lie on her bed and look dreamily at the ceiling, bathed in the phantom feeling of the water rocking her.

In Santa Cruz, she graduated to surfboards. She never needed a bodysuit; others stared in shock at how she plowed through the cold water near-naked. She was harder than the other surfers - though one managed to keep up with her, by determination and hard exercise. Avery left for college with her when she went; and, later, honeymooned with her in Hawaii.

"Do you hear that?" she asked him one night, lying in his arms on the beach.

"Hear what?"

"Oh, I don't know. A sound that isn't a sound. That doesn't make any sense, does it? It's like feeling the waves after you come out of the water."

"Sorry, I have no idea what you mean," Avery said, and grinned. "But it sounds cool."

It was easy to love someone who accepted you even when they didn't understand. But after Hawaii she was restless. She had recognized for the first time some rhythm that had always whispered in her head, and it wouldn't let her go. Only at her first obstetrician visit, months later, did she begin to suspect why.

"Do you have New England ancestry?" the doctor asked.

"...I don't know. Why?"

"... It's not that important. But you have some choices to make, both for yourself and the baby. You've already begun changing, and any gene therapies we could do now would probably leave you feeling unsatisfied and incomplete. But your baby has more human DNA than you do, Ms. Myers."

Bella looked over the literature. If she chose normality for the baby, would her child ever hear that rhythm, or would she always be alone with it in her head? The pamphlet felt like a weapon in her hands.

HERO MAKING

Creating characters is the most important step in setting up a roleplaying game. The quality of the characters makes or breaks a Series. A good Series requires interesting characters, characters that also fit the theme of the series.

The Director should guide players through character creation, starting by introducing main setting ideas and the needs of the Series. A Series composed of relatively ordinary people stumbling into increasingly strange and exotic situations is going to require very different characters from one where the characters are part of a monster-hunting OPS strike team, a group of psychics, sorcerers, and researchers who study of ancient occult mysteries, or a team of heroic space explorers.

There's no single right way for a group to create characters or for a Director to tell players about the Series. Some Directors have a general idea and just see what people come up with, leaving things wide open for the players. Most Directors provide some guidance, but this can be anything from asking players to create a group of space explorers who can be civilians or OPS agents to asking the players to create characters who have had some experience with the Cthulhu Mythos and who have a personal connection to at least one other character. While players should create characters in collaboration with their Director, some gaming groups prefer doing this with everyone together and talking about their characters, while others prefer their characters to be created away from the other players and for characters to have secrets that the other players don't know.

Also, remember that different sorts of characters are appropriate for different sorts of Series. If the Series is all about people who have never had contact with Mythos aliens and hyperspace encountering these things up close for the first time, starting out with four levels in sorcery and half a dozen spells simply isn't appropriate. Playing someone who is a hybrid ghoul or deep one also may not be, unless the character has no clue what they really are and only later finds out why one of their parents vanished when they were a very young child.

Working with your Director is an important part of this process. There can be a thin line between a Director placing too many limits on what people want to play and players making choices that are seriously incompatible with the sort of Series the Director has in mind. In a Series that's supposed to consist of heroic defenders of humanity, playing a secret serial killer who worships Cthulhu likely isn't the best choice, unless the Director feels

the group will be comfortable with that sort of tension. The goal here is to have every player, and the Director, be happy and comfortable with their character. A player less than satisfied with their character will have less fun, and a Director uncomfortable with player characters will have trouble making the fun happen – so a little bit of give and take on both sides is sometimes needed to make everything work out for the best.

Chapter Seven: Storytelling Hints provides Directors with advice for developing an *Eldritch Skies* RPG Series and storyline-appropriate characters. Both players and Directors should read through this chapter first. It contains sections on various casting choices. Before creating new Heroes, consider the basic concepts behind them. What kind of role will the worthy play? An ex-cat burglar who is now an OPS infiltration specialist, a hard-bitten strike team commando, an eccentric psychic, a brilliant physicist who is also a skilled sorcerer? Look to espionage, space opera and action movies and TV series for inspiration or come up with original concepts. If inspiration is lacking, remember that sometimes the concept behind the Hero develops after character creation, in the course of the game. In that case, just get all the numbers down and do a basic personality sketch for now.

Sources of inspiration for new characters include movies, TV shows, comics, and novels. Want to have your favorite movie action hero to fight Cthulhu? If the Director approves, then feel free to do so. Some characters work better than others, of course. Brave and heroic characters like soldiers, spies, explorers, and daredevil archeologists usually work best. Mainstream television characters with a tweak here and there might make interesting Heroes. An outlandish cartoon character or a gonzo kung-fu master might not transfer all that well, unless the game explicitly crosses over into these genres.

Instead of creating a character from scratch, players can also use ready-made Archetypes (see p. 86-96). They are pre-generated Heroes that can be customized and thrown into action with little or no work. Just check out the meaning of terms and numbers (see p. 53) to understand the characters' abilities.

ASSIGNING CHARACTERS

One option is for the Director to create the Cast and then have players pick from that "short list." The Director can then work the characters' backgrounds and talents into the plotline in a coherent way. This can lead to stunning plot twists, but this option puts more responsibility on the Director, who makes all the casting calls. If he or she guesses

wrong about certain player reactions, it might require serious scrambling later on. Some players may not get the characters they want, and might feel deprived of the right to play their own creations. Remember, Directors run the show but if a particular scheme doesn't work, the Director should be open to changing it – or the group should be willing to switch Directors.

THE CREATION PROCESS

The UNISYSTEM uses a “point system” to create characters. Players “buy” different abilities by spending character points. The better or more powerful a characteristic is, the more “expensive” it is. Some negative features, known as Drawbacks, give rather than cost points. They have a negative value—by acquiring them, the character gains a higher total of ability points. Keep in mind, of course, that Drawbacks limit or hurt characters in some way, so loading them on carelessly is not a good idea.

Not everything is based on points though. Some character elements are creativity-driven: character concept (what kind of person she is) and personality, as well as her name and history. These all come from the player, without the need for any points or mechanics.

THE CHARACTER ELEMENTS

Characters in the *Eldritch Skies RPG* have four basic elements. Some elements are conceptual (what kind of character is this?) while others are numerical attributes (what are the character's actual abilities?). As you make each selection, you narrow down the possibilities of the character, until you finally have a clearly defined fictional individual ready to go out and start throwing his weight around.

1. **Type:** The Character Type determines the general power level and nature of your character. Operatives are seriously tough and skilled. Civilians are cut-above people who depend on their wits and luck to survive. Veterans are really powerful and impressive.
2. **Attributes:** Your character's natural abilities, both mental and physical.
3. **Qualities and Drawbacks:** The innate advantages or penalties the affect your character.
4. **Skills:** Your character's training and learned abilities.

THE CHARACTER SHEET

Attributes: The measure of how strong, fast, and smart the character is. The human average is 2, and 6 is the maximum for an unaugmented human.

Skills: The character's knowledge and training. A competent martial artist has Brawling Skill 4; one of the OPS' best commandos may have an 8 or a 9.

Qualities and Drawbacks: The character's upsides and downsides. Is a character unusually attractive, psychic, or somewhat paranoid? Benefits costs points; flaws give points.

Life Points: How much damage a character can take before they are at, or beyond, death's door.

Speed: How fast the character can run (in kilometers per hour).

Drama Points: In cinematic and pulp Series (see p. 244-45), these are what separate the Heroes from ordinary people. Drama points allow a character to function like an action movie hero and not merely someone with a gun and some possibly misplaced courage.

Success Level Chart: A quick reference for just how impressive a character is at what they do. Look at the chart to see if your character was mindblowingly impressive or merely OK.

Combat Maneuver Table: The bonus added to the character's moves and the damage his attacks do. Add Success Levels to the damage.

CHARACTER TYPE

Creating a character involves allocating a number of points to various aspects. Character Type determines how many points you have to “spend” on each character component, while also defining what sort of character you have.

OPERATIVES

The Operative category includes highly trained agents who either work for OPS or in a similar capacity for a government. Spies, special forces soldiers, and FBI agents are all Operatives. Operatives also include characters who had such training but now work free-lance, as well as the occasional powerful sorcerer. Use this Character Type for people who know their way around the Cthulhu Mythos and typically have some special edge. Tough special ops soldiers who “get the mission done”, powerful and highly skilled sorcerers, brilliant engineering polymaths, and highly experienced psychic investigators are examples of this type of character. Every OPS operative is by definition an Operative, hence the name.

Attribute Points: 20

Quality Points: 20

Drawback Points: up to 10

Skill Points: 30

Drama Points: 10

CIVILIANS

Civilians are above-average people with some degree of training who happen to find themselves dealing with Mythos aliens and unusual situations. They don't have much in the way of special powers, but in a Series using Drama Points, they start the game with more points, allowing them to survive against insurmountable odds. Journalists who risk danger or madness to get their story, ordinary police officers who encounter cosmic dangers, and scientists and technicians who discover wonders and terrors either inside the laboratory or following them home are all examples of this type of character.

Civilians can be used in the same Series as Operatives, but are only recommended if the Director is using the "Now With Extra Pulp" (see p. 245) rule option for Drama Points. Otherwise, Operatives and Civilians may be too unequal to work well together. If the Director elects to go gritty and not use Drama Points (see. 135), then Operatives and Civilians should not appear in the same Cast, since in this case Civilians have no advantage to offset their lower scores.

Attribute Points: 15

Quality Points: 10

Drawback Points: up to 10

Skill Points: 25

Drama Points: 20

VETERANS

These are full-fledged cinematic heroes, with incredible skills and abilities. Veterans should not be used alongside Operative and Civilian characters, unless the Director and group want to have a significant power gap between the Characters. This is the type you would use to create Special Forces soldiers who rescue human experimental subjects from fiendish alien laboratories with baling wire and a knife, sorcerers whose names are spoken in whispers in the occult community, and augmented half-ghoul psychics who have battled mythos dangers on a dozen different worlds. Of course, in keeping with their impressive abilities, such characters will also face world-shattering dangers and terrible foes.

Attribute Points: 25

Quality Points: 30

Drawback Points: up to 10

Skill Points: 40

Drama Points: 10

MIXING AND MATCHING

In many Series, the characters are going to be all Operatives or all Civilians. If the concept for a Series is a crack team of OPS operatives, then no one should have a Civilian character, and if the Series is about a group of hardy colonists on an alien world seeking to uncover the terrors and wonders of their new world, then Operatives may be out of place. Operatives also have more raw power and more diverse abilities than Civilians, and some people will not like that sort of power difference. All Operative, all Civilian, and mixed Series can all work, but the Director should always make sure the group is comfortable with power level differentials and make sure players have clear expectations.

ATTRIBUTES

Attributes are inborn characteristics: strength, intelligence, senses and so on. Attributes define the limits of what a character can and cannot do. Characters who are designed to be impressive heroes shouldn't have low Attributes, and players should take care not to scrimp.

BUYING ATTRIBUTES

Attributes are purchased using Attribute Points. Those points are set by Character Type (see p. 53). Attributes can be "bought" up to level five on a one-for-one basis (i.e., Strength 3 would cost three points, Strength 4 four points, and so on). Attributes above level five are more expensive: 3 points per additional level. For a human character, the maximum Attribute is level six—that's tops for ordinary humans (buying an Attribute up to level six would cost 8 points). Partially human characters like half ghouls and half deep ones don't have this limitation, but buying Attributes up to maximum can really eat into points. Qualities and Augmentations can also increase Attributes; we'll revisit this later.

At the other end, at least one point must be put into each Attribute. Leaving any attribute at one is not recommended: that's the kind of weakness that can get a character taken out easily when things get hairy (and they always do).

For example: a Civilian character has 15 points to distribute among the six Attributes. This could amount to three Attributes at level two (average), and three at level three (somewhat above average). A player could also raise an attribute to four by taking a less important attribute down to average, or even drop an average Attribute to one, creating a character who would really shine in one aspect, is above average at a couple other things, is a liability at one thing and is average for the rest.

THE MEANING OF NUMBERS

Level 1: The character is below average in that Attribute. Strength 1 indicates a poor physique, either a petite or flabby, sedentary person. Dexterity 1 indicates clumsiness, someone likely to drop things—not to be trusted with intricate manual work except in areas where she has trained very hard. Characters with a Constitution 1 are delicate and often in poor health. Intelligence 1 is below average—not mentally challenged, but certainly slow on the uptake. A Perception 1 person is not very aware of his surroundings, likely to miss what's before his face. A character with Willpower 1 is easily intimidated and influenced by others, a follower instead of a leader, and somebody who is likely to succumb to temptation. Attributes at level one can be dangerous, and give a character a challenging weakness.

Level 2: This is the average for human beings. Most people from the general population have Attributes at this level, typically with one or two at levels one or three. Nothing wrong with being average, but a character is unlikely to make great achievements with such Attributes, unless his skills are so high he can compensate.

Level 3: This is above average but not extraordinary. Strength and Constitution 3 show some athletic aptitude—somebody who works out at least three times a week, or a natural athlete who has not taken time to develop her talent. Characters with Dexterity 3 are graceful—good dancing partners, grabbed near the beginning in pick-up sports, unlikely to “drop the ball” when put to the test. Intelligence 3 indicates a bright person who can easily learn new skills, if he has the temperament to do so. With Perception 3, a character has good senses and intuition, and is not easily fooled or confused. Characters with Willpower 3 are rarely bluffed or bullied under normal circumstances.

Level 4: An Attribute at level four is well above average. A few people, perhaps one out every ten in a random group, have one or two Attributes at this level. Strength and Constitution 4 can be found only in athletes (including the best football players in a large high school or college campus), extensively trained Special Forces soldiers, and other people who spend serious time in the weight room. A Dexterity 4 would only be common among top amateur ball players, gymnasts, acrobats, and sensei. Mental Attributes at level four indicate near genius (Intelligence), uncanny senses (Perception), or iron will (Willpower).

Level 5: This is the “practical” human limit. People at these levels are extraordinarily talented, able to perform complex and difficult feats with little practice. While people with Attributes at level five are not “record breakers,” they are among the best and the brightest. In a small or medium-sized community, only a handful of people have one or two Attributes at this level, and they are likely to be well known for their strength, wisdom, or toughness. Cities, large college campuses, and groups of OPS operatives have more of these extraordinary individuals, but even there they are not common. Think of the mental prodigy who can work hyperspatial equations in her head, the Olympic athlete, the sales clerk who resists bargaining and whose pitches always work.

Level 6: This is the true human limit. A few people with “freakish” attributes may exceed it (to level seven), but they are a handful even among the teeming billions living in the 21st century. Characters with one or more Attributes at level six are very rare, something on the order of one in ten thousand, or less. People with more than one Attribute at level six are perhaps ten times less common, and so on.

Level 7+: These are superhuman levels of ability. A physically fit deep one has Strength 7; Dexterity 8 would match a particularly graceful tiger...

An Operative has twenty points. A balanced Operative who's reasonably good at most things might have four Attributes at level three and two at level four, while keeping three Attributes at average level and having two at level five and one at level four would create a character who is extremely gifted in certain areas.

THE SIX ATTRIBUTES

STRENGTH

The measure of a character's physical power, Strength governs how much damage the character inflicts and how much weight he or she can carry, and helps determine how much damage he or she can take. Strength is useful to people who do a lot of heavy lifting or anybody likely to enter close combat—in *Eldritch Skies*, the latter may occur often. Characters apt to have a high Strength include athletes, manual workers, and soldiers. Frail or small-body types and couch potatoes have low strength.

The Strength Table notes the amount a character can dead lift without much effort. This load can be carried around for a while but carrying this much isn't easy or fun.

A character's maximum lifting weight—for brief periods is equal to double the Lifting Capacity, but lifting heroic amounts of weight too often leads to knee or back injuries.

DEXTERITY

Dexterity indicates a character's physical coordination, agility, and gracefulness. It aids any task that calls for motor control and precision, and reflex tasks like steering a vehicle, dodging an attack or firing weapons. A high Dexterity comes in handy for acrobatics, picking locks, wriggling through tight spaces, and sneaking around: an Operative performing an extraction mission will find it very useful.

CONSTITUTION

This Attribute shows a character's physical hardiness or health. Constitution is important when it comes to resisting disease, damage, and fatigue. It is used (along with Strength) to figure out what kind of pounding a Hero can stand up to. Constitution is useful for people in strenuous and dangerous jobs as well as anyone who is likely to be exposed to alien diseases and exotic toxins.

INTELLIGENCE

This mental Attribute determines your character's ability to learn, correlate, and retain information. A character can use Intelligence to excel at "scholastic" skills, and to understand and interpret information. Note that intelligence and education are two separate things; a character could be a natural prodigy, but if she grew up without books and pencils, she'd still be illiterate – while a character of low Intelligence could still be a great reader with some work. Education is covered by your character's skills, which determine what she has learned in her life. Scientists, engineers, master manipulators, and other intellectual types tend to have a high Intelligence level.

PERCEPTION

When a hungry ghoul is waiting in a dark alley, Perception might help your Hero spot the critter before it strikes. This mental Attribute governs the usual five senses and any extra ones that your character might possess. Hard-bitten detectives (to spot those important clues), people with persistent enemies (to see or hear them coming), and psychics (to detect hostile or alien minds) live longer when they are highly aware of their surroundings.

STRENGTH TABLE

STRENGTH	LIFTING CAPACITY
1-5	25 kg x Strength (Strength 5: 125 kg)
6-10	100 kg x (Strength - 5) + 100 kg (Strength 10: 600 kg)
11-15	250 x (Strength - 10) + 750 kg (Strength 15: 2,000 kg/2 tons)
16-20	500 kg x (Strength - 15) + 2,500 kg (Strength 20: 5,000 kg/5 tons)
21-25	1 ton x (Strength - 20) + 5 tons (Strength 25: 10 tons)
26-30	2 ton x (Strength - 25) + 10 tons (Strength 30: 20 tons)

LIFE POINT TABLE

STRENGTH	CONSTITUTION									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	18	22	26	30	34	38	42	46	50	54
2	22	26	30	34	38	42	46	50	54	58
3	26	30	34	38	42	46	50	54	58	62
4	30	34	38	42	46	50	54	58	62	66
5	34	38	42	46	50	54	58	62	66	70
6	38	42	46	50	54	58	62	66	70	74
7	42	46	50	54	58	62	66	70	74	78
8	46	50	54	58	62	66	70	74	78	82
9	50	54	58	62	66	70	74	78	82	86
10	54	58	62	66	70	74	78	82	86	90

WILLPOWER

This Attribute measures mental strength and self-control, and the ability to resist fear, intimidation, and temptation. Experienced Operatives don't lose their lunch when they find the remains of a ghoul's latest meal, but some things out there are much worse than that. When your character runs into that sort of creepiness, Willpower allows her to keep her cool. Any supernatural ability that tries to control or influence victims is resisted by Willpower. It can also be used actively, to intimidate and dominate others through sheer force of will.

ATTRIBUTE BONUSES

Some Qualities (like Astronaut, Half-Breed Ghoul, or Spy) provide bonuses to one or more Attributes. These bonuses are applied *after* Attributes have been purchased normally. For example, if you spend 5 points on Dexterity, and your character has a Quality that adds a +1 to Dexterity, a Dexterity 6 is the final result.

LIFE POINTS

Life Points keep a character fighting, running, or just standing when the pounding commences. Strength and Constitution are determinant factors—a big, muscle-bound Special Forces soldier can survive more punishment than a 90-pound professor. When your character's Life Points reach zero or lower, they're near death and should lie down before they fall over.

Life Points are determined by adding the character's Strength and Constitution, multiplying the result by

four, and adding 10. The Life Point Table gives the results of these calculations, handily allowing you to skip them. This formula is only for human beings and human-like beings such as deep ones and ghouls. Some creatures have different Life Point totals (hyperspatial entities like flying polyps are much tougher than normal humans, for example, see p. 230).

The Hard to Kill Quality (see p. 63) is a good way to increase Life Points. Players should work out their characters' Life Points after all Attributes and Qualities have been purchased, and all Drawbacks taken.

SPEED

This Attribute represents how fast characters can run at maximum speed. It usually only comes up during chases (see **Chapter 3: Rules & Gear**, p. 96). A character's Speed is equal to their (Constitution + Dexterity) x 3. This is how many kilometers per hour (kph) the character can run. This translates to (Constitution + Dexterity) x 2 mph. On a shorter time scale, characters can move Constitution + Dexterity meters (or yards) in a second and can run five times that far during a Turn.

QUALITIES AND DRAWBACKS

Qualities are innate or specially trained characteristics that give the character an advantage or positive trait. Being a psychic is a Quality, as is being a trained soldier or an ab-human hybrid. Characters like these have abilities that other people lack and they may also have some major or minor drawbacks, but overall the good outweighs the bad: players can buy these traits with Quality Points.

Drawbacks are characteristics that somehow limit or detract from the character—being overly money conscious, having emotional problems, or having a limp or bad eyesight, for example. Drawbacks have values. When Drawbacks are acquired, the character gains extra points that can be used to buy Qualities or skills. Think of the extra points as a little reward for giving the character a bit of a dark side—actually par for the course in the mythos universe.

Beginning characters are limited to 10 points in Drawbacks. That does not mean players have to take 10 points' worth of Drawbacks; most should probably end up with less than that. Not every character needs to be a paranoid amnesiac with a limp.

LIST OF QUALITIES AND DRAWBACKS

ACUTE/IMPAIRED SENSES

1-point or 2-point Quality or Drawback

Some people have the eyes of a hawk, or the ears of a bat. Others are near-sighted, hard of hearing, or otherwise impaired. Characters with this Quality have one sense that is more (or less, if it's a Drawback) refined and sensitive than the rest. Normally, the five senses are wrapped into the Perception Attribute. Acute or Impaired Senses indicate one or more are higher or lower than normal for a person with that Perception Attribute.

When bought as a Quality, an Acute Sense gives your character a +3 bonus to any Perception-related roll that relies on that sense. If acquired as a Drawback, Impaired Senses give a similar -3 penalty to Perception-based rolls.

Some Impaired Senses (hearing and sight in particular) can sometimes be easily corrected by appliances such as glasses or hearing aids. If the impairment is eliminated by the use of such devices, the Drawback only counts for one character point. As long as your character is wearing his glasses or hearing aid, he's fine. If, say, a heavily armed thug knocks his glasses off, your character could be in a world of hurt (blurry and quick moving weaponry is definitely on the "thing to avoid" list). It is possible to have more than one type of Acute or Impaired Sense, or an up-and-down mix, for example, Acute Hearing and Impaired Eyesight. Taking Impaired and Acute versions of the same sense would cancel out.

Smell and taste do not impact human abilities much. As such, a 1-point drawback is not possible, except that a half-breed ghoulish character could drop their acuity of smell to normal human levels for one point. The complete lack of smell or taste is miserable for the sufferer and affects situations like detecting smoke from a fire, and such an inability is worth 2 points.

HALLUCINOGENS AND THE MYTHOS

Hallucinogens and empathogens (such as MDMA, known as Ecstasy) are not physically addictive. Instead, they're a special case. A character with any level of Hyperspatial Exposure risks "seeing too far" when they take these drugs. Sometimes, that's why people take them. Other times, they stumble in unaware. A hyperspatially aware character who takes Ecstasy experiences a -1 penalty to Willpower and has a 50% chance of temporarily developing an uncontrollable psychic power, assigned by the Director for the duration of the drug's effect. The effects also temporarily disable Iron Mind and Supernatural Resistance.

A hyperspatially aware character who takes a hallucinogen suffers a -2 penalty to Willpower and Dexterity rolls, and will see creatures that are not usually there.

"Indescribable shapes both alive and otherwise were mixed in disgusting disarray, and close to every known thing were whole worlds of alien, unknown entities...Foremost among the living objects were great inky, jellyish monstrosities which flabbily quivered in harmony with the vibrations from the machine. They were present in loathsome profusion, and I saw to my horror that they overlapped; that they were semi-fluid and capable of passing through one another and through what we know as solids..."

— H.P. Lovecraft, *From Beyond*

Now, are those creatures actually there? Well, that's the problem. Some of them are. Without some independent means of verification, it becomes difficult to tell the difference between real hyperspatial manifestations and genuinely hallucinatory ones. The effect replicates the Voorish Sign spell or Tillinghast viewer, but adds in fodder from the character's own unconscious mind.

Cults often use these drugs on unwitting or unwilling guests; a few hits of acid in a drink can generate a conversion experience...or make their enemies vulnerable to passing hyperspatial predators.

ADDICTION

Variable Drawback

Some characters seek out drugs to relieve the stresses of their lives. While an opiate stupor might make memories of brain-twisting hyperspatial entities more bearable, it can also provide a different route to madness and death. Also, the OPS isn't too keen on hard drug addiction. Most Operatives

Addiction Point Value Table

	WITHDRAWAL PENALTY & TIME	PERSONAL RISK/DIFFICULTY	IMPAIRMENT PENALTY	POINT VALUE
Alcohol	-1 or -4; severe illness with major addiction; penalty loses one level every 4 days	Mild to moderate (toxicity, job loss)	-1 to -3	1 or 4
Cannabis	-1 (headache, nausea); 1-3 weeks	Moderate (legal risk, adulteration)	-1 to -2	2
Caffeine	-2 (severe headache; 3 days)	None (easily available, minimal harm)	+1 bonus; -1 "come-down"	1
Tobacco	-1 (irritability, headaches); 1-2 weeks*	Mild to None (easily available)	None	1
Prescription Sedatives & Painkillers	-3; severe illness; penalty loses one level each month	Black-market: Moderate. Medically prescribed: mild.	-1 to -3	4 if black-market; 3 if medical
Stimulants (Cocaine, Amphetamine)	-3 (depression, tiredness); penalty loses one level each 3 days	Black-market: Severe. Medically prescribed: mild.	+1 bonus; -2 "come-down"	4 if black-market; 2 if medical
Heroin	-3; penalty loses one level each week	Severe (adulteration, overdose, disease, legal penalties)	-3	5

* A character who has ever been addicted to tobacco must permanently make a willpower roll whenever they encounter it in stressful circumstances.

will need a good reason that they can take this Drawback and keep their job, and the fear of getting found out can be as much of a driving force as the need for the drug itself.

Habits can be mental or emotional in nature. In the one or two-point category, a character's addiction is either common and socially tolerated (caffeine, tobacco, cannabis) or purely psychological. Someone who's not clinically alcoholic can still become irritable and discombobulated when robbed of a nightly beer.

Legal risk is different in different areas, dependent on the laws of colonies and countries. However, characters will probably travel in the course of a Series.

A character with a 2-point or 3-point addiction to prescription drugs has a serious physical dependency, but also has a medical basis to take these drugs. For example, a character suffering mental trauma from Hyperspatial Exposure has a legitimate reason to take sedatives, but staying on them continuously still creates physical dependence – and if he's ever trapped on a planet where his medication isn't available, the withdrawal backlash could nearly kill him. Black market drugs, on top of this, carry risks of overdose and discovery. The same goes for painkillers taken over the long term.

USAGE EFFECTS

The Director is encouraged to give realistic penalties dependent on usage level and adjust from the table as needed. Penalties apply to rolls for all attributes. Sedatives and pain-

killers create a greater penalty for an occasional user than someone who takes them often enough to develop tolerance. Stimulants give a small bonus affecting all rolls but Willpower and Perception during their duration of effect and an equal or greater penalty when they wear off.

QUITTING

The addicted character is in a fix, so to speak. At low levels of addiction, the character might have to choose between the penalty for using and the penalty for not using their drug of choice in a given day. Full withdrawal doesn't kick in immediately, but a character who can't give in to their habit at the accustomed time suffers immediate -1 penalties to mental actions.

In addition to the point cost, a character must be very determined to overcome an addiction. Directors are encouraged to make it difficult: does the Hero really get to take a few weeks off in rehab without something coming up? The character must make a Willpower (doubled) roll for each day of complete detox, assuming they're not kept from accessing the drug by external circumstances. Directors are encouraged to look up realistic withdrawal symptoms before inflicting them on characters. Drama Points can be rewarded for good roleplaying.

Reducing the addiction over time can prevent the worst withdrawal symptoms. For higher-level addictions, this requires the supervision of a doctor. This requires a Willpower

roll and one month of game time for every point of addiction eliminated, or two months for every point of a prescription sedative addiction. The player must make an additional Willpower roll when especially stressful circumstances would normally drive the character to use the drug, or backslide.

AMNESIA

2-point Drawback

The character has lost a part of his memory. The character still remembers who he is, but some portion, between a few months and a few years worth, of his memories are missing. He doesn't know why: maybe this results from a physical injury or illness, from trauma too terrible to recall, an alien Hypnotic Command, a Hypnoscope, or a body-swap with a Yithian. What happened during the forgotten time period is up to the Director, who may impose new Qualities and Drawbacks later as the character starts to discover the lost memories.

ASTRONAUT

4-point Quality

The character has the "right stuff" and has experience both going into space and working with space ships. The character also knows her way around zero-G environments and automatically possesses the Space Training Quality. Astronauts gain +1 to one Mental Attribute (Intelligence, Perception, or Willpower), and +1 to Constitution. In addition, astronauts gain +1 to Acrobatics, +1 to Engineering, and +1 to Pilot. On the downside, astronauts learn that being careless gets you killed fast, and so all astronauts have a mild Obsession to double check all equipment and safety precautions. Being an astronaut costs 4 points.

ATHLETE

3-point Quality

The character is into physical fitness in a big way. Athletes can be marathon training types, weightlifters, enthusiastic swimmers or team players. Whatever their specialty, athletes gain +1 to each physical Attribute (to a maximum level of six for humans), and one level of both the Acrobatics and the Sports Skill. The character must also purchase at least one more level of each skill. Athletes also gain a two-point Obsession with keeping fit, eating right, and/or keeping in practice.

ATTRACTIVENESS

1-point/level Quality or Drawback

This Quality or Drawback determines the character's looks (or lack thereof). The average person has an At-

tractiveness of zero, but it can range from -5 to +5 in humans. A +1 or +2 make the person stand out in a crowd. At +3 or +4, we are talking model-good looks. At +5, the pulchritude borders on the heart stopping. On the flip side, at -1 or -2, the person has homely features, or unsightly blemishes or scars. At -3 or -4, the character is downright repulsive. At -5, looking at the character is almost painful and perhaps even mildly horrifying.

A positive Attractiveness helps a great deal in most social situations. A character's looks and attitude can slip him into sorcerous gatherings where he doesn't belong, or into the good graces of the wary. A character's Attractiveness bonus adds to any activity involving persuasion (usually Influence Skill rolls.) Negative attractiveness works the opposite way, except when the purpose is to intimidate someone. The harsher your character looks, the quicker most folks cave to his demands. Ugliness also brings Fear Tests (see p. 106).

Attractiveness costs or adds one point per level as a Quality or Drawback, respectively. After character creation, Attractiveness can change only by events that modify the character's entire appearance, either through scarring or plastic surgery, or by more moderate changes: a bit of gray at the temples can be distinguished, and an upgrade from chunky glasses to contacts or sleeker models can make a difference.

CLOWN

1-point Drawback

The Clown uses humor to cover all types of situations, even during the most inappropriate moments. Perhaps this character is deeply insecure and tries to gain other people's acceptance through humor, or simply delights in keeping folks off-balance with her comments. The biggest problem these characters have is that they cannot keep their mouths shut even when they know a joke will only work against them.

Clowns are generally accepted and liked during situations where their quirky humor is not out of place (parties and other social gatherings, or among friends). Their sense of humor gets them in trouble during tense and dangerous situations. Another problem the Clown faces is that people often do not take him seriously even when they should.

CONTACTS

Variable Quality

You know the routine—get in touch with the right people and you get information, special supplies, some cash, or even a well made sniper rifle. This Quality gives your character those phone numbers. The more helpful the

contact is, the higher the Quality's point value. For any and all Contacts, your Director determines whether they are available at any given time. Generally, the more time your character has to reach or get word to her Contact, the more likely the Contact comes through.

Contacts can be anyone with the inside track in their area (or anyone who at least claims to have the inside track). Pick a sphere of influence for your character's Contacts from the following: Criminal, Governmental, Supernatural, or Technical/Academic. Some suggestions are listed below.

Criminal: Informers, fences, dealers, burglars, dive bartenders, alien tech smugglers, mobsters, con men.

Governmental: Cops, detectives, national or international agents, bureaucrats, politicians, OPS operatives.

Supernatural: Professional sorcerers, deep one hybrids, human agents of ghouls, mythos cultists, serious occult hobbyists.

Technical/Academic: Astronauts, technicians, engineers, scientists, archaeologists, scholars, researchers, professors.

A Contact that only provides hints, rumors, or gossip costs one point. If the Contact usually provides reliable information and helps the character out in small ways (offering a ride, letting the character spend the night over, or getting a background check on somebody), this Quality sets you back two points. Actual allies who help the character in any way they can run three to five points, depending on the Contact's resources.

COVETOUS

1- to 3-point Drawback

Everybody wants stuff. A Covetous character wants stuff really badly, and is willing to do almost anything to get it. He may be motivated by love of money, lust for sensual satisfaction, hunger for power, or the search for glory. His desires are limited only by his sense of caution or morality—and in some cases, not even by that.

There are four types of covetousness: Greed (money and wealth), Lechery (sexual relations), Ambition (power and influence), and Conspicuousness (fame and renown). It is possible to covet two or more of those things, but each additional source of desire adds only a single point to the value of this Drawback.

The Covetous Drawback has three levels of severity, worth one, two and three points respectively.

Mild: The first level is relatively low-key. Your character knows what he wants and spends a great deal of time and effort to attain it, but won't break his own rules or those of society to do so. This is a one-point Drawback.

Serious: Presented with enough temptation, the char-

acter may act even if it goes against her better judgment or morality. She may resist if the action she contemplates is truly wrong and reprehensible—stealing credit for a friend's heroic deed, for example—but resisting requires a Willpower (doubled) roll, at a penalty of -1 to -3 if the temptation and possible rewards are great. This is a two-point Drawback.

Desperate: The character has a desire so strong that it often overwhelms her scruples. She can only avoid acting on temptation by making a Willpower (not doubled) roll, with penalties ranging from -1 to -5 depending on the size of the prize. For a high enough reward, the character turns on friends or loved ones, and even betrays her principles. This is a three-point Drawback.

CRIMINAL/INSIDER

2- or 3-point Quality

Some people live on the wrong side of the law. A Criminal can be a suave expert safecracker and second-story man, or an angry mob enforcer looking for revenge—basically anybody involved in shady deals and illegal shenanigans.

A Criminal gets +1 to any Attribute (Intelligent, Perception, or Willpower if they are thinking-type criminals, Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution for the brawn-over-brain types), +1 to the Crime Skill (naturally), and +1 to a skill related to her criminal career. A getaway driver, for example, would get a +1 to her Driving Skill, a cat burglar would use his bonus on Acrobatics, and an enforcer would put it into Brawling.

On the down side, Criminals have poor impulse control when it comes to money. They have to make a Willpower (doubled) roll whenever the opportunity for a fast buck presents itself—for example, taking time off to ransack a ghoul's lair instead of watching out for, say, ghouls. The Director can add penalties to that roll, depending on the amount of loot available—no penalty for a few hundred bucks, -1 for several thousand dollars, -2 for over \$10K, -3 for over \$100K, and -5 for a really big score (a million dollars or more). The biggest downside is the risk of punishment such as imprisonment, which can really make it hard to investigate mythos aliens, not to mention live a normal life.

Insiders are basically Criminals with connections. They gain a two-point Contacts (Criminal) Quality as well as a one-point Obligation (Important) to their syndicate.

DANGER SENSE

1-point Quality

Some people have a knack for knowing when something isn't right. Maybe they're a touch psychic, or maybe they're just really good at noticing hints that other people

miss. Regardless of the reasons, any time a Hero with Danger Sense is unaware of an immediate potential danger, she may make a Perception + Notice Test to notice that she is currently in danger. This sense does not indicate the exact type or source of the danger.

DEPENDENT

2- or 3-point Drawback

Your character has a vulnerable relative or someone he is close to—perfect for the villains to terrorize, hold hostage, or otherwise tag and bag. If your character has one Dependent, he gets two points. More than one Dependent is worth three points, regardless of how many there are.

EIDETIC MEMORY

1- or 2-point Quality

Your character has an uncanny ability to remember impressions of events or visions. After focusing for a few moments on some subject, she can recall this sight with startling accuracy. A person with the one-point version of this Quality can “freeze” an image in her mind (a static image like a page or a stop-action scene from the movie that is “life”) and recall it with precision at a later time. This is the limit of her capacity though; once three images are “recorded” a new requires the displacement of an old one (character’s choice). The player should write down the circumstances of the character’s mental “snapshot” so the Director has a good reference when you ask that detailed question several sessions later. Otherwise, he should fill in any details that you can’t remember whenever it is necessary. The Director may also require an Intelligence (doubled) or skill (say, Art for drawing) roll to accurately reproduce the memory in a form that others can recognize or use as a basis for research. The number of Success Levels in that roll reveals the accuracy of the reproduction.

Photographic Memory: The two-point level of this Quality gives the character a much deeper retention of her experiences. After reading a book, she can quote passages without missing a word. After viewing a scene, she can reenact it movement by movement. And she almost never forgets anything. As with Eidetic Memory, the Director will fill in the details but the scope and “memory storage” is essentially unlimited. Your character receives a +1 bonus to any skill roll where memorizing facts is useful, such as Knowledge and Science. Finally, any rolls where memory plays a significant part gain a +1 to +3 bonus, at the Director’s discretion. This can also be a downside when a character really doesn’t want his recol-

lection of the flying polyps to stay so sharp in his mind. Fortunately, even characters with this level of recall are vulnerable to the effects of the Hypnoscope.

EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

Variable Drawback

Characters with Emotional Problems react in unreasonable ways to certain situations and problems, suffering strong reactions to anger, pain, or the anguish of past trauma. The line between Emotional Problems and Mental Problems is thin; for the purposes of *Eldritch Skies*, Emotional Problems reflect inner turmoil, while a character with Mental Problems has a skewed perception of reality. Some suggestions are detailed here but feel free to come up with your own inner demons—characters who spend lots of time dealing with mythos oddness can become seriously eccentric.

Over time, situations can change. Characters can overcome their limitations (or replace them with new ones). Resolutions to these problems should always be roleplayed. A player who works through a cathartic inner struggle over the course of several Episodes might, at the Director’s discretion, eliminate the Drawback without having to “pay” any experience points to do so (see p. 140), and series with Drama Points can award them for this process.

Depression: Depression can stem from physical or emotional causes; in this case, it’s the latter. Common symptoms include sleep problems (either oversleeping or insomnia), severe procrastination (to the point that the sufferer may lose his job), and a lack of interest in anything. A depressed Hero suffers a -1 to most tasks, and tends to avoid getting involved. This is a two-point Drawback. A severe shock may snap someone out of this state for a while (a life-threatening crisis could do it), but the character sinks back into inactivity afterwards. The use of anti-depressant drugs can reduce the effect of this problem (which also reduces its value to one point while the underlying cause remains.)

Easily Flustered: This character is a bit high-strung. When put on the spot or placed in an uncomfortable social situation, he loses control just a bit. He might trip, knock something over, say stupid things, or flail around in confusion. This is mostly comic relief, but the Director may impose a -1 penalty to certain rolls (Dexterity-based for clumsiness, Intelligence-based for foot-in-mouth disease) until the person takes a deep breath and gets it together, or someone else takes over. This is a one-point Drawback.

Emotional Dependency: This clingy type is overly dependent on others. Once he makes a friend, he wants

to hang around all the time. When involved in a relationship, this type is excessively needy. Such behavior tends to seriously annoy friends and romantic partners. This is a one-point Drawback.

Fear of Commitment: Whenever your character starts feeling too close to somebody, she becomes afraid and pulls back. Maybe she is worried that if she lets somebody get too close, she will get hurt. Or perhaps she fears that if she reveals too much, the other person will see the “real her” and be appalled or disgusted. This problem is a one-point Drawback.

Fear of Rejection: When this person experiences rejection (or thinks he has been rejected), he feels hurt and angry. A person with this problem may be afraid to make friends or approach those he is attracted to, and if his fears come true, he harbors a great deal of resentment and anger. This is a one-point Drawback.

FAST REACTION TIME

2-point Quality

Most people freeze when something bad is about to happen or when they are surprised. Not someone with this Quality—this lucky individual rolls away and punches a hyperspatial mutant that bursts through a door as soon as it bares its tentacles. In combat, contact sports, or other physical confrontations, characters with this Quality gain a +5 bonus for Initiative purposes (see p. 108), modified by common sense (Fast Reaction Time cannot help the target of a sniper a kilometer away, for example).

Because they are largely immune to the “freeze” factor in dangerous situation, Fast Reaction Time folks also gain a +1 bonus on Willpower Tests to resist fear (see p. 106).

GENIUS

5-point Quality

This character is bright, really bright. Geniuses tend to obsess on some project or another. Geniuses gain +2 to Intelligence and +1 to another mental Attribute (to a maximum level of six); +4 skill levels to distribute among Computers, Knowledge, or Science, and a two-point Obsession with their latest project (which can change regularly). These characters are prime candidates for the Emotional Problems or Outcast Drawbacks.

GOOD/BAD LUCK

1-point/level Quality or Drawback

A character with Good Luck always seems to come out on top. Whenever she really needs a break, circumstances conspire to give her one. Those suffering from

Bad Luck, on the other hand, live by Murphy’s Law (“if anything can go wrong, it will”). Good Luck points are like low-key Drama Points (see p. 135), but are more applicable and, best of all, re-usable.

Each level of Luck counts as a +1 bonus (or -1 penalty) that can be applied to any roll, after the die is cast, once per game session. Multiple levels can be added together for a big bonus on one roll, or spread around several different actions. For example, a character with three levels of Good Luck can get a +3 bonus on one action, a +1 bonus to three actions, or a +2 bonus for one and a +1 bonus for another.

The player decides when Good Luck comes into play. Bad Luck, however, is in the hands of the Director, who chooses when it affects a given roll. Of course, Directors should exercise caution and good judgment when applying Bad Luck. If they use Bad Luck for meaningless rolls, the Drawback becomes little more than a minor inconvenience. On the other hand, applying Bad Luck to Survival Tests or other critical rolls is just...unseemly. Make the Bad Luck count, but don’t abuse anyone. Remember, the players are in the game to have fun.

Say Jenna has a two-point Bad Luck Drawback. At one point in the Episode, Jenna takes aim with her gun as an enemy attempts to flee the area. The character’s mission will be much harder if the villain escapes, but Jenna is in no immediate danger, so her Director states that a startled bird flies in front of her, spoiling her aim. A -2 penalty is applied to Jenna’s shot.

HARD TO KILL

1- to 5-point Quality

Characters with this Quality are tougher than nails. Even after they are severely wounded, medical attention has a good chance of reviving them, scarred but alive. This Quality is bought in levels. Level five is the highest possible for human beings; ab-humans and aliens can have more levels. Each level of Hard to Kill adds three Life Points to a character’s Pool. Additionally, each level provides a +1 bonus to Survival Tests. Most characters in an *Eldritch Skies RPG Series* should have a couple of levels of this Quality. Invest any leftover Quality points here: your character will be grateful and so will you.

HONORABLE

1- to 3-point Drawback

This Hero follows a code of behavior, and will not break it lightly, if at all. The more restrictive and rigid the code is, the higher its value. The character almost never

breaks the code's rules, no matter what the cause. In a life-or-death situation where honor must be ignored, he might do so, but even then a Willpower (not doubled) Test is necessary to overcome the psychological barriers reinforcing the code of honor.

The codes of honor given are examples, and players and Directors can come up with different values for characters to follow.

Minimal: The character never lies or betrays friends, loved ones, or people he respects. Anybody else, especially people from groups he dislikes or is prejudiced against, is fair game. This is a one-point Drawback.

Serious: This code of honor is more complex, and applies to everyone, friend or foe. This character always keeps her word and does her best to fulfill any promises she makes. She will not betray the trust of others once she has accepted it. She may be reluctant to give her word except in a good cause (at least a good cause as she sees it), because once it has been given, it is inviolate. This is a two-point Drawback.

Rigid: This character lives by a strict set of rules that controls most of his actions towards others. In addition to all the other restrictions above, he refuses to participate in acts of betrayal such as ambushes, striking a helpless or unsuspecting foe, or cheating in any way. Lying is anathema, and he will only do so in cases of extreme need. Even then, he will feel guilty and will not do a very good job at deceiving; any tasks requiring lying will have a -2 to -6 penalty, determined by the Director. This is a three-point Drawback.

HUMORLESS

1-point Drawback

Some people just lack the ability to laugh at life and take everything with the utmost seriousness. Other people's attempts at humor are seen as wasteful or annoying. Most people find this facet of a character's personality to be unattractive or bothersome.

IRON MIND

3-point Quality

This character is immune to all psychic powers, as well as all spells that seek to control his thoughts or emotions or send him mental messages. In addition, the character can never visit the Dream Realm. A magician can still use sorcery to spy on him and he can still travel through a hyperspatial gateway, but no one can get into his head. This Quality provides no protection against Hyperspatial Exposure, but people who possess it can never become

psychic. People with this Quality tend to be somewhat closed off and distant, and often also possess the Outcast Drawback (see p. 67).

LAW ENFORCEMENT

(LOCAL / NATIONAL OR INTERNATIONAL)

5- or 8-point Quality

A character with this Quality is a law enforcement professional. On duty, the character can call for backup in their jurisdiction area, flash a badge, and carry a gun. The pay isn't great, and the work can be dangerous. All law enforcement personnel get a +1 to any physical Attribute (Strength, Dexterity or Constitution), and a +1 bonus to the Crime, Driving, and Guns Skills. They also have authority of the law behind them (not to mention that they get to carry a gun).

With reasonable suspicion (any rational explanation that a neutral party would buy), they can stop cars, search people, detain suspects, and other nifty things. With probable cause (a reasonable basis to believe that criminal activity has occurred), they can arrest people. Whether such suspicion or cause exists is a question that keeps many attorneys and judges in full employment. Officers can be disciplined for bad decisions; suspects can walk. A local or regional Law Enforcement Quality costs five points. An officer's legal authority (worth two points) is balanced by a one-point Obligation (Important) to the force.

A character with the eight-point Law Enforcement Quality works for a national or international organization, with similar responsibilities and benefits. She gets a two-point Contacts (Governmental) Quality and a two-point Rank Quality but her Obligation Drawback increases to Major. Agents of the FBI, Interpol, and similar agencies all count in this category, as do certain weapon-bearing OPS operatives. These characters also gain the Espionage Training Quality. National organizations will usually have more backup available in their home territories, while international agents are often on their own.

If any enforcer abuses his authority, he can get in trouble: too many rules broken, even for the right reason, will get his gun and badge taken away. At that point, the character becomes ex-law enforcement, with all the skills of a normal officer or agent (and the Contacts for a national or international agent who hasn't burned his bridges) but none of the authority. For a former local or state cop, this Quality drops by one point, losing the authority and Obligation, and a former national or international agent also loses their Rank, taking the Quality down by three points.

LOVE

2- or 4-point Drawback

The character's love life is the stuff songs are made of—exactly what sort of songs is up to the storyline, of course. A Hero with this Drawback starts the game with a relationship or develops one shortly after the Season begins (usually during the first or second Episode). This love may or may not be reciprocated; the character might be in love with someone who barely knows she exists. Whenever the character has to choose between following her heart or her head, she must make a Willpower (not doubled) roll at a -3 penalty. This Drawback is worth two points.

Tragic Love: As above, but any romantic relationship the character develops ends badly. This can happen in two possible ways—something bad happens to the character's beloved, or the character has an unfortunate tendency to fall for the wrong people. Tragic Love can be a good source of Drama Points (see p. 135) and is a four-point Drawback.

MENTAL PROBLEMS

1- to 3-point Drawback

A character with Mental Problems has a distortion in his or her view of reality, whether it results from situations in their life or a neurochemical imbalance. The short circuit could be mild and quirky, or downright insane. Some common Mental Problems are suggested here. Like Emotional Problems, feel free to come up with your own or create variations on these themes.

Cowardice / Anxiety: The character is more afraid of danger and confrontation than average. He may shun danger altogether, or only risk it when he's sure he has the upper hand. A character with this Mental Problem suffers a sense of dread out of proportion to the situation, and at higher levels also experiences anxiety in his daily life. Use the value of this Drawback as a penalty to rolls to resist fear (see p. 106).

Cruelty: A character with this Drawback actually likes to inflict pain and suffering. At the lower level, she reserves this for people who have angered or attacked her, but at the highest level she is a sadist with no feelings of remorse (this is probably not appropriate for most Heroes, but is common among the leaders of mythos cults).

Delusions: Your character believes something that just isn't true—he might harbor nutty bigoted beliefs, or a certainty that most important national politicians are actually serpent people who dine on human flesh.

Obsession: A particular person, task or topic domi-

nates your character's life, to the exclusion of much else. To pursue his Obsession, he will go to almost any length (as limited by his morality). He may neglect other duties, both personal and professional, to pursue that which fascinates him. The "obsessee" may be a person (who may or may not be aware of the character's feelings, but would probably be disturbed by their intensity), a task like getting revenge on somebody or performing some elaborate feat, or a topic the character will prattle on at great length. This Drawback can result from the Hastur infection.

Paranoid: Everyone is out to get her; everything is a conspiracy and everyone is keeping secrets. A paranoid character never knows when somebody is going to turn against her, but she knows they all will, sooner or later. She expects treachery at every turn, and rarely trusts even her friends and relatives. In *Eldritch Skies*, where monsters exist and secret cults really are trying to end the world, a little paranoia can be a boon to survival, but a Hero with this Drawback goes too far. This makes her annoying or even frightening to have around, and her testimony less likely to be believed, even when she's speaking the truth. Paranoid characters often suffer from other Emotional and Mental Problems (their point values are determined separately).

Phobia: Something terrifies this Hero—snakes, heights, enclosed spaces, loud noises, sea life, technology. The harder it is to overcome the fear, the more this Drawback costs. Whenever the character faces the subject of the phobia, he has to make a Fear Test (see p. 106) with a penalty equal to the value of the Drawback. If the situation is normally frightening (say, the character is afraid of snakes and he's facing a giant snake-like abhuman, which would frighten anybody), add the value of the Phobia to the regular Fear Test penalty.

Reckless: A reckless character is supremely overconfident and impulsive, willing to take incredible risks. Most of the time, she acts first and thinks later—and gets into all kinds of trouble as a result. She says what's on her mind with little consideration for diplomacy or courtesy, rushes into dangerous situations, and rarely wastes time on second thoughts. Reckless does not necessarily mean suicidal, except maybe at the highest level. Acting on impulse may put the Hero in jeopardy, but she won't take actions with directly and obviously lethal consequences.

Violence: This character has a temper, likes getting in fights, and may have done prison time. It's hard for a violent character to walk away from a fight; they're always ready to start swinging or shooting. Whenever a potentially violent confrontation happens, even if the other party hasn't drawn a weapon, the character has to make

a Willpower (doubled) roll with a penalty equal to the level of the Drawback. On a failure, they react violently. However, they react with appropriate levels of violence and don't pull out grenades in a bar brawl or brass knuckles in a gun fight.

Zealot: A zealot holds beliefs (political, religious or personal) so strong that they dominate his life and behavior. He is willing to sacrifice anything, including his life or the lives of others, in service to the ideals he holds dear. This character is dangerous to himself and others, and shows a total disregard for the law when it conflicts with his beliefs. Mad cultists, wild-eyed crusaders, and extreme radicals qualify for this Drawback. This differs from Obsession and Delusion in scope (Zealot behavioral dictates are more comprehensive) and severity. This Drawback is rare outside of the Deranged level. Your Director will determine if a Mild or Severe level is even possible.

The higher the value of the Mental Problem, the more severe and debilitating it is. Generally, Heroes should not have Mental Problems worth more than two points, although playing the occasional lunatic can be fun once in a while.

Mild: The problem is controllable and your character seldom allows it to take over during times of crisis, especially when friends and loved ones are involved. People may not even know something is wrong with the character. This is a one-point Drawback.

Severe: The problem is severe and affects your character's daily life. Anybody who knows the character well has probably noticed something wrong with her. This is a two-point Drawback.

Deranged: Your character has totally lost perspective, and with it, regard for such considerations as the law or the safety of others. He may control his behavior out of fear of being stopped or discovered by the law or other major threats, but when no such fear exists, watch out. This is a three-point Drawback.

MINORITY

1-point Drawback

This Hero is considered a second-class citizen because of race, ethnic group, religion, sexual preference or physical characteristics. She is a member of a small or disadvantaged group, disliked by the establishment types. People of the dominant group tend to act negatively towards her; many are automatically suspicious, fearful or annoyed at her for no reason other than what she is. This Drawback has a one-point value to reflect the relatively enlightened 21st century, where people cannot be denied service in a restaurant because of the color of their skin

(in most places, at least). In other settings, where prejudice has the full weight of the law and tradition behind it, this Drawback might be worth two to three points.

NATURAL TOUGHNESS

2-point Quality

This character is seriously thick skinned and can really take a punch. He has four points of Armor Value (see p. 119) against blunt attacks, such as fists, steel rebars, sideswiping vehicles, and the like. Bullets and slashing attacks are unaffected. This Quality is common among professional boxers, bouncers, and bodyguards.

NERVES OF STEEL

3-point Quality

A character with this Quality is almost impossible to scare. Whether she is too dumb or too stubborn is open to question, but she remains unruffled even in the face of unspeakable mythos horrors. She is immune to fear except when confronted with the most terrible hyperspatial manifestations, and even then gains a +4 bonus to her rolls.

OBLIGATION

Variable Drawback

Some rights are accompanied by duties. An Obligation must be followed to various degrees and grants a number of points depending on the strictness of its dictates. Members of special agencies like the OPS, or the scary cults they oppose, often have an Obligation to their group. Failure to fulfill one's duty can lead to trouble—demotion, loss of job and health benefits, harsh words.. . sometimes it can even be downright dangerous to say “no” to one's secret puppetmasters.

Minimal: Obeying the basic precepts of the organization or creed and not betraying its members are the highlights here. This is worth no points. Most employees of most organizations fall into this category, since they can quit at any time.

Important: Your character is expected to routinely risk herself for the organization, and go above the basic precepts of the membership. An Important Obligation is worth one point. Low level OPS field operatives typically have this level of Obligation.

Major: The welfare of the organization is placed above that of your character. She is always on call and does not have time to pursue a normal job (unless it's a cover for the real assignment) or much of a personal life. The penalties for disobedience or selfishness are severe; potentially lethal in criminal organizations, potentially

job-destroying in aboveboard groups. This is worth two points. Experienced OPS field operatives often have this level of Obligation.

Total: Your character must be totally devoted to the group. He is even expected to die for the organization, should that be necessary. Missions are extremely hazardous, and he is constantly in danger of imprisonment, torture, or execution. This is worth three points. Usually this sort of obligation is reserved for cultists, deep cover spies, and special forces soldiers.

OCCULT INVESTIGATOR

4-point Quality

Both amateurs and professionals take an interest in mythos oddities. From ancient artifacts to exotic cults, a few people collect mythos knowledge and occult artifacts like other people collect stamps, driven by deep curiosity. Some of these people end up in mental asylums, or dead, or hideously mutated. The survivors learn a lot of more-or-less useful information, from the initiation rites of Cthulhu cults, to the best places in town to watch ghoul activity. Their knowledge also makes them better able to overcome their fears (or maybe they are a little bit too insane to be afraid anymore).

Occult Investigators get a +1 to any two mental Attributes (Intelligence, Perception, or Willpower) and a +2 bonus to the Occultism Skill. Furthermore, they get a +1 bonus to Fear Tests, thanks to their familiarity with the strange and unusual. When presented with an opportunity to learn something supernatural—stopping to grab a tempting artifact as the ghouls close in, for example—they must do it unless they make a Willpower (doubled) roll, with penalties of -1 to -5, depending on how valuable the find is.

OUTCAST/MISFIT

2 or 3-point Drawback

Misfits, dorks, freaks, and geeks—all names for the outcasts of society. Because of their interests, lack of charisma, habits, or mannerisms, these people are seriously unpopular in all social groups not made up of other Outcasts. Outcasts have a rough time in social situations; they have a -2 penalty to Influence rolls. They automatically attract the attention of any cruel or abusive character.

Some make it a practice to avoid paying too much attention to their surroundings to spare themselves hurtful looks or whispers—these types suffer a -1 penalty to all Notice rolls. Others are the proverbial “fish out of water” and are unfamiliar with modern society (perhaps they were raised in an isolated science station on some colony, or maybe by cultists on a remote island). This detriment is mostly roleplayed

but should affect the character's behavior with regularity. The “notice” or “unfamiliar” conditions can be dropped, in which case the Outcast is simply a Misfit, and the Drawback is worth only two points.

PHYSICAL DISABILITY

Variable Drawback

Your character suffers from limb loss, spinal column damage, or any number of impairments as a result of accident, disease or a birth defect. Here's a basic list. Alternatives should be variations on these descriptions. Remember that 21st century medicine in *Eldritch Skies* can cure all of these problems – regrowing limbs, eyes, and reconnecting severed spines. Any character with such a disability has some rare and exotic medical condition that precludes such intervention, or perhaps a phobia of invasive medical care that outweighs the need for a cure.

Blind: The character cannot see anything. Ranged combat will always be near-impossible: attack and defense rolls for ranged combat are at a -8 penalty. Perception and Notice rolls (modified by Acute or Impaired Hearing) are needed to find a target who is not touching the character. Close weapon combat rolls are at a -5 penalty; brawling and martial arts at a penalty of -2. The character cannot drive vehicles or perform other tasks requiring vision. This is an eight-point Drawback.

Missing or Crippled Arm/Hand: The hand in question cannot be used to grab or hold objects. Any task requiring two hands is at a disadvantage (-3 or worse) or simply impossible. This is a two-point Drawback. A character with a prosthetic hand can overcome some of these problems, reducing the Drawback to one point in value.

Missing or Crippled Leg/Foot: This character is unable to walk or run normally. With the help of crutches or a cane, she can move at up to one-third normal speed (see p. 104). Hand-to-hand combat rolls are at a -2 penalty. This is a three-point Drawback. Prosthetics can reduce the penalties, increasing speed to up to half-normal, and reducing combat penalties to -1. This reduces the Drawback value to two points.

Missing or Crippled Arms: Both arms are missing or crippled. Your character cannot use any tools normally. Some people with this handicap have learned to use their feet with great skill to compensate for their loss, but it's still no picnic. This is a four-point Drawback. Commonly available prosthetics that are controlled using implanted electrodes still give the user a -2 penalty to all actions involving the use of either arm. These prosthetics reduce the Drawback value to two points.

Missing or Crippled Legs: This character is unable to walk. Without the help of a wheelchair, the best he can do is crawl or roll on the ground. This is a four-point Drawback.

Quadriplegic: Paralyzed from the neck down, almost all physical activities are impossible for this character. A special wheelchair, operated with the neck or mouth, can help him move around (if the unfortunate has access to such instruments). Someone needs to take care of his basic needs, from feeding to changing. This highly debilitating trait is an eight-point Drawback.

POKER FACE

1- or 2-point Quality

This Quality allows a Hero to pull off the most brazen of deceptions with a straight face. For one point, the character gets a +2 bonus to any opposed roll where lying is involved (the skill used depends on the situation, but is usually Influence). For two points, the character gets the +2 bonus against psychic and scientific tests as well, such as spells, polygraph tests, and court approved link crown scans (see p. 131).

RANK

1-point/level Quality or Drawback

Your character is in the military or some other exceedingly hierarchical organization. High rank has privileges—officers, agents, or soldiers obey your character's orders. On the other hand, low rank can mean a character has to obey orders he or she really doesn't like, or be punished. The value of a Rank ranges from -1 to +9, and costs one point per level (or grants one point at the lowest level). High Rank also entails numerous duties that may restrict your character's actions even more than very low Rank. The Ranks Table below shows some sample law

RANK LEVEL DESCRIPTION

-1	Rookie Cop, Private
0	Beat Cop, Corporal
1	Agent, Sergeant
2	Detective, Senior Agent, Sergeant First Class
3	Agent in Charge, Lieutenant
4	Bureau Chief, Captain
5	Commissioner, Major
6	Lieutenant Colonel
7	Colonel
8	Major General
9	General

enforcement, government agency and U.S. Army ranks. Rank titles in other organizations vary. The OPS has a less formal rank structure; this Quality is not required for every member. As such, the -1 level is not available. Characters with no or low rank still enjoy some autonomy, while characters with a notable Rank Quality have stronger influence in the organization and have an easier time requisitioning equipment. (See p. 123)

RECURRING NIGHTMARES

1-point Drawback

Your character is plagued by terrifying dreams that replay one or more traumatic experiences, or are just frightening and disturbing. Every night, the Director may check to see if your character suffers from nightmares. They may be imposed at the Director's discretion, or may be rolled randomly (a roll of 1 on a D10 means the character experiences a nightmare that night). On any night when the character is afflicted by the nightmare, he suffers -1 to all rolls the following day, resulting from exhaustion or jumpiness.

RESISTANCE

1-point per level Quality

Some people are just innately better at ignoring the bad things that life throws at them. This ability allows your character to fend off the effects of a particular type of harm. Each different type of Resistance Quality must be purchased separately. Some examples are presented below, but others may be devised by you or your Director.

Pain: Each level of this Quality reduces the penalties associated with severe wounds, and adds to Willpower and Constitution rolls to stay conscious or fend off death when severely injured (see p. 114).

Poison/Disease: Your character has a cast-iron stomach and an overactive immune system; add twice the level of this Resistance to any Constitution rolls to resist the effects of poison or disease.

Supernatural: For some reason, your character is able to resist psychic powers and sorcery that has mental effects. She adds her Resistance level to any rolls against being spied upon or influenced through psychic means. Unlike Iron Will, this Quality doesn't prevent your character from being a psychic. In fact, many powerful psychics possess this Quality.

RESOURCES

2-points/level Quality or Drawback

Money can be extremely useful, especially if you have a lot of it. A character's level of Resources determines how much material wealth she has access to. This trait varies widely. Some levels are described below. In the case of a teenager or dependent, the resource level describes their caretaker. Whether your character has access to these assets at any given time is a matter for the Director and the plotline. Figures are given in approximate US dollar value equivalents, circa 2011, our world; in the *Eldritch Skies* world, currencies can vary and Directors are encouraged to assign equivalent values based on the economy of the area where the characters find themselves. For example, the cost of a mansion in Minnesota will buy far smaller housing on a colony with limited oxygen. Please be realistic: a homeless character who's hired by OPS to complete space missions is no longer effectively homeless, and needs to buy off the Drawback to a more realistic level.

Destitute (-5): Has the clothes on her back, ten dollars' worth of stuff, and maybe a shopping cart. Any income over a few dollars goes to immediate needs.

Miserable (-4): Personal wealth of \$100 worth of property (including the clothes on his back) and income of \$100 a month. Lives in shared public housing, or is homeless.

Poor (-3): Personal wealth of some \$500 in property; lives in low-income housing, and has income of \$500 a month, whether fixed or from odd jobs.

Hurting (-2): Personal wealth of about \$1,000 in property, and lives in a small apartment in a bad part of town. Has an income of about \$1,000 a month before taxes.

Below Average (-1): Personal wealth of \$5,000 in property (including an old vehicle, perhaps), and lives in an apartment. Has a pre-tax income of \$1,500 a month.

Okay (0): Personal wealth of \$15,000 in property. Has an income of \$2,500 a month before taxes.

Middle Class (+1): Personal wealth of \$50,000 in property (will usually include a partially-paid house or condominium as well as a new or slightly used car). Has an income of \$5,000 a month before taxes.

Well-off (+2): Personal wealth of \$300,000 in property. Has an income of \$10,000 a month before taxes.

Wealthy (+3): Personal wealth of \$700,000 in property. Has an income of \$40,000 a month.

Rich (+4): Personal wealth of \$2,000,000 in property. Has an income of \$50,000 a month.

Multimillionaire (+5): Personal wealth of \$5 million in property. Has an income of \$200,000 a month.

Each additional level adds an additional \$5 million in property and \$200,000 to monthly income. You're not going to be playing a billionaire in *Eldritch Skies*.

SECRET

Variable Drawback

There exists a dangerous and hidden fact about your character. This could be a secret identity or a shady past. The more damaging the secret if it became known, the higher the value of the Drawback. For example, damage to your Hero's reputation and livelihood would be worth one point; a threat to his well-being (he might be arrested or deported if the truth were known) two points; life and limb, three points. Former membership in a Cthulhu cult is likely a one point secret, while current membership and secret allegiance to a Great Old One would be worth at least two points.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

2-point Quality

The observant almost always know what is going on around them, and can react with uncanny quickness if necessary. This character gains a +2 bonus to any Perception-based rolls to sense trouble or danger in her immediate surroundings. It's also very hard to sneak up on her or pick her pocket; the same bonus applies for noticing Crime rolls in her vicinity.

SLEEP PATTERNS

2-point Quality or Drawback.

The character's sleep patterns are abnormal in some way. Below are two suggestions for Sleep Patterns.

Deep Sleeper: The character is extremely difficult to awaken. Anything short of physical damage has little chance of stopping the character from sleeping a full uninterrupted eight hours. When aroused prematurely, he remains groggy and any roll will be at -1 until he has the full eight hours of sleep, after which he will awaken normally without prompting. **Cost:** -2 points (Drawback).

Light Sleeper: The opposite of Deep Sleeper, the slightest noise or disturbance wakes the character, who is instantly alert and aware of her surroundings. **Cost:** 2 points.

SOLDIER/SPECIAL FORCES

3-point/9-point Quality

Your character is a member of a military organization. Soldiers get a +1 bonus to any Attribute (depending on their specialization in the service – soldiers can be anything from gun-toting grunts to doctors or radar

operators, after all), a +1 bonus to Guns, and a +1 bonus to any two skills related to their specialty. They also have access to a great deal of equipment (although with some limitations as to when they can use it), equivalent to 2 levels of Contacts (Governmental). On the down side, soldiers have a 2-point Obligation. All soldiers automatically gain the Military Training Quality.

Above the common rank and file, there are various elite special forces like the SAS or the SEALs. These characters are trained to perform covert operations and kill with whatever instruments they have at hand. They get a +1 to any three Attributes, a +2 to Guns, +1 to both Brawling and Archaic Combat, and +1 to any two Skills related to their specialty. They also have the equivalent of 3 levels of Contacts (Governmental). However, their Obligation is Total (3 points) - these guys are expected to regularly risk their lives.

A character who has left the service reduces their Contacts by 2, but does not get the discount for the Obligation. Soldier still costs 3 points, and Special Forces Soldier costs 10 - unless of course they are the sort of Special Forces Soldier who can be called up for duty later. In this case, they still have a 1-point Obligation, making the Quality cost 9 points, and have people keeping track of their activities.

SPECIAL TRAINING

1-point Quality

Sometimes skills alone aren't enough and characters must be instructed in the use of highly specialized equipment and techniques. There are three different Special Training Qualities, each one representing the fact that the character has been trained to perform a series of unusual tasks and use highly specialized gear. Each Special Training Quality costs 1 point. Attempting to use specialized equipment without the appropriate special training incurs an automatic -2 penalty to the roll. For example, attempting to drive a tank without the Military Training Quality causes an automatic -2 to the character's roll.

Espionage Training: The character has been trained in the use of specialized espionage equipment like bugs, tracking devices, and other surveillance technologies. This Quality is automatically included in the eight-point Law Enforcement Quality and the Spy Quality.

Military Training: The character has been trained to use military equipment like tanks, shoulder-launched rockets, and military rifles. This Quality is automatically included in the Soldier and Special Forces Soldier Qualities.

Space Training: The character has been trained in the

details of how spacesuits and spacecraft work and how to move and work in zero-G. This Quality is automatically included in the Astronaut Quality. Characters without this Quality suffer a penalty of -2 to all Dexterity related rolls in zero-G.

SPY

5-point Quality

The character is a covert operative. They spy on people, sneak into places, and may have performed an assassination or two. There are many kinds of spies; some rely on speed and deadly training, while others are highly skilled technicians who work well under incredible pressure. All spies gain +1 to Willpower and a +1 to one other Attribute, +1 to Guns, +1 to Crime, and +1 to two other skills related to their specialty. They also have the equivalent of 3 levels of Contacts (Governmental) and automatically gain the Espionage Training Quality. However, their Obligation is Total (3 points) - these guys are expected to risk their lives for a living. Also, spies live in a dangerous and creepy world and automatically gain the Paranoid (mild) Drawback. Being a spy costs 5 points. Ex-spies lose the obligation, but gain a 1-point secret and reduce their level of contacts by 2 - keeping the cost at 5 points.

TALENTLESS

2-point Drawback

The Talentless individual totally lacks creativity and artistic ability. Maybe she is too stolid and practical, or just doesn't have the imagination to do anything artistic. This Drawback doesn't just affect her ability in the arts, but also in many social skills where flair and creativity are necessary.

Your character has a -3 penalty when trying to do anything artistic. This penalty does not affect Tasks where other people's art is judged; many expert critics are Talentless. When she tries to create something though, the best she can hope for is a mediocre result. In addition to the penalty, the character can never get more than one Success Level in artistic pursuits, regardless of how high his skill levels or rolls are. The same penalty applies to such skills as Influence—a lack of creativity affects the ability to convincingly lie, charm, flatter, intimidate, or schmooze. “Would you like to buy this artifact? It's, um, very old.”

AB-HUMAN QUALITIES

Because aliens and ab-humans are so mentally different from humanity, players in *Eldritch Skies* cannot play such characters. However, some players enjoy the challenge of playing someone who is something other than human,

and there's room for them in this game. Because they originate from humanity, deep ones and ghouls, the two most common types of ab-humans, occasionally interbreed with humanity. In addition, sometimes individuals are exposed to the same sort of hyperspatial exposure that originally created both species of ab-human. While they usually remain human, their offspring may be born changed. Occasionally, inhuman ancestry can lie dormant in a family's genes, waiting for the right sort of minor quirk of chance that can cause a family who last had an ab-human ancestor centuries before to bring forth mildly inhuman offspring. These hybrid Heroes were always raised among humans and begin play with human minds and human emotions, but they aren't quite human. Characters with either of these two half-breed ab-human Qualities may have values as high as 7 in Attributes increased by these Qualities.

DEEP ONE HYBRID

6-point Quality

The character has some degree of deep one ancestry, but not enough to fully transform into a deep one. Alternately, maybe they would have transformed, but have been given genetic therapy to keep them mostly human; or the progression of their amphibious traits has slowed and they will not fully transform for decades to come. In their late teens or early 20s, the character transformed into an amphibious human with a few deep one traits. These characters may be partially or entirely covered with fine, flesh-colored fish scales that cause them to look exotic, though not necessarily ugly, or they may simply have the classic "Innsmouth Look" with somewhat bulging eyes and concealed gill slits in folds of skin on their neck. Some humans understand what these distinctive traits mean, and discrimination against these individuals is not uncommon. In addition, while deep ones are slightly more willing to deal with hybrids than with ordinary humans, they always regard hybrids as alien outsiders.

All deep one hybrids have the following traits: +1 Strength, +1 Constitution, Low-light Vision, Amphibious, and Natural Armor (1). This Natural Armor can be visible or invisible, at the player's choice. In addition, these characters are comfortable in temperatures down to -18 degrees Celsius (0 F) without discomfort, harm, or need for special clothing. Half-breed deep ones never have lower than Hyperspatial Exposure Level 1 and can increase their Strength & Constitution up to 7.

HALF-BREED GHOUL

6-point Quality

The character either has a parent who is a ghoul, or has distant ghoulish ancestry that for some reason strongly expressed itself in them. The character appears to be fully human, and the only obvious differences are night-adapted eyes that range in color from yellow to orange and teeth that appear slightly sharper and longer than normal. Many experience some of the typical ghoul bloodlust and all have a taste for especially well aged meat and a cast iron stomach. (The unusual individuals who crop up occasionally eating metal and glass in public stunts are probably half-ghouls.) Some half-breed ghouls live with and as ghouls, but those who are playable characters were brought up with humans and live as humans. Half-breed ghouls normally live somewhat longer than normal humans. With access to modern medicine, they have an average lifespan of 170 years, and most do not begin to look elderly until their late 140s.

All half-breed ghouls have the following traits: +2 Strength, +1 Constitution, Low-light Vision, Acute Smell (1), Resistance (Poison/Disease) (1), either the Cruelty (mild) or Violence (mild) Mental Problems. In addition, half-breed ghouls never have lower than Hyperspatial Exposure Level 1 and can increase their Strength & Constitution up to 7.

PSYCHIC POWERS

Psychic powers are natural abilities, and, according to many researchers, an inevitable consequence of intelligence. Many scientists who understand these abilities believe that the only reason not all humans are psychic is humanity's natural resistance to all hyperspatial phenomena. Today, approximately one in 500 people possess psychic sensitivity. A few people are naturally born psychic, but most psychics develop these powers later in life. These abilities can be awakened in some people, typically by someone making psychic contact with them. Once someone becomes psychic, they automatically gain Hyperspatial Exposure Level 1 and the Psychic Sensitivity Power. At this point, they can also learn additional psychic abilities.

PSYCHIC SENSITIVITY

3-Point Power

Every psychic possesses this power, and this power is a prerequisite for all other psychic powers, with the exception of Psychic Link and Psychic Visions. Characters with psychic sensitivity have two abilities. They can sense the emotions of other intelligent beings, and they can

mentally communicate with other intelligent beings. A successful Perception + Psychic Art roll allows the psychic to learn about the target's true emotions. Unless the psychic rolls three or more Success Levels, they can only read the strongest emotions a target is feeling. The psychic can also communicate mentally with any other psychic within approximately 100 meters. The psychic can either communicate to all psychics within this range or can choose a single target that they can see or otherwise sense. In addition, psychics can communicate with other psychics they know well and have made psychic contact with before, regardless of distance.

Psychic communication requires no rolls, is as easy as talking, and works even if the two psychics do not share a common language. It is also difficult to tell lies psychically. Characters communicating psychically can use all Charisma-based skills normally, but take a -3 penalty on all attempts to lie or deceive. Psychic communication includes a mixture of words, emotions, and images.

Communication between psychics who do not share a common language consists of images, emotions, and general impressions. It is slower and less precise than that between people who do share a common language. Communicating simple concepts in this fashion is easy, but attempting to discuss any complex or abstract topic like law or biology can be difficult, frustrating, and slow.

Almost all aliens and ab-humans are at least mildly psychic, and psychics can also communicate with these beings. However, doing so requires an Intelligence + Psychic Art roll because of the difficulty of understanding alien thoughts. This roll must score a certain number of Success Levels, depending upon just how alien the species is.

Psychic communication with aliens is at best vague and fragmentary. All Charisma-based skills suffer a penalty ranging from -3 to -10, depending upon how mentally different the ab-humans or aliens are. This communication is a slow and lengthy affair, made more difficult because even the most basic sensory images are difficult to understand, since most aliens possess different senses from humans.

Psychics can also communicate with non-psychics at a range of up to 100 meters, as long as the psychic can clearly see the person. Doing so always requires a Willpower + Psychic Art roll. When attempting to communicate with someone with no levels of Hyperspatial Exposure, all the psychic can only communicate is very simple and very direct concepts like "Danger" or "Help!" and a vague sense of where the target needs to go or where the danger is coming from. When communicating with anyone with one or more levels of Hyperspatial Exposure, the psychic

can also send short simple sentences and relatively uncomplicated visual images. If the target deliberately attempts to mentally respond to a psychic communication, the psychic can also receive these impressions from targets with one or more levels of Hyperspatial Exposure. Psychics can communicate with non-psychics they know well and have made psychic contact with before at any distance, but such communication requires intense concentration and at least one full minute of effort. All characters with this Quality have a minimum of Hyperspatial Exposure 1.

CLAIRVOYANCE

4-point Power

Characters with Clairvoyance can "see" people, places, and objects unimpeded by distance or barriers. These visions are sometimes triggered by intense emotions, but the psychic can also deliberately attempt to have a vision about a person, place, or object that they have some sort of emotional connection to. The psychic regularly sees crimes being committed and other disturbing events and incidents. These visions are flashes of insight about ongoing events controlled by the Director. Often, the character sees through the eyes of a victim or perpetrator, or from a worm or bird's eye view.

Each vision is different, but the point of view is often confusing, and most visions are short. Sometimes, the psychic receives multiple related visions each adding a little more information to the overall puzzle. The physical range of the visions is irrelevant; if the Director believes the character is in a position to be involved in the related events, the vision could be of events occurring halfway across the world or even on another planet. These visions most commonly occur when the character touches someone or something associated with some powerful sorcerous, psychic, or emotional event like a ritual, a kidnapping, or a murder. Visions are always of the present or occasionally of a possible future.

When a vision occurs, the character must make a roll to determine how clear their vision is. Also, any time the clairvoyant is unaware of an immediate potential danger, the Director should ask her to make a Perception + Psychic Art roll to notice the threat. Even on a failure, being asked to roll notifies the player that some danger is nearby, and leaves the character with a vague sense that something is up. Success on this roll reveals small but potentially useful hints about this danger, but none of these hints should be at all detailed. Clairvoyant characters can attempt to have a vision by touching a person or object related to the subject of the vision and making a Perception + Psychic Art roll.

EMOTIONAL INFLUENCE

4-point Power

Your character can affect those around her emotionally. To use this ability, the psychic must either touch the target or look directly in the target's eyes from no more than two meters away. The psychic can use this power to produce any emotion in the target, from lust, to anger, to grief, to amused joy. How the target reacts is determined by the Director. For example, if the emotion is anger and the target is a fairly aggressive person, violence is likely. Conversely, if the target is more avoidant, anger might manifest as passive aggression.

The psychic must make a Willpower + Psychic Art roll to use this ability. To avoid this influence, the target must make a Willpower (not doubled) roll with a penalty equal to the Success Levels of the influencer's Willpower + Psychic Art roll. A psychic target makes a doubled Willpower roll.

If the target succeeds in the initial roll, the psychic cannot affect that particular emotion in that character for at least the next 15 minutes. If the psychic wins this contest, the target feels the desired emotion as a strong and real emotion and reacts to it as they normally would. If the emotion doesn't fit with the circumstances, such as rage at a good friend's birthday party, it soon fades. However, if it fits at all with the target's current circumstances, the target is inclined to act on this emotion as if they were feeling the emotion naturally. The emotion also fades as rapidly or slowly as it normally would, depending upon the circumstances and the target.

Remember that for certain emotions (say lust), your character's Attractiveness levels also modify (negatively for positive Attractiveness levels; positively for negative levels) the target's Willpower roll (such modifiers are paid for separately and do not affect the cost of this Quality). This is a rare power and one that is rarely discussed publicly or in the news media. Most people don't believe it exists. Various governments and law enforcement officials know that it exists, but the general public only knows of it through vague and general rumors. Few people are willing to trust anyone who is believed to have this ability.

INSIGHT

4-point Power

On a successful Perception + Psychic Art roll, the character can discern detailed truths about a person (including psychological Qualities and Drawbacks, but not thoughts or memories) by reading the psychic impressions she gives off. The character can look at someone and learn her na-

ture, feelings, desires, fears, and whether she is insane, possessed, mentally controlled, or an alien being who merely looks human. To read these impressions, the psychic must be within two meters of the person. Insight also allows the character to track someone by attuning herself to the person's psychic traces. Any use of this power requires one to two turns of concentration. The character can only track a character that they have met and been in mental contact with or that they saw clearly when they started tracking them. The psychic traces necessary to track someone linger for an hour or two. This ability works equally well on people with any level of Hyperspatial Exposure and on ab-humans, but not on aliens or people with no levels of Hyperspatial Exposure.

MIND PROBE

4-point Power

If a character with this power touches someone or looks directly into their eyes from no more than a range of two meters, he can listen to what the being is thinking. The subject resists the telepath's Willpower + Psychic Art roll with a Willpower roll. If the target has 0 Levels of hyperspatial exposure, the target doubles their Willpower when making this roll. If the target has 1 or more levels of hyperspatial exposure, the target does not double their Willpower when making this roll. If successful, the psychic's Success Levels on the Willpower + Psychic Art roll dictate the time (in minutes) that may be spent probing and the depth of the "read" (consult Telepathy Chart).

MIND PROBE CHART

LEVEL OF SUCCESS	RESULT
1	Can sense surface thoughts (whatever the subject is thinking at the moment).
2	Can delve deeper into the mind of the target. Any one simple question (i.e., anything that can be answered in one sentence or less) can be "asked" of the subject, and the information plucked from his mind. Each additional Success Level adds one more question and answer.
5+	Can get a clear picture of the subject's personality, find memories, and get any information the target has, provided the psychic knows what they are looking for.

PSYCHIC LINK

1-point Power

Certain people have strong psychic bonds to specific people or animals. Characters with a psychic link always share a close emotional bond. Family members, particularly siblings (especially twins), partners, romantic couples, and beloved animals have all demonstrated this psychic link. When a player chooses the Psychic Link Power for his character, he must decide who the character is linked to and why. The other party involved often has a reciprocal link, but not always.

In a few rare cases, an individual may have a link to several people (most often family members). Psychically linked characters always have a general idea where the other individual is and how she is doing. By making either a successful (doubled) Willpower roll or a successful Willpower + Psychic Art roll, any character with such a link can communicate with the individual they are linked to for as long as desired, in thoughts, emotions and images. If the other individual does not also have the Psychic Link Power, only the psychic character can actively participate by sending or reaching for impressions; the non-psychic feels the contact, but cannot obtain any information from the psychic that the psychic is not actively sending. A non-psychic can possess the Psychic Link Quality, in which case they can communicate actively with the linked psychic. At least one partner in any link must possess the Psychic Sensitivity Power.

PSYCHIC VISIONS

1-point Power

The character can see the future in visions or dreams. Most of the time, these visions are not very clear, nor do they happen very often, and they cannot be activated on purpose—they just happen. No rolls are needed. Directors should make the visions or dreams ambiguous and use images and situations from the character's life. The visions should reflect her current problems and worries. Friends and enemies may appear in the visions, offering advice, vague threats, or deep philosophical comments. The Director can use the visions to drop hints about upcoming events—the rise of some great evil, the possible arrival of an Apocalypse, a surprise visit by a difficult relative. A character without Psychic Sensitivity, but with at least one level of Hyperspatial Exposure can have this Power; it might even represent latent psychic talent that could further develop in the course of the game.

PSYCHOMETRY

4-point Power

Your character possesses a preternatural sensitivity to objects and the energies others leave when they touch them. They can gain information about places the same way. Characters with psychometry often get impressions from simply bumping against a wall or touching the steering wheel of a car—many people with this power wear gloves most of the time. The Director determines the visions a psychic character receives. To use this ability actively, your character must touch the object and roll Perception + Psychic Art. The exact result depends both upon the roll and upon the history of the object being touched. Consult the chart below but know that your Director might modify the “read” depending on the needs of the storyline.

UNDETECTABILITY

4-point Power

The character can use her mental powers to affect others' perceptions, allowing her to become almost impossible to notice. Characters with this power may add a bonus equal to their Willpower to all Acrobatics or Crime rolls involving stealth. However, the character must deliberately act stealthy to use this power; a character cannot be undetectable while shouting. This power does not allow a character to hide without cover. A character with this power can hide in shadows or vanish into a crowd, but she is still perfectly visible in an empty well-lit corridor. The additional stealth provided by this ability does not affect automated systems or recordings, only the senses of living beings who are in the vicinity of the character.

SORCEROUS QUALITIES

Sorcery is the ability to affect the structure of the physical world and its relationship to the various dimensions of hyperspace using carefully constructed mathematical patterns. These patterns can be activated by dancing and chanting, attaining various visionary mental states, performing elaborate mathematical calculations, or creating a complex electronic device with these patterns within its circuitry. Actually using sorcery requires both an understanding of the esoteric mysteries involved, as well as the knowledge of the particular spell that you wish to cast or create a device to perform.

PSYCHOMETRY CHART

SUCCESS LEVEL	RESULT
1	Feel the strongest emotions involved with the object in the recent past (one week or less), and gain some sensory glimpse of the person feeling that emotion. This is not a full-face portrait, but it could be a flash of someone's shoes, the smell of their perfume, the sound of music playing in the background at the time, or some other (more or less) useful clue. This level reveals items that are supernatural in nature or which were made by aliens or ab-humans.
2	Impressions go back further in time (a month or less) and get more precise for more recent (one week or less) events. If the visions are frightening, the character may need to make a Fear Test. This level reveals a few vague hints about the potential uses or powers of any supernatural item or alien artifact.
3	Basic impressions go back one year or less. The character can now detect more than one wielder/owner within that time frame if they left a good psychic "imprint" (i.e., felt strong emotions while in contact with the item). Clues are even more plentiful, but they are rarely complete. Events of <i>extreme</i> emotional or magical power can be glimpsed, no matter how long ago they were. This level reveals if an old knife was used to perform a human sacrifice 900 years ago, but would likely not show anything more than a shadowy glimpse of who performed the deed or where it was performed.
4	Basic impressions go back ten years or less. Visions are granted about every owner/wielder of the object or those in contact with it (in the case of a murder weapon, that would include both the killer and the victim if the weapon was a knife or something that had to touch the victim). This level reveals most of the powers and uses of any supernatural item or alien artifact. This level also reveals a bit more information about powerful events that happened many centuries or millennia before. It would show that a knife was used by a mutated cultist to perform a human sacrifice in the ruins of a large church, and might even show a partial glimpse of the victim's face or a general sense of why the sacrifice was being performed.
5	Impressions go back up to a century. The visions are stronger and incredibly detailed. They are also imprinted more firmly in the psychic's mind. They may be revisited at a later time even if the object is not available. Clues from before that time are also more complete. These kinds of Success Levels are the most subject to Director variation.
6+	This brings up any scene concerning the item or place in the last ten thousand years, or at any time if it involved significant supernatural events or events of great emotional power. These visions may be entered, walked around in, slowed, frozen, or otherwise experienced in full sensory mode as if part of some virtual reality game. The Director should withhold only specifically warded or totally plot-destroying information.

HYPERSPATIAL DEVICES

Variable Quality

The character owns a hyperspatial device that duplicates the effects of a single sorcery spell. Characters cannot possess devices that duplicate the effects of Level 5 spells. See *Chapter Four: Arcane Secrets* for the complete list of spells. Although they can be made in almost any form, the minimum size and weight of the device depends upon the level of the spell. Increase the size by one category for any device made by deep ones or Yithians.

SORCERY

4-point/level Quality

Your character is a sorcerer, able to wield the potent and dangerous powers of hyperspatial sorcery. Spells range in power from Level 1 to Level 5, and your character must have at least as many levels of the sorcery Quality as the level of the spell she is attempting to cast. The character can be either a ritual sorcerer or a builder of technosorcerous devices. See *Chapter Four: Arcane Secrets* for further information about hyperspatial sorcery. Every character who possesses this Quality must have at least one level of Hyperspatial Exposure.

SPELLS

Variable Quality

To use sorcery, characters must also know various spells. Each spell costs a number of points equal to half their level (rounded up). See *Chapter Four: Arcane Secrets* for the complete list of spells.

SPELL LEVEL	POINT COST
1	1
2	1
3	2
4	2
5	3

AUGMENTATIONS

With advances in human biotechnology, combined with biological information recovered from elder one ruins and gained from trade with the mi-go, humanity has begun creating ways to alter and augment people. Some of the prototypes for these procedures were developed by the mi-go, and many people still call them mi-go tech or some similar term. Most of this biotechnology was designed by humanity. Alien biotech has been extensively tested and modified so as to work with human physiologies safely and stably in long-term use. The majority of advances that have finished testing are purely medical. Cancer, diabetes, and many other ailments can now be successfully cured and current estimates are the people who have access to the various new treatments will have healthy life spans of at least 120 years, and possibly considerably longer.

However, these select safe and legal treatments are only the first biological advances to be freely available. There are many other augmentations – some of which are now being tested for safety, others that have been discovered to be unsafe, and some that are only legal with proper authorization. There is a thriving black and gray market in augmentations for criminals, the rich and eccentric, and terrorists. Popular TV action shows & film regularly feature mutated super-villains with vast augmentation-induced powers. Although the reality is far less impressive, augmentations can still be quite powerful. Some augmentations only require a series of shots containing tailored stem cells and

engineered viruses and bacteria, but the more radical and extreme augmentations usually also require surgery to implant vat-grown organs or tissues.

LEGAL AUGMENTATIONS

Characters, before or after play begins, can purchase the following Qualities as augmentations – Fast Reaction Time, Hard to Kill, Natural Toughness, Resistance (either pain or disease/poison), and Eidetic Memory. In addition, the following augmentations are available.

BIOFILTER

2-point Augmentation

The character's body automatically filters out harmful substances. This augmentation renders the character immune to toxic substances in the air, such as atmospheric impurities, bacteria, viruses, gas attacks, etc, and provides a +2 bonus on Constitution Tests against injected, ingested, or contact poisons and diseases.

ENHANCED TIME SENSE

2-point Augmentation

The character can receive and process sensory information far faster than most humans. The character must already possess the Fast Reaction Time Quality and a minimum Perception of 5 to purchase this augmentation. Enhanced Time Sense doubles the bonuses provided by the Fast Reaction Time Quality.

The character can also discern things occurring too fast for a normal human to perceive, such as individual frames of a film or sounds that have been speeded up to many times normal. The character can also read a number of times faster than normal equal to their Perception (a character with a Perception of 5 can read 5 times faster than normal). The character can track back the paths of bullets and similar fast-moving objects on a successful Perception + Notice roll. Whenever desired, the character can also choose to see the world at the same speed as everyone else, watching a film and ignoring the individual frames if desired.

SPELL LEVEL	POINT COST	MINIMUM SIZE	MINIMUM WEIGHT
1	1	The size of a wristwatch or pen.	At least one ounce
2	2	The size of a mobile or paperback book	At least half a pound
3	4	The size of a thick hardback book	At least two pounds
4	8	The size of a large briefcase	At least 10 pounds

IMPROVED SENSES

Variable Augmentation

These augmentations cover detection abilities beyond human limits. The description and cost for each of these senses follows.

Echolocation/Sonar: The character has the ability to project sound waves, and detect objects by measuring the speed with which they bounce back. This sense is sufficiently accurate that the character can develop a perfect picture of their immediate environment. The range for this sense is five meters x Perception. **Cost:** 3 points, or 6 points if the radar works in a 360-degree arc, enabling the character to sense things behind him. This sense works equally well in both air and water, but not in vacuum.

Electrical Sense: The character can see the flow of electrons, and sense the flow and strength of electrical currents, allowing the character to see electrical wires in a wall or even the details of the wiring of an alarm system, as long as the current is no more than Perception meters away. This augmentation provides a +3 bonus to Science or Engineering rolls dealing with repairing or studying electronic equipment as well as crime rolls to open electronic locks or disable electronic alarm systems. The character can also detect magnetic fields, though people with this sense usually "tune out" everpresent planetary magnetic fields. **Cost:** 3 points.

Enhanced Sense: One or more of the character's five senses is enhanced to inhuman levels. The character could track by scent, hear a whisper across a large room, or read a computer monitor from 20 meters away. This augmentation requires the character also possess the Acute Senses Quality for the same sense and to have a minimum perception of 5. When applicable, this augmentation doubles the bonus provided by Acute Senses, but most of the time no roll is needed. **Cost:** 3 points per sense.

Infrared Vision: The character can see into the infrared range of the spectrum, enabling him to detect things by their heat differentials. This allows the character to see even in complete darkness, but it can be fooled by clothing or systems designed to fool infrared sensors. **Cost:** 2 points.

Low-Light Vision: The character's eyes can amplify light to superhuman levels, at least as good as a cat's. Night penalties are halved (rounded down) and the character can see as well on a cloudless moonlit night as a normal person does during the day. **Cost:** 1 point.

Spectrum Vision: The character's eyes can see in both the infrared and ultraviolet spectrums, providing the equivalent of both Infrared Vision and Low-Light Vision. **Cost:** 3 points.

OXYGEN RESERVE

1-point Augmentation

Characters with this augmentation can also hold their breath for up to 30 minutes, enabling them to survive in completely inhospitable environs, such as underwater or in a room filled with poison gas. They still require a space suit in vacuum, but do not need a working air supply.

PRESSURE TOLERANCE

2-point Augmentation

The character's ability to live and operate in high and low pressure environments is significantly increased. The character can comfortably live in pressures as low as 0.3 atmospheres (equivalent to an altitude of 9.5 km on Earth) and can spend time in pressures as high as 5 atmospheres (equal to a depth of 40 m underwater) without needed to undergo decompression when returning to normal atmospheric pressure. This augmentation also adds +1 to the character's Constitution and allows characters to hold their breath for up to 10 minutes while remaining active.

There is also a related 0-point augmentation where the only benefit is to render the character immune to the affects of altitude sickness. This augmentation requires only a simple injection and is given to all new colonists on Eridanos. Characters with this lesser augmentation can comfortably live in environments where the pressure is above 0.4 atmospheres (equivalent to an altitude of 7.5 km on Earth).

RAPID HEALING

1-point Augmentation

The character heals three times as rapidly as normal. As a result, the character heals three times Constitution LPs/Day. This augmentation is not usable with or cumulative with any other Quality or augmentation that enhances healing.

TEMPERATURE TOLERANCE

1-point Augmentation

The character can survive unprotected in temperatures as low as 0 F (-18 C) and as high as 140 F (60 C) without discomfort, harm or the need for any special clothing.

RESTRICTED AUGMENTATIONS

Providing unauthorized individuals with any of these augmentations is illegal and possessing them is frowned upon by most governments. Anyone purchasing any of these augmentations must possess one of two Drawbacks: a 1-point Obligation (to the organization that legally

provided the augmentations) or a 1-point Dark Secret (possesses an unlicensed augmentations). If so desired, a character who obtains them illegally through a criminal organization can take both Drawbacks. Augmentations can be detected by any thorough medical exam, but unless otherwise stated are not visible. Possessing restricted augmentations is not illegal, but people known to have them can face job discrimination and in many nations, legal penalties for crimes are higher if such augmentations are used when performing the crime.

AMPHIBIOUS

2-point Augmentation

The character can breathe water and survive any depth underwater without problems or discomfort. The character can also swim at their normal running speed instead of having their swimming speed equal to the Success Level of a Dexterity and Sports roll, which is what ordinary humans must make do with.

BOOST GLAND

3-point Augmentation

This augmentation provides the user with a brief rush of strength and energy. For ten rounds, the user gains a +2 bonus to Strength and Dexterity and can temporarily exceed normal human limitations in both attributes. The increase in Strength adds 4 Life Points to the character's total, but these points are lost when the effects of the boost wear off. Boosting a human physiology in this fashion is exhausting. The user cannot use this augmentation more often than once every two hours. This augmentation allows the character to temporarily gain a Strength and a Dexterity of up to 7.

COMMANDO UPGRADE

6-point Augmentation

This extensive augmentation provides the user with +1 to all three Physical Attributes, as well as one level of Hard to Kill. In addition, the user gains the Regeneration Augmentation. This augmentation does not allow any of the character's Attributes to exceed 6.

ELECTRICAL ATTACK

5-point Augmentation

The character's arms and legs now contain muscle-like tissue similar to an electric eel's implanted in them. This allows the character to do 16 points of electrical (Bash) damage by touch. Alternately, the character can choose to use this augmentation to duplicate the effects

of a hand taser (see p. 115). The character can control the ability consciously, and can use it to attack any target by touch or any target who is touching a conductor, like a metal railing or ledge, that the character is also touching. Metal armor offers no protection against this attack, but highly insulating clothing, like electrician's gloves used as a barrier against conductive substances, offer complete protection from this attack.

ENHANCED ATTRIBUTES

1- or 3-point Augmentation

Using various forms of genetic alteration and drug therapies to encourage the subject's body to enhance itself, anyone with enough money and the right contacts can now enhance any of their Attributes. People can become stronger, tougher, or even smarter. Currently, it's only possible to use this augmentation to give someone one additional point in any enhanced Attribute. Those bonuses are always added to the character's Attributes after Attribute points have been distributed. So, if you give your character a Strength of four and then add an Enhanced Attribute augmentation to Strength, the final Attribute score would be five. The cost of raising any Attribute is one point as long as the final value of the Attribute is six or less. This augmentation can raise any Attribute that naturally has a value of six up to seven, but raising an Attribute from six to seven costs three points.

NATURAL ARMOR

Variable Augmentation

The character has biological armor grown under or on top of their skin. There are two types of armor, invisible and visible armor. Invisible armor lies under the surface of the character's skin and can only be detected by a medical examination. Invisible armor provides 1 point of armor per level, and cannot have a level higher than 3.

Visible armor provides 2 points of armor per level, but greater amounts of armor causes the character to look increasingly inhuman. Up to 2 levels, the character can have a slightly scaled or obviously leathery skin, like a snake's scales or a rhino's hide. At 3 levels of armor, the character must have obvious bony plates, like an alligator's hide or arthropod carapace. Also, for every level of visible armor, the character automatically gains one level of negative Attractiveness. So, a character with three levels of visible armor would have six points of armor and an Attractiveness of -3. Characters cannot possess more than three points of this augmentation.

NATURAL WEAPONRY

Variable Augmentation

The character has claws or teeth that inflict Slashing/Stabbing damage. Using these claws requires either an Archaic Weaponry or Brawling + Dexterity roll. The damage of the natural weapon determines its cost.

Fangs or Small Claws: The character has short fangs and sharp carnivore teeth or small sharp claws at the end of their fingers that do cutting damage equal to 2 x Strength and are less than two centimeters long. At no additional cost, the character can have both claws and fangs, just claws, or just fangs. **Cost:** 1 point.

For one additional point, these claws can be made to retract into the character's fingers like a cat's claws. When retracted, they cannot be seen and the character can shake hands and wear gloves normally. All legal versions of this augmentation are retractile.

Large Fangs or Claws: The character has claws several centimeters long or fangs and teeth similar to a cougar or other large predator. Both are obvious and difficult to conceal and like the previous augmentation, the character can have one or both for the same cost. augmentation allows the character to do 3 x Strength cutting damage. **Cost:** 2 points.

For one additional point, these claws can retract into the character's knuckles, between the character's fingers. When retracted, they cannot be seen and the character can shake hands and wear gloves normally. All legal versions of this augmentation are retractile.

REGENERATION

2-point Augmentation

The character heals 12 times as rapidly as normal, recovering Con LP every two hours.

WALL WALKING

3-point Quality

The character has slightly rough pads like on the feet of a gecko on her hands, feet, knees, and forearms. Other than their slightly odd texture, these pads look like normal skin, but allow the character to stick to almost any surface, regardless of whether it is horizontal, vertical or anything in between. The character can automatically climb walls or sheer cliffs without needing to make Dexterity or Acrobatics rolls. In addition, she can move at Dexterity + Constitution meters per turn – the speed of a brisk walk. The character can climb any surface capable of supporting their weight.

HYPERSPATIAL AUGMENTATIONS

Trade with the mi-go is strictly controlled by the OPS and the UN Security Council. Despite restrictions, the mi-go have already produced some amazing augmentations designed for use by humans. The mi-go are masters of biotechnology and are happy to trade prototypes of human augmentations for minerals, biological samples, and access to elder one and great race records and artifacts. These augmentations were based on similar alterations that the mi-go can make to their own species.

However, while mi-go research has proven invaluable for creating some of the more advanced augmentations developed by human researchers, none of the augmentations developed by the mi-go for use by humans have been approved for more than the most limited use. For all their skill, the mi-go do not understand all of the myriad of side effects their technologies can have on human physiologies and psychologies. Many their devices and augmentations can have unforeseen and occasionally dire side effects. Most mi-go augmentations are still undergoing testing, but four have been used in limited test programs by the OPS, several government intelligence agencies, and military special forces in both the US and China. A few renegade mi-go are also willing to illegally trade these augmentations to humans willing to pay their price.

These augmentations all give the character some ability to directly interact with hyperspace. While powerful, this ability is also exceedingly dangerous. These augmentations do not just produce hyperspatial exposure, they automatically add +1 to the user's Hyperspatial Exposure level regardless of existing exposure threshold. Anyone with a mi-go hyperspatial augmentation and any other hyperspatial exposure has a permanent Hyperspatial Exposure level of 2 rather than 1. A sorcerer who already had a Hyperspatial Exposure Level of 3 would automatically gain a Hyperspatial Exposure Level of 4, and become dangerously insane, simply by gaining one of these augmentations. Characters can only possess a single hyperspatial augmentation. Only spies, special forces soldiers, and a few OPS operatives can legally possess one of these augmentations. These augmentations are highly illegal for all unauthorized personnel to possess.

ATTACK FIELD

8 or 12-point Augmentation

The character can project a field of hyperspatial energy around their body. At the user's choice, the field can be used in one of three settings, to only affect living tissue, to

only affect complex electronics, or to damage all matter. The character can also alter the size of this field so that it extends between 10 and 60 centimeters from their body. Targets that touch this field suffer damage. For 8-points, the field does 20 points of Bash damage and for 12 points the field does 30 points of Bash damage. Damage caused by this field either causes subtle but severe damage to living cells or microcircuits or it causes all matter to appear to rapidly corrode or decay. Armor protects from this damage normally. When active, this field produces a slight shimmer in the air, but is not otherwise visible. Turning the field on or off requires a single combat action. All damage caused by this augmentation is Bash damage.

DEFENSE FIELD

12-point Augmentation

The character can project a solid field of hyperspatial force around herself. Normally, this field only protects the character, but the character can also expand it into a dome with a radius of up to three meters, centered on the character. This expanded force field protects anyone within three meters of the character. Also instead of projecting a field around herself, the character can project a single wall of solid hyperspatial force as large as four meters on a side, up to 10 meters away from herself.

Creating a defense field or changing how it is deployed requires one combat action. This field provides 10 points of armor and a damage capacity of 50 points. When an attack is made against anyone inside this field or against the field itself, 10 points is subtracted from the attack, and any additional damage reduces the field's damage capacity. When the damage capacity is reduced to 0, the field instantly collapses. Once the field has collapsed, it cannot be used again for one full minute, since it requires that long to regenerate.

HYPERSPATIAL FLIGHT

8-point Augmentation

A character with the Hyperspatial Flight augmentation can fly by means of an implanted organ capable of generating hyperspatial fields that produce reactionless acceleration. He can move at five times normal human running speed ($\text{Constitution} + \text{Dexterity} \times 10$ meters per second or $\text{Constitution} + \text{Dexterity} \times 30$ km per hour). The character can hover, maneuver in all directions, and change direction from one turn to the next. The character must make a successful $\text{Dexterity} + \text{Acrobatics}$ roll to fly and will need to make additional successes to perform complex maneuvers. He can fly equally well in an atmosphere and in the vacuum of space.

The organ that allows the character to fly produces what looks like a pair of hyperspatial wings four meters across. While occasional obstacles like people, telephone poles, or widely spaced trees do not interfere with flight, the character cannot fly in a narrow corridor or other enclosed space that does not allow room for the hyperspatial field to fully extend. During the daytime, humans only see this field as a pair of vaguely wing-like shimmers in the air, but at night it glows slightly, causing the character to be easily visible while flying. These effects only appear to people with one or more levels of Hyperspatial Exposure.

HYPERSPATIAL MANIPULATORS

3 to 15-point Augmentation

The character can project one or two complex fields of temporarily solidified hyperspatial energy that each have a range of up to 10 meters. These fields allow the character to manipulate objects at a distance. The user can both feel objects they are touching with these manipulators as if they were touching the objects with their hands, and can manipulate objects that are inside closed containers or on the other side of a door.

Characters use their normal skills to manipulate objects, but if the character cannot see the object they are manipulating, then most tasks require a minimum of two additional Success Levels to succeed due to the complexity of working by feel. (Tasks like mechanical lock picking are normally done by feel and would have no penalty.) Each level of this augmentation allows the user to manipulate objects with one point of effective Strength. Four levels of this Quality would allow the character to manipulate objects with a Strength of four. Characters cannot take more than five levels of this power. Characters can use these fields to wield both melee and ranged weapons and to make unarmed attacks normally. Brawling or melee attacks do damage based on the Strength of these manipulators.

SKILLS

How can a top engineer rebuild a starship engine in less than an hour? Why can a crack sniper hit a target a half-kilometer away? The answer is their skills. Skills are learned abilities, the result of training, study, or experience. In general, anything teachable is considered a skill. The character's background, education, and life experiences determine what skills he would be likely to have.

Skills are broken down into broad categories. Rather than assign a skill to different types of guns, for example, Guns covers the ability to fire anything with a trigger.

This is not realistic, but reflects the somewhat cinematic tone of *Eldritch Skies*. It also makes character creation easier: rather than players having to page through a huge list of skills, all skills are noted on the character sheet. That way, you can run down the choices quickly and decide which are most appropriate.

Skills can be run using the broad categories all at the same level. That's easiest. For those who like to see a bit more detail, the specifics of each skill are left to your imagination. An intrepid jungle explorer Hero's Science Skill would reflect mostly an expertise in botany and biology, and his Knowledge Skill would deal mainly with geography and exotic cultures. A criminal lawyer may have a Crime Skill that lets her communicate with underworld types, but she probably can't pick a lock. At your Director's discretion, skill uses outside your character's focus might suffer a roll penalty. When the Director says that a given skill requires a focus, players should make sure to note down their character's skill focus on the character sheet.

BUYING SKILLS

To acquire skills, use the skills category character points of the Character Type chosen. Skills cost 1 point per level for levels one through five. After level five, each additional level costs 3 points. For example, Dave wants his character to be a high level corporate negotiator, regularly arranging deals for multinational corporations, some of whom deal in alien technology. Such expertise would require a skill of 5 or higher. Dave decides to go for broke and give the character an Influence Skill 7. This costs 5 points for the first 5 levels, and 6 points for the other two, for a total of 11 character points. Dave's character is a serious player, but he is going to have to rely on contacts, friends, and allies for any other kind of expertise.

ACROBATICS

Known to stunt men, cat burglars, and physics-defying martial artists, this is the ability to perform tumblers, somersaults, and other complex maneuvers. It is also used to dodge attacks, climb obstacles, and perform similar tasks of agility. Acrobatics can replace Crime when trying to move silently (use the higher of the two skills for sneaking around attempts).

Using the Skill: Acrobatics is used with Dexterity to perform most maneuvers, including avoiding close combat attacks and gunfire. When jumping for distance, climbing, or swimming, use Strength and Acrobatics instead. If you have the Space Training Quality, it also allows you to move around in free fall or low gravity.

THE MEANING OF SKILL NUMBERS

Like most numbers in the **Unisystem**, high is good and low is bad. The higher a skill level, the more proficient the character is at using that skill. In general, a level one indicates a beginner or amateur, somebody who has just learned the rudiments of the skill. Level two or three represents general competency—the ability to perform average tasks with ease. Level four or five indicates extreme competence in the subject, the result of a lot of study or practice. Higher levels indicate true mastery of the skill or craft, and the ability to perform the most difficult tasks with relative ease. For example, a master martial artist would have a Brawling skill level in the 7-10 range.

ARCHAIC WEAPONS

When a fist is not enough, it's time to draw a knife. Alternately, perhaps your character is an Olympic level fencer or has trained with a fencing master on Galatea I. This skill is used for all archaic weapons, from swords and axes to crossbows and throwing knives. Commandos are often proficient at the ancient art of dismembering their foes with both sharp and blunt objects.

Using the Skill: Dexterity and Archaic Weapons cover most combat actions. Feints use Intelligence (or Perception to recognize them). Archaic Weapons is very useful when it's Combat Maneuver time (see p. 85). It can be used instead of Acrobatics or Brawling to avoid getting hit.

ART

This skill covers all areas of creative endeavor: acting, music, painting, sculpture, creative writing, and so on. That does not mean your character knows all artistic skills equally well. When creating the character, decide which art or arts are his specialty. A character who is skilled at painting and drawing may not be able to sing or dance. An artistic polymath who can sing, dance, draw, sculpt, and make amazing origami should buy one or two additional Art skills as Wildcard skills.

Using the Skill: There are two types of rolls that use this skill. To create art, use Intelligence and Art (for writing and painting), Willpower and Art (for acting or storytelling), Dexterity and Art (for dancing or playing an instrument), or Constitution and Art (for singing). The Success Levels determine how good the creation (or performance, for things like music or dance) is. To judge someone else's art, use Perception and Art.

BRAWLING

Call it brawling, martial arts, or fisticuffs, this skill covers the art of using hands and feet (and other body parts) in combat. Brawling is indispensable for special forces commandos and is also very useful around hostile security guards and in bar fights.

Using the Skill: Dexterity and Brawling for hitting someone or avoiding being hit (can be used instead of Acrobatics or Archaic Weaponry for the latter). Many Combat Maneuvers (see p. 85) are based on the Brawling Skill. Intelligence and Brawling may be used to identify a fighting style, or to feint an opponent. Perception and Brawling counter such feints.

COMPUTERS

This is the skill for using computers, sensors, and all other common technological devices that aren't weapons or vehicles. It includes using mobiles. What governs the use of this skill versus engineering? Simple: if it's a hardware problem, it's Engineering; if it's a software problem, use Computers. The skill extends to the amount of hardware comprehension involved in using a device – a Computers expert could put together system components or troubleshoot cable connections – but not enough to repair physical damage or figure out which wire to pull to deactivate an explosive.

Using the Skill: Intelligence and Computers to write a program, gain information, or hack into a secure system. For hacking, the system's security imposes penalties, from -1 for a local library's membership records to -8 or worse for an OPS database. Perception and Computers help diagnose software or hardware problems without having to call someone's support line.

CRIME

Sometimes a character needs to break into an alien spy's apartment, or maybe uncuff handcuffs in a hurry. Breaking and entering, skulking around, picking pockets—if it's illegal, this skill covers it, with two major exceptions: computer hacking uses the Computers Skill, and conning people depends on the Influence Skill. Your character doesn't have to be a criminal to have this skill; cops, private investigators, spies, and other (relatively) honest but street-wise folks have it as well.

Using the Skill: Dexterity and Crime are used for things like moving stealthily (although Acrobatics can replace Crime here), lifting someone's wallet, and picking locks. Victims resist such activities with their Brains Score, or Perception and either Notice or Crime (which-

ever is better). Crime and Intelligence are used to identify criminals and street contacts (this roll is modified by how familiar the character is with the local criminal scene).

DOCTOR

OPS operatives and others who delve too deeply into mythos activities can easily get hurt, so this skill sees a lot of use. This skill covers the ability to heal injuries and cure disease through modern medicine. A full-fledged doctor has a skill of four or higher, while a surgeon capable of installing cutting-edge modifications would have a level of at least six. First aid and paramedic or nursing training all fall under this skill at lower levels.

Using the Skill: An Intelligence and Doctor roll is used to treat injuries; each Success Level restores one Life Point of damage (only one roll per patient per day). This also prevents the victim from losing more Life Points from bleeding or complications. Perception and Doctor can be used to diagnose medical problems, or determine cause of death.

DRIVING

This is the ability to operate any ground vehicle, ranging from cars, trucks, and motorcycles to mobile labs and all-terrain vehicles. Ground vehicles in *Eldritch Skies* generally have computer systems that drive them well enough for normal purposes; however, anything out of the ordinary requires user intervention.

Using the Skill: Dexterity and Driving for high-speed chases, cutting through heavy traffic, driving on an unstable slope in a storm, and other complex maneuvers. If your character is not familiar with a specific vehicle (such as trying to drive an 18-wheeler or a motorcycle if he has only driven cars before), rolls suffer a -2 to -5 penalty or worse. Use Intelligence and Driving for general maintenance—for real trouble, switch to the Engineering Skill.

ENGINEERING

If it's broken, an engineer can fix it. If it isn't broken, she can improve it. If she doesn't have it, she can build it. Engineering covers all technical and craft skills, from carpentry to mechanics to setting up electronic equipment. An Engineering-skilled character with space training can operate a space suit. This is what your character needs if he wants to fix the life support system on a starship before the air runs out or to make a hyperspatial device into a makeshift weapon before the flying polyp batters down the door. More devious characters can also use this skill to set up elaborate and interesting traps.

Using the Skill: Perception and Engineering for spotting a problem. Intelligence and Engineering to do the repairs or construction work. Things that require a soft touch would use Dexterity and Engineering instead.

GUNS

Guns may not work so well when you're up against hyperspatial entities. However, against cultists, ab-human mutants, hostile aliens, and hungry ghouls, guns mean serious business. This skill covers all firearms, as well as gun-like ranged weapons, like zappers.

Using the Skill: Dexterity and Guns for pointing and shooting. Aiming slows a character's attack to the end of the Turn, but adds the Success Levels of a Guns and Perception roll to the shooting roll. Intelligence and Guns help clear a jammed gun.

INFLUENCE

The ability to deceive, seduce, intimidate, or manipulate people. Influence allows your character to pick up somebody at a bar, scare people into giving up important information, or otherwise persuade others to his or her will.

Using the Skill: Intelligence and Influence for fooling, scamming, or fast-talking others. Willpower and Influence to intimidate people. If your character is trying to seduce somebody, for example, any Appearance levels act as bonuses or penalties to the roll. By the same token, an augmented commando would find it a lot easier to intimidate someone if he lifts that person over her head; the proper circumstances add bonuses or penalties in the one to five range. A Willpower and Influence roll by the target might counter some or all of the impact.

KNOWLEDGE

All non-scientific, non-artistic disciplines are covered by this skill: it represents history, sociology, psychology and a plethora of other understandings. It also could be used for general or area knowledge that hasn't been formalized into an academic discipline (say local politics, or familiarity with an area's terrain.) Knowledge can be useful in predicting a cult leader's next move, or in setting up a personality profile (if you know the basic aspects of a sociopath's psychology, you may be in a better position to catch him). Knowledge can also help with occult research, for example identifying an ancient spear as being of deep one origin and originating from one of their settlements in the Atlantic. Players should specify what their Knowledge skill represents, or purchase multiple

Knowledge skills when the scope of information calls for it: getting a Ph. D. in everything involves a lot more than drinking and reading Malcolm Gladwell.

Using the Skill: Knowledge is used with Intelligence for almost all rolls. Success Levels in that roll may be added to a subsequent Occultism or Influence roll.

UNDERSTANDING THE MYTHOS

A substantial overlap exists between Knowledge, Science, and Occultism in *Eldritch Skies*, but they each define specific areas of understanding. When making calls on which skill to use, use this rule of thumb: Knowledge covers lore and historical information. Occultism uses a sorcerous framework to understand hyperspatial creatures and phenomena directly; and Science applies to technosorcerous devices and the mathematical understanding of hyperspace.

A Hero with a Science-based understanding of hyperspace can usually piece out what a sorcerous ritual does, and a dyed-in-the-wool black-robed sorcerer can recognize a gadget's effects and the spell it replicates. Nonetheless, they might be at minuses when trying to perform rituals or use devices outside of their specialties. See **Chapter Four: Arcane Secrets** (p. 143) for more details.

LANGUAGES

To get around in Beijing, sound good ordering at a French restaurant, or read the Latin *Necronomicon*, you need to learn a few languages. This skill covers any language other than one's native tongue.

Using the Skill: This skill is used differently from the rest. Each level of Languages indicates fluency in one language (player decides which ones). When trying to decipher some arcane inscription, use Intelligence and Language. In *Eldritch Skies*, knowing a few languages helps a character to pick meaning out of unknown languages as well.

After character creation, picking up new languages is difficult. This skill cannot be improved unless the character spends several months studying the new language (see p. 83 for improving a character through experience).

NOTICE

Has someone searched your character's apartment? Is a cultist tailing your character? This is the skill that lets you know. Without Notice, a character might miss the obscure reference in a news article, the telltale damaged equipment in the laboratory, or the "follow-my-lead" wink from his contact.

Using the Skill: Perception and Notice to spot things. Intelligence and Notice to remember something your character saw before but didn't realize was important until now.

OCCULTISM

Forbidden knowledge, ancient lore written by or about aliens, the ravings of mad occultists, and legends of ancient sorcerers. This is the skill of the truly arcane. It includes things like the nature of hyperspace, information about hyperspatial beings, as well as an understanding of what sorcery can do (but not how to perform it). Your character needs the Occultism Skill before she can become a proficient sorcerer.

Using the Skill: Intelligence and Occultism to recognize or research the nature of some mythos being. Perception and Occultism to identify a hyperspatial creature on first sight. Occultism is also used to cast spells (see p. 148).

PILOTING

This skill covers piloting aircraft, boats, and spacecraft. Like Art, a basic area of expertise must be specified (aircraft, boats, and spacecraft are the three big areas).

Using the Skill: Dexterity and Piloting to perform maneuvers, Intelligence and Piloting to use sensors or communication systems.

PSYCHIC ART

Using the powers of the mind requires more than just the knack for doing so. Most of them also require some degree of skill or training. Just like you need the Computer skill to find something obscure on the internet, the Psychic Art skill may allow you to find something in someone else's head. Because all psychic powers are related, this one skill covers using all of them.

Using the Skill: Perception and Psychic Art to learn someone's emotions, Willpower and Psychic Art to manipulate them.

SCIENCE

This skill covers all of the sciences—physics, biology, chemistry, and so on. It can come in handy when trying to identify hyperspatial oddities and similar weirdness. Although using sorcery requires Occultism, understanding the mathematical nature of hyperspace uses Science.

Using the Skill: Intelligence and Science for most things, from mixing a chemical formula to inventing a new device to repairing a broken dragonfly drive (Science can be used instead of Engineering for certain highly complex applications). Perception and Science is used to spot science-oriented clues, like identifying an unusual biochemical residue.

SPORTS

Swimming, team sports, running, ice skating: all sports are covered by this skill, except activities like boxing and martial arts, which use Brawling, and gymnastics, which is part of Acrobatics. In a pinch, Sports can be used instead of other combat skills to do things like swinging a bat in anger or tackling a monster—if you really want to wrap your arms around one.

Using the Skill: Depending on the nature of the sporting event, one of the three physical Attributes is used. Coordination and agility-based tasks (throwing a baseball) depend on Dexterity, brute force activities (weight lifting or tackling) rely on Strength, and endurance sports (marathon running) use Constitution.

WILDERNESS

The Wilderness skill allows characters to find shelter, anticipate the effects of wind and weather, and forage for food. It also covers knowing the habits of wild animals and working with or training domestic or service animals. Characters with the Space Training Quality can use Wilderness instead of Engineering to check and troubleshoot a space suit. Success Levels on an Intelligence + Wilderness roll may be added to any rolls related to tracking or moving stealthily in an outdoor environment, or overcoming natural obstacles (like climbing a tree).

Using the Skill: Perception and Wilderness to find food or shelter, Intelligence and Wilderness to understand the habits of animals or to figure out what upcoming weather is like. Dexterity and Wilderness allows you to create snares and traps or to build simple shelters. Willpower and Wilderness to tame an animal. Dealing with alien animal life and weather patterns without local Knowledge or experience requires additional success levels.

WILD CARD

Don't worry if you don't see your favorite skill listed above. It's the nature of the beast (low skill category beast, that is) to lose some completeness. To take care of that problem, we have the unsung 21st skill on the list—the Wild Card. This is your fill-in-the-blanks skill—it can cover anything you want, with one caveat. The Wild Card Skill cannot be broader than the pre-existing skills: Weapons, for example, which would cover both Guns and Archaic Weapons, would not be OK. A character can have more than one Wild Card Skill (despite character sheet unsightliness)—take as many as it takes, as long as your Director approves.

COMBAT MANEUVERS

Are you wondering about that large Combat Maneuvers section on your character sheet? These are your character's preferred moves. You can find a list of Combat Maneuvers in **Chapter Three: Rules and Gear** (see p. 99). Before filling in this list, you should become familiar with the rules governing them. Combat Maneuvers have three elements.

Bonus: This totals the character's appropriate Attribute, skill, and Maneuver-specific modifiers. The bonus is what you add to the die roll to determine how well the attack or defense worked.

Damage: This lists the base damage of the Maneuver (if the Maneuver does any damage). Add any Success Levels of the roll to the base damage.

Notes: This highlights any special effects of the attack.

DRAMA POINTS

Sometimes a character needs to succeed at something, regardless of the probabilities (and sometimes the consequences). In a movie or TV show, the scriptwriter just decides how things go, although they try not to get so outlandish as to break the viewer's suspension of disbelief. In the *Eldritch Skies RPG*, we can simulate this with Drama Points. When you use a Drama Point, your character gets a huge bonus to his chances, representing the combination of impressive luck and awesome skills common to all cinematic and pulp heroes. The shot ricochets around a corner and cuts the hangman's rope, the bullet is only a mild flesh wound, an apparently slain companion is "not dead yet"...all those things are possible when you spend a Drama Point. Information on Drama Points is covered in **Chapter Three: Rules and Gear** (see p. 99).

Characters start with a set amount of Drama Points depending on their Character Type. Civilians get more beginning points—it's how they keep up with the Operatives, if you wish to allow both types of characters in the same Series.

FINISHING TOUCHES

These are the little things that mean so much—name, look, and the like. These touches bring life to your Hero and make her more than a list of numbers on a sheet of paper.

Name: What's in a name? Among other things, it can provide some insights into your character's background and personality. Surnames refer to the character's ancestry; nicknames can add color. A name helps make the character into a person.

Look: You can go the "identity card" route and be content to provide height, weight, eye and hair color, but other details make your character more memorable. Consider choosing a well-known actor, singer, or film character to represent your character. "David Tennant with stubble and a ponytail." This provides a quick visual frame of reference for yourself and others.

Other Characteristics: Maybe the character has some distinctive habit or mannerism—he always leaves the top button of his shirt undone, or can't sit still when he's thinking. Any scars, tattoos, or piercings that are easily noticeable? How does your Hero normally dress? What kind of music is in her mobile link, what sort of car does she drive? You're set to go. The stars of the show have been cast, and it's time to get the cameras rolling and the action started.

ARCHETYPES

On the next few pages, you will find six ready-to-play characters—three Operatives and three Civilians. The characters have their own story and background, and can be used as-is or modified by players as they see fit. Enjoy!

CHARACTER TEMPLATES

The following six sample characters are ready to play, and can also be used as inspiration for your own Heroes.

INDEPENDENT SORCERER

ATTRIBUTES (20 + 5 FROM QUALITIES)

Strength 3
 Dexterity 4
 Constitution 3
 Intelligence 6 (+2 from Genius Quality)
 Perception 4 (+1 from Occult Investigator Quality)
 Willpower 5 (+1 from Genius Quality, +1 from Occult Investigator Quality)
 Life Points 34
 Speed 21
 Drama Points 10
 Hyperspatial Exposure Level: 2

QUALITIES (20 + 9 FROM DRAWBACKS)

Contacts (Supernatural) (2)
 Genius (5)
 Occult Investigator (4)
 Sorcery 3 (12)
 Spells (6)

DRAWBACKS (9)

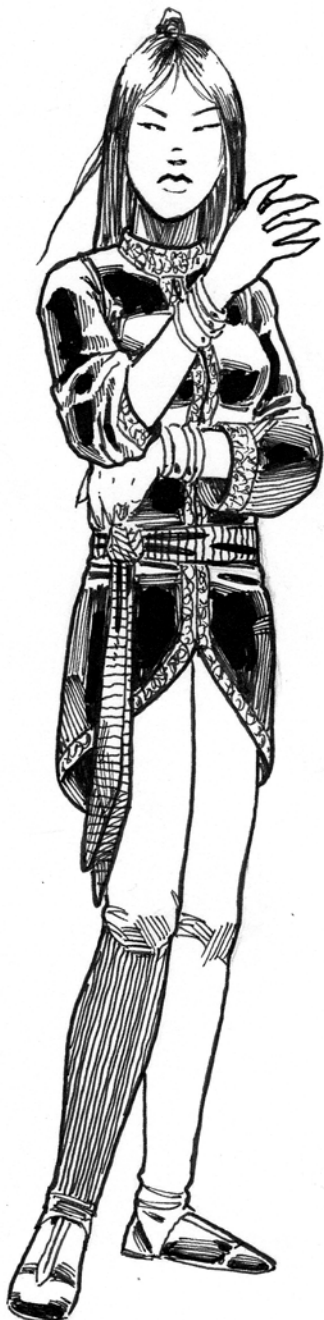
Covetous (mild, power) (1)
 Emotional Problems (easily flustered) (1)
 Honorable (1)
 Minority (lesbian) (1)
 Obsession (latest project) (from Genius Quality)
 Phobia (severe, large bodies of water) (2)
 Secret (sorcerer) (1)
 Sleep Disorders (deep sleeper) (2)

SKILLS (30 + 6 FROM QUALITIES)

Acrobatics 1	Knowledge 5
Archaic Weapons 0	Languages 2
Art 3	Notice 2
Brawling 0	Occultism 5
Computers 4	Pilot 0
Crime 2	Psychic Art 0
Doctor 0	Science 4
Driving 2	Sports 0
Engineering 0	Wilderness 1
Gun Fu 2	Wild Card 0
Influence 3	

SPELL	LEVEL
Voorish Sign	1
Elder Sign	2
Open Gateway	2
Protective Warding	2
Dho Hna Ritual	3

MANEUVERS	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	5	—	Defense action
Large Pistol	6	15	Bullet damage
Zapper	6	5 + Stun	Bash + Stun



I've always been fascinated by the occult. I read stories of horror and the supernatural as a child. Later, I was your typical goth teen steeped in occult history and wearing black dresses and overly large silver jewelry. In college, I started finding out about actual sorcery, at which point I figured out that advanced math and learning my way around a computer was far more important than learning archaic languages. These days, sorcery is something best done using a high-end mobile link.

Once I was out of college, I started serious occult studies and got connected to the occult community. There are some serious strange people involved in this stuff, but there are also wonders that I never could have imagined. I've seen things that I wouldn't have believed possible. I've also seen horrors that have caused me to wake up screaming on more than one occasion. Studying the occult is not for cowards.

For a good while, I was just in this for myself. Then I encountered that cult and the things they were trying to do. Having to swim to shore from the ruins of their yacht made certain that I'd never look at the ocean the same way again. I attracted some attention when I saved the guy the cult was going to sacrifice. Less than a week after that all went down, a spook from the OPS came to see me. I still have no idea how they figured out who I was. I'm not much of a joiner, but they were OK with that. These days, I consult with the OPS, and occasionally help out with difficult cases. I get to see even more wonders, and I can try to make certain that more psychos don't get into human sacrifice or worse.

Quote: *"It's obvious where they went; this room has the hyperspatial signature of a recent Gateway spell. I don't know where it goes, but I can find out."*

ROLEPLAYING THE INDEPENDENT SORCERER

You're a brilliant occultist who is obsessed with occult knowledge. However, while you love the occult, you're also a good person who can easily see how others can abuse occult knowledge. When you hear about a dangerous cult, sorcerous devices in the hands of criminals, or similar problems, you think about what you can do to help. You occasionally work with the OPS, but you also like handling problems on your own.

OPS Strike

TEAM COMMANDO

ATTRIBUTES (20 + 8 FROM QUALITIES)

Strength 5 (+1 Commando Upgrade Quality & +1 Deep One Hybrid)
 Dexterity 5 (+1 Commando Upgrade Quality)
 Constitution 6 (+1 Commando Upgrade Quality, +1 Astronaut Quality, +1 Deep One Hybrid)
 Intelligence 4
 Perception 4 (+1 Soldier Quality)
 Willpower 4 (+1 Astronaut Quality)
 Life Points 57
 Speed 33
 Drama Points 10
 Hyperspatial Exposure Level: 1

QUALITIES (20 + 3 FROM DRAWBACK)

Astronaut (4)
 Boost Gland (2)
 Commando Upgrade (6)
 Regeneration (from Commando Upgrade)
 Hard to Kill (from Commando Upgrade)
 Deep One Hybrid (5)
 Amphibious (from Deep One Hybrid)
 Low-light Vision (from Deep One Hybrid)
 Natural Armor 1 (from Deep One Hybrid)
 Fast Reaction Time (2)
 Oxygen Reserve (1)
 Soldier (3)

DRAWBACKS (3)

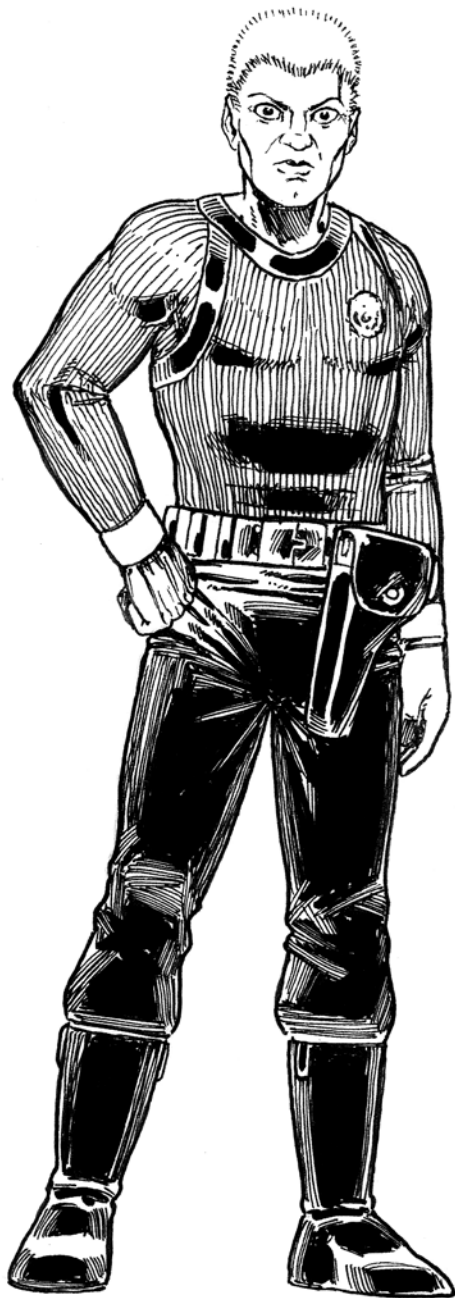
Honorable (2)
 Minority (from Deep One Hybrid)
 Obligation (total) (1) (+2 from Soldier Quality)

SKILLS (30 + 6 FROM QUALITIES)

Acrobatics 3	Languages 1
Archaic Weapons 2	Notice 2
Art 0	Occultism 2
Brawling 2	Pilot 2
Computers 2	Psychic Art 0
Crime 1	Science 2
Doctor 2	Sports 2
Driving 2	Wilderness 2
Engineering 2	Wild Card 0
Guns 4	Sports 0
Influence 2	Wilderness 1
Knowledge 1	Wild Card 0

MANEUVERS	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Big Knife	8 (10)	15 (21)	Slash/Stab
Big Assault Rifle	9 (11)	20	Bullet
Big Pistol	9 (11)	15	Bullet
Dodge	8 (10)	—	Defense Action
Kick	6 (8)	12 (16)	Bash
Punch	7 (9)	10 (14)	Bash
Rifle Grenade	9 (11)	30	Fire

Numbers in () using Boost Gland



I went to college on an Army scholarship and did my tour of duty after graduation. Then, I started to transform. The doctors stopped things before I got too fishy. However, some folks in the Air Force don't look to kindly on what I am now, and so I started looking at my options. Then, I got the opportunity of a lifetime. I tried out for the OPS and I wasn't just accepted, they offered me training for space duty. Even better, I got a whole bunch of upgrades via some of their fancier augmentations. These days, I can't imagine doing anything else.

I occasionally work strike team operations on Earth, but most of the time, I'm out in the solar system or the stars, hunting down things that are trying to hunt us down first. I get the best weapons, the best soldiers under my command, and I've visited more than a dozen planets. It's not all cake, I've lost people under my command, not many, but more than enough. Moonbeasts want to enslave people, some of the hyperspatials can kill you just by hanging around, and some stuff just doesn't like people. It's a dangerous universe out there, and I'm part of what keeps these threats away from all the people who are just looking to lead happy peaceful lives and maybe raise some kids.

Thankfully, it's not all monster hunting; there's nothing quite as satisfying as a successful disaster relief mission, and there's plenty of opportunity for those out on the newer colonies. Blowing up some monster that's trying to kill you is satisfying, but saving lives is what really gives my life meaning. I'd love for my job to become obsolete, but until it is, I'm going to be the first line of defense. If monsters from outer space or even hyperspace want to kill or enslave people, they'll need to go through me first.

Quote: "Suit up soldiers, sensors just detected a hyperspatial gateway opening three clicks away, in the direction of Copernicus crater. It's time to put that lunar combat training to good use."

ROLEPLAYING THE OPS STRIKE TEAM COMMANDO

You are a career soldier who is also a highly trained astronaut. You're not a dumb grunt, you are the best of the best and you have the training to back this up, because you're an officer in the OPS. You're brave, honorable, and utterly devoted to both your mission and to the women and men under your command.

OPS

Psychic Spy

ATTRIBUTES (20 + 3 FROM QUALITIES)

Strength 3
 Dexterity 4 (+1 From Enhanced Attribute Quality)
 Constitution 3
 Intelligence 4
 Perception 5 (+1 from Spy Quality)
 Willpower 4 (+1 from Spy Quality)
 Life Points 34
 Speed 21
 Drama Points 10
 Hyperspatial Exposure Level: 1

QUALITIES (20 + 5 DRAWBACKS)

Emotional Influence (4)
 Enhanced Attribute (1)
 Insight (4)
 Low Light Vision (1)
 Photographic Memory (2)
 Psychic Sensitivity (3)
 Rapid Healing (1)
 Spy (5)
 Undetectability (4)

DRAWBACKS (5)

Addiction (tobacco) 1
 Covetous (mild, ambition) (1)
 Emotional Problems (fear of commitment) 1
 Honorable (1)
 Paranoia (mild, from Spy Quality)
 Recurring Nightmares (1)

SKILLS (30 + 4 FROM QUALITIES)

Acrobatics 3	Knowledge 1
Archaic Weapons 1	Languages 3
Art 0	Notice 2
Brawling 1	Occultism 1
Computers 2	Pilot 1
Crime 4	Psychic Art 4
Doctor 1	Sports 0
Driving 2	Science 1
Engineering 1	Wilderness 0
Guns 3	Wild Card 0
Influence 3	

MANEUVERS	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	7	—	Defense Action
Grapple	7	—	Resisted by Dodge
Punch	5	6	Bash
Knife	5	6	Slash/Stab
Pistol	7	12	Bullet
Zapper	7	5 + Stun	Bash + Stun



I don't know why I ended up a psychic, but it happened when I was 17. I was always good with people, and being psychic made me even better. Between all that and being good with languages, when I got out of college, an OPS recruiter convinced me to join up. I know what I do is dangerous, but my powers give me an edge and the OPS provided me with a few augmentations to help out.

Some people say that my life is all about lying to people and sneaking around, and while that's mostly true, it's also pretty darn important. If someone is smuggling nuclear weapons, nerve gas, mi-go augmentations, or hyperspatial weapons then they need to be stopped, and a few lies and some invasion of privacy is a small price to pay for avoiding mass death. It's a really tough job, and I've got no idea if I'll live to see retirement age, but when I prevent a shipment of weapons out of the hands of a criminal gang or some crazy cultists, I've done a good day's work.

This isn't James Bond, gaining someone's trust so you can gather evidence to arrest them is hard, and having to shoot someone you've spent the last three weeks working with, because otherwise they'd shoot you first is not conducive to anyone's mental health. I won't lie – this life has taken a toll on me, but it's also completely worth it. Most people don't get to travel the world and thwart the forces of evil. At the end of the day, I know that I've saved lives, sometimes many thousands of lives, and that makes the nightmares, the violence, and the craziness completely worth it.

Quote: *"The mi-go augments look like they are coming from the Soltara Corporation – I'll need to go undercover to get proof."*

ROLEPLAYING THE PSYCHIC SPY

Psychic spies investigate various problems for the OPS (or for the government they work for) using a mixture of psychic powers, advanced technologies, and carefully honed skills. You are fast on your feet and used to having to lie your way out of almost any situation. Of course, when someone sees you with your hand in their concealed wall safe, sometimes a pistol and a rappelling rig works better.

Half-Breed Ghoul Cop

ATTRIBUTES (15 +4 FROM QUALITIES)

Strength 5 (+2 from half-breed ghouL Quality)
 Dexterity 3 (+1 from cop quality)
 Constitution 3 (+1 from half-breed ghouL Quality)
 Intelligence 3
 Perception 3
 Willpower 2
 Life Points 42
 Speed 18
 Drama Points 20
 Hyperspatial Exposure Level: 1

QUALITIES (10 +3 DRAWBACKS)

Cop (5)
 Half-Breed Ghoul (6)
 Situational Awareness (2)
 Acute Smell (Part of half-breed ghouL Quality)
 Low-light Vision (Part of half-breed ghouL Quality)
 Resistance (poison/disease) (1) (Part of half-breed ghouL Quality)

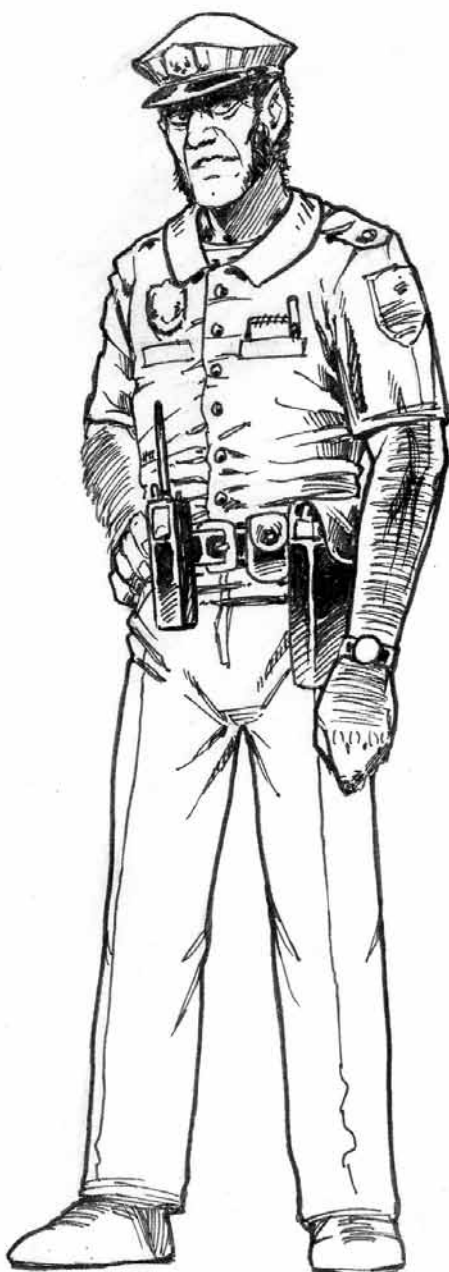
DRAWBACKS (4)

Honorable (1)
 Recurring Nightmares (1)
 Resources (below average) (2)
 Violence (mild) (Part of half-breed ghouL Quality)

Skills (25 + 3 from Qualities, +1 from Drawbacks)

Acrobatics 1	Knowledge 1
Archaic Weapons 1	Languages 0
Art 0	Notice 3
Brawling 2	Occultism 3
Computers 2	Pilot 0
Crime 3	Psychic Art 0
Doctor 3	Science 2
Driving 3	Sports 1
Engineering 1	Wilderness 0
Guns 3	Wild Card 0
Influence 2	

MANEUVERS	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Club	5	23	Bash
Dodge	6	—	Defense Action
Grapple	7	—	Resisted by Dodge
Pistol	6	12	Bullet
Punch	5	10	Bash
Shotgun	6	20	Bullet
Zapper	6	5 + Stun	Bash + Stun



I'm a big guy with a bit of a temper. I guess it's no surprise that I became a cop. I haven't made detective and at this point, I'm guessing I won't. These days, I don't mind, I like walking a beat and getting to know the neighborhoods I work.

Of course, it's not all muggings and petty theft, I've seen some strange things, things most people either don't believe or don't want to hear about. There are people, or something, living under the city, and whatever they are, they're hungry and don't much care what sort of meat they eat. Then there are the cultists. I'm all for freedom of religion, but human sacrifice isn't part of that, and any cult that's run by some sort of tentacled mutant raving about summoning monsters is one that I'm going to try to shut down.

Lately, I've taken to reading about some of odd things I've seen. I'm not sure I believe any of the stuff that I've read about Great Cthulhu, but it sure looks like some of the crazies do, and that's enough to make me worry. These days, I poke around at this stuff when I'm off-duty, and some of the things that I've found worry me.

A few weeks ago, I caught a glimpse of one of the things, or people, or whatever living under the city. Its face was all wrong, but it had the same yellow eyes that I have, eyes that I've never seen on anyone else. I'm adopted and never really thought much about my birth parents, but maybe it's time that I looked into that too. I've been having dreams about my childhood that scare the hell out of me. I want some answers.

Quote: "Put down that knife and step away from the guy you have tied up on the slab."

ROLEPLAYING THE HALF GHOUL COP

Your job is protecting people and you take your responsibilities seriously. You've also noticed that some of the threats are pretty darn strange and you have a knack for noticing some of the strange things that most people miss. There are cults that worship things that no one else talks about, hideous mutants with strange abilities, and then there are the creatures living beneath the streets, creatures that look like they are behind the fact that homeless people sometimes simply vanish. You've started learning more about the occult and what you've read disturbs you.

Civilian Psychic

ATTRIBUTES (15 + 2 FROM QUALITIES)

Strength 2
 Dexterity 2
 Constitution 2
 Intelligence 3
 Perception 4 (+1 from Occult Investigator)
 Willpower 4 (+1 from Occult Investigator)
 Life Points 26
 Speed 12
 Drama Points 20
 Hyperspatial Exposure Level: 1

QUALITIES (10 + 5 FROM DRAWBACKS)

Attractive +2 (2)
 Occult Investigator (4)
 Psychic Sensitivity (3)
 Psychometry (4)
 Resources (middle class) (2)

DRAWBACKS (5)

Amnesia (2)
 Covetous (mild, lechery) (1)
 Obsession (discovering lost time, Moderate) (2)

Skills (25 + 3 from Qualities, +1 from Drawbacks)

Acrobatics 1	Knowledge 4
Archaic Weapons 0	Languages 1
Art 2	Notice 2
Brawling 0	Occultism 4
Computers 2	Pilot 0
Crime 1	Psychic Art 4
Doctor 0	Science 0
Driving 2	Sports 0
Engineering 0	Wilderness 0
Guns 1	Wild Card 0
Influence 3	

MANEUVERS	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	3	—	Defense Action
Pistol	3	12	Bullet

Growing up, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I enjoyed going after hot guys and I was good at school, but nothing caught my attention. Then, in my last year of college, a friend told me about a psychic testing program some corporate recruiters were having. I tried out and scored top marks. I signed up and after I graduated, they trained me and I'd finally found something that I both loved and was really good at.

After my contract ran out, I went freelance. Mostly, I work for museums and auction houses. My art history degree helps, but mostly what they want is someone who can touch a work of art and tell them about it. I make good money doing it. Exciting work, enough money for fancy clothes and a great car, it's pretty sweet. However, it can also get pretty strange.

Nearly a year ago, I had a three-month contract cataloging and authenticating old books for a wealthy private collector. I remember getting the job and the first few days of work, and that's it. Most of that time is gone, I can't remember any of it. I was well paid, and when I went back to talk to the collector, he'd left the country. His private secretary said that she had no idea why I was having memory problems and suggested that perhaps I'd been working too hard.

I decided to start trying to find out what actually happened to me, and it was the start of a long strange journey. I'm not done, but I've been finding some clues, as well as a lot of information that frankly scares the hell out of me. Something is going on, and I'm going to find out what.

Quote: "Let me see that snake mask. It's ancient, far older than it looks, I think it's Thurian. It was worn by priests, I can see a ceremony where they were honoring a pair of elaborately dressed serpent people."

ROLEPLAYING THE CIVILIAN PSYCHIC

You are a respected and well-paid professional and you are proud of your job and expect respect. You also have perceptions that most people can barely imagine and sometimes these abilities show you things you'd rather not have seen. In at least one case, your abilities attracted the interest of people you'd rather have avoided. Now you can't remember what you were doing for three months and you want to know why. You've begun to become obsessed with both the need to find out what happened to you and increasingly with the mysterious of the occult that you've been uncovering in the course of your search.



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ASTRONAUT

ATTRIBUTES (15 + 3 FROM QUALITIES)

Strength 3 (+1 from Enhanced Attribute Quality)
 Dexterity 3
 Constitution 3 (+1 from Astronaut Quality)
 Intelligence 3
 Perception 3
 Willpower 3 (+1 from Astronaut Quality)
 Life Points 30
 Speed 18
 Drama Points 20
 Hyperspatial Exposure Level: 1

QUALITIES (10 + 4 FROM DRAWBACKS)

Astronaut (4)
 Biofilter (2)
 Enhanced Attribute (1)
 Oxygen Reserve (1)
 Rapid Healing (1)
 Resources (middle class) (2)
 Spectrum Vision (3)

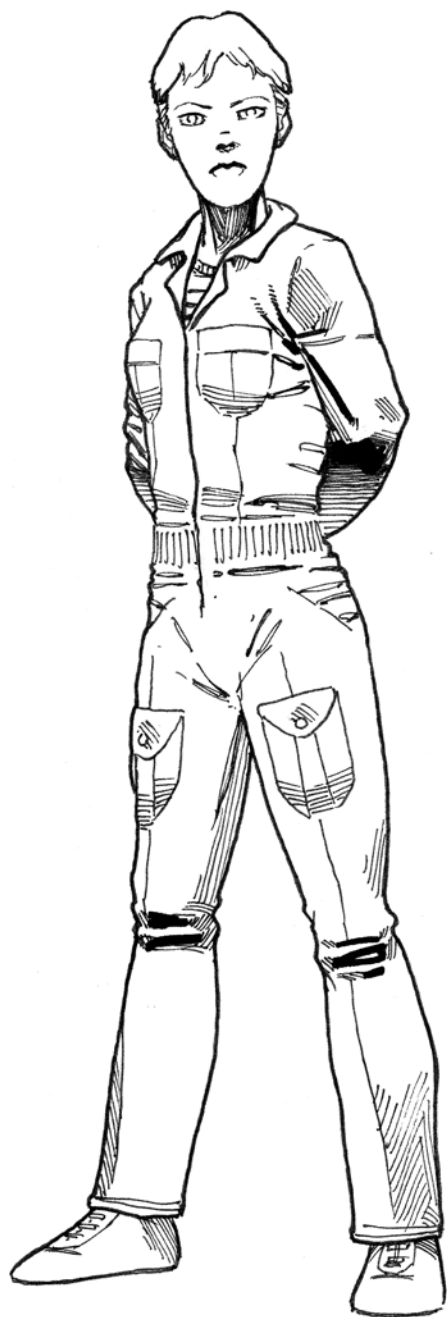
DRAWBACKS (4)

Honorable (2)
 Obsession (mild, double-check all safety equipment, part of Astronaut Quality)
 Obsession (moderate, having new and unique experiences) (2)
 Violence (mild) (Part of half-breed ghoul Quality)

Skills (25 + 3 from Qualities, +1 from Drawbacks)

Acrobatics 3	Knowledge 2
Archaic Weapons 0	Languages 0
Art 0	Notice 2
Brawling 1	Occultism 0
Computers 2	Pilot 3
Crime 0	Psychic Art 0
Doctor 0	Science 3
Driving 1	Sports 2
Engineering 4	Wilderness 2
Guns 2	Wild Card 0
Influence 1	

MANEUVERS	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	5	—	Defense Action
Pistol	5	12	Bullet
Zapper	5	5 + Stun	Bash + Stun



I've always loved space. The first starships went out when I was just a kid, and I knew I wanted to go out there too. I worked hard in school, and I got my chance. By the time I was old enough, female astronauts were fairly common, and so I didn't get hassled for that. However, it was still tough; they don't let slackers run spaceships.

I still remember the first time I helped take up a drag-onfly ship, feeling it hum and grip the fabric of hyperspace is like nothing else. Of course, getting into space is only the first step. These days, I work exploration missions. You get prestige and big bonuses when you find a world that has something that someone wants, but it's also a whole lot less safe than cargo and passenger runs between established colonies. I'll never forget the planet where the ground literally tried to eat us, and everyone with sense leaves newly discovered alien artifacts for the professionals. All it takes is the appearance of one hyper-spatial monster to make that lesson vividly clear.

The reality of space travel is far from glamorous, weeks traveling through the void, mostly to arrive at planets that no one and nothing has ever had any interest in, but which might still have new and interesting ways to kill you. However, the few occasions when you find something are incredible. Being the first person to stand on a world that will likely have a thriving colony in three years is an amazing feeling, and so is seeing alien ruins that no one has looked at for millions of years. I can't imagine doing anything else.

Quote: *"The atmosphere looks breathable, and I can see what look like ruins down on the surface. It looks like we found one worth spending some time looking at."*

ROLEPLAYING THE CIVILIAN ASTRONAUT

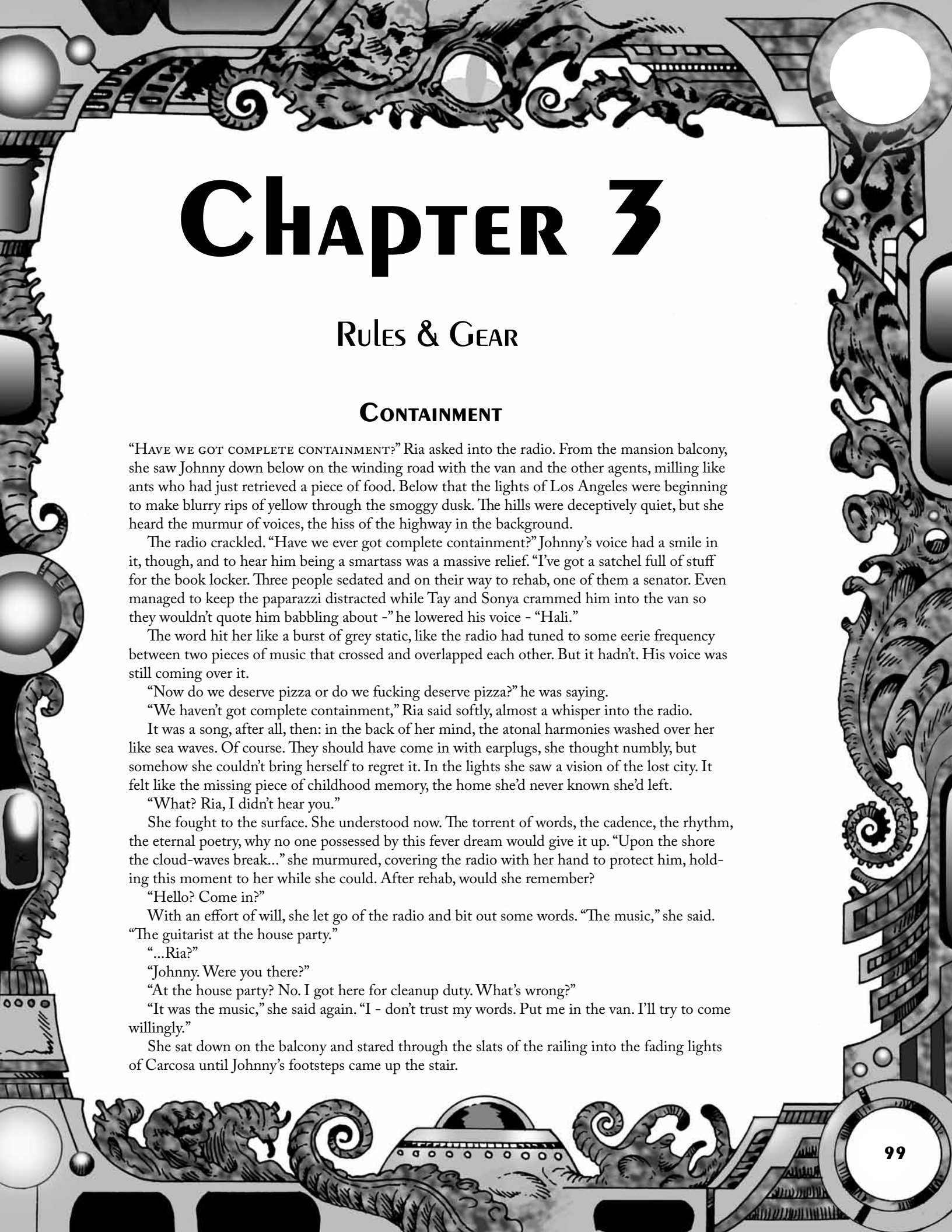
You have the "right stuff" and regularly travel beyond the edges of explored space, finding new worlds and new dangers. You are tough and determined, and you live for adventure. However, that doesn't mean you're careless or any sort of daredevil, people like that don't last long in space.



Steam had not been suffered to go down entirely, despite the departure of all hands for the shore; and it was the work of only a few moments of feverish rushing up and down between wheel and engines to get the Alert under way. Slowly, amidst the distorted horrors of that indescribable scene, she began to churn the lethal waters; whilst on the masonry of that charnel shore that was not of earth the titan Thing from the stars slavered and gibbered like Polypheme cursing the fleeing ship of Odysseus. Then, bolder than the storied Cyclops, great Cthulhu slid greasily into the water and began to pursue with vast wave-raising strokes of cosmic potency. Briden looked back and went mad, laughing shrilly as he kept on laughing at intervals till death found him one night in the cabin whilst Johansen was wandering deliriously.

But Johansen had not given out yet. Knowing that the Thing could surely overtake the Alert until steam was fully up, he resolved on a desperate chance; and, setting the engine for full speed, ran lightning-like on deck and reversed the wheel. There was a mighty eddying and foaming in the noisome brine, and as the steam mounted higher and higher the brave Norwegian drove his vessel head on against the pursuing jelly which rose above the unclean froth like the stern of a daemon galleon.

H.P. Lovecraft – *The Call of Cthulhu*



Chapter 3

RULES & GEAR

CONTAINMENT

"HAVE WE GOT COMPLETE CONTAINMENT?" Ria asked into the radio. From the mansion balcony, she saw Johnny down below on the winding road with the van and the other agents, milling like ants who had just retrieved a piece of food. Below that the lights of Los Angeles were beginning to make blurry rips of yellow through the smoggy dusk. The hills were deceptively quiet, but she heard the murmur of voices, the hiss of the highway in the background.

The radio crackled. "Have we ever got complete containment?" Johnny's voice had a smile in it, though, and to hear him being a smartass was a massive relief. "I've got a satchel full of stuff for the book locker. Three people sedated and on their way to rehab, one of them a senator. Even managed to keep the paparazzi distracted while Tay and Sonya crammed him into the van so they wouldn't quote him babbling about -" he lowered his voice - "Hali."

The word hit her like a burst of grey static, like the radio had tuned to some eerie frequency between two pieces of music that crossed and overlapped each other. But it hadn't. His voice was still coming over it.

"Now do we deserve pizza or do we fucking deserve pizza?" he was saying.

"We haven't got complete containment," Ria said softly, almost a whisper into the radio.

It was a song, after all, then: in the back of her mind, the atonal harmonies washed over her like sea waves. Of course. They should have come in with earplugs, she thought numbly, but somehow she couldn't bring herself to regret it. In the lights she saw a vision of the lost city. It felt like the missing piece of childhood memory, the home she'd never known she'd left.

"What? Ria, I didn't hear you."

She fought to the surface. She understood now. The torrent of words, the cadence, the rhythm, the eternal poetry, why no one possessed by this fever dream would give it up. "Upon the shore the cloud-waves break..." she murmured, covering the radio with her hand to protect him, holding this moment to her while she could. After rehab, would she remember?

"Hello? Come in?"

With an effort of will, she let go of the radio and bit out some words. "The music," she said. "The guitarist at the house party."

"...Ria?"

"Johnny. Were you there?"

"At the house party? No. I got here for cleanup duty. What's wrong?"

"It was the music," she said again. "I - don't trust my words. Put me in the van. I'll try to come willingly."

She sat down on the balcony and stared through the slats of the railing into the fading lights of Carcosa until Johnny's footsteps came up the stair.

THE RULES OF THE GAME

The basic rules are simple. Players control the Heroes. You Directors set the scene and control the Supporting Characters and Guest Stars. Players have direct control over the actions of their respective Heroes; the Director controls the rest of the world, including any likely enemies the characters encounter along the way. Dice determine what the results of a given action are. Most importantly, there's Rule No. 1: relax and have fun.

There's more to it than that, of course: that's why the rest of this chapter exists.

RUNNING A GAME

Here are the basics that new gamers need to know. Experienced roleplayers can skip to the next section.

To run a game, each player needs the character sheet of their Hero, a pencil, some scrap paper, and a ten-sided die (or they can share a die, if they feel community-oriented). The Director should have any notes and information handy. The rest is done mainly by talking, describing the scene, or what the characters are doing, or acting out the Heroes' dialog.

If you are the Director, you describe the situation. For example: "You're watching a movie in the theater on Comfort Station orbiting Pacifica, getting a break from the planet conditions. Halfway through the show, there's a disturbance near the front row. A woman stands up and starts screaming. What do you do?"

This is when the players get to choose what their Heroes do. It could be real simple—"I ask the woman what's wrong," "I head down there to see what's going on," or "Is she in my way? Can I lean to the side and see past her so I don't miss the film?"

Most of the time, when a Hero does something, it gets done. Sometimes the outcome of the action is in doubt. Just because a Hero makes a rousing speech to attempt to calm a panicked crowd doesn't mean the speech is any good or anyone is calmer afterwards. That's where the dice and the numbers on the character sheet come in.

THE BASICS

In the Unisystem, players roll dice when their Heroes try to do something important, and when there is a chance the attempt could go wrong or misfire somehow (more on that in *To Roll or Not to Roll*, see p. 100). As the Director, you tell the players when to roll, and what numbers to add to the roll. The dice roll represents luck and chance; the character sheet has the skills and natural

abilities of the character. The better those skills are, the more likely the character will succeed. An ex Navy Seal is going to do better in an urban firefight against cultists far better than a theoretical physicist. However, luck sometimes allows the untrained to succeed, and the expert to fail, which is where the dice comes in.

THE BASIC MECHANIC IS:

D10 ROLL + ATTRIBUTE + ATTRIBUTE OR SKILL

So what's all that mean? We'll break it down for you. **D10:** a ten-sided die. Rolling high is better.

Attribute: The natural abilities of the character. The Hero's Strength is used to see if he can lift a bag of cement over his head; Dexterity factors in when picking someone's pocket. In some situations (lifting something, for example), only Attributes are needed. In those cases, the player rolls and adds the character's Attribute, doubled. In some rare cases, you may call for the use of two Attributes instead of an Attribute and skill, or for one Attribute, not doubled.

Skill: The learned abilities of the character. Ask for the character's Brawling Skill when he's punching someone, or Crime for sneaking past a security guard. Always add a skill with an Attribute.

The player announces what he intends to do. You tell him what skill and Attribute to add to the roll. The player rolls the dice and adds the Attribute/Skill combo to the result. If the total, after all modifiers, is nine or higher, the character has succeeded. Otherwise, he's failed and problems may well ensue.

SUCCESS LEVELS

In some situations, you need to know not just whether or not a character succeeds, but how well she does. When that's the case, check the result against the Success Level Table nearby (and on the character sheet). The higher the number of Success Levels, the better the character did. Some difficult tasks require more than one Success Level just to succeed at all.

Example: A sorcerer named Livia is researching a mythos cult that recently stole an ancient statue from a museum. To see if she can identify the cult, the sorcerer's player rolls a D10 and adds Livia's Intelligence (4) and Occultism (6). The die roll is a four; the total result is fourteen. Fourteen is greater than nine, so Livia was successful. Some cults are harder to identify than others

SUCCESS LEVEL TABLE

ROLL TOTAL	SUCCESS LEVELS	DESCRIPTION
9-10	1	Adequate
11-12	2	Decent
13-14	3	Good
15-16	4	Very Good
17-20	5	Excellent
21-23	6	Extraordinary
24-26	7	Mind-boggling
27-29	8	Outrages
30-32	9	Superheroic
33-35	10	God-like
+3	+1	

though; if the cult was particularly secretive, more than one Success Level should be required. Looking at the Success Level Table, the Livia's player sees that fourteen equals three Success Levels. You decide that three Success Levels is more than enough (you could also set this threshold before the roll). "It takes some doing, but you finally come across the name in a Rhode Island police report from the late 19th century," you tell the player. "The members of the Church of Starry Wisdom used a sacred relic known as the Shining Trapezohedron to summon the Haunter of the Dark."

Yet Another Example: Livia is trapped under a collapsed roof beam and an athletic police officer named Sam is trying to lift it off her. Better, yet it's a bit urgent—the building's on fire. To see if he can lift the debris off Livia quickly enough, Sam's player rolls a D10 and adds Sam's Strength (6) doubled (12). The die roll is a four, for a total of 16. That's four Success Levels, more than the amount you decided was necessary. "Sam heaves the fallen beam out of the way and helps Livia to her feet before they both need to start running for the door."

THE MEANING OF SUCCESS LEVELS

So what's the deal with Success Levels? How important are they to the game? What do all those numbers mean? Most of the time, Success Levels don't matter much. For most things, a result of nine or greater means the Hero has succeeded at the task attempted. Sometimes though doing something is not as important as doing it well, and that's where Success Levels come in.

Creative Activities: A musical performance, writing a great novel, or telling a good lie—how well the char-

acter did has a lot to do with how people react to the result. One Success Level is pretty mediocre; he didn't do anything wrong, but no one is all that impressed. If the audience was already hostile or suspicious, whatever the character was trying to pull is not going to work. Two is decent—the character pulls it off (whatever it is) without a hitch and looks competent while doing so. Three Success levels is a good job—this is where folks start to take notice. Many people are impressed. Four Success Levels get standing ovations, as well as favorable reviews from most critics. At five and above, everything works perfectly and almost everybody really loves what he did.

Damage and Healing: When a character needs to attack someone, how well the player rolls determines how much damage was done. Add the Success Level of the attack roll to the damage of the attack. When using the Doctor Skill, each Success Level heals one point of damage.

Lengthy Tasks: Activities that take some time (like breaking down a door or repairing a damaged dragonfly drive) may require that the Hero get a high number of Success Levels, usually in the five or better range. Without time pressure, characters can accumulate Success Levels by trying over and over. For example, you may rule that breaking down a sturdy door requires eight cumulative Success Levels. The player might roll well enough to get all eight Success Levels in one or two tries if they are sufficiently brawny, while a less physically impressive character might take several tries (at one or two Success Levels per roll, it might take four to six rolls before the door breaks).

RESISTED ACTIONS

Sometimes an attempt is resisted. This usually happens when a character is trying to do something someone else would rather didn't happen. If our hero is trying to sneak past a security guard, there's a chance that the guard will notice. This is very important during fight scenes. One character tries to hit someone and the other to avoid being hit, and vice versa.

Resisted Actions involve two or more characters; players (or the Director) make rolls for each and the one with the higher total wins. If one succeeds (gets a total of nine or above) and the other doesn't...the result is fairly obvious. If both succeed, the one with the higher total wins. If both fail, nobody accomplishes anything. If you still need a comparison, the higher roll fails less badly. In case of a tie, the defender (if there is a defender) wins; otherwise, it is just a tie. Guest Stars and Adversary characters typically use a fixed value (no roll) for their action (the Muscle, Combat, or Brains Score); the Hero needs

to beat those Scores to succeed at an attack. If defending, the Hero needs to beat or simply tie those Scores.

Run It Down: Two OPS strike team commandos, Dulce and Jane, are practicing their target shooting and have decided on a friendly wager. They each roll and add their Dexterity and Guns Skill. Higher total wins the contest; a tie is a tie. The competition can be broken down into several actions (down to a roll for every single shot) or reduced to one roll each for the entire competition. This would depend on how important this particular bet is (see *To Roll or Not to Roll*, p. 102).

Go Again: Dulce and Jane have been out drinking and get into a fistfight. Dulce throws a punch and Jane is trying to dodge under it. Dulce's player rolls and adds her Dexterity and Brawling Skill. Jane's player rolls and adds her Dexterity and Acrobatics Skill. If Dulce's total is higher, she hits Jane. If Jane wins or ties (because she is the defender), she dodges the blow.

And Again: Jane is trying to sneak past a cultist guarding an imprisoned colleague. She rolls and adds her Dexterity and Acrobatics or Crime (whichever is higher; in this case, it's Acrobatics). She needs to beat the cultist's Brains score (a 12 in this case). If her total is 12 or less, the cultist hears her and gives the alarm.

ROLL MODIFIERS

In addition to skill and Attribute levels, other factors may add bonuses or penalties to the roll. Easy tasks can have bonuses, while difficult and complex ones may have penalties. Gaming veterans will notice that modifiers are the flip side of Success Levels. Negative modifiers make it harder to reach the Success Levels needed; positive ones make it easier. On the other hand, you can make finer adjustments with modifiers (a +1 bonus affects a roll but does not amount to a full Success Level). Also, positive modifiers could transform a roll into a success in a way that Success Level decreases can't (i.e., once you lower the required Success Levels to one there's no way to make the task easier).

In general, modifiers should be used sparingly; most rolls are going to be made without them.

In addition to these modifiers, Drama Points can add bonuses to rolls. They are detailed on p. 135.

TO ROLL OR NOT TO ROLL

Action rolls are useful only when the situation has some dramatic value and where the outcome is in doubt. Keeping rolls to a minimum keeps players more involved with the story and less involved with their dice. Generally, if

BASE MODIFIERS TABLE

Easy	+5 to the roll
Moderate	+3 to +4
Average	+1 to +2
Challenging	No modifier.
Difficult	-1 to -2 to the roll
Very Difficult	-3 to -5
Heroic	-6 to -9
Superheroic	-10 or worse

the action is routine or not important, rolling shouldn't be involved. Also, some things should be so ridiculously easy that making rolls is a waste of time—no need for Perception and Notice rolls to spot a four-meter-tall tentacled mutant running down the streets of Mumbai, for example. Some basic pointers follow.

Good Times to Roll: Chasing a vehicle with the autopilot off; shooting a pistol at a charging cultist; searching alien ruins for clues to their abandonment; climbing a chain-link fence with three rabid dogs close behind.

Bad Times to Roll: Changing lanes in light traffic; shooting a pistol at a paper target (unless wagering is involved); searching your own bedroom for a bottle of aspirin; climbing a chain-link fence with plenty of time and no pressing circumstances.

Not every situation is going to be as clear-cut as these, but in general, it's best to keep the action flowing. The less time the players spend rolling dice, the more time they have to get into their characters and have fun.

USING ATTRIBUTES AND SKILLS

In situations where rolls are necessary, the Director decides what skills and Attributes the players get to use. Skill descriptions in *Chapter Two: Creating Civilians and Operatives* provide some guidelines. Here are a few more words of wisdom.

Strength: Strength affects how much damage the Hero inflicts in hand-to-hand combat. Beyond that, Strength is used when brute force is the most important factor. Lifting a heavy object would use Strength (doubled), or Strength and Sports if the character has some weightlifting background. Strength is also used when trying to tackle someone to the ground (use it with Brawling or Sports) or when breaking free from someone's grip (using Strength (doubled) or Strength and Brawling, whichever is better). Dexterity can substitute in this last, if the grip isn't solid: think of how a squirming cat is hard to hold.

Dexterity: Most physical actions use Dexterity. Dexterity includes both general agility and nimbleness (for use with Acrobatics and Brawling) and fine coordination, for things

like Crime (picking locks and pockets, or sneaking around).

Constitution: The least-used Attribute in terms of rolls, Constitution comes in handy when the character needs to resist fatigue, injury, and disease; for most of those, add the character's Constitution (doubled) (i.e., if the Hero has a Constitution 3, most actions involving Constitution add six to the roll). Some Sports (marathon running, for example) use Constitution instead of Dexterity. Constitution also influences things like singing ability (use Constitution and Artist to sing, for example).

Perception: If the roll requires the character to spot something, Perception is the Attribute to use. This Attribute measures how aware the Hero is of his surroundings. Notice is most commonly used with Perception, but Perception can complement almost any skill. For example, Perception and Brawling might be used to detect some weakness in an opponent's fighting style.

Intelligence: Used in any roll where a character's memory and intellectual ability are important. It helps in such things as deciphering some ancient text (Intelligence and Occultism) or outsmarting an enemy in a brawl (Intelligence and Brawling). Sometimes it is hard to decide whether to use Intelligence or Perception in a roll. Rule of thumb: if memory or reasoning ability is the most important element, use Intelligence. Corollary of thumb: if reaction or instinct is paramount, use Perception.

Willpower: Willpower is mostly used defensively, but it can also apply to a number of skill rolls. Trying to intimidate others, or avoid being intimidated, would use Willpower and Influence, for example. When attempting to manipulate someone's mind using psychic powers, Willpower is a key Attribute (use Willpower and Psychic Art).

ABILITY SCORES

To unclutter the game and keep things moving, the basic die-rolling rules only apply to Heroes and (if you so decide) important Adversaries and Guest Stars. Rather than roll for every ghoul, moonbeast thug, or crazed cultist who attempts to oppose the Heroes, the Supporting Characters' Attributes and skills are condensed into Ability Scores. The scores are the "roll totals" of those characters. Whenever Heroes need to fight or outwit these characters, they need to beat the Ability Score number. No dice needed.

Ability Scores are pre-rolled results, generated by taking the character's Attribute and skill averages and adding six to the total. Or dispense with all the calculation and just assign Scores based on how strong you want the opposition to be. Most Ability Scores range between nine and fourteen, but powerful monsters and skilled

Supporting Heroes may have much higher levels.

There are three Ability Scores: Muscle, Combat, and Brains.

Muscle: This Score is used for contests of strength: tackles, breaking free from grapples and holds, strangulation, tug-of-war and door-shoving, and similar brute force situations. Heroes need to tie or beat the Muscle Score number with their rolls. Muscle is generated by taking double the Strength of the character and adding six.

Combat: This is the number used for attacks and defenses. It uses the character's Dexterity and the average of his combat-oriented skills plus six. The Score determines the Success Level of an attack; add that Success Level to the damage of the attack. So, a deep one with a Combat Score 15 has a set four attack Success Levels. If his Score is greater than the Hero's rolled defense, his damage is four points higher than normal (before modifiers). Note that the Combat Score encapsulates many different skills. If you want a bad guy who is very good with a knife, average at dodging, and useless with a gun, you need to create (or assign) several different Combat Scores.

Brains: This Score applies to all mental and perceptive abilities of the character. It is used to spot enemies, resist attempts to control or deceive the character, or to use any magical or supernatural ability. It typically uses the average of the character's Mental Attributes (Intelligence, Perception, and Willpower) and the average of appropriate skills, plus six. As with Combat, the Brains Score combines a bunch of stuff into one total. For a powerful hypnotist who couldn't think his way above ground from the subway, you'll need to specify a couple different Brains Scores or use the complicated method.

Par Example: For an insane but burly cultist, with Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Constitution 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, and Willpower 2, the Muscle Score is a moderately impressive 12 (Strength doubled plus six). Combat is a 10: the cultist's effective combat skills average two (you could vary that if you like), plus two for Dexterity and the base of six. For Brains, the total is a 10—the average of the cultist's Mental Attributes is two and he's got an average smarts skill of two (again that could be varied). If the cultist tries to grapple with somebody, he uses the Combat Score +2 (see the Maneuvers Table, p. 108); the Hero has to tie or beat that 12 with his roll. To punch somebody, Combat is used; avoiding getting punched by the cultist requires a defense roll total of 10 or higher. If the heroes try to sneak past the cultist, their totals need to be 11 or higher, to beat the Brains Score of 10.

Chapter Six: Eldritch Threats & Alien Wonders

gives more info on creating Supporting Characters and Adversaries, including a handy chart for assigning, rather than calculating Scores. The Quick Sheet nearby helps collect all an Adversary's or Guest Star's vital statistics in one place. That's how we present the Guest Stars and Adversaries in this book.

MOVEMENT

The *Eldritch Skies RPG* should be played with a focus on story and fun. For the most part, precise movement actions will not be needed. Simply allow the characters get where they want to be and move the action along. Only refer to the following rules if it's important that the character makes a specific movement over a specific distance in a specific time—the game should not be supplemented by tape measurers and hex-maps.

On the rare occasion, however, you may decide that how far a character can move in any given Turn is important. In those cases, add that character's Dexterity and Constitution together. This result is how many meters the character may move in a second (times five for a Turn). Tripling the sum of Dexterity and Constitution shows how many kilometers per hour that character can run.

Chases: Movement concerns may arise during a chase scene. First, you must decide how much of a lead the pursued has on the pursuer. We suggest granting +1 per Turn of head start. Then have the two racers perform a Dexterity (doubled), or Dexterity and Sports Resisted Action. The winner gains +1 per Turn. So, if the lead sprinter started with a three Turn head start (+3) and the pursuer won the first Resisted Action, the lead would be down to +2. Once the lead is eliminated (brought down to 0), the pursued is caught; if the lead grows to +5, the pursued is escaped.

Leaping: If you need to figure how high or far a character can leap, refer to the Jump Table. With a good running start, double those distances. Making a Dexterity and Acrobatics roll increases the character's jumping distance by either one meter (lengthwise) or 0.3 meters (in height) per Success Level.

JUMP TABLE

STRENGTH	HIGH JUMP	LONG JUMP
1-2	0.3 meters	2 meters
3	0.6 meters	3 meters
4-5	1 meter	5 meters
6	1.5 meters	6 meters
7-8	2 meters	8 meters
9-10	3 meters	10 meters
+1	+0.5 meters	+1 meter

Climbing: This is accomplished with a Dexterity and Acrobatics roll (or Combat Score) with a modifier depending on the condition of the vertical surface. No modifier applies where good hand-holds are available (climbing up a pipe bolted to the wall); -6 would be reserved for rain slicked close-fitted brick. Some surfaces—say, wet glass—just aren't climbable without special tools or augmentations. If you need to know how far the climber moves in a Turn, multiply the Success Levels of the roll or Score by one meter.

RESEARCH

You can't contain or destroy a dangerous mythos creature until you know what and where it is. Research, investigation and computer hacking are important parts of any *Eldritch Skies* Series. However, most of the time spent with dusty tomes and lengthy internet searches should be done "off-camera." Have the characters roll, figure out how long it's going to take them, give them a couple of opportunities to come up fun dialog or interesting ideas while doing their research, and then give them whatever information (if any) they've gleaned.

To find information about an ancient artifact or some similar mythos mystery, use Intelligence and Occultism. If the characters don't have access to the right sort of sources the right books, the research is an automatic failure. The Director doesn't always have to tell them right away: failure is part of drama, after all. Eventually, you could allow them to figure out the name of the right book or books, and send them off on a mini-quest to find them.

Hacking works similarly, using Intelligence and Computers instead. Some databases are harder to break into than others, but you should not penalize the characters too much. Just like research, hacking happens mostly off-camera, so don't waste time with complex cyberpunk node-graphs.

Other types of research and investigation may use Knowledge or Crime instead. Then there's old-fashioned legwork—asking questions, following people around, and so on. Those can be roleplayed, especially if the investigator is likely to get herself in trouble.

THE QUICK SHEET

Attributes: Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Perception and Willpower.

Ability Scores: The Muscle, Combat, and Brains Scores the players need to beat with their rolls in order to do something to the creature or character in question (or avoid having something done to them).

Special Abilities: Any unique or unusual powers get listed here.

Name: Speaks for itself.

Motivation: What drives the character or creature? We're talking high concept rather than detail here. A word or two that describes the character's goals is usually enough. Some monsters are single-issue creatures ("Kill humans!" "Feed"). "Release Cthulhu" is also not uncommon for an Earth-based Series focusing on cultist activity.

Name: Cultist Thug

Motivation: Obey their cult leader, beat up or kill enemies, serve the Great Old Ones.

Species: Human

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Constitution 3, Intelligence 2, Perception 2, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 12, Combat 13, Brains 10

Life Points: 34

Speed: 18

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Natural Toughness, Hyperspatial Exposure 1

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	13	—	Defense Action
Grapple	15	—	Resisted by Dodge
Knife	13	9	Slash/Stab
Pistol	13	15	Bullet
Punch	13	9	Bash

Life Points: How much damage the character or critter can take before slowing down or dying. Bad guys generally don't get consciousness or Survival rolls. Once their Life Points are reduced to zero or below, they're dead.

Speed: How fast the person or creature moves (in kilometers per hour). Typically, this is (Constitution + Dexterity) x 3 if the individual runs, half that if it crawls or slithers, and twice that if it can fly.

Drama Points: Good, bad, and neutral folks can have a few Drama Points. That means even a scrawny tech smuggler or a local beat cop can land a punch or two.

Maneuvers: A list of the most common maneuvers the creature uses, including scores, damages (bumped up by the "default" Success Levels from the attack score, but no other modifiers) and notes. Weak or low-ranking characters only have a couple of maneuvers. Seriously deadly Adversaries have several. To use dice for Guest Stars and Adversaries, rather than relying on their pre-calculated scores, simply subtract six from the scores given, and use that result as the modifier to a roll. Note that damage totals must be re-calculated in this case as the Success Levels of the roll (not the set score) affect the final damage.

Creature Type: The species—Human, hybrid, deep one, mi-go, ghoul, mutant monstrosity, and so on.

MYTHOS TERRORS

Life in the world of the Cthulhu Mythos can get downright scary. Whether it's witnessing your best friend eaten by ghouls, or watching a cult summon a flying polyp, almost any character is likely to freak out once in a while. Most of the time, this should be roleplayed rather than determined by rolls: if a mutilated corpse is encountered, players can react to it as their characters dictate. During potential combat situations though, the faint-hearted may freeze for a crucial moment. It is where Fear Tests come into play.

When something scary happens, the characters make a Fear Test—a Willpower (doubled) roll (Qualities like Nerves of Steel or Fast Reaction Time help big time). Feel free to use modifiers (see the examples provided in the Fear Test Modifiers list).

If the result of the roll is nine or higher, the character may be afraid or apprehensive, but can act normally. If the result is eight or less, they have a serious negative reaction. You can use the Panic Table for inspiration.

PANIC TABLE

ROLL RESULT	EFFECT
7-8	Startled: The character is startled but not paralyzed, and can act normally. Initiative is lost, however; the critter wins Initiative automatically on that Turn.
5-6	Freak out: The character screams and/or flinches away. Only defensive actions can be attempted on that Turn and the character cannot go on Full Defense. Run Away!: The character takes off running for a full Turn, unless cornered, in which case he cowers in terror. No attacks are possible, and defensive actions suffer a -2 penalty. After the first Turn (or handful of seconds), a new Fear Test can be rolled (reduce any penalties by one with each successive Turn, until the character snaps out of it).
3-4	Total Terror: The character is not in control of his actions. He may lose his lunch, pass out or suffer some other humiliating fate.
2 or less	

FEAR TEST MODIFIERS

Hungry and aggressive ghoul: -1

Hyperspatial creature: Use the creature's Hyperspatial Exposure Level (i.e., a critter with Hyperspatial Exposure Level of 3 would impose a -3 penalty to Fear Tests).

Splatter factor: -1 for some blood; -2 for murder vic-tim's body; -3 for R-rated gore; -4 for vast and hideous carnage.

Sudden or unexpected encounter: Add -2 to the other modifiers (i.e., the corpse falls out of a locker; the mutant springs from the shadows or materializes unexpectedly from hyperspace.)

Familiarity Factor: After seeing it often enough (third or fourth encounter), eliminate the penalty to the roll.

COMBAT

Defeating mythos threats often requires fighting. Combat in the Unisystem uses the same rules described above, but with a few extra features. Combat does not have to dominate an *Eldritch Skies* game, but you should likely have some heart-pounding action at least every couple of sessions, if not every session.

When combat starts, you help choreograph the action. Sometimes it's easy (our heroes are ganging up on one big nasty monster). Other times, it's a bit more complicated (a general melee involving a team of OPS agents vs. a dozen cultists and a servitor of the other gods). The *Eldritch Skies* combat rules are meant to help keep things flowing—the action should be fast and exciting.

BREAKING IT DOWN

To make life easier when action gets hectic, combat is divided into segments, known as Turns. A game Turn is a short bit of time—five seconds or so—during which characters can attack each other. In one Turn, a normal character can attack once and defend from one attack without penalties. High Dexterity characters can make more than one attack during a Turn.

Every Turn has a number of stages: Intentions (where the Heroes say what they intend to do), Initiative (determining who goes first), and Actions (where the fight is resolved, and damage, if any, is assigned). A fight usually lasts more than one Turn, unless the Heroes have their act incredibly together or the opposition decides it's had enough and leaves.

Intentions: At the beginning of the Turn, you ask the characters involved for intentions—what the characters want to do. Intentions include such things as "I shoot the ghoul in the face," "I turn tail and run," or "I launch a spin kick followed by two fast punches." You decide if the action being attempted is feasible or if it will take more than one Turn to complete. If there is a problem with the intention, and it's something the character would know, warn the player. Otherwise, the intention stands.

Initiative: At the beginning of a fight, you determine who attacks first. Common sense is the first determinant

of Initiative. What are the circumstances of the fight? If it's an ambush, for example, the ambushers go first. If an Operative is going at a cultist with a gun and is too far away to grab it, the gunman gets to shoot first. Generally, mental actions (unleashing psychic and similar supernatural powers) go first, followed by ranged weapons (guns, thrown knives, grenades), and finally come melee combat like punches, kicks, meat cleavers, and sledgehammers.

If the situation is less clear-cut (a Civilian accidentally runs into a ghoul lurking in a sub-basement, for example), the character with the highest Dexterity (modified by Fast Reaction Time) goes first. If both sides have the same Dexterity (and they both have or lack Fast Reaction Time), each side rolls a die. The higher roll wins. A tie means both characters act at the same time (which can be fairly ugly if both declared "I hit them with a baseball bat"). During subsequent Turns, you can determine Initiative in the same manner, or award it to the character who has momentum (whoever managed to connect a punch without being hit back, for example).

Action: Whoever wins Initiative attacks first (assuming the Intention involved an attack). Attacks are resolved as usual—the player rolls a D10 and adds the character's appropriate Attribute and skill, plus or minus any modifiers. The defender uses a defense action roll or Score. If a character is faced with more than one attack in a Turn, but only has one defense available (either because of insufficient Dexterity, or because he has used or plans to use his additional actions as attacks, see), any undefended blow lands if the attack roll result (or Score) is nine or higher. Essentially, a character without defense actions resists attacks with a zero total for his roll or Score.

If an attack hits, damage is determined based on the type of attack and the Success Levels of the roll. This is also when players (and Directors) can spend Drama Points to provide that special heroic or plot-aiding extra.

After the first character attacks first, the opponent (if still on his feet, that is) gets to attack back, and so on.

To make things quicker, Attributes, skills and modifiers are summarized in the Combat Maneuvers section of the Character Sheet or Quick Sheet. These areas should have the character's favorite combat moves already pre-figured. In the case of a Hero (or other character using rolls and not a set Score), the player rolls and adds the Combat Maneuver number. When fighting Supporting Characters, roll totals have to beat the target's Combat Score to succeed with an attack, or tie or beat the Combat Score to defend successfully.

KEEPING COMBAT EXCITING

"What do you do?"

"I punch the ghoul."

"Roll and tell me what you get."

"Sixteen—no, seventeen. Five Success Levels."

"Okay, you hit him. Add five to your base damage."

"Er, that's fifteen points."

"The ghoul is punching you back now. Roll a Dodge and tell me what you get."

Sleepwalking through scenes? Don't just drink more cola: try something different. The key to exciting combat is description. Create a picture of the action in the minds of the players to keep action sequences from being too repetitive. Players should describe their own actions, too. To encourage that, give creative details and reward players who go beyond the rules to help create vivid and exciting combat.

Visualize the action. Mythos monsters have a lot of options in combat. "Its tentacle lashes out and tries to hook around your ankle as the creature's once-human asymmetric mutant form slithers down the slope." Cultists and other human or ab-human Adversaries still have multiple moves. They might try to punch their victims ("The tech smuggler guard's fist is on a collision course towards your head. What do you do?"), grapple them ("Uttering a high pitched howl, the ghoul tries to grab you."), or use some improvised weapon ("This cultist has got a baseball bat, and he's swinging at your head."). If the player describes some interesting maneuver ("I duck under the swing and try to redirect the bat so he hits himself in the face"), let them attempt it without penalizing them or even give them some bonuses (usually a +1 or +2, or maybe add the Success Levels of the previous maneuver or defensive roll). For really heroic moves ("I somersault over him and wind up behind him with my gun to his head"), Drama Points come into play when applicable.

Describing the effects of the characters' actions also helps them feel they are defeating dangerous foes rather than beating the stuffing out of numbers on a piece of paper. "You think that was a look of surprise on the hyperspatial mutant's face. It was hard to tell. Now it's deliquescing into a pool of ichor." "The punch spins the cultist around like a top. She knocks over a park bench and lands in a heap, and you think she's unconscious." "For a second, it looks like nothing happened. Then the ghoul's head rolls off his shoulders."

Finally, if you have to choose between rules and fun, go for the fun. Be flexible—no rules system is going to cover all the bases. If your instinct tells you it's better to ignore or modify the rules for dramatic purposes, it's probably right.

INITIATIVE ROLLS

To get a more random result for Initiative, have every character involved roll a D10 and add their Dexterity (plus any Fast Reaction Time or Enhanced Time Sense bonuses) to the total. The character with the highest total goes first, second highest next, and so on until everyone has acted.

Keep the same acting order for the next Turn, or if everyone really needs another excuse to roll dice, have them all roll initiative again.

COMBAT MANEUVERS

To make combat both interesting and diverse, a large repertoire of action moves is really helpful. Punches and kicks are all right, but it's far more cinematic to spice them up with flying jump kicks and feints. The Combat Maneuver section on the Character Sheet lays out all the information on these maneuvers. Listed below are the most common moves for humanoid characters. All the specs are collected in one table in the **Appendix**.

Aiming: Sometimes it pays to take careful aim—if the character misses the unarmored spot on the mutant's head, the mutant is going to be a hazard a while longer. Aiming delays the shot action until near the end of a Turn. The player adds Perception and the appropriate skill (Guns for guns, Archaic Weapons for throwing knives or whatever) to the roll, or just uses the Brains Score. The shot action (which occurs that same Turn) gets a bonus equal to the Success Levels of the Aiming roll.

Bow Shot: A character can fire a bow as fast as she can draw and shoot; multiple shots use the multiple actions penalties. A Bow Shot uses a Dexterity and Archaic Weapons - 2 roll, or Combat Score - 2, and its base damage is (4 x Strength) points (Slash/stab type; to a base damage maximum of 20—Success Levels and modifiers can bring the total higher). Pistol range modifiers are applicable.

Brain Shot: A quick and lethal head shot. This covers gunshots to the head, hitting someone's skull with a crowbar, and similar murderous acts. Simple punches to the face do not count—it's fairly easy to punch people in the face and that type of attack is not forceful enough to get a damage bonus. Attacking the brain specifically uses the appropriate Combat Maneuver with a -4 penalty, or the Combat Score - 4. Bash damage is doubled for a Brain Shot, Slash/stab damage tripled, and Bullet damage quadrupled—very little is quite as lethal as massive brain trauma. This only applies to creatures with obvious heads, so only humans and ab-humans. Your Operative likely isn't all that certain where a moonbeast's brain is.

Break Neck: Before this maneuver may be attempted, the character must succeed at a Grapple. After that, the attacker rolls and adds Strength and Brawling, or just uses the Muscle Score. The defender rolls and adds Strength and Constitution. If the attacker's roll is higher, the base damage is (4 x Strength) points (Bash type). If the total damage reduces the defender to -10 Life Points, he must pass a Survival Test with an added penalty equal to the Success Levels of the Break Neck attack (in addition to any normal Survival Test modifiers; this is due to the very sensitive nature of the neck area for us normal human types). Failing this test gets a telltale crunching sound with fatal results. Once again, if it doesn't have a human-style spinal-cord-containing neck, you can't break it.

Catch Weapon: This risky move is only for experts, or the truly desperate. It works against archaic weapons: nothing human or ab-human can catch bullets. This maneuver uses a Dexterity and Brawling -5 roll, or the Combat Score -5. The Enhanced Time Sense augmentation provides reduces this penalty from -5 to -3. If the catcher's roll is not greater or equal to the shooter's or thrower's roll, the weapon attack does an additional +5 base damage (as the character steps directly into the path of the thrown knife). On the other hand, if the catcher's roll works, everyone nearby is going to be very impressed and most opponents will be fairly intimidated.

Choke: Before this maneuver may be attempted, the character must succeed at a Grapple. After that, the attacker rolls and adds her Strength and Brawling, or just uses her Muscle Score. The defender rolls and adds his Strength and Constitution (or again uses the Muscle Score). If the attack result is higher, the base damage is (Strength - 1) points (Bash type). Furthermore, the defender cannot breathe (see Asphyxiation). He is at -2 to all actions—being choked to death can be quite distracting.

Decapitation: Slicing off heads requires a sword, axe, or similar large cutting implement. Decapitation uses a Dexterity and Archaic Weapons - 5 roll, or the Combat Score - 5, but damage is multiplied by five (after Success Level bonuses are added and armor effects subtracted; damage type is not applied; weapon damage is listed on). If the damage is enough to reduce the victim to -10 Life Points or less, a Survival Test is in order. If that fails, the head comes off, and the victim is instantly dead. Once again, no head, no decapitation, so this only works on enemies with distinct heads and necks.

Disarm: For those times when a Hero doesn't want to hurt someone, or isn't armed and his opponent is. Disarm uses a Resisted Action with a Dexterity and Archaic

Weapons -2, or Dexterity and Brawling -3 roll, or the Combat Score - 2 against the target's Parry action.

Dodge: The Hero ducks, somersaults or leaps out of the way of an attack. Dodging hand-to-hand attacks can be done once per Turn without penalty; dodging missile attacks (bullets, thrown knives, bolts of hyperspatial energy) suffers a -2 penalty on top of any other modifiers. Dodge adds Dexterity and the highest appropriate skill (Acrobatics, Archaic Weapons, or Brawling) to the roll, or just uses the Combat Score.

Feint: The art of faking out the adversary and attacking him from an unexpected direction. A Feint counts as a Resisted Action. It uses an Intelligence and Brawling or Archaic Weapons roll, or the Brains Score, and is resisted by the target's roll adding Perception and either of those skills, or just the Brains Score. If the attacker wins, she can add the Success Levels of the Feint roll to her next attack action roll against the same opponent.

Grapple: If you want to stop someone without hurting them, grabbing them generally works well. Accomplishing this requires grappling. Grabbing people is fairly easy; use a Dexterity and Brawling +2 roll, or the Combat Score +2. Cults often try to capture their victims like this for later sacrifice or brainwashing. The victim resists with a Dodge action. The attacker has to decide what part of the body to grab: limbs, the whole body, or the neck. It's possible for characters to grapple aliens, but Directors should impose minuses based on the extent of dissimilarity, or simply navigate the consequences: it may not be harder for a human to restrain one limb of a six-limbed creature, but the creature has five other limbs to fight back. When Grappled, the target is at -2 to actions that involve the grappled limb, or -1 to all actions if grappled around the body. If both arms are grappled by two attackers, the victim is at -4 to most rolls, and cannot Dodge. A neck grapple doesn't impair the target, but sets him up for either the Break Neck or Choke action. The victim can try to break free the next Turn with a Strength (doubled) roll, or the Muscle Score versus another Grapple action.

Groin Shot: This attack employs another attack Combat Maneuver, with a -3 penalty to the roll or score. Damage is normal, but a male human or ab-human victim must gain at least one Success Level with a Willpower (doubled) roll (or the Brains Score) minus double the Success Levels of the attack. If not, he is knocked down and unable to do anything for the Turn. Females aren't completely unscathed, either, but the Willpower roll (or Brains Score) suffers only a -1 penalty. Every Turn after the first, the character can make a new roll with a cumulative +1 bonus to recover.

The groin shot can be used with several different maneuvers. Kicks are the most common, but depending on the relative positions of the characters, punches, weapon attacks and even a head butt can all work unpleasantly well. This maneuver doesn't work on aliens, unless it's established that the alien has vulnerable reproductive organs and the character knows where they are.

Gunshot: Point towards enemy, pull the trigger, and they take a bullet. Use a Dexterity and Guns roll, or the Combat Score. Base damage varies depending on the gun used, but all benefit from Bullet type damage. Range modifiers are applicable.

Head Butt: Head butts are most effective if the butt-or is in a grapple or other very close action: then the victim cannot really dodge out of the way. Even so, a Head Butt may be attempted against anyone close enough. If the Head Butt misses, the attacker hits with the wrong part of the head and he takes the damage instead of the defender. Head Butts use a Dexterity and Brawling - 2 roll, or the Combat Score - 2, and do (2 x Strength) base points of damage (Bash type).

Jump Kick: It's not easy to do, but when done right, it's both effective and impressive. A Jump Kick requires two rolls, but counts as a single action. The first roll uses Dexterity and Acrobatics, or the Combat Score, to get airborne; the second is a Dexterity and Brawling - 3 roll (or uses Combat Score - 3). The kick does 3 x (Strength + 1) base points of damage (Bash type), and gains an additional damage bonus equal to the Success Levels of the Dexterity and Acrobatics roll or Combat Score. Of course, if either of the rolls miss, the Jump Kick becomes a Jump Stumble (the Hero falls down). A Jump Kick is the only attack action the character can attempt on that Turn (no multi-actions are possible).

Kick: The basic kick is a simple, yet effective way to hurt someone and it doesn't require any weapons. If a kick is parried, the target has a chance to try and Grapple the leg, though. The Kick uses a Dexterity and Brawling - 1 roll, or the Combat Score - 1, but football and soccer players can replace Brawling with Sports if they like. A professional dancer could use Art. The Kick's base damage is 2 x (Strength + 1) points (Bash type).

Knockout: Sometimes a character wants to take somebody out without killing them. Any Bash attack, such as Punches, Kicks, and nightsticks, can be turned into a Knockout attack, using a Dexterity and Brawling - 2, or Dexterity and Archaic Weapons - 2 roll, or the Combat Score - 2. The total damage of the attack is halved, but the victim has to make a Constitution (doubled) roll (or use the

Muscle Score) with a penalty equal to the Success Levels of the Knockout roll, or she goes down for the count. Like other head attacks, this only works on humans and ab-humans.

Recovery from a knockout is up to the Director, and also depends on the Series type: in a Pulp or Cinematic Series, the victim may recover in a few turns, or wake up an hour later...possibly tied to a chair and waiting to be interrogated, but no worse for wear except for a whanging headache. A Gritty series should have more realistic and dangerous consequences for concussion (and characters with points in the Doctor skill will know the risks.) A character could seem fine for a few hours and then die or require hospitalization from a brain bleed – or simply suffer a minus to mental activities until they undergo rehabilitation treatment.

Melee Weapon: This covers swinging swords and axes, stabbing, and other close combat actions that involve blunt and bladed weapons. It uses a Dexterity and Archaic Weapons roll, or the Combat Score. Baseball or hockey players can substitute Sports to swing stick-like weapons (fencers and archery enthusiasts use Archaic Weapons, though). Since weapons do different types and amounts of damage, each weapon has its own effects.

Parry: Your basic blocking move, used to deflect punches, kicks, and other close combat attacks. Weapons may only be Parried by weapons; Parrying a weapon with a hand-to-hand attack is just asking for injury. A hand-to-hand attack may be Parried by a weapon but punching an armed defender is a stupid or desperate idea. A Parry uses a Dexterity and Brawling, or Dexterity and Archaic Weapons roll, or the Combat Score. Thrown weapons can be parried at a -2 penalty. Arrows and crossbow bolts are parried at a -6 penalty. No character can parry bullets; even the best Operatives aren't *that* good. The Enhanced Time Sense augmentation reduces the penalty to parry thrown weapons, arrows, or crossbow bolts by 2.

Punch: Closed fist, traveling quickly towards the target. Uses a Dexterity and Brawling roll, or the Combat Score, and does 2 x Strength points of damage (Bash type).

Slam-Tackle: A sports maneuver that can stop touch-downs or bring down fleeing artifact thieves. Tackles use Strength and Sports rolls, or Muscle Scores, and can be Dodged, but not Parried. On a successful hit, the target takes 2 x Strength base points of damage (Bash type) and, if he fails to resist with a Strength (not doubled) roll or the Muscle Score divided by two, he goes down hard. At the end of a successful Tackle, the attacker can Grapple the victim's legs or torso without rolling. Tackling is the only attack that can be attempted on that Turn (no multi-actions here either, nice try).

Spin Kick: This is a spinning or roundhouse kick, harder to execute but delivering more damage. When a character really wants to leave a mark, he should use a Spin Kick. This move has the same potential problems as the regular Kick, described above. It uses a Dexterity and Brawling - 2 roll, or the Combat Score -2, and does 2 x (Strength + 2) points of base damage (Bash type).

Sweep Kick: Just the thing to keep a psychically dominated teammate from escaping, the Sweep Kick does little damage but sends foes to the ground by kicking their feet out from under them. This special kick uses a Dexterity and Brawling - 1 roll, or the Combat Score - 1. If it hits, the defender takes Strength points of base damage (Bash type). Further, he must resist with a Dexterity and Acrobatics roll, or the Combat Score to keep her feet. If not, he falls down.

Takedown: This includes judo throws, wrestling moves, trips, and similar methods of throwing an enemy to the ground. The Takedown uses a Strength and Brawling roll, or the Muscle Score. If the target fails to Parry or Dodge, he hits the mat and takes Strength points of Bash damage. Otherwise, the defender takes no damage and the Takedown fails.

Target Limb: Targeting a limb (arm, leg, or tentacle) uses the appropriate Combat Maneuver with a -2 penalty, or the Combat Score - 2. Damage over half the target's maximum Life Points cripples or severs that limb; excess damage is lost. Combine that with Slash/stab weapons and the result is even uglier.

Throw Weapon: The art of taking a properly balanced weapon and throwing it at a target. The range of this attack is two meters plus two meters per Strength level. Throw weapon uses a Dexterity and Archaic Weapons - 1 roll, or the Combat Score - 1, and the base damage varies by the weapon tossed.

Toss: Want to hurl an opponent across the room? The defender must be Grappled first and the attacker must have a minimum Strength 4. Then, the attacker uses a Strength (doubled) - 4 roll, or the Muscle Score - 4, and the defender resists using a Strength (not doubled) roll or the Muscle Score divided by two. If the attack succeeds, it does Strength points of base damage (Bash type). Also, the defender is tossed one meter for each Success Level in the roll, and is automatically knocked down. If the attack fails, the defender remains Grappled, but takes no damage and doesn't go anywhere, causing the attacker to look pretty foolish.

Wall Flip: Your character needs a nearby wall or solid object with a vertical surface. He also needs to be really

good. With a Dexterity and Acrobatics - 3 roll, a Dexterity and Brawling - 3 roll, or the Combat Score - 3, he can do that awesome “run up the wall, flip over, and land behind the attacker” business. If the flipper gains at least one Success Level, he adds a +3 bonus to his result (as if he went Full Defense), and can apply that defense result against all attacks against him that Turn. If not hit, the character ends the Turn behind one of his attackers and gains initiative against them the next Turn. If he fails his Wall Flip maneuver, he suffers his own Strength level in Bash damage and winds up prone next to the wall. This is another maneuver best reserved solely for pulp series.

Wall Smash: Grabbing someone and slamming him into a wall or other nearby surface. The attacker must have sufficient Strength to lift her opponent without much effort. She must also succeed in a Grapple roll first. If so, she can swing the defender around and slam him bodily to a nearby surface. That requires only a Strength and Acrobatics roll or the Muscle Score. The person grabbed defends with a similar roll or Score (assume he has defense actions available). Damage is 3 x Strength in Bash type.

Whirling Sword: This is a complex maneuver, swinging a sword or other balanced weapon (staff, fighting sticks, and so on) in a complex. Anybody who steps into range of the whirling sword is attacked. Even better, any close attack made against the character can be parried. The character uses a Dexterity and Archaic Weapons - 4 roll, or his Combat Score -4 to attack and defend for the Turn. This is a great maneuver against multiple opponents, but has a couple of drawbacks. It's the only action the character can attempt that Turn, and it does nothing against ranged attacks. The other problem is the maneuver cannot be used for long before the character gets tired. Every Turn after the first, the penalty for this maneuver is increased by another two. Characters are only likely to encounter this maneuver among the finest warriors on Galatea I.

Wrestling Hold: This is a half-nelson, full-nelson, or similar move, where the character immobilizes the enemy, usually by grabbing him from behind and twisting one or both arms. This requires a successful Grapple. After that, the attacker must make a Strength and Brawling - 2 (or Muscle Score - 2) roll. The defender then resists with a Strength or Dexterity (whichever is better) and Brawling roll, or the best of his Combat or Muscle Scores. If the attacker wins, the defender suffers a -1 penalty to all actions for every Success Level in the Wrestling Hold attack until he breaks free or the attacker lets go. Other-

wise, the defender remains Grappled.

COMBAT COMPLICATIONS

In the world of *Eldritch Skies*, fights don't happen in neat boxing rings or empty, well lit rooms. There's no such thing as a fair fight with a serious enemy. Here are some possible complications.

Attacking from Behind: A distracted opponent (like a ghoul trying to gnaw on a human corpse) cannot defend (defense roll is zero) against attacks from behind. Targets with Situational Awareness are the exception; they can defend, but at a -2 penalty. At your discretion, other would be-victims may get a Perception and Notice roll before they are bushwhacked; in that case, they can defend with a -2 penalty.

Full Defense: Sometimes, fighting is not the best option and running is impossible. Going fully defensive allows the character to defend against two attacks at no penalty, and gives her a +3 bonus to all defensive actions (Dodges and Parries, for the most part). No attacks are allowed on the Turn the character goes into Full Defense mode. This is a good idea for Civilians who want to keep their enemies busy until help arrives.

Full Offense: Here, the character attacks recklessly, without worrying about defense. Best reserved for surprise attacks or suicide troops. It's also good when several attackers are going after one target. The character gets a +2 bonus on all attacks on that Turn, but cannot defend against any attacks (defense rolls all equal zero). Note that for the most feeble of Guest Stars and Adversaries (Combat Score 8 or lower), the only way to have any chance of landing a blow is to go Full Offense (or use a Drama Point).

Knockdowns and Fighting While Lying Down: Getting knocked to the ground is a bad thing. When a character is knocked down, he cannot attack for the remainder of the Turn and any defenses suffer a -4 penalty. Further, as long as the character is on the ground, attacks and defenses incur a -4 penalty. Getting up usually takes a Turn. Doing it in an action requires two Success Levels in a Dexterity and Acrobatics roll (or Brawling if the character's Brawling skill represents martial arts training.) A number of Combat Maneuvers result in a knockdown; also, any blow that inflicts more than triple the victim's Strength in damage before accounting for damage type or maneuver modifiers may result in a knockdown (if it seems dramatically appropriate).

Invisibility: Invisible characters are ridiculously hard to hit with ranged weapons. Only a few aliens and ab-humans can become invisible, but those that can are deadly. If some-

one shoots at an invisible character without knowing exactly where the character is, the attacker must make a roll. If the result is ten, roll again. If the second roll result is a nine or a ten, the shot hits the invisible character by sheer chance. A Heroic Feat Drama Point adds +5 to both rolls, making this double high roll a little easier. A similar rule applies for melee attacks against invisible targets who seek to avoid combat.

Invisible opponents who engage in close combat have to stay relatively near their victim. That allows the character fighting them to concentrate for a Turn and make a Perception (not doubled) roll, or a Perception and Notice roll (modified by Acute Senses other than vision). Making two or more Success Levels grants the searcher some clue about where the invisible person is. The combatant can then attack his transparent assailant, but does so at a -4 penalty. Once the attack is done, another Turn of concentration and a successful roll are necessary to strike again.

Those Directors who don't mind a bit more complexity could allow very good Perception rolls to modify the attack penalty. For each additional Success Level (over the two needed to get an idea where the invisible person is) decrease the to-hit melee penalty by one. Each additional two Success Levels decrease the to-hit ranged penalty by one. Thus, if a melee attacker's Perception result is a 15, he gains two additional Success Levels. The penalty to hit the invisible character becomes -2 instead of -4.

Defending against invisible attacks is usually impossible (defense total is zero). If the defender knows an invisible person is around (he's been popped once already), he can make a Perception roll as described above. Success grants a defense roll during the next turn at -4. Note that a character can concentrate on defending or attacking an invisible character in a single Turn, not both.

The to-hit or to-defend Perception roll can be dispensed with in smoke, steam, or other environment where the invisible person can be at least partially seen. Throwing a sheet over, pouring flour on, or otherwise marking an invisible character or creature also eliminates the Perception roll, but is far from easy to do (such marking may only occur as part of an attack). A melee (not ranged) attacks against a partially visible character suffer only a -2 penalty.

Multiple Actions: Characters can attack once and defend once a Turn at no penalty. Fast and furious fighters can do more, however. Characters with Dexterity 5 or greater gain extra actions per Turn according to the Additional Actions Table.

For those more formula oriented, subtract four from the character's Dexterity, then divide by two, rounding up. This is the number of extra actions the character may

take in one Turn.

The extra actions may be taken as attacks or defenses. As it is difficult to do more than two things at once, additional actions suffer cumulative penalties of -2. If the target defends against any of those attacks, the character cannot continue attacking on that Turn. Again, we summarize with an Additional Actions Penalty Table.

Multiple actions can generally be resolved as a single roll (roll once and add the modifiers and the extra action penalties to each successive use of that roll). Note though, that with one-on-one combat if an attacker's first attack hits, all subsequent attacks will hit (the attacker loses -2 per attack, but so does the defender per defense). This same effect does not necessarily arise with one-on-many combat as each defender has his own defense action roll or

Score. In a slightly more time-consuming alternative, each attack, defense, or other action can be rolled separately.

Example: Miguel, an Operative with Dexterity 6, is attempting to meet with a rogue mi-go working with an evil corporation. The attempt failed, and he finds himself facing off with two corporate security thugs with commando upgrades. He's in a hurry to catch up with the boss, and doesn't realize how tough these thugs are, so he decides to attack each thug in one Turn. His high Dexterity grants him one additional action per Turn, and he declares them both to be attacks. You call for one roll with successive penalties. Miguel's player rolls and adds his Dexterity and Brawling; the result is 18. That's over the first thug's Combat Score of 16, so he gets punched. Miguel's second attack uses the same result (18) but subtracts two and becomes a 16. That ties the second thug's Combat Score (16 as well), so the blow doesn't land (ties go to the defender). Finally, Miguel does not get his third attack as the second thug defended successfully against him.

Now Miguel has a problem. He has one defense action available at no penalty. Unfortunately, he also has

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS TABLE

DEXTERITY	ADDITIONAL ACTIONS
5-6	1
7-8	2
9-10	3
11-12	4
+2	+1 per

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS PENALTY TABLE

DEXTERITY	ADDITIONAL ACTIONS
First	None
Second	-2
Third	-4
Fourth	-6
+1	-2 per

two uninjured thugs in his face. They both swing. One he counters with a Parry roll of 17. The other strikes unhindered; his Combat Score (18) is greater than the minimum success total (9), so he automatically connects. He'd better hope the thug is relatively weak.

Multiple Opponents: It's always a good idea to have numbers on your side. When two or more attackers gang up against a single target, they each get a +1 bonus to all actions for each attacker, to a maximum of +4 for four attackers (more than four attackers just get in each other's way). So, if two deep ones attack one Hero, they each get a +2 to their Combat Scores. By the same token, if three Operatives charge a deep one, they get a +3 bonus to their attack and defense rolls. On top of this, if the defender doesn't have enough actions to defend against all attacks, he resists those additional attacks with a zero defense roll. Here is another way for below-nine Combat Score characters to have a chance of hitting their opponent—attack in numbers.

Drawing a Weapon: Sometimes you want a weapon right now, but it happens to be in your pocket or sitting on a table or otherwise not at hand. Can you get it ready in time to use it? Normally, drawing or equipping a weapon counts as an action. If the item is buried in a briefcase, backpack, or a ghoul's skull, it could take several Turns to get it.

Tied Up: Sometimes, enemies don't want to kill you. Sometimes they just want to tie you up. When a character is tied up, chained, or otherwise restrained, fighting is a lot more difficult. If the character's legs are free, he can kick at no penalty. If he can move (i.e., the character isn't bound to a stake or chained to a wall), he can also head butt people. If his arms are bound in front of him, he can punch at a -2 penalty. Getting free uses Dexterity and Acrobatics, with penalties from -1 (some poorly tied knots in cheap rope) to -6 (for lots of good rope or police handcuffs).

GUNS AND DISTANCE WEAPONS

Why resort to fisticuffs when you can dispatch your enemies at a distance? Every well trained operative can handle a gun, and generally packs heat for fieldwork. If you're down in the tunnels and the ghouls are advancing, then it's time to open up with your assault rifle, or at least a nice big pistol – though firing through a human crowd is highly frowned upon.

OTHER MULTIPLE ACTIONS OPTIONS

The basic multiple action rules limit characters to a certain number of actions. This is done for simplicity's sake. At the risk of some additional complexity, some Directors may decide to handle multiple actions differently and permit more actions in a Turn.

Cumulative and Universal Penalties: Each additional action declared in the Intentions phase of combat adds -2 to all actions that phase. That means if a character declares four attacks or four defenses in a Turn, each action suffers a -6 penalty (the first attack or defense has no penalty; each one after that incurs a -2). This allows characters to act as much as they want, at the expense of degrading all their actions.

Off Balance Penalties: Under this optional rule, each extra action taken in one Turn imposes a base -2 penalty to all actions in the next Turn. So, a character who takes three additional actions in one Turn suffers a -6 to all actions in the next. Again, the limit on actions is removed, but the frenzy of activity makes the character highly ineffective and vulnerable thereafter.

Interruptions: Another possibility is to have the player roll for each attack and defense, but if an attack is blocked, initiative switches over to the opponent. He gets to use his actions until a defense is used successfully, then the first attacker resumes his actions (if any). In a one on many fight, the same sequence applies.

How does this work?: Randolph Carter attacks with a Punch, Kick, and a Sweep. He keeps one defense in reserve. He rolls for the Punch, hits, and does damage. Then he rolls for the Kick (taking into account the -2) and the villain blocks it. Randolph's opponent gets to attack now (if he has any), as he interrupted Randolph's attacks. He throws a pathetic punch and Randolph uses his free defense to dodge. Now, the action shifts back to Randolph for his last attack. He rolls for the sweep (taking into account the -4).

Generally speaking, missile combat works like regular combat. Attackers make rolls or use their Combat Score, and the target tries to defend (usually by Dodging). Dodging gunshots and energy weapons is difficult. A Dodge against missiles suffers a -2 penalty on top of any other that are applicable (the character is busy ducking for cover). If there is no available cover, the Dodge incurs a -4 penalty.

Range Penalties: To keep things simple, assume no penalty at Short Range, a -1 penalty to shots at Medium Range, and a -3 penalty to shots at Long Range. Short range is under five meters for pistol-ranged weapons, and 20 meters for rifle-ranged weapons. Medium range is under 20 meters for pistol-ranged and under 100 meters for rifle-ranged weapons. Long range is up to 50 meters for pistol-ranged and up to 300 meters for rifle-ranged weapons. The individual weapon descriptions indicate whether pistol or rifle ranges are used.

Multiple Shots: If shooting doesn't work at first, try again. Most guns can fire more than once over a five-second period (in fact, most handguns can be emptied in five seconds). Roll and add Dexterity and Guns; each additional shot uses the same roll, but drops down one Success Level (due to the continuing effects of recoil). Bows use the Multiple Action rules; crossbows and other single-shot weapons must be reloaded after each shot.

Automatic Fire: Automatic weapons (assault rifles and machine guns) can fire a constant stream of bullets until the gun runs dry or the barrel overheats. While this may make the firer feel better, the constant recoil makes autofire fairly inaccurate. Group the autofire in lots of ten or less bullets. For the first group of ten, the Success Levels of a Dexterity and Guns roll show how many bullets hit. Each subsequent group of ten or less uses the same roll but drops two Success Levels.

Autofire can also be used as suppression. The shooter picks a doorway-sized area and fills it with lead. Roll Dexterity and Guns. Anyone moving into that area is hit by a number of bullets equal to the Success Levels of that roll.

No matter how autofire is used, anyone in the area must make a Willpower (doubled) roll or spend all their actions hitting the ground, ducking behind cover, or otherwise making themselves as invisible as possible. Directors can modify that roll based on how close the person is to the hail of gunfire and how much combat experience she has.

Trained soldiers fire bursts, controlled gunfire that sends three bullets downrange. For bursts, make one attack roll; each Success Level in the roll allows one bullet to hit the target. Successive bursts use the same roll but drop one Success Level.

With either autofire or burst fire, the base damage for each bullet is modified by armor, and then added together before applying the Bullet type modifier. Success Levels do not affect the damage calculation.

CAUSING INJURIES AND HARM

Land enough punches and kicks on somebody, and something is going to break. Exploring alien ruins and hunting out-of-control mutants is a dangerous job; the Heroes should expect their share of lumps, cuts and bruises, visits to the emergency room, or even the morgue.

Damage affects the character's Life Points. Once his Life Pool is depleted, she risks losing consciousness or dying. When an attack hits a character, subtract the damage inflicted from her Life Point Pool. Armor can protect the character from harm; reduce damage by the Armor Value or any protective garment worn before decreasing Life Points.

Players might wish to write down the Life Points of the character on a piece of scrap paper, and adjust the total there rather than make wear and tear from erasures on the character sheet.

DAMAGE—THE BASICS

Attack Maneuvers have a damage number or a formula. If it is a number, the damage is fixed, an inherent characteristic of the weapon—a .45 pistol does the same damage for everybody. Formulas usually depend on the Strength of the attacker—a punch from a 400-pound ab-human mutant is going to hurt more than a punch from a skinny office clerk. Do the calculations once and write the damage of the attack on the Combat Maneuver portion of the character sheet.

During play, the actual damage inflicted is equal to the base damage, plus one per Success Level of the attack roll, minus any Armor Value possessed by the defender. This total is then multiplied by any damage type or other modifier. That's a bit complicated, but once you play through a few

FIXED VS. ROLLED DAMAGE

Eldritch Skies is designed so that damage from weapons and other sources is based on a fixed number + the Levels of Success the attacker rolls. This works wonderfully for Cinematic and Pulp play, where Drama Points are used to reduce damage. However, for Gritty play, where Drama Points are not used, or in cases where the Director and Players wish more variety, weapon damage can be rolled on dice instead. See the Appendix for rolled damage for all listed weapons.

combats, it becomes much easier. The character sheet has the Success Level Table right by the Combat Maneuvers, so a quick glance provides that information. Quick Sheets have the Success Levels of the Combat Score worked into their damage entries.

Example: Miguel has a Strength 5. The Kick formula is $2 \times (\text{Strength} + 1)$. Enter five into the formula, and Miguel's Kick inflicts a base damage of 12 points. After an attack roll, the Success Levels are added to this base damage. So if Miguel's player gets four Success Levels on a Kick attack, he adds four to his base damage (12), for a total damage result of 16.

Example twice: Miguel uses a knife in the next combat. Knife base damage is $(2 \times \text{Strength})$, or 10 for Miguel. After an attack roll with two Success Levels, the damage becomes 12. Further, a knife is a Slash/stab weapon (see below), so the final damage is doubled to 24 Life Points. Ouch!

Example thrice: Miguel now picks up one of Livia's pistols. The gun has a base damage of 12 (no formula this time). Miguel's two Success Level attack raises that to a 14. His target is wearing a bulletproof vest though, which subtracts 10 from the damage, leaving a mere four. Bullet damage—the kind imposed by the gun—is doubled after armor (see below). So, the final damage result is eight Life Points.

TYPES OF DAMAGE

There are four types of damage. Bash, Stab/slash, Bullet, and Fire. All of them hurt, but they have slightly different effects. Armor (natural or worn) and other damage decreases (like the Natural Toughness Quality) are applied before damage type is factored, except in special cases. These damage multipliers should be applied to all characters or creatures (human, ab-human, alien, etc.), unless they have a specifically applicable immunity to damage.

Bash Damage: This covers any attack by a blunt object (fists, two-by-fours, falling rocks, the sidewalk at the end of a long fall, and so on). Bash attacks reduce Life Points normally. They are the only type of attack that can be used to knock out a victim (knives and bullets are simply too lethal).

Slash/stab Damage: This is done by pointy or sharp objects that cause blood loss, puncture vital organs, and otherwise cut and pierce someone's body. Double this damage, after subtracting any armor or similar protection (if any). Weapons with sharp edges can be used to cut off limbs or heads; if a limb is attacked and the damage is enough to reduce the victim to 0 Life Points, the limb has been severed (see also, the Decapitation Maneuver).

Bullet Damage: Bullets do nasty things to most things they encounter. They mostly work like Slash/stab attacks,

doubling base damage after adding Success Levels. Bulletproof vests are very good against Bullet damage, but not very useful against Slash/stab attacks.

Example: Livia shoots a hideous ab-human mutant and inflicts 26 points of damage. Since she was using a bullet, this is doubled to 52 points of damage. If the mutant had particularly tough skin (Natural Armor with an Armor Value 6), six of the 26 points would be subtracted, reducing the initial damage to 20, doubled to 40—still a nasty shot.

Fire Damage: Burns are a particularly horrific way to get hurt. Fire can scar terribly and fire damage heals more slowly than normal. A character on fire takes three points of damage every Turn until somebody puts him out. If more than 20 points of fire damage are inflicted, some scarring will occur (assuming the victim lives). Fire Damage also heals at half the normal rate; the player should keep track of fire damage separately (this doesn't affect I Think I'm Okay though).

The Simple Option: If you and your players want to keep things simple, have all damage work the same way as Bash attacks—no doubling effect, no healing modifiers, and so on. This option is not very realistic, but it is easier to remember.

WEAPON DESCRIPTIONS

The following weapons may be used during the game. See Equipment for information about costs and restricted weapons.

Assault Rifle: Standard issue military & OPS strike team weapon, usually with a 20- to 30-round magazine. Illegal in most places, except for the military, OPS, and SWAT teams. Can autofire and burst fire. Base damage is 16 points (Bullet type). Using an assault rifle without penalty requires the military training Quality. Cost: -2 (Restricted)

Axe: Used by fire departments and medieval knights, although for different purposes. Long-handled axes can be wielded two-handed (add +1 to the effective Strength of the character). Does base damage of $5 \times \text{Strength}$ points (Slash/stab type). This drops to $4 \times \text{Strength}$ points when the axe is thrown. Cost: -3

Big Assault Rifle: If your bosses are handing these out, it's going to be a serious bug hunt. This extra large assault rifle includes an over-the-barrel grenade launcher with a six-grenade clip; for details on grenade launchers. The rifle has a 30-shot clip and can autofire and burst fire. Base damage is 20 points (Bullet type). Using a big assault rifle without penalty requires the military training Quality. Cost: 0 (Restricted)

Blunt Weapon: This includes various types of sticks. The small ones—a police baton, a belaying pin, a rebar,

or the heavy half of a pool cue—do base damage of 3 x Strength points (Bash type). Bigger ones—baseball bats, sledgehammers, maces, and coat racks—are generally wielded with two hands (add +1 to the effective Strength of the character). The do 4 x Strength points of base damage (Bash type). Cost: none

Bow: An ancient weapon for killing people at range, the bow has improved in modern times and now uses various composite materials. The maximum effective Strength when using a bow is five. That means if the user's Strength is greater than five, the base damage tops out at 20. Does 4 x Strength points of base damage (Slash/stab type), and uses pistol ranges. Cost: -3

Crossbow: Not as fast as a bow (requires a Turn to reload), but easier to use. Base damage is a fixed 16 points (Slash/stab type). A smaller, one-handed version called a pistol crossbow does 9 points of base damage. The "bow" part of the smaller weapon folds against the stock so it can be holstered like a regular gun. Both weapons require a Turn to reload after each shot, and use pistol ranges. Cost: -3

Electric Cannon: Used only by the military and OPS strike teams, this weapon can either be mounted on a vehicle like a car or light plane or it can be carried by a single individual. However, much of the weapon is a bulky three-kilogram unit that must be worn as a backpack, which is connected to a modified zapper rifle. This weapon never runs out of charges, and once a shooter has hit a target with an electric cannon, they can maintain the beam. This allows the shooter to keep the same attack roll for subsequent attacks without having to make a new Heavy Weapons roll (although the shooter can choose to do so if they want to try for a better result).

When hit, the victim takes some damage from the charge, and must make a Constitution doubled roll at a penalty of five plus the Success Levels of the attack. On a failure, the victim is knocked out. Even if the target manages to stay conscious, the shock gives her a -2 penalty to all actions (including resisting another shock) for the next four Turns. Multiple shots have cumulative penalties. Base damage is 5 points (Bash type). The shooter can automatically maintain the electrical connection until the target moves far enough so that some other object or obstacle comes between shooter and the target. Electric cannons are extremely bulky weapons, and about as far from unobtrusive as you can get. They can also be used to deliver damaging shots. These shots do 24 points of electrical damage (treated like Bash damage) every turn. This device uses rifle ranges. Cost: +1 (Restricted)

Grenades: There are several different types of gre-

nades, but they all share a few common characteristics. To use a grenade, pick your spot and make use the Throw Weapon maneuver (or the Combat Score). With three or more Success Levels, your aim is true and the grenade goes exactly where you want it. With one or two Successes, your aim is a little off, which will adjust the focus of the blast. If you fail, the grenade doesn't end up anywhere close to where you wanted it to go—which could be very bad for innocent bystanders in the area. The range of a grenade is two meters plus two meters for each level of Strength the user possesses. Using a grenade without penalty requires the military training Quality. Here are the two basic types:

Grenade (Basic): This is the standard military grenade. You pull the pin and toss it a far away. The grenade inflicts a base 30 points of damage to everything within a meter of "Ground Zero," 20 points within a three-meter radius and eight points within a five-meter radius. All damage is Fire type. Cost: -3 (Restricted)

Grenade (Flashbang): This device produces a brilliant flash of light and a tremendous burst of sound, blinding and stunning anyone caught nearby. If you are within 10 meters of the point of impact and you are facing the grenade, you need to make a Dexterity (doubled) check; Fast Reaction Time and Situational Awareness each add 2 to your check. You will be blinded for five rounds minus the number of Successes you score on your Dexterity check. In addition, if you are within five meters of ground zero you must make a Constitution (doubled) check. Acute Hearing forces you to subtract 2 from this roll, while Impaired Hearing actually adds 2 to the check. You will be stunned and unable to take any action for 2 rounds minus the number of Success Levels obtained on the Constitution check. Eye or ear protection may add to the respective rolls or negate the need to roll completely, at the Director's discretion. Cost: -3 (Restricted)

Grenade Launcher: If you want to send a grenade a long way away, get one of these. A grenade launcher is a small rifle that shoots self-propelled grenades instead of bullets. Grenade launchers use an entirely different style of grenade than the kind you throw—you don't just pull the pin and toss it in the launcher. But purely for the sake of simplicity, use the same stats for rifle grenades that are given above for hand grenades.

Firing a grenade launcher requires a Dexterity + Guns roll; hitting the target dead on requires three Success Levels, just like throwing a grenade. The grenade itself strikes with considerable force, inflicting 20 points of Bash damage before it explodes. A grenade launcher uses pistol

ranges, with one catch; the grenade has to travel at least 5 meters before it arms, otherwise it won't explode. Most grenade launchers can hold six shots, but older models only hold one. Using a grenade launcher without penalty requires the military training Quality. Cost: -2 (Restricted)

Hand Taser: This pocket-sized device is an excellent tool for incapacitating people. Press one end against somebody and he gets shocked. The taser uses a Dexterity and Archaic Weapons roll, or the Combat Score, and must be pressed up against the victim. When hit, the target takes a base damage of five points (Bash type) from the charge, and must make a Constitution (doubled) roll (or use the Muscle Score) at a penalty of five plus the Success Levels of the attack. On a failure, the victim is knocked out. Even if he remains conscious, the shock gives him a -2 penalty to all actions (including resisting another shock) for the next four Turns. Multiple shots create cumulative penalties. Cost -3

Hyperspatial Disruptor: This powerful device is highly illegal for unauthorized personnel to possess. Unauthorized use tends to attract OPS and governmental strike teams hell-bent on stopping the user by any means necessary, and it's easy to see why. Derived from work on hyperspatial gates and the dragonfly drive, this device envelops the target in a rapidly varying hyperspatial field that disperses small amounts of the target across several dimensions of hyperspace. The result is a weapon that is not only extremely deadly; it can also drastically weaken any barrier, including high-grade steel or solid rock. More importantly, this weapon instantly destroys any hyperspatial creature less powerful than a Great Old One, and temporarily disrupts and banishes even a Great Old One.

Any living target caught within the center of the range is immediately and automatically killed, as are lesser hyperspatial entities like servitors of the other gods or flying polyps. Each use of the device on an inanimate object halves its armor and then does 50 points of (Bash type) damage. Repeated uses allow users to cut through thick barriers. Finally, the object banishes any Great Old One it strikes for 1d6+3 hours. The one major limitation on this device is its extremely short range. Disruptors only affect targets within five meters (short pistol range), but they affect a cone five meters across. Any target further away is completely unaffected by this weapon.

A disruptor is a tube 10 cm in diameter and 60 cm long, connected by cable to a small five-kilogram backpack containing a battery and additional power boosting circuitry. Living targets within the outermost one meter of the cone on any side receive 30 points of (Fire type) damage: at that

range, the disruptor field destroys any armor they are wearing and destroys skin without penetrating further into the body. Like full-body burns, this requires immediate medical care for those who survive: any character who does not receive medical attention within 20 minutes of taking this injury goes into shock, dropping them to -10 Life Points and requiring a Survival Test. In addition, damage done by this weapon ignores all versions of the reduce damage power. Cost: +4 (Restricted)

Knife: Average switchblades or easily concealed knives have a base damage of 2 x Strength points (Slash/stab type). This drops to 2 x (Strength - 1) points when the knife is thrown. Large knives (called short swords in another age) do 3 x Strength points of base damage (Slash/stab type). Throwing this monster requires a Strength 4 or better, and does 3 x (Strength - 1) points. Little knives, like the blade on an average folding pocket knife, do 2 x (Strength - 1) points of damage (Slash/stab type), or (Strength - 1) points when thrown. Cost: -4

Pistol: These guns come in various sizes but all use pistol ranges and do Bullet damage. Small caliber, easily concealed small caliber handguns like .22 or .32 caliber handguns have a base 9 points of damage, and hold 10 bullets. Standard .38 or 9 mm pistols have a base damage of 12 points. Revolvers hold six shots per gun; pistols can have as many as 17 rounds. Large .357 magnum or .45 caliber pistols have less than 10 shots in their magazines (revolvers have six shots) and do a base damage of 15 points. Huge .44 magnum, or .50 caliber pistols have the same number of bullets but do 18 points of base damage. Cost: -3 for small pistols, -2 for all other pistols.

Quarterstaff: Basically a long stick. A pool cue can double as a quarterstaff. Used with both hands (damage bonus already factored in). Base damage is 3 x (Strength + 1) points (Bash type). Cost: -4

Rifle: A hunting rifle is either single-shot or has 5-10 rounds. It does 20 points of base damage (Bullet type). Cost: -2

Shotgun: This weapon is popular with hunters and the police. The sawed-off version suffers a -2 penalty when rolling, but is easier to conceal. A 12 gauge shotgun does base 20 points of Bullet damage, holds two shots, and uses pistol ranges. A 20 gauge shotgun is identical, except that it only does base 12 points of Bullet damage. Both also come in pump action varieties that hold five rounds instead of two. Cost: -2 (sawed off shotguns are restricted).

Sniper Rifle: A compromise between big sniper rifle and the hunting rifle, the sniper rifle provides both impressive range and solid firepower, without being too

bulky to easily use. If you have the sniper rifle set up and properly braced, you can use the sight to gain a +3 to your Guns roll (in addition to any other bonuses). The sniper rifle can be fired without being braced, but you can't use the sights and you take an additional -3 to your Guns check due to the awkward size of the weapon. Base damage is 20 points (Bullet type). A sniper rifle has a short range of up to 30 meters, a medium range of up to 120 meters, and a long range of 500 meters. Military sniper rifles hold 10 shots, but there are single-shot models out there as well. Cost: -1

Spear: Essentially a long pointed stick. Fairly common in ancient times; very rare nowadays. Uses two-handed (damage bonus already factored in). Base damage is 3 x (Strength + 1) points (Slash/stab type). This drops to 3 x Strength points when the spear is thrown. Cost: -3

Submachine Gun: Basically a large pistol capable of automatic fire. Can autofire and burst fire, uses pistol ranges, and holds between 20 and 40 bullets. Base damage is 12 points (Bullet type). Cost: -2 (Restricted)

Sword: Rapiers, broadswords, and other large blades. This also covers katanas and other fancy weapons. Some of these weapons can be used two-handed; in that case, add +1 to the effective Strength of the wielder. Does base 4 x Strength points of Slash/stab damage. Large Sword: A big, heavy sword that must be used two-handed (the +1 to Strength is already built-in). Base damage is 5 x (Strength + 1) points (Slash/stab type). Cost: -2

Tranquilizer Gun: Useful for bringing down animals and ab-humans (at least those whose physiologies react to drugs) without hurting them. Uses rifle ranges. A typical dose of tranquilizer is a narcotic poison with a Strength 6. Each Success Level in the poison roll reduces the victim's Strength by one level; if reduced to zero, the target falls unconscious for one hour. Many hyperspatial mutants and ab-humans recover much faster; reduce the unconsciousness time by ten minutes per Constitution level (minimum of ten minutes). In general, human drugs and poisons don't work on aliens, but maybe someone in R&D can get you tranq darts designed to work on moonbeasts. Cost: -2

Zapper: Zappers are weapons that fire beams of focused electricity capable of temporarily stunning and paralyzing the target. This weapon, which has replaced inefficient string-lead tasers, normally fires an electrical charge that does little damage but knocks out most targets. When hit, the victim takes some damage from the charge, and must make a Constitution doubled roll at a penalty of five plus the Success Levels of the attack. On a failure, the victim is

knocked out. Even if the target manages to stay conscious, the shock gives her a -2 penalty to all actions (including resisting another shock) for the next four Turns. Multiple shots have cumulative penalties.

Zappers can be built as either lightweight rifles or small pistols. The rifles have the normal range of a rifle, while the pistols have the normal range of a pistol. Base damage is 5 points (Bash type). Specially made zappers can also deliver higher power shots that are designed to harm the target, doing 20 points of electrical damage (which is treated like Bash damage) to the target. These models have a switch allowing you to toggle between knock out and lethal shock modes. Cost: -2. Zappers that can fire lethal shots have a cost of -1 and are Restricted.

WEAPON ACCESSORIES

These useful items can make the difference between victory and defeat. Of course, if you're not a soldier, a SWAT team member, or an OPS operative, being found carrying any of these is going to make the cops look at you very carefully.

Laser Sights: A laser sight goes under the barrel of your gun and sticks a red dot on your target. A laser sight provides you with a +1 to any Guns check with the associated weapon. In smoke or fog, the beam will be visible, which looks cool, but is also a great way to reveal your position to the enemy. Cost: -3 for a sight properly fitted to your gun, -4 for some tooling around with a laser pointer and duct tape.

Silencers: One of the problems with guns is that they are noisy. Well, as all of you who have seen spy movies know, that's why the silencer is every assassin's friend. If you're working for the OPS, or a national intelligence or law enforcement agency, you can get a silencer for almost any firearm. Note that silencers have to be designed for a particular model of gun; you can actually get a silencer for an assault rifle, but you can't put the same silencer on your pistol, and silencers for rifles are large and extremely obvious. Using a silencer gives a shooter a -1 penalty on her Guns roll, but anyone around needs to make a Perception + Notice check to hear the sound of the shot. This should be modified for distance; if you're standing right next to a shooter with a silencer, the sound is still pretty noticeable. Cost: -2 (Restricted)

HEAVY WEAPONS

The following weapons are typically only used by terrorists or in wartime. They should not appear in any Eldritch Skies episode that does not deal with these problems or very similar ones.

Portable Anti-Aircraft Rocket: Designed to be fired by one person from a disposable launcher, this guided missile can easily hit both stationary targets and fast moving ones like speeding cars or even fighter jets. It comes in a disposable launcher 1.2 meters long and the entire unit weighs 12 kg. It does 50 points of damage, but all armor except hyperspatial energy fields are divided by 2 (round up) before this damage is applied. It also causes an explosion, doing the listed damage to anything within 1 meter of impact. In addition, everyone within 5 meters takes 10 points of Bash damage. Users gain an automatic +3 to hit due to the guidance system.

Portable Anti-Tank Rocket: Designed to be fired by one person from a disposable launcher, this rocket is ideal for destroying armored vehicles or small buildings. It is slightly less than a meter long, weighs only 2.5 kg, and has the same range as a rifle. It does 35 points of damage, but all armor except hyperspatial energy fields are divided by 5 (round up) before this damage is applied. It also causes an explosion, doing the listed damage to anything within 1 meter of impact. In addition, everyone within 5 meters takes 15 points of Bash damage. Because it lacks a guidance system, it cannot be used to hit fast-moving targets.

Satchel Charge: This is a typical terrorist bomb consisting of a dozen blocks of plastic explosive and a detonator that can be triggered by either a timer or a signal from a mobile. These weapons are easy to use and fits easily within a medium-sized brief case. This bomb does 42 points of damage to everyone within 10 meters and 12 points of damage to everyone within 30 meters.

ARMOR

Armor works by absorbing or reflecting some of the force of an attack, keeping sharp pointy objects away from the character's vital organs and cushioning against impacts. All armor has an Armor Value, a number that subtracts damage from an attack. Armor has its disadvantages, though—it can be cumbersome and it can attract unwanted attention. Walking around in military grade body armor turns heads. In addition to the armor described below, some creatures have natural armor in the form of scaly skins or bony plates.

Notes: Chameleon armor changes color to rough-

ly match the background. It provides a +3 bonus to all stealth rolls. However, it does not make the wearer invisible or allow them to hide in plain sight. See chameleon jumpsuit () for details on how it works.

GETTING HURT

When bullets, knives or pseudopods get through, bad things start to happen. Characters reduced to ten Life Points or below are severely injured, and find it hard to continue fighting—all combat rolls are at a -2 penalty. If reduced below five Life Points, this penalty goes up to -4.

Consciousness Tests: When reduced to zero Life Points or below, unconsciousness or incapacitation (i.e., the character is conscious, but can only lie there and work very hard on breathing) is likely. The character has to make a Willpower and Constitution roll, at a penalty of -1 for every point below zero. So, a character who is at -4 Life Points (he has taken enough damage to reduce all his Life Points to zero, and four more points on top of that) has a -4 penalty to his consciousness roll. The Resistance (Pain) Quality adds a bonus to consciousness rolls, and also reduces wound penalties.

Survival Tests: If the character is reduced to -10 points or worse, death is a possibility. The character has to make a Survival Test; this uses Willpower and Constitution (just like a Consciousness Test) with a -1 penalty for every ten points below zero (i.e., a character reduced to -32 Life Points would have a -3 penalty to the Survival Test). The Hard to Kill Quality provides a bonus to Survival Tests. If the character passes the Test, he lives; if he doesn't, he dies (see Drama Points for some possible alternatives).

Slow Death: If the character is below -10 Life Points, survives his Survival Test, but does not get medical help within a minute, he may still die. Survival Tests are required every minute after the first, at an additional -1 penalty per minute (so after five minutes, the additional penalty would be -5; half an hour later, it would be -30, and even a Drama Point may not be enough to save the character). A successful Intelligence and Doctor roll stabilizes the character and dispenses with further Survival Tests.

Dying Words and Actions: Most who fail a Survival Test are likely to be unconscious as well as incapacitated. This is no fun, dramatically speaking. If a character dies, the player should have the option of performing one last deed or saying some famous last words. The Last Deed option allows the character to rally and act normally for one or two Turns (no wound penalty applies). Last words can take as much as a minute (more likely, they should

BRAIN INJURIES: A GAME-CHANGER

A character who takes a severe blow or gunshot to the head, or lacks oxygen for too long before being resuscitated, can suffer brain damage. Many wounds that would be permanent in the real world can be dealt with easily in *Eldritch Skies*: limbs and eyes and skins can be regrown. The brain, however, holds something less replaceable. Heroes can come back from some kinds of brain damage, but it takes a while – and their personalities and abilities might not be the same afterward, though people make new synaptic connections as healing takes place. Players who retain a character after this kind of injury should work with the Director to weave this into the story: maybe the character must re-learn his combat skills and can no longer remember parts of childhood, or becomes erratic and superstitious but develops a new musical talent. The effects should vary, based on the tone of the Series and what the player believes is a realistic direction for the character.

consist of a couple of sentences). These are the last acts of the character—make them count.

Resuscitation: Some injuries kill the character, but leave him intact enough for medicine to bring him back. Drowning or suffocation, gunshot wounds, and similar injuries are often not destructive enough to prevent modern science from saving the character. Common sense should be your guide. If the character was burned to a crisp or eaten whole by a flying polyp, CPR isn't going to help. Resuscitation requires an Intelligence and Doctor roll, followed by another Survival Test from the victim. In addition to any previous modifier, the victim gets a bonus equal to the Success Levels of the Intelligence and Doctor roll, and a penalty of -1 per five minutes since her untimely demise. Or the caretaker can spend Drama Points to perform the sort of medical miracle cinematic Heroes are good at.

TERMINAL VELOCITY

A falling body accelerates for about 160 meters. If a strictly linear damage formula is applied at that point, the faller suffers 480 Life Points. Any further falling creates no further damage, not that a fall of that magnitude needs much in the way of further damage. That's exceptionally deadly. Still, it's your game; we're just offering options.

GETTING BETTER

Going to the hospital – or far from civilization, calling in medical backup – is an excellent idea whenever a character is severely injured. Without medical help, characters may heal from wounds, but very slowly. When using Drama Points, healing is not much of a problem. Characters in a Series of this type should be up and around on the next Episode, unless the injuries were truly epic in scope.

For the rest of humanity, injuries are healed at the rate of 1 Life Point per Constitution level every day spent under medical care. Augmentations can speed this up a bit. Also, some ab-human mutants and aliens can recover from almost deadly injuries in less than an hour, which is one of the reasons that OPS strike teams are well paid.

OTHER TYPES OF INJURIES

Bullets and knives aren't the only dangers Heroes and other characters can face. Here are some hazards that may come up in the course of a Series.

Disease: This works just like Poisons, except that Disease rolls (using the Strength of Disease) are usually less frequent (rarely faster than once per hour, and typically once per day). Many diseases do not kill, but merely incapacitate victims with fevers, chills, and other unpleasant symptoms. Diseases affect all characters and creatures, unless they have a special Resistance Quality or other immunity. They don't usually jump species barriers, but can affect hybrids.

Falling: Any fall from more than one meter inflicts three points of Bash damage per meter. Falling damage tops out after 50 meters (150 Life Points)—falling further doesn't do any more damage. While that limit can be debated, it preserves the cinematic nature of the game (a fall over 50 meters kills most characters but Drama Points allow for statistically unlikely survivals) and are not unrealistic (humans have fallen out of airplanes and survived).

A Dexterity and Acrobatics roll (or the Combat Score) reduces the fall's effective distance by one meter per Success Level. So a character who gets four Success Levels in a Dexterity and Acrobatics roll would take no damage from a three-meter fall, and would suffer only six points of damage from a six-meter fall.

Poison: Poisons have a Strength Attribute. Roll and add double the Poison's Strength; this is resisted by the victim's Constitution (doubled). If the poison "wins," the victim is drained of one Attribute level per Success Level in the Poison roll. The Attribute depends on the type of poison; paralyzing agents drain Dexterity, while debili-

ARMOR TABLE

ARMOR TYPE	ARMOR VALUE	NOTES	COST
Leather Jacket	2	Typical biker jacket	-3
Bulletproof Vest	10 (5)	Bulky, second value is used against Slash/stab attacks	-2
Covert Armor or Chameleon Covert Armor	6 (3)	Looks like a blazer or full motorcycle leathers, second value is used against Bash attacks	0/+1
Combat Armor or Chameleon Combat Armor	12	Worn by soldiers in combat and SWAT teams	+1/+2 (Restricted)
Space Suit	4	Bullet or Slash/stab damage in excess of this armor causes the suit to leak	+1
Armored Space Suit	14	Bulky, this suit can repair up to 4 point leaks, but more than 18 points of Bullet or Slash/stab damage causes the suit to leak	+2

tating venoms drain Strength. When the Attribute is reduced to zero, the victim is unconscious or incapacitated. If the poison is lethal, then it also starts draining Constitution. Non-lethal drugs that causes unconsciousness or paralysis do not reduce Constitution.

When Constitution is drained to zero, the victim dies. The frequency of Poison rolls depends on how powerful the substance is. Very deadly poisons roll every Turn, while less powerful agents roll once per minute, per hour, or even per day. An Intelligence and Doctor or Science roll may help identify the poison and remove it from the victim. In other cases, you'd better find an antidote stat. Poisons affect all characters and creatures, unless they have a special Resistance Quality or other immunity.

Radiation: Low level ionizing radiation causes no visible harm, but can damage DNA and thus greatly raise someone's risk of developing cancer years or decades later. Fortunately, cancer is curable in the world of *Eldritch Skies*. Higher levels of radiation cause immediate harm or even swift death. For simplicity, there are three levels of radiation in *Eldritch Skies* – Low, High, and Lethal. Medicine in *Eldritch Skies* is sufficiently advanced that all but the worst radiation poisoning can be cured. However, radiation damage is still very serious and takes four times as long to heal as normal damage. Burns and systemic illness are both possible consequences of this type of injury. Ingesting or inhaling radioactive material can cause low-level radiation damage to continue accruing for a longer time.

Low: Anyone exposed to this level of radiation receives 1 LP/3 hours. This level of radiation is mostly found in regions that were subject to attack by nuclear weapons decades or centuries in the past, within a dozen or so kilometers of a recent nuclear attack or nuclear accident, in mild solar flares, or on planets with extremely high levels of natural radioactivity.

High: Anyone exposed to this level of radiation receives 1 LP/15 minutes. This level of radiation is found in space in planetary radiation belts, moderate solar flares, or within a few kilometers of a recent nuclear attack or nuclear disaster.

Lethal: Anyone exposed to this level of radiation receives anywhere from 1 LP/minute to, at the most extreme, 1 LP/turn. Even after receiving a lethal dose of radiation, the character can still function as if they were reduced below 5 LP (-4 to all rolls), but they will die within a day regardless of medical treatment. The only possible interventions at this point are those which would cause a total physical transformation of the character – extreme hyperspatial exposure or possibly transplant into a Mi-Go brain canister. This level of radiation is mostly found right next to badly damaged nuclear reactors or in space during the worst solar flares.

Suffocation: If unable to breathe (i.e., being choked, under water, or in a non-oxygenated environment), a character dies. Anybody can hold out for 12 Turns. After that, a Consciousness Test is required with a cumulative -1 penalty every Turn. 30 seconds after the character has fallen unconscious, survival Tests kick in, again with a cumulative -1 penalty every 30 seconds.

Vacuum: Being exposed to the vacuum of space isn't like drowning. If you try to hold your breath, your lungs explode. Characters can act and remain conscious for Constitution +1 turns. After 30 seconds, the characters must make a survival test, with a cumulative -3 penalty every 30 seconds. Characters also take one point of Bash damage per turn spent in vacuum, but armor provides no protection against this damage.

BREAKING STUFF

Unless it is dramatically necessary, characters can break things without having to roll. Smashing a plate glass window or turning an expensive computer into a pile of

BREAKING STUFF CHART

Interior Door	Three Success Levels
Reinforced Wooden Door	Four Success Levels, and the first Success Level in any one roll is ignored
Metal Door	Six Success Levels, and the first two Success Levels in any one roll do not apply
Reinforced Metal Door	Eight Success Levels, and the first five Success Levels in any one roll are ignored
Interior Wall	Armor Value 4; 20 points of damage
Brick Wall	Armor Value 6; 40 points of damage
Concrete	Armor Value 10; 80 points of damage

useless electronic parts does not require rolls and damage calculations. A good swing with a crowbar does it all.

Sometimes, there's a dramatic component to a good busting up. This might include breaking through doors, walls, and other obstacles, where time is of the essence. Typically, the Success Levels of a Strength (doubled) roll determine how fast a door gets what's coming to it and comes off its hinges. Walls require a certain amount of damage before a man-sized hole is punched into them. The Breaking Stuff Chart above summarizes.

Inanimate objects also get damaged in combat. Combatants toss their opponents around. Missed attacks get fists, crowbars, or bullets buried in walls. In many cases, it's possible to just describe on the fly. If more precision is needed, the damage done to walls and other objects varies depending on who's swinging what. For augmented commandos and super strong ab-humans, the Tossed Item Chart runs it down. Of course, the character must have a Strength Attribute sufficient to lift the item or person without much effort. Still, several characters can work together and combine their Strength levels for tossing purposes. The Director decides if they all can fit around, and get a handle on, the object.

EQUIPMENT

The following section contains the gear and equipment used by Operatives and Civilians in *Eldritch Skies*. This list contains both equipment unique to the setting and also

common equipment that is often used in the course of mythos adventures. Only very basic descriptions of various pieces of equipment are provided; Directors are encouraged to use common sense when handling equipment. For example, while size and weight is not provided for most equipment, an ordinary character won't be able to carry fifty rifles. This section also includes special rules for purchasing and acquiring equipment. Weapons and armor are listed above in the section on combat.

EQUIPMENT COSTS

OPS Operatives and other individuals working for large organizations don't need to purchase necessary gear for their missions: this equipment is issued to them on loan from the organization. However, some characters will wish to have their own gear. In addition, freelance Heroes must purchase their own equipment.

Purchasing equipment is handled in a relatively simple manner. Every piece of equipment has a listed cost. This cost is expressed in terms of the levels of the Resources Quality that the characters possess. These costs can range from -4 to +5 and most equipment ranges in cost from -3 to +3. Any character with at least the listed level of resources can afford the item. However, purchasing an item with the same cost as the character's level of Resources represents a significant expense and this character cannot afford any item with a similar cost for at least one month. If the character has one or more levels of Resources above the minimum needed to purchase the item, they suffer no such restriction. Any character with two more levels of Resources above the listed minimum for the item can afford to outfit their entire team with these items. Characters who lack the needed level of the Resources Quality cannot afford the item.

TOSSED ITEM CHART

ROUGH WEIGHT	DAMAGE TO WALL/OBJECT HIT	SAMPLE ITEM
up to 50 kg.	2 x Strength	Chair, end table
up to 100 kg.	3 x Strength	Person, recliner
up to 200 kg.	4 x Strength	Heavy couch, lawnmower
up to 500 kg.	5 x Strength	Motorcycle, refrigerator
up to 1,000 kg.	6 x Strength	Small car
up to 2 x previous	(+1 previous) x Strength	

RESTRICTED ITEMS

Some equipment is Restricted. Such items include military weaponry, advanced hyperspatial devices, and similar dangerous items that national governments and the OPS wish to keep out of the hands of civilians. Characters who do not work for governments or the OPS cannot simply request or purchase this equipment. Instead, characters without proper authorization who wish to acquire this equipment must find someone willing to illegally sell that piece of equipment to them. Often, attempting to acquire such a piece of equipment can be the basis for an entire Episode. Also, the cost of purchasing illegal equipment increases by +1.

ISSUED EQUIPMENT

If the Heroes work for the OPS, a government, or a large corporation, their employer issues them all of the equipment they should need on their mission. No rolls are required. If the characters are traveling to an unknown alien world, their employer issues them sensors and vacuum suits, just as characters sent to visit the deep ones are issued gill-breathers and likely a small submarine. Characters are only issued equipment they know how to use. Thus, the organization only issues military weapons to characters with the military training Quality. The following are lists of common equipment for various types of missions.

STANDARD FIELD KITS

The OPS supplies its teams with good equipment. When gear is damaged or destroyed, the OPS will replace it. Characters are free to upgrade this equipment, but they should at least have this much – unless of course their helicopter or aerodyne crashes on a remote Pacific island, and they aren't going to be able to leave or acquire new gear until the huge storm that caused the crash is over. At that point, they might be down to pocketknives, a pistol with one clip, and the clothes on their backs.

INVESTIGATORS KIT

- Bug detector
- Camera jewelry
- Covert armor
- Fiber optic pen
- First aid kit
- Gecko pads
- Hypnoscope
- Knife
- Mobile link

- Sniffer
- Standard pistol
- Surveillance drone
- Video bug
- Zapper pistol

URBAN STRIKE TEAM KIT

- Assault rifle or submachine gun
- Big pistol
- Chameleon combat armor
- First aid kit
- Grappling gun
- Grenades (flash bang only)
- Hyperspatial disruptor or electric cannon (one per team)
- Knife
- Mobile link
- Rappelling rig
- Sniper rifle (one per team)
- Surveillance drone

SPACE KIT

- Atmosphere sensor
- First aid kit
- Knife
- Mobile link
- Plasma cutter
- Sniffer
- Space suit with life support pack
- Zapper pistol

SPACE STRIKE TEAM KIT

- Armored space suit with life support pack
- Assault rifle or big assault rifle
- Atmosphere sensor
- Big pistol
- First aid kit
- Grenades (regular and flash bang)
- Hyperspatial disruptor (one per team)
- Mobile Link
- Plasma cutter
- Surveillance drone

ACQUIRING ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

If a character possesses the training required to use a piece of equipment and wishes to have it for a mission, they can request it. If this request is either relatively minor (cost +1 or less) or is a fairly obvious choice for the mission, then their employer provides it and no roll are

required. However, if a character wishes an unusual or unexpected piece of equipment, such as combat armor for a normal diplomatic mission, or a powerful technosorcerous device (see Sorcery), the player must roll to see if they can convince the organization they are working for to issue that particular piece of equipment.

This roll is made using Willpower + Influence + Status. Success levels have the following meaning:

SUCCESS LEVEL	EQUIPMENT
1	Equipment costing +2, Technosorcerous devices with spell level 1
2	Equipment costing +3, Technosorcerous devices with spell level 2
3	Equipment costing +4, Technosorcerous devices with spell level 3
4	Equipment costing +5, Technosorcerous devices with spell level 4
5	Technosorcerous devices with spell level 5
+1 (or more)	If the equipment seems particularly inappropriate or problematic for the mission.

For the OPS or national government, restricted equipment is as easily available as normal equipment. However, acquiring restricted items from large corporations (which cannot legally gain access to them) increases the difficulty of the roll by +2 Success Levels, if it is possible at all. Even the most powerful tech research company could risk getting shut down over an unauthorized hyperspatial disruptor.

Remember that equipment issued to characters for a mission belongs to their employer. If this equipment is lost or destroyed, the characters must explain what happened to it. While it requires some filling-out of forms, the OPS understands that in many situations, “an alien ate my machine” actually is the best explanation. Other employers might be less forgiving. Characters who are particularly careless with valuable equipment can experience penalties to future rolls to acquire additional equipment. A character who sells or gives away valuable or restricted equipment can face various penalties, including being charged with theft or having their effective Resources docked as the loss is taken out of their salary.

VEHICLES

Eldritch Skies is not a war game; it doesn't include stats on main battle tanks and missile-bearing attack helicopters. Instead, this section provides a quick rundown of the basics on a wide range of vehicles, as well as what happens when a vehicle hits someone. Remember, spacecraft aren't treated as vehicles in *Eldritch Skies*: they're more

like mobile game settings, since even the small ones are at least as large as a commercial airliner, and large spacecraft are the size of oil tankers.

VEHICLE ATTRIBUTES

Like characters, vehicles have Attributes:

Weight: The mass of the vehicle in kilograms

Speed: This has two values, maximum speed and average cruising speed, in kilometers per hour. The former is for going all out. That's going to put some serious stress on the vehicle. After a certain period (which is up to the Director), start asking for Toughness (doubled) rolls with a cumulative -1 penalty for each successive roll. When one fails, the vehicle suffers some form of damage. The repercussions of that range from a slow coasting stop to much worse. This assumes that the driver doesn't spin off the road because of a failed Driving roll, of course.

Range: How many kilometers the vehicle can travel before having to recharge or refuel.

Damage Capacity: The “Life Points” of the vehicle. When a vehicle's Damage Capacity has been depleted, it usually ceases to function. It may not be completely destroyed, but it's no longer operational (a “Survival Roll” using Toughness may be allowed though).

Armor Value: How much damage a vehicle's skin or armor stops before it starts taking damage. This runs in the area of two to ten for your typical car.

Toughness: This is the equivalent of the Constitution Attribute, and measures the vehicle's ruggedness, redundant systems, and damage control. When a vehicle takes a lot of damage, a Survival roll—Toughness (doubled)—is needed to see if the vehicle continues to function.

Handling: This is the equivalent of the vehicle's Dexterity. It reflects how the vehicle maneuvers and responds to the driver. For some rolls, you have to use the lowest of the driver's Dexterity or the vehicle's Handling attribute—even the best race car driver is going to get only so much performance out of a garbage truck. Handling varies from one to five or so for most vehicles. The driver's skill adds normally to the vehicle's Handling score.

Crew/Passengers: How many people are needed to operate the vehicle/how many passengers (in addition to the operators) can it carry.

Cost: The cost of the vehicle, expressed in terms of the Resources Quality.

DRIVING AROUND

No rules are needed to drive around a city, retract the roof, or parallel park or even when you're flying your

aerodyne to go shopping. It's when things get exciting (car chases, smashing into a concrete abutment at 100 kph) that a few guidelines are needed.

Chases: These are resolved as resisted rolls, using Dexterity (or the vehicle's Handling, whichever is lower) and Driving or Piloting. The faster vehicle gets a +1 bonus for every 15 kph of speed it has over the slower one. You can use the Combat Score for Supporting Heroes or monsters, modified if the vehicle's Handling is lower than the character's Dexterity. Both sides roll and keep track of their Success Levels every Turn.

The pursued gets one automatic Success Level for every two Turns of head start he had. The first side that gets five more Success Levels than their adversary "wins." If the pursued wins, he manages to lose the chasers. If the pursuers win, they catch up and can attempt less than friendly actions like ramming and hijacking.

Going Over It Again: Livia the OPS Operative is being chased by a group of cultists. Livia has her motorcycle; the cultists are in a van fitted out for kidnapping their victims. Livia has a two-Turn head-start, so she begins with two Success Levels. On the first turn of the chase, Livia gets four Success levels (for a total of six) and the cultists get three. On the second turn, Livia gets two Success Levels to the cultists' four (score now is Livia 8, Cultists 7). On the third Turn, our heroine manages to get six Success Levels and the bad guys a mere two (Laura 14, cultists 9). Livia's five Success Levels ahead, so she's managed to evade pursuit.

Crashes and Collisions: Vehicle collisions do a lot of damage. Vehicles weighing under two tons do 10 points of Bash damage for every 15 kph (about 10 mph) of relative speed. Vehicles over two tons inflict 20 points per 15 kph of relative speed, and heavy vehicles (over 10 tons/10,000 kgs) inflict 30 points per 15 kph of relative speed. Relative speed factors the movement of both parties in the collision. If only the vehicle is moving, it's easy—the vehicle's speed is the relative speed. If two vehicles collide and they are moving toward each other, the relative speed is the sum of both vehicles' speed.

How much damage the vehicle doing the smashing takes depends on how solid the target is—hitting a small animal does very little damage; smashing into the side of a mountain does a lot more. Small animals or objects do no damage. Large animals or human-sized things cause the vehicle to take one-third of the damage it inflicts (round down). Hitting a lighter vehicle produces half the damage inflicted, and hitting anything solid or heavier than the vehicle does the same amount of damage to the vehicle.

If the car hits something hard enough to come to a stop, passengers inside the vehicle take half the damage if not wearing seatbelts and one-fifth of the damage if they are. Air bags provide an additional 20 points of damage protection. All modern vehicles have both.

Example: If an Operative is attempting to run down a monstrous hyperspatial mutant at 80 kph (50 mph), the impact does 50 points of damage to the mutant. The Operative's car takes 11 points of damage on the first hit (50/3, rounded down, minus 5 Armor Value; since the mutant is human-sized). The Operative takes no damage, regardless whether she is wearing a seatbelt or not, since the impact didn't stop the vehicle.

AUTOMATIC VEHICLES

Every modern vehicle, including all of the vehicles listed below, are fitted with computer controls that allow the vehicle to drive itself under normal conditions. To operate it, the driver simply speaks their destination or visualizes it to their mobile link, and the vehicle goes there. Automatic vehicles avoid pedestrians and obey all local traffic laws. Automatic controls work really well under normal circumstances, and the vehicle does not need to make a roll to drive to a store, just as Heroes don't need to make such rolls. However, automatic controls are not designed for extreme use. When driving at top speed in a bad storm, or in similar conditions, like high speed chases, automatic vehicles only add +3 to the roll – equivalent to a driver with a Dexterity of 2 and a Driving or Piloting Skill of 1. When driving or piloting in dangerous situations, having a person at the controls is almost always better than letting the vehicle try to drive itself.

Another Example: An 18-wheeler traveling 80 kph (50 mph) sideswipes a sedan traveling at 50 kph (30 mph). The relative speed is 30 kph (20 mph) because the vehicles are traveling in the same direction. The 18-wheeler inflicts 60 points of damage (30 points times two 15 kph intervals), minus the Armor Value, on the sedan. The light car does 20 points (minus Armor Value) to the far heavier truck. Neither driver takes damage as neither vehicle was stopped.

Final Example: The sedan driver puts on the brakes after the sideswipe and loses control. He slams into a guardrail going 30 kph and stops solid. The driver takes 10 points of damage if he's not wearing a seatbelt, and four points if he's buckled up.

Maneuvering: When trying to make tight turns at

high speed or weave around traffic, make Dexterity (or Handling, whichever is lower) and Driving rolls. Apply a -1 penalty for every 15 kilometers per hour over 80 – high speed chases can easily become deadly. Sharp turns incur a -2 penalty on top of that. Sudden moves (trying to avoid a deer jumping in front of you) suffer a -3 penalty. Trying to run another driver off the road works like an attack/defense combo—both sides roll a Maneuvering roll. If the defender ties or wins, she avoids the attempt; if the attacker wins, she pushes the target onto the shoulder...or worse.

STARSHIPS AND THE VEHICLE RULES

Dragonfly drive starships fly by pushing against the fabric of hyperspace and so can hover and land slowly and softly. They are also exceptionally maneuverable and have elaborate computer controls to avoid collisions. As a result, they do not normally get into any sort of collisions. There are only two circumstances when this can happen – if another vehicle strikes a starship or if a starship is badly damaged or has been hijacked by someone intent on destroying it.

Airplanes and other air vehicles can deliberately or accidentally strike the hull of a starship. If this happens, the starship is usually unharmed. Starships have a sturdy hull that provides an Armor Value of 60. Also, when the drive is in use, it creates a field of hyperspatial energy around the starship that provides an additional 200 points of Armor Value that cannot be reduced by any physical weapon, for a total AV of 260. Also, while the drive is in use, inertial damping fields and artificial gravity protect everyone inside the vehicle. These fields are innate byproducts of the hyperspatial drive and humanity cannot yet produce them in other ways. As a result, any impact that does not cripple the ship will be barely felt by anyone inside. Only attacks that can do a minimum of 100 points of damage that penetrates the starships armor has a chance of damaging a dragonfly drive starship.

If badly damaged, the starships inertial damping and artificial gravity become unreliable and the passengers and crew can be thrown and jolted around easily. Also, the starship becomes far more difficult to maneuver or land. Subtract between -2 and -5 from all Piloting rolls, depending upon the severity of the damage. A hard landing usually crushes anything beneath the starship, but often leaves the starship with only minor damage, since it is protected by the hyperspatial energy field.

A starship that suffers enough damage to disable its engines either floats helplessly in space, if it is in orbit or in deep space, or if it is near a planet's surface, it plummets

to the ground in a crash that destroys the starship, kills everyone inside. A crashing starship does 500 points of damage to everything and everyone within 100 meters of the impact and 50 points to everything within 300 meters. In addition, starships are powered by small nuclear reactors, similar to those used in nuclear submarines, and a severe crash would also release this radioactive material.

The most effective way to temporarily incapacitate a starship is to fire a hyperspatial disruptor at the drive field surrounding the ship. No roll is needed to accomplish this, since a hyperspatial disruptor only has a range of 5 meters. A single shot temporarily overloads and shuts down the hyperspatial drive. Restarting the drive requires 2 minutes, which can be reduced by two round (10 seconds) for every Success Level someone working with the starship's engine's rolls on an Intelligence + Engineering roll.

Shutting down a starship's hyperspatial field immediately drops it out of hyperspace. However, if this field merely flickers or becomes slightly unstable while the ship is traveling faster than light, the ship continues on its journey, but hyperspatial energies and creatures can leak through. In such an event, everyone on the ship suffers a level 2 Hyperspatial Exposure, and there is a chance that one or more hyperspatial beings can enter the starship during one of these field fluctuations.

Lesser servitors (see *Eldritch Threats & Alien Wonders*) are by far the most common creatures that might invade a starship, but servitors of the other gods and flying polyps are both also possible intruders. A few ships that have vanished into hyperspace, never to be seen again may have encountered Great Old Ones or Other Gods during such a drive malfunction, but the odds of this happening are thankfully very rare. Retuning the dragonfly drive (Intelligence + Engineering) can eliminate any problems in the ship's hyperspatial field, but creatures that have already entered the ship must still be dealt with.

A FEW VEHICLES

Here's a few vehicles for land, air, and sea, complete with stats. As described above, in 2030, all vehicles are sold with automatic guidance systems. These systems enable any vehicle to drive on its own in normal circumstances (not high-speed chases.)

GROUND VEHICLES

These vehicles are all powered by superconducting batteries, and come equipped with collision avoidance radar, GPS navigation, and wireless internet access. They can also be entirely operated by voice commands. Of course,

if you've in a freeway chase with some scary corporate thugs, nothing beats human hands on the steering wheel.

18-WHEELER

Weight:	12,000
Speed:	150/100
Range:	550
Damage Capacity:	150
Armor Value:	6
Handling	4
Crew/Passengers:	2
Cost:	+2

ARMORED SWAT TEAM VAN

Weight:	2,500
Speed:	180/90
Range:	650
Damage Capacity:	100
Armor Value:	50
Toughness	3
Handling	2
Crew/Passengers:	1/6
Cost:	+2 (Restricted)

Notes: This armored vehicle is used by both SWAT teams and OPS strike teams and has lockers containing weapons, body armor, and first aid materials.

COMPACT CAR

Weight:	750
Speed:	150/80
Range:	800
Damage Capacity:	40
Armor Value:	4
Toughness	3
Handling	2
Crew/Passengers:	1/3
Cost:	+0

COMPACT CAR

Weight:	3,000
Speed:	150/80
Range:	500
Damage Capacity:	110
Armor Value:	8
Toughness	5
Handling	3
Crew/Passengers:	1/3
Cost:	+1

MOTORCYCLE

Weight:	200
Speed:	250/110
Range:	350
Damage Capacity:	30
Armor Value:	2
Toughness	1
Handling	5
Crew/Passengers:	1/1
Cost:	-1

OPS LAB RV

Weight:	1,700
Speed:	210/110 (60 off road)
Range:	300
Damage Capacity:	100
Armor Value:	12
Toughness	2
Handling	2
Crew/Passengers:	1/4
Cost:	+3/+4 for the pressurized version (Restricted)

Notes: Designed for both on and off-road driving, this vehicle is a mobile laboratory that can be used to analyze alien artifacts and unusual technologies, as well as more conventional scientific and technical mysteries. Pressurized versions exist for use on alien worlds with hostile atmospheres. Life support for such vehicles functions for five days.

POLICE CRUISER

Weight:	1,100
Speed:	230/110
Range:	900
Damage Capacity:	75
Armor Value:	4
Toughness	2
Handling	4
Crew/Passengers:	1/3
Cost:	+1 (Restricted)

SECURITY SEDAN

Weight:	2,400
Speed:	230/90
Range:	550
Damage Capacity:	70
Armor Value:	40
Toughness	3
Handling	3
Crew/Passengers:	1/4
Cost:	+3

Notes: Designed for transporting important people who are at risk for kidnapping or murder, this armored vehicle can be rendered airtight by flipping a switch and contains a three hour air supply.

SEDAN

Weight:	1,200
Speed:	210/105
Range:	650
Damage Capacity:	45
Armor Value:	4
Toughness	2
Handling	4
Crew/Passengers:	1/4
Cost:	+1 (+2 for a fancy sedan)

SPORTS CAR

Weight:	1,000
Speed:	260/130
Range:	500
Damage Capacity:	45
Armor Value:	4
Toughness	2
Handling	5
Crew/Passengers:	1/2
Cost:	+2 (+3 for a fancy sports car)

VAN

Weight:	2,500
Speed:	160/105
Range:	500
Damage Capacity:	65
Armor Value:	4
Toughness	3
Handling	3
Crew/Passengers:	1/6
Cargo:	500 kg
Cost:	+1

AIR VEHICLES

Like ground vehicles, air vehicles are all computer controlled and fitted with advanced sensors. Jets run on hydrogen, but helicopters and aerodynes are powered by superconducting batteries and electric motors.

AERODYNE

Weight:	1,500
Speed:	550/400
Range:	1,300
Damage Capacity:	40
Armor Value:	4
Toughness	2
Handling	5
Crew/Passengers:	1/3
Cost:	+3/+4 for a fancy aerodyne

Notes: Aerodynes are the Rolls Royce of the air, and everyone wants one. With both lift and propulsion provided by ducted fans, this vehicle looks like a streamlined car with four small but powerful ducted fans at the cor-

ners. Capable of carrying four people and up to 200 kg of cargo, this vehicle can hover and take off vertically as easily as a helicopter, but without the large rotors.

CORPORATE JET

Weight:	16,000
Speed:	800/400
Range:	3,200
Damage Capacity:	250
Armor Value:	4
Toughness	3
Handling	3
Crew/Passengers:	1/8
Cost:	+5

Notes: The OPS also has similar jets for its own use.

OBSERVATION HELICOPTER

Weight:	2,100
Speed:	260/130
Range:	400
Damage Capacity:	40
Armor Value:	4
Toughness	3
Handling	4
Crew/Passengers:	1/1
Cost:	+3

Notes: This is the sort of very small helicopter used by news services.

PASSENGER OR TRANSPORT HELICOPTER

Weight:	1,600
Speed:	200/100
Range:	500
Damage Capacity:	50
Armor Value:	4
Toughness	3
Handling	4
Crew/Passengers:	1/5 or 1/1 & 3,000 lbs of cargo
Cost:	+4

SPACE PLANE

Weight:	30,000
Speed:	43,000/35,000
Range:	90,000
Damage Capacity:	800
Armor Value:	10
Toughness	4
Handling	4
Crew/Passengers:	2/20
Cost:	+5

Notes: Powered by monohydrogen rockets, space planes are single stage winged rockets used to journey to and from orbit or to travel to any location on Earth in an hour or less. The OPS has dozens of space planes used for both purposes and various nations and corporations have many more. Larger models capable of carrying as many as 80 passengers.

BOATS

High-speed boat chases are unlikely, but anything's possible in *Eldritch Skies*.

FISHING TRAWLER

Weight:	7,000
Speed:	55/30
Range:	2,500
Damage Capacity:	120
Armor Value:	6
Toughness	5
Handling	2
Crew/Passengers:	1/10
Cost:	+3

Notes: If you want to be ignored out on the big blue sea, this is the vehicle for you. It has long term accommodations for passengers and crew and includes a Zodiac as a lifeboat. Also, it can be fitted with either a fully equipped lab, a concealed helipad, or four zodiacs and full gear for a dozen commandos.

JET SKI

Weight:	230
Speed:	100/50
Range:	30
Damage Capacity:	30
Armor Value:	1
Toughness	1
Handling	4
Crew/Passengers:	1/2
Cost:	+1

MINISUB

Weight:	2,300
Speed:	50.25
Range:	700
Damage Capacity:	100
Armor Value:	6
Toughness	4
Handling	2
Crew/Passengers:	1/2
Cost:	+4

Notes: Just the thing if you want to drop in on some deep ones. It's fitted with two robot arms, a powerful spotlight, and an artificial gill capable of supplying the three people inside with air for 60 hours.

SPEED BOAT

Weight:	1,700
Speed:	150/100
Range:	350
Damage Capacity:	70
Armor Value:	4
Toughness	3
Handling	4
Crew/Passengers:	1/4
Cost:	+2

ZODIAC

Weight:	45
Speed:	65/30
Range:	30
Damage Capacity:	15
Armor Value:	1
Toughness	1
Handling	5
Crew/Passengers:	1/3
Cost:	0

Notes: An inflatable motor boat of the sort used by both Jacques Cousteau and many commandos.

ADDITIONAL GEAR

The following is a list of devices used in the world of *Eldritch Skies* that are significantly more advanced than similar equipment found in our world. All ordinary devices that we are familiar with in our world also exist, this is just the stuff that doesn't.

EVERYDAY TECHNOLOGIES

The following devices are widely used and can be purchased in any city on Earth and on any large off-world colony. Everyone has at least basic familiarity with these devices and most people younger than 40 grew up with them.

DEAD HEAD

This piece of psychic technology was developed in the 1970s as a way to block psychic contact. Wearing a dead head unit makes the wearer immune to all forms of human telepathy, empathy, and mental probes or communication by aliens that exist purely in the physical world. However, hyperspatial beings with potent psychic powers can overwhelm, disable, or even burn out dead head units. Unlike the Iron Mind Quality, this device does not render the user immune to sorcery designed to affect the wearer's mind. Also, these units do not protect against any form of hyperspatial exposure. Characters wearing a dead head can have exactly the same visions and dreams of hyperspace and exactly the same mental contacts with hyperspatial entities as anyone else.

The earliest units were caps or bands built into various types of hats. However, advances in psychic technology mean that a dead head can function as long as it has a direct connection to the skin over the wearer's brainstem

or the upper part of her spinal cord. Most dead heads are now built into the modern psi-links that are worn around the user's neck. Alone, they are no larger than a one dollar coin. Cost: -3

GILL-BREATHER

In the late 1990s, previous forms of underwater breathing apparatus, like SCUBA gear was replaced by gill breathers. Using ultra-thin oxygen permeable membranes derived from reverse-engineering elder one technologies, this device is the size and approximate shape of a 20 oz soda bottle. Gill breathers extract dissolved oxygen from fresh or salt water like the gill of a fish, and recycle the air the diver breathes. This unit effectively allows a diver to stay underwater as long as desired.

Since this device requires remarkably little power, it can operate for up to 30 hours before needing to be recharged. Unlike conventional oxygen rebreathers, gill breathers do not produce large clouds of bubbles, which can reveal a diver's position. Best of all, this device is easy to use and the micro-mechanical pumps inside the unit serve to fully regulate and control the pressure of the air provided by the gill-breather. Gill breathers require nothing more than brief instruction and a few minutes of experience to learn to use. Cost: -1

HIBERNATION UNIT

This device comes as both a refrigerated stretcher and a covered bed-like unit. When patients are given the correct combination of drugs and placed in this device, they enter a state of deep hibernation similar to that which small mammals like ground squirrels enter in the winter. In this state, human metabolism decreases by a factor of 40, allowing patients to survive lengthy surgeries with minimal trauma or to sleep away a two week journey on a crowded starship. Many ambulances also now contain hibernation units to help keep injured patients remain alive until they can be moved to a hospital.

Since 2004, almost all interstellar colonists have been transported while in hibernation. Entering hibernation requires only 10 minutes, and individuals can be revived with a mixture of warming and drugs that requires only 40-60 minutes. Fewer than one in 5,000 individuals entering hibernation have any medical problems recovering, and almost all of these problems are relatively minor, making the procedure exceptionally safe. Cost: -3 (for hibernation); a portable hibernation unit costs 0.

LINK-CROWN

The first and most basic psychic technology developed in the 20th century was the link crown. The original versions were a pair of heavy and awkward constructs of vacuum

tubes that were linked by wires. The development of transistors and miniature radios allowed them to be made smaller and more comfortable, but the greatest advance came with the development and refinement of integrated circuit technology in the 1980s and 90s. By the dawn of the 21st century, the link crown had become a simple, flexible headband no more awkward or bulky than a somewhat stiff piece of ribbon, wearable around the user's forehead or built into most hats or caps. Inside this plastic ribbon is a complex array of printed circuits and microchips.

Once two or more link crowns are connected, the users are in psychic contact with one another. This contact is identical to contact between two psychics, allowing the user to share thoughts, images, emotions, and sensory impressions. Many modern psi-links also include dead head circuitry. Activating this circuitry prevents the wearer from using the psi-link and from all psychic powers. Cost: -3

Psi Links: Advances in neural interface technology means that since 2008, the term link-crown is no longer accurate, since these devices can now be worn around the user's neck as a pendant or choker, or even as a pin attached to the user's collar. Today, psi-links are typically worn as jewelry or built into the collars of many shirts and blouses. Some highly secure psi-links are still designed to connect with other psi links by means of thin cables plugged into small jacks. However, the vast majority connect to other psi-links by means of short range Bluetooth connections or via the users' mobiles. Calling the mobile of another psi-link user places the two people in psychic contact.

MOBILE LINK

The latest and most advanced use of link-crown technology is in a revolutionary and exceedingly widespread computer interface. First released in 2002, the basic mobile link was a device that functioned as a cell phone, a digital camera, PDA, portable computer, GPS device, media player, game console, and a wireless internet terminal. The most distinctive feature of this item is its complete lack of any conventional input or output devices. Instead, early users controlled it by means of a specialized psi link worn around user's forehead. Thinking about what the user wants to search, type, or even draw caused the computer to respond appropriately, and the input it generated was then fed directly back into the user's brain. Some of the fancier units included small screens so that users could show images to others. Today, the psi links are smaller and their camera and computers more powerful. Also, psi-links are now worn around the user's neck. Slightly more than two thirds of all cell phones sold are now mobile links.

Mobile links can use augmented reality programs, and do so by tapping into the user's senses, using the owner's eyes to see and ears to hear, while also broadcasting information directly to the owner's eyes and other senses. This device can provide further information on anything the user is looking at, or identify a song or animal cry the user is listening to. In zones without network access, a mobile link still uses an internal encyclopedic database. Users can also wear camera jewelry to effectively give themselves enhanced senses. Mobile links also both send and receive both smell and touch, allowing users to experience virtual reality that is almost indistinguishable from actual physical experiences. Cost: -2

Camera Jewelry: Typically worn as earrings, pendants, or occasionally on rings, these devices include both powerful digital cameras and directional microphones to allow mobile and mobile link users to effectively possess enhanced senses. The cameras provide users with the equivalent of both the infrared and low-light vision Augmentations and the Acute Hearing Quality. Cost: -1

Mobile: A standard mobile without a psi-link has all of the other capabilities of a mobile link. However, instead of a psi-link, the owner uses either a touch screen, microphone, and a speaker, like a modern cell phone, or a pair of display glasses. These glasses look and function like ordinary sunglasses, and act as a heads-up display that displays images that only the user can see. Display glasses also contain built-in speakers and microphones in the temple pieces, as well as a camera at the bridge of the nose, for video recording and to help provide augmented reality information. Cost: -3

SUPERCONDUCTING BATTERIES

Much of the various types of alien technology recovered from ancient ruins across the Earth and from the Roswell crash proved to be far too advanced to duplicate or understand. However, the materials from which these various devices were made could usually be analyzed and one of these materials changed the world. It was a room-temperature superconductor. First discovered in 1969 during an analysis of some artifacts from the great race ruins on the Moon, technicians were able to duplicate it by 1974, although manufacture was still expensive. By 1979, it was easy and inexpensive to create, and batteries and other items incorporating room-temperature superconductors went on sale in 1980. Because of their origins, one major brand of these batteries still uses a logo in the shape of a stereotypical "grey" alien, while another uses a stylized graphic of one of the Great Race of Yith.

Today, superconducting batteries are found in everything from personal electronics and flashlights to cars. Capable of holding as much as 4 kilowatt hours per kilogram, they supply more than 20 times as much power as the best non-superconducting batteries. Mobiles and other electronics only need to be recharged every few weeks, and a pocket-sized flashlight can (dimly) light an entire room or produce a brilliant beam of light for at least 24 hours. One of the most important uses for these batteries was in electric cars. Hybrid electric gasoline cars dominated the 1980s. By 1990, 50% of new cars being sold in the US and the EU were solely electric, and by 2000, this number had grown to more than 95%.

ESPIONAGE TECHNOLOGIES

The majority of people only encounter these technologies in action movies, crime novels, and similar media. These specialized technologies are used by both criminals and law enforcement, but are not in common use.

BUG DETECTOR

This small handheld device can detect and localize any radio transmissions originating within 10 meters. It can also detect any small battery powered electrical devices, like bugs that are within one meter. Detecting a transmitting mobile requires only one Success Level on an Intelligence + Crime roll, while detecting a video bug or a surveillance drone (see below) that is transmitting requires at least three Success Levels. Locating a bug that is on but not transmitting requires the user be willing to carefully search the room and roll at least six Success Levels. This is due to the amount of "noise" that makes it hard to fine-tune readings. This device requires the Espionage Training Quality to use properly. Cost: -2

CHAMELEON JUMPSUIT

The ultimate in camouflage. OPS has combined the finest computer technology with a complex network of miniature photo-sensors and other circuitry woven into cloth created from a specially made organometallic thread that changes color in response to electrical current. This material is as tough and durable as conventional Army fatigues and can also change color, while being no bulkier or less comfortable.

This jumpsuit has two modes of operation. In the first mode, the operator pre-sets the color using either commands entered on concealed touch-pad controls on the cuff of the right sleeve, or from a psi-link. Changing the suit's color requires only a single turn. Each suit comes equipped with 50 different color options, including black, white, arc-

tic, jungle, and desert camouflage, international orange (for high visibility) and color patterns similar to several different common uniforms. Wearers can successfully imitate police and similar uniforms if lighting conditions are poor and if the correct pattern is used, the suit provides a +1 bonus to all stealth tests when used in this mode.

In active mode, the suit changes color to match the surrounding environment. Unfortunately, while the color-matching capabilities of this device are quite accurate, they are also somewhat slow. If the wearer is moving faster than one meter per second the unit cannot keep up with the motion and changing background. The resulting blurred image negates all benefits gained from using this device. However, if the wearer moves slowly and carefully, the suit provides extremely accurate camouflage, adding a +3 bonus to all attempts to not be seen. To gain this bonus, the suit's optional gloves, boots, and hood must be worn. Otherwise, reduce the stealth bonus to +2. Remember, even the best camouflage does not allow the user to hide in plain sight. Chameleon combat armor and chameleon covert armor have the same armor protection as normal combat armor or covert armor (12 points or 6/3 points) but also function like chameleon jumpsuits. Cost: 0

FIBER-OPTIC PEN

This ballpoint pen also contains a pair of one meter long thin fiber optics. Each fiber optic is less than one tenth of a millimeter in diameter and can be easily slid through a door jam, into a drawer, or even inside a tiny hole cut in an envelope. One fiber optic has a wide-angle lens on the end and connects to a high definition video camera inside the pen. The other fiber optic attaches to a tiny LED inside the pen and can be used as a flashlight. The camera also has night vision capability: so long as there is even a tiny amount of light, the fiber optic displays clear images. This device delivers clear images within two meters of the lens and somewhat blurry images within five meters of the lens. If inserted into a mechanism like the interior of a mechanical lock, this device provides the user with a +2 bonus to pick the lock or otherwise manipulate the mechanism. This device requires the Espionage Training Quality to use properly. Cost: -1

GECKO PADS

This device consists of eight small pads designed to attach to the user's hands, forearms, shins, and feet. Each pad is covered with thousands of tiny electrically active fibers. When activated and pressed firmly against any solid surface, the pad adheres to almost any surface much

like a gecko's feet. Each pad can support up to 50 kg; most users can be supported by only two pads – three if they are carrying heavy gear. Gecko pads adhere equally well to rough, smooth, wet, and dry surfaces, and allow a trained user to climb at a rate of two meters per turn. Users can climb any wall sturdy enough to support them and can also climb on ceilings. Climbing is relatively easy because each pad instantly releases when twisted in the correct manner. Also, the user can shut off all of the grippers at once, allowing the user to jump down from a wall or ceiling. This device requires the Espionage Training Quality to use properly. Cost: -2

GRAPPLING GUN

Used with a rappelling rig, this device is the size of a sawed off shotgun and fires a small grappling hook up to 20 meters (about five stories). If aimed right, the hook can snag railings, pipes, or other convenient supports. It requires a Dexterity and Archaic Weapons or Guns (whichever is higher) roll, or the Combat Score. With one Success Level, the grapple attaches normally. If the support is slippery (e.g., rain slicked ledge or pipe) or someone tries to dislodge it, it comes off pretty readily though. If the roll achieves at least three Success Levels, the grapple wraps around the support and is much more difficult to dislodge. The hook does not come loose itself, and attempts to dislodge it require a Strength (doubled) roll or the Muscle Score with a number of Success Levels above those gained by the original grappling gun roll. Cost: -2

HYPNOSCOPE

OPS obtained this device from their contact with the Great Race of Yith. The Great Race used it to make their mind-switched subjects forget their time among the Great Race. This device uses a mixture of psychic fields and complex patterns of light that place the subject in an exceptionally deep hypnotic trance. In this state, the subject can be told to forget events or to edit their memories. These memories can be recovered through deep hypnosis, and can inadvertently be brought forward by traumatic events or use of hallucinatory drugs. Some subjects may have half-remembered dreams about the suppressed events.

This device is a hemisphere the size of half a lime covered with many multicolored LEDs and mounted on a short handle. When activated, it affects everyone within a cone shaped area three meters long and four meters wide, in front of this hemisphere. Anyone behind the device is immune to its effects, as is anyone wearing a dead head. Everyone affected must make a non-doubled Willpower roll and roll at least two Success Levels to avoid

being affected by this device. Subjects must make this roll every turn that they are within range of the hypnoscope. Failing any of these rolls causes the target to be subject to the device. At this point, the target may be ordered to forget any incidents or to remember events differently. These memories are not erased, but the subject loses conscious access to them.

The one limitation on this device is that if the subject is regularly reminded of the persons, objects, or events that they were ordered to forget, they soon remember them. The subject makes a non-doubled Willpower roll every time they are exposed to the person, object or incident that they were ordered to forget. If the subject obtains three or more Success Levels, their memories begin to return. If someone was ordered to forget that they were married, they would make a roll to remember being married every time they saw their spouse and every time that someone mentioned that the subject was married.

This device is useful for causing people to forget singular incidents, like encounters with hyperspatial beings, secret technologies, or the time a mysterious stranger forced them to betray their loyalties. However, hypnoscopes are not useful for suppressing memories of anything that is part of the subject's normal life. Civilian use of a hypnoscope is a serious crime. Cost: -1 (Restricted)

PLASMA CUTTER

This device is the size of a large flashlight – 35 cm long, and 5 cm in diameter. When activated it produces a five cm long exceptionally hot plume of plasma from the front. This plasma “blade” can cut through almost any normal material, if the user has sufficient time. The user cuts by moving this unit slowly across the surface the user wishes to cut. Each cut automatically does 20 points of damage to the object. Repeated cuts over the same area penetrate armor. When cutting through a five cm steel wall (armor value of 40) the first two cuts in the same location penetrate the wall's armor, and future cuts in this location would reduce the wall's damage capacity, allowing the user to cut a peephole, or even a doorway in the steel wall.

Plasma cutters cut at a rate of 1/3 meter (one foot) per turn, allowing the user to slice through a normal door lock in one turn and to cut a one meter wide hole in a three cm thick steel wall in five minutes. Plasma cutters are not designed to be used as weapons, and although the plasma “blade” is very hot, unless it is used on a helpless and immobilized target, it only does 5 points of damage. The superconducting batteries that power a plasma cutter allow it to be used to up to 20 minutes of continuous use before it must be recharged. Cost: 0 (Restricted)

RAPPELLING RIG

Popular with commandos, extreme sports enthusiasts, and spies, this device consists of a lightweight rappelling harness and 50 meters of exceedingly thin cable connected to a specialized letdown spool at the user's waist. This spool has an automatic brake so that it lets the user down at a maximum speed of eight meters per second, allowing the user to descend all 50 meters in only six seconds, providing a hard but safe landing on any stable surface. The cable can support up to 250 kg and can be attached by either a sturdy metal hook or a specialized gecko pad also capable of supporting 250 kg. In addition, the spool is attached to a small superconducting motor with a powerful battery. This motor can raise 100 kg the full 50 meters in 1 minute or 250 kg 50 meters in two minutes. However, the battery must be recharged after only two uses. Cost: -2

SNIFFER

This small but versatile piece of equipment is a portable chemical analyzer that can detect various substances by the gases they give off. The most common uses for this device are detecting illegal drugs or explosives, or tracking individuals by smell. A sniffer is approximately the size and shape of a paperback novel and has a slender built-in probe on a one meter cable. If the user places the sniffer within seven cm of an object, it can determine the rough composition of most common organic compounds and can immediately tell if the sample contains any illegal drugs or known explosives. It can also determine if a sample of alien food is safe to eat or drink or if a blood sample contains a specific toxin. Used in any of these fashions it requires an Intelligence + Science or an Intelligence + Medicine roll.

If the user has access to an item of clothing recently worn by someone and knows where that person was within the last several hours, the user can track this person from that location using the sniffer. The sniffer functions much like an electronic bloodhound. However, rain swiftly washes away traces of these chemicals and heavy foot traffic and similar disturbances erase them in less than an hour. Also, a sniffer can only track someone who is on foot. If the target gets into a vehicle, they cannot be tracked. It can also be used to determine if someone wearing a specific brand of perfume was recently in a particular area. Used in these fashions it requires an Intelligence + Crime roll. Cost: -1

SURVEILLANCE DRONE

Used by both spies and the military, this device has revolutionized surveillance work. The drone itself looks

roughly like either an ordinary dragonfly or a large beetle. It is five cm long with a seven cm wingspan. Like a real insect, the flapping wings actually provide both propulsion and steering. Electrically activated glue in the unit's feet allows it to stick to both walls and ceilings.

This drone contains sensors equivalent to a tiny video camera and a directional microphone. It can fly at speeds up to 50 kph and is capable of hovering. In flight or under poor lighting conditions it can easily be mistaken for a real insect. However, in normal light, a stationary drone is obviously mechanical. Also, during operation the unit broadcasts continually, so it can be easily detected by a bug detector.

The drone can be controlled by either a specialized controller, similar to a portable video game set, or by a mobile link. The controller also gives the user access to the images and sounds from the unit's camera and microphone. The unit's radio allows it to be operated within three kilometers of the user. This unit weighs 15 grams and when the wings are folded back, it can be safely carried in its padded storage tube, which is seven cm long and two cm in diameter. Cost: -2 (Restricted)

VIDEO BUG

This lentil-sized surveillance device is 5 mm in diameter and 1 mm thick. It has an adhesive backing and contains a digital still and video camera that can see in near total darkness using light amplification. This device is capable of resolving clear, crisp images within 10 meters, picking up whispers within three meters and normal speech within 10 meters. These devices are normally programmed to only record when they detect speech or movement and have batteries that allow them to record for up to two weeks under normal conditions. This device can broadcast to a mobile link or other radio that is within three kilometers and broadcasts a highly encrypted signal. To avoid detection, it only broadcasts compressed bursts of data that last no more than 15 seconds and does so either once a day or in response to a special encrypted signal. Alternately, this bug can be set not to broadcast at all, and to record its surroundings until the user retrieves it. Used in this fashion, it is almost impossible to detect. Cost: -2 (Restricted)

SPACE TECHNOLOGIES

The following devices are familiar to anyone who has worked on a spacecraft or has explored alien worlds, but are familiar to the general public only through documentaries, movies, and novels about space exploration.

ATMOSPHERE SENSOR

Designed to communicate with the user's mobile or mobile link, this sensor is a lens-shaped device five cm in diameter and two cm thick that is typically worn on the

user's wrist. It contains sophisticated sensors designed to analyze all types of gases. Many space travelers set this device to notify them if there is any potentially dangerous change in atmospheric composition or pressure, such as if harmful gases are introduced into the atmosphere, pressure drops suddenly, or carbon dioxide levels begin to rise too high. It can also be used to swiftly learn if the atmosphere of a planet is safe to breathe. All such warnings are automatic and require no skill roll. Cost: -3

SPACE SUIT

This skin-tight suit uses mechanical pressure to protect the wearer from vacuum. Incorporating electrically active fibers, it automatically tightens as pressure drops, but remains loose in pressurized environments, allowing the wearer to put it on or take it off in less than five minutes. Many OPS personnel wear their space suits when inside an on-planet base, as they are designed to be comfortable when not pressurized. The suit weighs a total of 4 kg and protects the wearer from pressures down to vacuum and from temperatures ranging from -100 C to +150 C. Space suits provide the wearer with four points of armor, but leak if this armor is penetrated by a bullet or slash/stab weapon. A slow leak gives the user 10 minutes before they begin suffering exposure to vacuum, while a bad leak (10 or more points cuts or stabs through the suit's armor in one blow) empties the suit of air in 2 turns. All space suits require the Astronaut Training Quality to use properly. Cost: 0

Armored space suits: Armored space suits are used by OPS off-world strike teams. They provide the wearer with 14 points of armor and instantly self-seal as much as four points of damage that penetrate the suit's armor. However, they are bulky and cumbersome. Wearers are treated as if their maximum Dexterity when wearing an armored space suit is 2, and their maximum movement is two meters per second or five kilometers per hour. Cost: +2

Life Support Pack: Using a highly efficient rebreather unit and oxygen stored as a dense liquid, this unit is far smaller than previous life support units. It weighs only 6 kg and provides the wearer with oxygen for up to 20 hours. The unit is a partially rigid vest with a slightly domed back, worn over the user's space suit. Cost: 0

THE DRAMA POINT SYSTEM

The rules played straight mostly simulate "reality"—the reality where many people fail at the most inappropriate moments and suffer and die as a result. In the world of *Eldritch Skies* reality could easily become seriously

THE GRITTY APPROACH

The Drama Point System is not for everybody, especially if you take a more callous viewpoint on Lovecraft's universe. Some players and Directors want to take a harsher approach, rather than thinking in terms of Hollywood heroics. While Drama Points allow the ability for players to say *no, the story doesn't end here*, or to go out in a brilliant last stand against the enslavement of humanity, doing extra damage in their defeat, some players and Directors prefer a darker, more random approach.

In a Gritty Series, the characters are on their own, to live and die by their talents and the luck of the dice. Games without Drama Points are far more deadly. Heroes should be either Operatives or Civilians, because in mixed groups, Civilians will be at a major disadvantage and become completely upstaged. Also, injured characters may be incapacitated for long periods of time, and death is much more likely even among Operatives.

As usual, the Director and the players should talk things over to make a decision that satisfies the group (happy players keep coming back, and happy Directors keep making new Episodes, after all). If the Director and players are not using Drama Points, then weapon damage should be rolled.

depressing. When going up against utterly inhuman mythos monsters and aliens, if you don't have some sort of edge, you're likely not to last very long. *Eldritch Skies* offers several different ways to play. (See **Pulp vs. Gritty Series**, for more detail.)

Drama Points represent the cinematic or pulp tradition wherein Heroes have luck on their side. The characters repeatedly survive overwhelming odds and succeed at impossible-seeming tasks. Heroes enjoy faster recovery times from their injuries (conflict with aliens and hyperspatial beings might otherwise cause numerous casualties and long hospitalizations for the survivors.) After all, *Eldritch Skies* is the long view on Lovecraft's world: humanity may be small and outnumbered, but we're not immediately doomed – and neither do your characters have to be. In the fine tradition of cinematic SF, *Eldritch Skies* offers the option for Operatives and even Civilians to escape from a battle with little more than a few bruises.

With Drama Points, the Heroes can temporarily "short-circuit" reality and perform heroic feats, do the impossible, and win the day. Drama Points are narrative aids that prevent the heroes from suffering ignominious, meaningless deaths because of bad luck. They do not make the characters unbeatable. For one, characters get

a limited number of Drama Points, so they have to be used with great care. Also, Adversaries get some Drama Points too—this allows a cultist to seriously threaten a trained Operative with a lucky punch or shot, or permits a criminal mastermind to escape certain death yet again.

Drama Points can be earned in a number of ways. They are awarded for performing heroic feats. They are also given as "payment" for the times when tragedy of misfortune strikes the Heroes. When bad things happen to good people, one or more Heroes may be given Drama Points as a reward for their suffering, especially if they play out the trauma with aplomb. Finally, Drama Points are earned when the players help recreate the feel of a well-rounded SF adventure that includes storylines and subplots beyond the basic "kill the monster" scenario.

Characters start the game with 10 or 20 Drama Points. These points are not regained; once they are spent, they are gone until the Director give new ones out. Players can use poker chips or other tokens to represent Drama Points (they can mark off five points from their total and pile up five chips in front of them, for example). As the points are spent, you can gather the tokens up and hand them back as they are earned.

USING DRAMA POINTS

Used judiciously, Drama Points can snatch victory from the tentacled maws of defeat, or at least make failure far less deadly. The three uses are Heroic Feat, I Think I'm Okay, and Back From the Dead.

Drama Points may be spent at any time, even when the character isn't acting or doesn't have initiative. This is mostly applicable for I Think I'm Okay. An attacker could do 100 points of damage to a character and bring him to -40 (serious Consciousness and Survival Test territory), but if the defender has a Drama Point to spend, that hit becomes 50 points and the Hero is still standing. Heroic Feat happens on the character's action and Back From the Dead is implemented outside of combat or other dice-rolling situations.

The Director has veto power over the use of Drama Points. Usually, if something bad is slated to happen to a character, using Drama Points won't help him get out of the situation. The consolation prize is that those situations earn him extra Drama Points. So, if an Operative must be kidnapped by a cult for the plot to begin, the Operative's player doesn't get to use Drama Points in the scene where the character is kidnapped, because that would screw up the story. However, use such tactics sparingly and always give the player a Drama Point or two –

see below for more info on gaining Drama Points. For a discussion of creating both pulp SF and gritty SF Series, see **Pulp vs. Gritty Series**.

HEROIC FEAT

Sometimes, a character really needs to land the shot, disarm the time bomb with seconds on the clock, or shoot the liquid nitrogen tank the enormous mutant is lifting over its head. Maybe an ordinary reporter needs to toss a grenade into the mouth of the flying polyp on the first try. This is a good time to invoke the Heroic Feat rule.

By spending one Drama Point, the character gets an automatic 10 on any one roll. Instead of having to roll the dice and take the result, the character automatically manages to do their very best. This can be an attack or defense action, any use of a Skill, or even a Fear or Survival Test. Any subsequent uses of that roll result, such as multiple actions, also enjoy this result.

By spending two Drama Points, the character can manage to be even more impressive. Two Drama Points allows the character to instead gain a +10 bonus to any one roll. You roll the dice and add +10. This improved version of Heroic Feat can also be tacked on to damage; the +10 bonus is added to the damage of the attack, in addition to any Success Level bonuses.

The player must announce if they are using one or two Drama Points during the Intentions phase of a Turn (see Combat), or before rolling during non-combat situations. Also, only one Heroic Feat is allowed in a Turn—it can be used either for a skill or Attribute roll, an attack, a defense, or damage, but not more than one of those in the same Turn.

Heroic Example: Miguel is unarmed and has been cornered by a hungry ghoul. In a burst of desperate speed, he grabs a wrench and hits the ghoul over the head. Miguel's player spends one Drama Point and he gets an automatic 10 to his Dexterity and Archaic Weapons roll. Without rolling dice, Miguel has a total of 16. Not surprisingly, the kick lands, and the ghoul doubles over with a very surprised expression in its face. Miguel then legs it out of there.

I THINK I'M OKAY

The character rolled with the impact and the baseball bat didn't crush his skull. The bullet happened to glance off his tie pin. The thrown knife got caught in the bullet proof he was wearing under his shirt. Somehow, the injuries that should have killed the Hero or at least put her out of commission are not as bad as everyone thought. Or maybe she got her second wind and is ready to go after

bandaging a bloody but largely harmless wound. Whatever the rationale, I Think I'm Okay allows a character to get back into action after enduring a beating that would have sent a seasoned combat veteran to the hospital.

For a single Drama Point, the character immediately heals half the Life Points (round up) she has suffered to that point. The character is still be bloody and battered, but can act normally. Any crippled or even severed limbs are repaired sufficiently to continue the fight (or the running away). That foot looked like it was cut off by the falling door, but that was just a trick of the light. I Think I'm Okay can be used once per Turn; if used several Turns in a row, each use halves whatever damage remains. However, characters can only use it three times in any combat. In addition, if the character had suffered enough damage to be incapacitated or unconscious, healing does not necessarily awaken her. The Director decides if the time is right for the character to revive and join the action. Also, if the injuries were life threatening, the Director may decide that the character must go to the hospital at some point, although she can wait until the fight scene (or the Episode) is over.

Okay Example: A cultist with a shotgun shoots Livia the sorcerer. The wound inflicts 40 points of damage, and Livia had already been injured for 37 points previously. Livia is in really bad shape. Not wishing to see the end of her Hero, Livia's player spends a Drama Point. The 77 points of damage are reduced to a "mere" 38 points—not exactly unhurt, but not dying, either. The blast must have missed Livia's vital organs. Next Turn, Livia's player could reduce it even further, to 19 points, and a Turn later, to nine points – just a flesh wound. This would take three Drama Points, though, a pretty hefty expenditure, and the maximum the player could spend this combat – hopefully Livia won't be hit again in that particular battle.

BACK FROM THE DEAD

Sooner or later, everybody dies. In the Cinematic or Pulp world of *Eldritch Skies* it's possible to come back. It doesn't happen often, but can. A character who dies may, by spending Drama Points, make a triumphant return. No return from the grave is without complications though, and not even Drama Points can erase the problems that result from cheating the Grim Reaper.

The sooner the character is back from the dead, the more Drama Points it costs. Coming back next Season costs one Drama Point (that means the player is going to need a new Hero until then). Returning on the next Episode costs five Drama Points. Cheating the Grim Reaper

on the same episode as one's demise costs 10 Drama Points. If the Hero did not have enough Drama Points to spend, he can pay the Director in installments—all Drama Points he has now, and any Drama Points the character gets in later Episodes, until the debt is paid. Spending the points is not enough; the Director and the player need to work out the details behind the resurrection. Some possible explanations include:

Miraculous Resuscitation: A hard-working team of heroic doctors got that heart pumping after some electric shocks, surgical miracles, or pure force of will. This time halfway into death might change the character: perhaps she remembers a year spent in the Dream Realm, or some other hyperspatial or psychic experience, at the Director's discretion. More prosaic mental changes are also possible (see Brain Injuries: A Game-Changer.)

Unknown Forces: No one knows what happened, not even the character, but they're back. Maybe someone used time travel to retrieve a living version of the character just before their death, maybe someone made a deal with a Great Old One or used some ancient and exotic bit of sorcery to alter the structure of reality to get the character back. Maybe the reasons for all this, and the consequences for the character's return, will become clear later and supply a whole new storyline in the process.

Alien Intervention: Someone or something secretly experimented on the character, either to keep her around or simply to see what would happen. The result is that a while after she dies, she gets better. Usually, a character should gain an additional level of Hyperspatial Exposure because this happened, and most people will be exceedingly curious about who or what secretly messed around with them.

All these options could be very useful to generate drama and new storylines. How does the character's miraculous return affect the Series? How do the rest of the Heroes react? What terrible price must be paid for the life that has been given back?

PULP SF AND CUSTOMIZATIONS

The standard option for *Eldritch Skies* is cinematic SF. However, maybe you want to run the sort of pulp SF suitable to an action picture. For an even pulpier and more heroic Series, consider making these changes. The first change is to drop the cost of the two Drama Point Heroic Feat to one Drama Point and to eliminate the one Drama Point version. Next, remove Limitations on the use of I Think I'm OK. As long as a Hero (or for that matter, a major Adversary) has sufficient Drama Points, they can keep reducing the amount of damage they have taken. Spend four Drama Points and that 50 point

sucking chest wound becomes a 3 point bruise. Finally, add in two more uses for Drama Points: Plot Twist and Righteous Fury. Like Heroic Feat, Righteous Fury happens on the character's action, while Plot Twist is implemented outside of combat or other dice-rolling situations.

PLOT TWIST

The killer accidentally dropped a valuable clue at the scene of the crime. Another team tracked their GPS signal just before the cultists were about to sacrifice two operatives. Someone just scanned a copy of an ancient treatise on Thurian artifacts and put it up on the internet, and it's still up when one of the characters goes looking for information about an artifact from that era.

Heroes often find help and information from the most unlikely places or at precisely the right time. Once per game session, a character can spend a Drama Point and get a "break." This is not a Get Out of Jail Free Card or for that matter an I Win Card. The gang of ghouls might not be hungry, but that doesn't mean they'll let you go. However, they will drag you back to their lair unharmed, rather than trying to eat you right away. By the same token, sometimes clues are available, but they cannot be found at that time. If the Director decides a Plot Twist is not possible, the player gets back the Drama Point.

Note: In a standard, cinematic, *Eldritch Skies* Series, you might find that Plot Twist works well and isn't too over-the-top, it's up to you. However, if used in a cinematic Series, raise the cost of Plot Twist to two Drama Points.

RIGHTEOUS FURY

Mad as hell and not going to take it anymore? Nothing is more deadly than an angry Hero; even the humblest Civilian can become a fearsome enemy if properly motivated. It takes a lot to drive a character over the edge, but when it happens most fictional action heroes become unstoppable engines of destruction. If you want your Hero to act like an action movie protagonist in the final battle to defeat the cult that killed his best friend or kidnapped his child, Righteous Fury is the way to go.

By spending two Drama Points, the character gets a +5 bonus to all attack actions, including sorcerous attacks, for the duration of the fight. These benefits are cumulative with Heroic Feats. However, there must be an appropriate provocation to invoke the Righteous Fury rule. A player can't decide his character is upset about the existence of deep ones or the eventual heat death of the universe. He needs to be truly provoked—a brutal attack on a loved one, an unexpected betrayal of trust, the sudden revelation of a long ago act of treachery.

CUSTOM DRAMA POINT RULES

Want a game where there are no do-overs, but players have more influence over general plot events? The Director can customize which Drama Point rules are allowed in any game, and influence the feel of the game in this way. For example, to create an extra-dangerous setting where characters can still accomplish impressive things, a Director might allow Plot Twist, Righteous Fury, and Heroic Feat, but not I Think I'm Okay or Back From the Dead – or choose the opposite rules for a setting where lifespans are longer but persistence is necessary.

EARNING DRAMA POINTS

Once Drama Points are spent, they are gone for good. To get more, a character has to work for them. They can be obtained in a number of ways—some are easy, others depend mainly on the course of the Series, and others are just handed out by the Director's infinite wisdom.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

Characters can use experience points to buy Drama Points. Operatives buy them at the rate of two experience points for each Drama Point. Civilians get a discount—they get one Drama Point for every experience point they spend. This is the most mechanical way to gain more Drama Points, and can result in characters that improve very slowly (as experience points are channeled into Drama Points and used to survive).

HEROIC ACTS

Stopping cultists or protecting innocent bystanders from alien influence does not, by itself, constitute a Heroic Act—it's expected from the Heroes. To earn Drama Points, the character needs to perform acts of self-sacrifice for the good of others. The sacrifice should be significant—serious risk of death or injury, or some personal loss. This type of act should get one or two Drama Points, depending on how serious the risk or sacrifice was.

WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE

Sometimes, the plot may require that something bad happen to the Heroes. Say an Operative is investigating something, and is blindsided and captured. This shouldn't happen often or players will feel railroaded. But the plot may absolutely require that a particular Operative be out of action for a while, or be held for ransom. When it does, you should “pay” for the privilege by giving the affected characters one to three Drama Points.

MORE PULPY GOODNESS

If you're going for that pulp action movie feel, and are using the extra pulp rules for spending Drama Points listed above, then here's another way to gain Drama Points that supports this type of feel for a Series.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

Witty lines, quick jabs, or memorable speeches: a few clever words make game sessions shine. A Drama Point, once per game session, should be awarded to a player who devises or happens into a witty, funny, and/or memorable line. Both the Director and the other players must agree that the line is worthy of the reward. No one should get points for parroting lines from another source unless they are used in a particularly creative manner.

Some examples should clarify. Say someone sneaks up behind the character and clobbers him from behind, or the escape car refuses to start, or a freak accident allows a villain to escape. When this rule is invoked, the players cannot use Drama Points to undo the results—if the villain is meant to get away this time, he has to get away. Likewise if one of the Heroes is taken hostage for a while. The more unfair the situation is, the more Drama Points should be awarded—up to three for situations where the characters end up locked in a cell for a while.

TRAGEDY AND INNER TURMOIL

When a subplot involving a character and his Drawbacks (things like Addictions, Love, and Emotional Drawbacks) results in a tragic situation, the characters involved get one to three Drama Points every game session where the subplot comes into play. Losing a loved one, trying to overcome drug addiction, driving away a friend due to paranoia, being rejected by their adoptive parents when they learn of their ghoulish ancestry—these kinds of subplots are worth Drama Points. Characterization is the ultimate test here. “My character goes to a bar and gets plastered”, isn't enough; a few days of fighting through delirium tremens while the other characters hold the door against attackers, or trying to keep the effects of intoxication from blowing a whole investigation, on the other hand—it's all about role-playing the moments that make these stories worth telling, the points where a personal crisis crosses tracks with the main game plot and wrecks at top speed.

EXPERIENCE AND IMPROVEMENT

If a character keeps doing something, they usually start getting good at it. An experienced Operative is going to know more and be better at their job than someone just out of

training. At the end of each Episode (or game session if the Episode lasts more than a session), award players experience points. These points can be used to improve Attributes or Skills, to gain new Qualities or buy off Drawbacks, or to buy Drama Points in Series that use Drama Points.

EXPERIENCE POINT AWARDS

Typically, each player should get one to five experience points in a game session. Everybody who participates gets one experience point (call it the “You Drove a Half Hour, oh, and Picked Up Snacks Before Playing” award). If the characters succeeded in saving the day through teamwork, heroic (or lucky) monster-bashing, and creative thinking, an additional one or two points should be awarded. Players who kept in character and helped move the story along should get another one or two points. At the end of major story arcs, another point should be awarded to everyone in the group, plus one more at the end of the Season Finale.

USING EXPERIENCE POINTS

Experience points improve characters in several ways. They represent learned wisdom from fighting and investigating the supernatural, physical improvements due to the trials of life in the *Eldritch Skies* universe, and learned abilities (assuming the character was taking in-game classes, or practicing a skill in her spare time).

Improving Attributes: Swinging an axe enough times builds a stronger axe-swinging arm. Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution can be improved through physical training. Characters can learn to pay more attention to the world around them, improving Perception. Willpower improves after undergoing ordeals; whatever doesn't kill you only makes you stronger. Intelligence might get better as a result of maturity and simple exercise—give neurons a workout and they may start improving, whether it's from thinking quickly on the spot or taking logic classes.

Improving an Attribute costs five times the cost of the next Attribute, with a minimum of 15. For instance,

ATTRIBUTE IMPROVEMENT COST TABLE

OLD ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	NEW ATTRIBUTE LEVEL	EXPERIENCE COST
1	2	15
2	3	15
3	4	20
4	5	25
5	6	30
6	7	35
7	8	40
8	-	-

raising an Attribute from two to three costs 15 points; raising it from five to six costs 30 points. Usually, humans can improve each Attribute by one level and no more and with a maximum of 6. A combination of both augmentations and ab-human ancestry can allow a character to raise an Attribute higher, with a maximum of 8, but that's as high any player's character can go.

Skills: Raising a skill costs two times the new level. Thus, raising a skill from level three to four costs eight experience points. A skill cannot be improved by more than one level at the end of a game session. There is no limit to potential skill levels. Starting a new skill (i.e., moving from level zero to level one) costs five experience points. After that, it improves normally. This assumes the Hero was able to learn the skill somehow, either by having a teacher or extensive practice. Skills that the Hero never uses cannot improve.

SKILL IMPROVEMENT COST TABLE

OLD SKILL LEVEL	NEW SKILL LEVEL	EXPERIENCE COST
0	1	5
1	2	4
2	3	6
3	4	8
4	5	10
5	6	12
6	7	14
7	8	16
8	9	18
9	10	20
+1	+1	2 x new Skill level

Language: Language is a special case—no matter how good the Heroes are, they are not going to pick up a new language from one Episode to the next. To improve this skill, the character needs to spend at least a month studying the language intensively. Only then can he spend the points to gain it.

Qualities and Drawbacks: Some Qualities are in-born—if you don't have them now, you'll never have them (Acute Senses, for example: vision or hearing rarely improves with time). Others are possible additions to a character. A Civilian might gain psychic powers in the aftermath of a psychic attack, or pick up Situational Awareness through long sessions in the training room. Also, a trip to a clinic, legal or not, is all you need for a new augmentation. All added Qualities cost their normal value in experience points, but are only available with appropriate plot rationales. Having experience points and saying “I think my character now knows Sorcery” isn't going to cut it.

In some cases, the Quality costs no points—if the Hero becomes rich through her own efforts during game play, she should not be charged for the increase in Resources Level, for example. Other times, a character gets special abilities only as a result of plot developments. In a game, this type of power costs no points, since it is wholly under the Director's control.

Some Drawbacks can be “bought” off, although again some compelling reason for the change should be provided. The cost is the same as the original value given for assuming that particular Drawback.

Psychic and magical powers may also be added onto psychic and magical characters as a Series progresses, and are treated as any other Quality. Sorcerers learn new spells, and psychics can learn new powers. Again, always remember the storyline and what makes sense for the character. If a sorcerer spends lots of their free time studying and

sharing information with fellow sorcerers, then it makes sense for them to learn new spells and additional levels of the Sorcery Quality. If they're spending all their free time down at the firing range, working on their Guns skill, then they likely shouldn't be able to also spend two experience points to learn a new level four spell.

Drama Points: Drama Points may be purchased with experience points. As mentioned above, Operatives gain one Drama Point per two experience points spent. Civilians can exchange the two on a one-for-one basis.

SPENDING DRAMA POINTS: SOME GUIDELINES

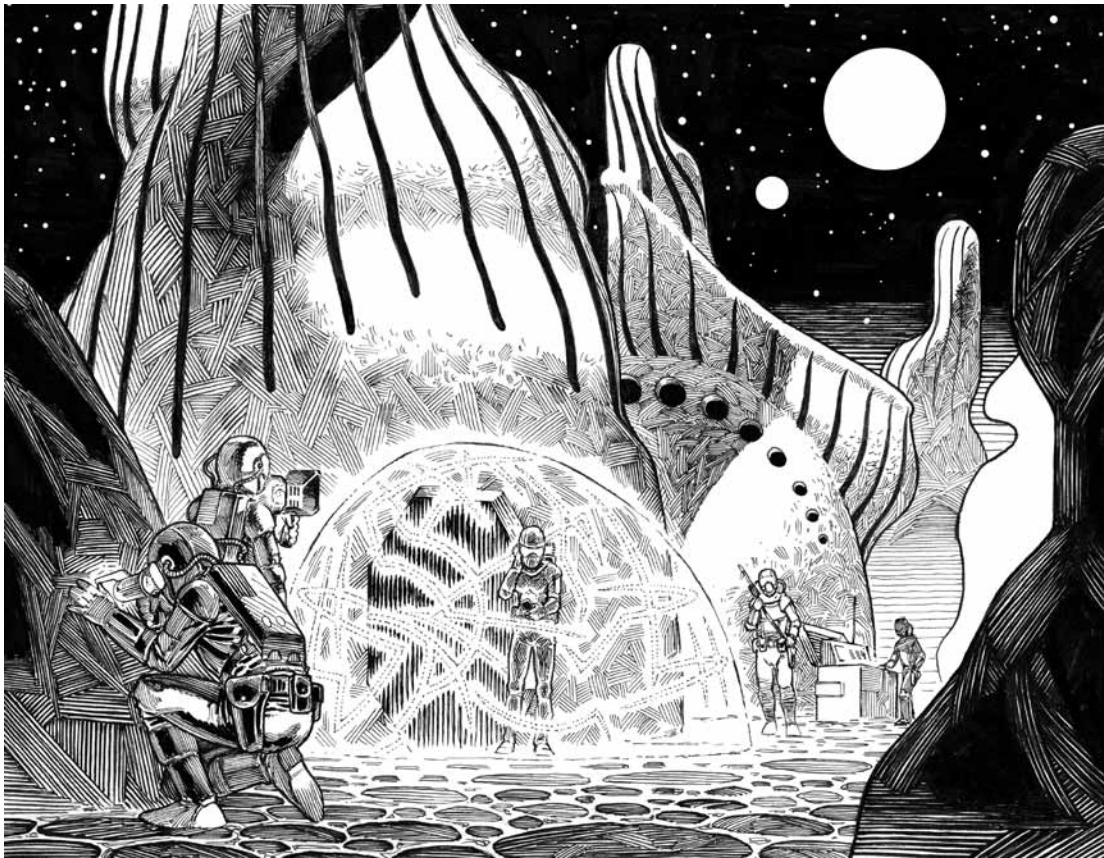
So a character has 10 or 20 Drama Points, ready to allow her to do the impossible. How many should be spent in an Episode? What happens if the player runs out? While the answers vary from one gaming group to the next, here are some rules of thumb for both the Director and the players.

If all Drama Points are spent, they aren't around when the player's character really needs them. On the other hand, if a player is too reluctant to spend Drama Points, her character can easily lose a serious fight (which may force the expenditure of Drama Points to nurse him back to health). Ideally, players should average no more Drama Points spent than earned in any game session, and preferably fewer. That gives them a stash of saved-up points for the Final Showdown or some other dramatic moment.

During a combat heavy Episode, characters should not spend more than five Drama Points apiece—assume a maximum of two points on each of two fights, and one point for some non-combat use. But that's in a “fair” fight. If a group of four Civilians tries to take a similar number of experienced augmented commandos, they are asking for trouble. They may end up spending Drama Points like crazy just to survive. In those cases, it's better to use one Drama Point for a Plot Twist to stop the fight, if the Plot Twist rule is in use – or a Heroic Feat to get away. If you want to keep up the pressure and constantly put the Heroes in dangerous situations, players may end up spending 10 Drama Points per session. In that case, consider giving out more Drama Points than normal, unless the idea is that the characters should burn brightly and briefly.

Players should save Drama Points for important moments. Their low-ranking Adversaries should be conquerable with good tactics and planning and few if any Drama Point expenditures. As such, a good Director will scale the enemies to the abilities of the characters. If none of the Heroes have a Combat Maneuver with a bonus higher than nine, putting them up against a group of monsters with Combat Score 16 (which means the best Hero needs a seven or higher on a D10 just to avoid getting hit, and an eight or higher to hit the monster) is trouble. It forces the Heroes to spend a bunch of Drama Points to win the day.

Try to shoot for a maximum expenditure of five Drama Points per game session or Episode (depending on how long the Episode is), and an average of 2-3 points. If all the players are spending more than that amount on a regular basis, consider turning down the heat a bit. If only one player is overspending, then it's probably her problem and not the game's. This sort of problem is usually self-correcting. That player won't have Drama Points when her Hero really needs them.

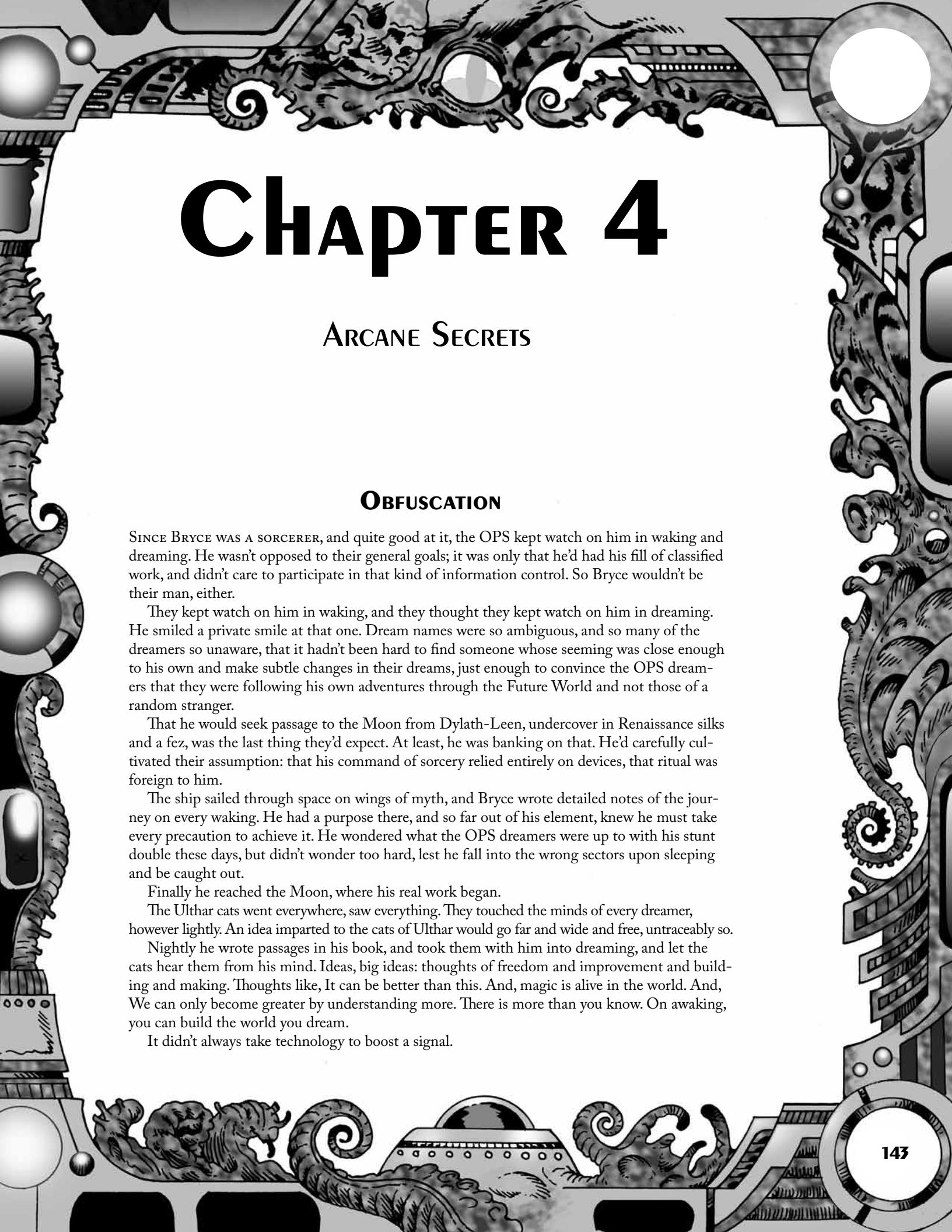


What made the students shake their heads was his sober theory that a man might - given mathematical knowledge admittedly beyond all likelihood of human acquirement - step deliberately from the earth to any other celestial body which might lie at one of an infinity of specific points in the cosmic pattern.

Such a step, he said, would require only two stages; first, a passage out of the three-dimensional sphere we know, and second, a passage back to the three-dimensional sphere at another point, perhaps one of infinite remoteness. That this could be accomplished without loss of life was in many cases conceivable. Any being from any part of three-dimensional space could probably survive in the fourth dimension...

It was also possible that the inhabitants of a given dimensional realm could survive entry to many unknown and incomprehensible realms of additional or indefinitely multiplied dimensions - be they within or outside the given space-time continuum - and that the converse would be likewise true. This was a matter for speculation, though one could be fairly certain that the type of mutation involved in a passage from any given dimensional plane to the next higher one would not be destructive of biological integrity as we understand it. Gilman could not be very clear about his reasons for this last assumption, but his haziness here was more than overbalanced by his clearness on other complex points. Professor Upham especially liked his demonstration of the kinship of higher mathematics to certain phases of magical lore transmitted down the ages from an ineffable antiquity - human or pre-human - whose knowledge of the cosmos and its laws was greater than ours.

H.P. Lovecraft - *The Dreams in the Witch House*



Chapter 4

ARCANE SECRETS

OBFUSCATION

SINCE BRYCE WAS A SORCERER, and quite good at it, the OPS kept watch on him in waking and dreaming. He wasn't opposed to their general goals; it was only that he'd had his fill of classified work, and didn't care to participate in that kind of information control. So Bryce wouldn't be their man, either.

They kept watch on him in waking, and they thought they kept watch on him in dreaming. He smiled a private smile at that one. Dream names were so ambiguous, and so many of the dreamers so unaware, that it hadn't been hard to find someone whose seeming was close enough to his own and make subtle changes in their dreams, just enough to convince the OPS dreamers that they were following his own adventures through the Future World and not those of a random stranger.

That he would seek passage to the Moon from Dylath-Leen, undercover in Renaissance silks and a fez, was the last thing they'd expect. At least, he was banking on that. He'd carefully cultivated their assumption: that his command of sorcery relied entirely on devices, that ritual was foreign to him.

The ship sailed through space on wings of myth, and Bryce wrote detailed notes of the journey on every waking. He had a purpose there, and so far out of his element, knew he must take every precaution to achieve it. He wondered what the OPS dreamers were up to with his stunt double these days, but didn't wonder too hard, lest he fall into the wrong sectors upon sleeping and be caught out.

Finally he reached the Moon, where his real work began.

The Ulthar cats went everywhere, saw everything. They touched the minds of every dreamer, however lightly. An idea imparted to the cats of Ulthar would go far and wide and free, untraceably so.

Nightly he wrote passages in his book, and took them with him into dreaming, and let the cats hear them from his mind. Ideas, big ideas: thoughts of freedom and improvement and building and making. Thoughts like, It can be better than this. And, magic is alive in the world. And, We can only become greater by understanding more. There is more than you know. On awaking, you can build the world you dream.

It didn't always take technology to boost a signal.

HYPERSPACE & HYPERSPATIAL EXPOSURE

Hyperspace is both the home to the Other Gods and the Great Old Ones and the source of power for sorcery and various advanced technologies. Most of humanity is unable to perceive hyperspatial manifestations, which serves to protect our species from many dangers. Gaining psychic powers or using sorcery is always accompanied by a certain level of exposure to hyperspatial energies, and certain powerful types of sorcery and mental or physical contact with hyperspatial entities produce an even greater degree of exposure. Hyperspatial exposure is measured in six levels, from 0 to 5. Moderate levels of exposure renders characters slightly more susceptible to hyperspatial influence, while a high degree of exposure renders the character mentally and eventually even physically inhuman.

GAINING HYPERSPATIAL EXPOSURE

Every source of Hyperspatial Exposure has a rating between one and five. Whenever a character is exposed to a source of Hyperspatial Exposure the GM must first check and see if the level of this influence is greater than the character's current level of Hyperspatial Exposure. If the new source of hyperspatial energies is less than or equal to the character's present level of Hyperspatial Exposure, then no roll is needed and the character is completely unaffected by the exposure.

If the new influence is greater than the character's current level of Hyperspatial Exposure, then the character must roll to avoid receiving a higher level of Hyperspatial Exposure. This roll is always Constitution + Willpower, and the character must obtain a number of Success Levels equal to the level of the influence. For instance, a character with one or two levels of Hyperspatial Exposure who casts a sorcerous spell to create a gateway through hyperspace (a Level 3 source of Hyperspatial Exposure) would need to obtain at least three Success Levels on their roll to resist this influence. Success means no change in the character's exposure level, while failure leads to the character gaining one additional level of Hyperspatial Exposure. A few powerful devices can partially shield a character from some influences, but otherwise all exposed characters with a level of Hyperspatial Exposure lower than the current hyperspatial effect must make this roll.

Example: A character with one level of Hyperspatial Exposure is exposed to a Level 3 Hyperspatial Exposure

and fails their roll to resist it. They gain one additional level of Hyperspatial Exposure and now have two levels. Except in rare circumstances involving the most powerful hyperspatial energies, characters never gain more than one level of Hyperspatial Exposure from failing a single roll. To resist a single continuing hyperspatial influence, one roll is made for every 24 hours of exposure. The only exception is exposure to one of the Great Old Ones – see descriptions of individual Great Old Ones for the frequency of roll. In addition, a character would need to roll to resist multiple different sources of Hyperspatial Exposure even if the character encountered all of these sources on the same day.

AUTOMATIC SOURCES OF HYPERSPATIAL EXPOSURE

In addition to having to roll to resist various sources of Hyperspatial Exposure, sometimes characters have experiences that automatically cause them to gain one level of Hyperspatial Exposure, with no chance to resist. The most common example of this is becoming a psychic, which automatically gives a character permanent Level 1 Hyperspatial Exposure if they do not already possess it.

REDUCING HYPERSPATIAL EXPOSURE

Level 1 Hyperspatial Exposure is permanent: innocence of the dimensions beyond, once lost, is never regained. Level 5 Hyperspatial Exposure is also irrevocable, representing a permanent transformation of mind and body that demolishes the character's former nature.

Levels between one and five can be temporary. People's minds and bodies gradually throw off the changes made by exposure to hyperspatial energies. Over time, without further hyperspatial encounters, characters with between two and four levels of Hyperspatial Exposure gradually reduce their level of Hyperspatial Exposure. All characters with either Level 2 or Level 4 Hyperspatial Exposure automatically reduce their level of exposure by one level if they do not have to make any rolls to resist Hyperspatial Exposure during a four month period. Characters with Level 3 exposure automatically reduce their exposure by one level if they spend one full month without making further rolls to resist exposure. In addition, the Reverse Mutation spell instantly reduces a character's level of Hyperspatial Exposure.

MADNESS AND MUTATION: EFFECTS OF HYPERSPATIAL EXPOSURE

Exposure to hyperspatial energies or entities causes mental and physical aberrations, classified into six levels. People eventually recover from most Hyperspatial Exposure unless transformed into inhuman beings.

Level 0: The baseline state for normal humans. These individuals are unable to sense hyperspatial radiations and are difficult for psychics to contact. Except under the rarest circumstances, hyperspatial entities cannot make contact with these individuals.

Level 1: The person can sense hyperspatial energies and operate hyperspatial devices. Also, particularly close or active hyperspatial entities can contact these individuals. Sources of Level 1 exposure include travel in a dragonfly drive starship, proximity to an unshielded hyperspatial drive, or exposure to mythos sorcery. All human psychics automatically have Level 1 Hyperspatial Exposure.

Duration: Sometimes fades after years without further exposure, but for all game purposes, this level is permanent. It is always permanent for psychics.

Level 2: The individual is more sensitive to hyperspatial phenomena. Even non-psychics receive dreams or visions from highly charged locations; individuals with Level 2 Hyperspatial Exposure occasionally receive dreams from nearby mythos entities. Sources of Level 2 exposure include traveling through a gateway, learning or using lower level Mythos Sorcery, having a distant and indistinct psychic vision of hyperspatial beings, mental contact with anyone with Level 5 Hyperspatial Exposure or with any aliens bearing hyperspatial implants, such as the mi-go. Every mythos sorcerer has at least Level 2 Hyperspatial Exposure.

Duration: Fades after 4-6 months, generally permanent for sorcerers.

Level 3: The individual is exceedingly sensitive to hyperspatial phenomena and experiences extraordinarily vivid and memorable dreams and visions in the presence of hyperspatial entities. Hyperspatial entities can easily send dreams and messages to individuals with Level 3 Hyperspatial Exposure, though they do not have these dreams and visions with frequency unless bound to a particular entity. They may also experience occasional dreams and visions in the presence of any sort of connection to these entities, such as an idol of an entity worshiped by a mythos cult. Sources of Level 3 hyperspatial exposure include physical contact with lesser hy-

perspatial beings, brief and partial glimpses or very limited exposure to a fully hyperspatial entity like a Great Old One, exposure to powerful hyperspatial devices, or casting a mythos spell to initiate contact with a powerful hyperspatial entity. At this level, the individual's offspring are often born with Level 1 Hyperspatial Exposure, and may spontaneously develop psychic powers.

Duration: Fades after 1-2 months.

Level 4: Hyperspatial exposure warps the individual's mind to the extent that their thought processes are no longer human. Their minds become as alien as those of a deep one, a ghoul, or one of the mi-go. Individuals without Hyperspatial Exposure find art and writing by such individuals disturbing and confusing; Level 1 to Level 3 exposure makes such work potentially comprehensible. Psychic contact with such an individual does not induce Hyperspatial Exposure, but is exceptionally disturbing, and requires at least one Success Level on a Fear Test to perform without consequence. Sources of Level 4 exposure include mental contact with most lesser hyperspatial entities, direct exposure to a Great Old One, participating in a failed sorcery ritual, or performing the most powerful mythos magics, including any spell designed summon a Great Old One. The individual's offspring will generally have significant genetic alterations, like additional or webbed fingers, and one or more innate levels of Hyperspatial Exposure. Researchers believe deep ones and ghouls result from humans undergoing this level of exposure for several generations.

Duration: Often fades after 4-6 months, but can be permanent.

Level 5: In addition to the features of Level 4 exposure, the individual transforms profoundly, becoming a powerful inhuman beast. Unlike deep ones and ghouls, these idiosyncratic beings have significant hyperspatial powers. These mutants are singular, not members of a new species, and are usually too aberrant to breed with humans or any other creatures and pass along mutations. Sources of Level 5 Hyperspatial Exposure include physical or psychic contact with a Great Old One or exposure to powerful hyperspatial radiations, such as during a badly failed sorcerous ritual.

Duration: Always permanent.

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS OF HYPERSPATIAL EXPOSURE

Gaining a level of Hyperspatial Exposure is always easily noticeable and is usually quite traumatic. It never happens without a character knowing they've undergone a strange experience. The exact effects depend both upon the level of the influence and the character's roll. Characters who roll less than 9 on a roll to resist Hyperspatial Exposure fall unconscious for 1D10 minutes + 5 minutes per level of the Exposure. During this time, the character experiences strange and disturbing visions and minor seizures (convulsions or ambulatory trances, at the Director's discretion.) The character will only be able to remember fragments of these visions. However, these visions may contain vague hints of information about the source of the Hyperspatial Exposure, but this information is at best exceedingly cryptic and incomplete.

Characters who succeed in rolling 9+ on the roll to resist Hyperspatial Exposure, but fail to roll the necessary number of Success Levels remain conscious, but suffer a penalty to all actions equal to the level of the Hyperspatial Exposure. This penalty lasts 1d10 minutes. During this time, the character has strange and distracting waking visions that relate to the source of the Hyperspatial Exposure. These visions usually contain a few bits of useful information about the source of the Hyperspatial Exposure and can often provide the character with valuable clues.

HYPERSPATIAL SORCERY

Although most human occultists describe it as magic, hyperspatial sorcery is actually a complex science based upon the manipulation of hyperspace and the effects that hyperspatial exposure has on the minds and perceptions of intelligent beings. One of the truths of the cosmos that humanity has just begun to understand is that conventional matter and energy alone do not sufficiently describe the interactions of the cosmos. There are three other crucial components; the many dimensions of hyperspace, consciousness, and most importantly the hyperspatial energies that arise when different universes contact one another. The presence or absence of these hyperspatial energies can drastically alter objects and events in the physical world. Also, consciousness is tied into both conventional quantum phenomena and into the interactions between the various levels of hyperspace and the physical world.

PERFORMING SORCERY

Sorcery is difficult to learn and to perform. Sorcerers must always have a number of levels of the Sorcery Quality that are at least equal to the level of the spell they are performing. If a character only possesses two levels of the Sorcery Quality, then they can only cast Level 1 and Level 2 spells. Until they gain more levels of the sorcery Quality, they cannot cast Level 3, Four, or Five spells. Casting a spell requires the player to roll Willpower + Occultism. Drama Points can be used normally to increase the spell's chance to succeed. If the roll fails (i.e., the total is less than nine), the spell doesn't work—the ritual simply fails without any negative consequences. However, success can be more problematic.

The roll's Success Levels are compared to the spell's Power Level. If the number of Success Levels is less than the spell's Power Level, something magical happens—but it may not be exactly what the caster intended. The spell's intent may be twisted or perverted, and the caster may be injured—or even killed—as the hyperspatial energies rip through her body. The Director can decide what happens, or she can roll on the Spell Failure Table. If the roll results in Success Levels equal to or greater than the spell's Power Level, all's well and the spell works.

LEARNING SPELLS

Possessing the Sorcery Quality just allows a sorcerer to understand sorcery. Actually learning a spell is a different process. Each spell must be learned individually. Spells cost a number of points equal to half their level (rounded up). See *Psychic & Magical Qualities* for further information.

ENHANCING SORCERY

A single sorcerer relying upon their own knowledge of sorcery can be quite powerful, but there are also a number of ways to enhance the power of a ritual. These methods can provide bonuses for the sorcerer casting the ritual, and can even allow a sorcerer to cast a ritual that would normally be impossible. Most of them only work with certain types of sorcery (see below for a discussion of the different types of sorcery).

ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL

Regardless of whether a sorcerer is performing an elaborate ritual involving dancing and chanting, working complex calculation, or constructing a hyperspatial device, working with others can accomplish more than working alone. In all cases, one sorcerer, typically the most skilled, leads the ritual or the design and construction effort. As-

sistants and additional colleagues increase the sorcerer's effectiveness by adding to the sorcerer's roll.

USING UNTRAINED ASSISTANTS

Some rituals are designed to be performed by between three and two dozen participants or can optionally incorporate the use of large numbers of assistants. Other than the sorcerer leading the ritual, the participants require no skill, knowledge, or special training beyond knowledge of a given ritual. Using additional participants in a physical ritual provides the following bonuses.

However, each participant other than the sorcerer must make a doubled Intelligence roll and roll at least one Success Level. If the participant fails, their efforts are not counted into the total number of assistants present. Also, because they are by nature loud and elaborate, physical rituals are easy to disrupt, and require a minimum of 15 minutes per Level to perform. If interrupted by loud noises or similar disturbances that do not physically affect any of the participants, but may distract them, each assistant must roll a non-doubled Willpower roll to maintain their concentration. See the table below for the bonus provided by untrained assistants. Only count the assistants whose rolls succeed; failure has no other negative consequences.

UNTRAINED ASSISTANTS	BONUS
3	+1
6	+2
12	+3
24	+4
48	+5

USING ADDITIONAL SORCERERS

Some rituals can also be performed with the assistance of additional sorcerers. All sorcerers involved in the ritual must know the spell being cast and have the level of the Sorcery Quality necessary to cast it. One sorcerer leads the ritual, and their roll is the base roll for casting the ritual. Each additional sorcerer must make a successful Intelligence + Occultism roll. Only those sorcerers who succeed in this roll can lend their aid to the ritual. Failure on this roll has no negative consequences.

ADDITIONAL SORCERERS	BONUS
1	+1
2	+2
4	+3
6	+4
8	+5

ADDITIONAL POWER – SACRIFICE AND ARTIFACTS

Normally, a sorcerer's ritual repertoire is limited by their level of sorcery, but with additional power, a sorcerer may cast a ritual one level higher than normal. A sorcerer with three levels of the sorcery quality could cast a Level 4 spell, but not a Level 5 spell using one of these methods. The sorcerer must first know the ritual being attempted, and must use one of the following sources of additional power: sacrifice or artifacts.

Sacrifice: Sacrifice is exactly what it sounds like; the sorcerer sacrifices the life of a living, intelligent being as part of the ritual. This method can only be used to enhance the power of sorcerous rituals. Only intelligent beings like humans, deep ones, elder ones, or moonbeasts may be sacrificed in this fashion. Animals, even relatively intelligent animals like monkeys lack the psychic complexity. Sacrificing any intelligent being is illegal in almost every nation on Earth and is considered a serious crime by the OPS.

Using Artifacts: If the sorcerer is using ritual sorcery, then they must destroy or drain the power of a powerful hyperspatial artifact during a ritual. If the sorcerer is constructing a technosorcerous device, they must incorporate the artifact into the device they are constructing. In either case, any single artifact can only be used once. Humanity cannot yet construct sufficiently powerful artifacts. However, mi-go hyperspatial augmentations work for this purpose, as do many hyperspatial artifacts created by the elder ones or the great race of Yith.

SPELL FAILURE AND INTERRUPTING A RITUAL

Some spells fail because the sorcerer screwed up. Others fail because someone either deliberately caused them to fail or caused enough of a disturbance that the sorcerer was too distracted to continue. If an intruder disrupts a ritual by overturning idols, injuring or killing participants, or simply shoving people around, then the ritual automatically fails and if the roll to cast it results in one or more Success Levels, then the sorcerer must roll on the Spell Failure Table. If the spell is interrupted, +5 is added to the roll on the spell failure table – interrupting a spell can be devastatingly dangerous to the sorcerer and everyone nearby.

SPELL FAILURE TABLE

Roll D10 and add the Spell's Power Level – Add +5 to this roll if the spell is interrupted

ROLL TOTAL	RESULT
4 or less	Luck is with you—the spell still works.
5-7	The spell works, but it's less effective than expected. The duration, damage or effect is reduced by a factor of three (if not applicable, then the spell may have some other partial effect).
8-10	The spell works, but the caster is damaged by its energies. The magician takes five Life Points of damage per Level of the spell.
11-13	The energies of the spell go out of control, doing five Life Points of damage per Power Level of the spell to the caster and to everyone in the same room. In addition, these rogue energies set fire to nearby flammable objects, knock things off of shelves, and generally cause enough random destruction that the room looks like it has just endured a moderate earthquake.
14-15	The spell is completely reversed in effect. An attack spell heals the target instead, a spell to weaken a monster makes it stronger, and a spell to make someone invisible makes everyone notice her. In addition, the sorcerer must roll to resist a Hyperspatial Exposure with a level equal to the spell's level.
16+	The hyperspatial energies go completely out of control. These energies typically either summon dangerous entities from beyond our reality or cause everyone within 10 meters to roll to resist a Hyperspatial Exposure with a level equal to $1d10/2$ (round up). Also regardless of any other effects, the sorcerer must make a roll to resist a Level 5 Hyperspatial Exposure. If the sorcerer fails, they automatically gain 2 levels of Hyperspatial Exposure.

THE VARIETIES OF SORCERY

There are two very different methods of performing hyperspatial sorcery, either performing “rituals” or creating hyperspatial devices. The first method is known as ritual sorcery, while the second is referred to as technosorcery.

RITUAL SORCERY

This type of sorcery includes everything from primitive rites involving human or animal sacrifices, frenetic dancing, and elaborate accoutrements like body paint and ritual weaponry, to careful and deliberate calculations using either pencil and paper or cutting edge computers. The one factor unifying these disparate practices is that an intelligent mind performs the symbol manipulation that lies at the heart of the “magic”. The basis for this form of sorcery is that conscious intelligent minds are able to alter the fabric of hyperspace by thought alone. Minds accomplish these manipulations by means of the same facilities that permit all intelligent minds to learn to use psychic powers. The difference is that affecting the structure of hyperspace is an exceptionally difficult and complex undertaking, and so the sequence of thoughts needed to perform any particular hyperspatial manipulation is always exceptionally complex and precise. The mind of a physical being simply cannot manage these sequences of thoughts without help. As a result, all sor-

cery of this type requires some form of ritual to guide the thoughts and the mental and emotional reactions of the sorcerer through the many complex steps necessary to cause the desired result.

This ritual can take almost any form. Conceptually simple but most physically elaborate, the ritual involves the use of loud highly rhythmic music, bright colors, and powerful imagery to force the minds of everyone involved into the necessary patterns. This type of ritual simply consists of a series of simple but emotionally powerful actions that contain vivid sensory information. Each action has a specific effect on the minds of the people involved in the ritual, and the ritual guides their thoughts through the necessary pattern. These rituals are usually designed to include many participants and except for the sorcerer leading the ritual, these individuals usually need no understanding of the nature or purpose of the ritual and do not need any knowledge of hyperspace or of any of the principles of sorcery.

At the other end of the difficulty scale, the most mentally complex but physically simplest type of ritual sorcery involves either the sorcerer performing a series of complex and intense visualization exercises or a series of demanding mental calculations. This method involves no equipment beyond a quiet place where the sorcerer won't be disturbed, but demands great self-discipline and extensive mental training. However, the results produced by all of these disparate methods are identical.

Modern sorcerers rarely use either of these methods and instead rely upon intermediate types of ritual sorcery, where the sorcerer relies on a few easily available external props to help focus their mind on the visualizations. The most common type of ritual sorcery is what has become known as scientific sorcery. In scientific sorcery, the sorcerer performs complex calculations and uses them to create elaborate graphs and diagrams. While this type of sorcery was once performed with pencil and paper, it is now most commonly performed on a computer or, more recently a high-end mobile link equipped with special programs. The sorcerer sets up the equation, inputs the correct values, and then the device solves the equation and draws the graphs and diagrams in a manner that allows the sorcerer to mentally focus on the process of solving the equations and creating the graphs.

ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF RITUAL SORCERY

Each of the different methods of performing ritual sorcery has advantages and disadvantages, but in practice scientific sorcery has the best combination of ease and speed and so is the most widely used by skilled sorcerers. All varieties of ritual sorcery are automatically disrupted if someone physically restrains, attacks, or otherwise interferes with the sorcerer who is performing or leading the ritual. If interrupted in this fashion, then the sorcerer must roll on the Spell Failure Table.

PHYSICAL RITUALS

Physical rituals are loud, frenetic, and emotionally powerful. They also require tools like razor sharp daggers and chalices filled with potent substances, and often costumes, appropriate ritual artwork, and similar elaborate items. These rituals require 10 minutes per Level to perform. If interrupted by loud noises or similar disturbances that do not directly affect the sorcerer, but may distract them, each participant must roll a doubled Willpower roll to maintain their concentration.

Enhancement Rules: Physical sorcery can use all forms of enhancement - assistants, additional sorcerers, sacrifices, and artifacts.

MEDITATIVE SORCERY

Meditative sorcery rituals require nothing more than a place for the sorcerer to concentrate. They are always solitary affairs requiring intense concentration. No one can assist the sorcerer in these rituals, which require five minutes per Level to perform and are easy to interrupt.

HYPERSPATIAL EXPOSURE AND RITUAL SORCERY

One of the drawbacks of all forms of ritual sorcery is that the process of affecting hyperspace with a conscious mind is a two-way street - the fabric of hyperspace also affects the conscious mind. The degree of this hyperspatial feedback is limited, but spells that bring the sorcerer into contact with hyperspatial beings can cause additional hyperspatial exposure.

SPELL LEVEL	HYPERSPATIAL EXPOSURE LEVEL
1	1
2	2
3	2
4	3
5	3

If interrupted by loud noises or similar disturbances that do not directly affect the sorcerer, but may distract them, the sorcerer must roll a non-doubled Willpower roll to maintain their concentration.

Enhancement Rules: Meditative Sorcery cannot use assistants, but multiple sorcerers can silently meditate together. It cannot be used with sacrifices or artifacts.

SCIENTIFIC SORCERY

Scientific sorcery uses simple props like images and diagrams to guide the sorcerer's focus through the ritual. These props both speed the ritual and allow other sorcerers to participate in it. If performed without the use of computers, scientific sorcery requires 30 minutes per Level to perform, as the participants perform elaborate calculations by hand.

Using computers significantly increases the speed of scientific sorcery. All participants require either a computer or at minimum, a mobile or mobile link to help guide them through the ritual. The images and sounds provided by the computer or mobile help focus concentration, so intruders must actively disturb the participants by shaking or threatening them or blocking their view of the images they are using. These rituals require only two minutes per Level to perform. If interrupted by loud noises or similar disturbances that do not directly affect the sorcerer, but may distract them, each participant must roll a doubled Willpower roll to maintain their concentration. While a ritual begun with proper focus and then interrupted in the middle can be dangerous, a ritual programmed into a computer either by an untrained individual or a sorcerer who doesn't even begin to

focus on it is no ritual at all: the computer is only there to help the sorcerer follow the mental path.

Enhancement Rules: Scientific Sorcery can use additional sorcerers, but not assistants. Scientific sorcery can also use artifacts but not sacrifices.

TECHNOSORCERY

Technosorcery is the complex and difficult art of constructing devices capable of manipulating the fabric of hyperspace without the intervention of a conscious mind. Alien species have created hyperspatial devices using a variety of exotic technologies like advanced bioengineering or nano-manufacturing. All human-created examples of technosorcery are complex electronic devices. The first were large, crude, and exceptionally delicate devices made using vacuum tubes. However, since the 1980s, these devices have all been created using advanced micro-circuitry.

One major limitation of these devices is that they cannot be created solely using software. Instead of being able to run each spell as a program on a single computer, each spell requires a separate device made with exceptionally complex and highly specialized circuitry. Researchers have been attempting to create generalized technosorcerous software that can be run on computers or high-end mobiles, but so far, this type of device has proven impossible. In addition, push-button sorcery has also proven impossible. Each device must be adjusted for the location and precise nature of the effect being produced before it can function. Many alien devices do not possess this limitation, and can be used without any adjustment.

CREATING TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

To create such a device, a sorcerer must spend one or more days building it. The exact time is described below. Only characters that both possess the required levels of the Sorcery Quality and know the spell can build or help build these complex devices. Also, each device must be at least partially hand made by the Sorcerer – they cannot be mass produced. A few hyperspatial devices, like the dragonfly drive, can be mass produced, but even these de-

vices must be inspected and adjusted by a skilled sorcerer before they are ready to use. Sorcerers cannot work more than 16 hours per day; if more than one is working on the device, they can take shifts.

The minimum size of the device is determined by the level of the spell that it creates. However, many devices made by aliens, and almost all devices created more than 50 years ago by human sorcerers, are considerably larger than this minimum size. Technosorcerous devices created by the OPS typically resemble personal electronic devices. However, those made by aliens or long-ago human sorcerers can look like anything from a living creature to a piece of jewelry or an ornately carved statue.

JURY-RIGGED DEVICES

Alternately, characters can jury-rig a device to produce the desired spell once. These jury-rigged devices are clumsy affairs that are one size category larger, but require far less time to produce. A jury-rigged device designed to produce a Level 4 spell would be as large as a normal device designed to produce a Level 5 spell. A jury-rigged Level 5 device is as large as five ordinary Level 5 devices.

Enhancement Rules: Technosorcery can use additional sorcerers, but not assistants. Technosorcery can also use artifacts but not sacrifices.

USING TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

To use a technosorcerous device, the user rolls Intelligence + Engineering, and must achieve a number of Success Levels equal to the level of the spell. The process of activating and calibrating such a device requires only three turns (15 seconds) per Level of the device, making technosorcery far faster than ritual sorcery. Also, the person operating the device must have an Occult and Engineering skill that are both equal to the Level of the device, but need not possess the Sorcery Quality. Alien or ancient human technosorcerous devices can look like elaborately carved stones or similar objects and typically require short incantations, specific types of mediation, or physical actions to use.

SPELL LEVEL	TIME TO BUILD	TIME TO JURY-RIG	MINIMUM SIZE
1	3 days	2 hours	wrist watch or pen
2	6 days	4 hours	pocket watch, mobile, or paperback book
3	12 days	7 hours	hardback book or netbook, minimum of 1 kg
4	24 days	11 hours	large briefcase, minimum of 5 kg
5	48 days	16 hours	large suitcase, minimum of 25 kg

THE MYTHOS GRIMOIRE

The following spells are known to humanity. Alien beings, non-Earthly humans, and a few cults that are in contact with hyperspatial beings know additional spells. However, these are the only spells that OPS operatives and other Heroes can start play with. Each spell description includes details of the hyperspatial exposure produced by the spell, as well as how the spell operates and what it does. In addition, each spell includes descriptions of some of the technosorcerous devices that can produce the same effects.

A note on spell levels: Some spells have two levels listed: in all cases this means that there are two versions of the spell, a lower and a higher level one. Learning only the lower level version of the spell does not allow the user to cast the higher level version, but learning the higher level version of a spell allows the sorcerer to also cast the lower level version. Also, the sorcerer must possess sufficient levels of the Sorcery Quality to cast the desired level version of the spell.

AVOIDANCE WARD

Level 1

Duration: When used on an individual, this spell lasts until the target next sleeps, falls unconscious, or dies, whichever comes first. When used on a location, this spell lasts as long as the objects marking the warding remain in place and undamaged.

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 1

This spell is specifically designed to affect the perceptions of individuals with little or no Hyperspatial Exposure. It affects everyone with Hyperspatial Exposure Level 0 who fails to achieve three or more Success Levels on a non-doubled Willpower roll, and anyone with a higher level of Hyperspatial Exposure who fails to achieve three or more Success Levels on a doubled Willpower roll. The individual's Level of Hyperspatial Exposure is added to their Willpower before it is doubled. As a result, characters with Hyperspatial Exposure of Level 2 or higher are almost never affected by this spell.

This spell can be used on individuals, on mobile objects like vehicles, and on locations. Everyone who fails to resist this spell sees any person, object, or location protected by this spell as unremarkable and easily forgettable. Affected individuals register the existence of the person, vehicle, or place that is protected the ward, but take no notice of it other than what is necessary to get out of its way. This ward instantly and automatically fails if the protected person or object acts in a dangerous or

obviously forbidden manner.

If someone protected by this spell pulls out a gun and starts waving it around, the spell instantly ends. Similarly, a car protected by this spell becomes easily noticeable if it's driving in the wrong lane, in a high-speed chase, or if someone inside leans out to shoot at someone on the street. In such cases, witnesses will be able to give descriptions that are exactly as detailed and complete as if the target was not protected by this spell.

Also, even someone completely unremarkable cannot walk into a high security installation without displaying the correct ID or keying in the correct door code. However, if someone protected by this spell attempt has a stolen ID that looks even remotely like them and knows the correct door code, any guards will only notice them as another completely unremarkable and unmemorable person entering the installation.

This spell is especially effective when used to protect locations. A house or shop protected by this ward would be ignored by people walking or driving by, unless it was obviously on fire or there was a gun battle occurring in the front yard. No one would notice any minor oddities such as people coming and going at all hours of the day or night, or the occasional muffled scream. Also, no one affected by this spell will attempt to enter or investigate the warded location. Even if someone suggests that they do so, anyone with Hyperspatial Exposure Level 0 will attempt to find some reason why investigating that location isn't important. Casting this spell on a location involves placing at least four small objects inscribed with special sigils around the perimeter of the area or at minimum, in the four corners of a room or vehicle. This spell lasts until these objects are disturbed or damaged.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

A personal avoidance ward is often built into a belt, pocket watch, or similar device. They are too large to be built into a working mobile, but may be disguised as one. Avoidance wards designed to protect locations usually take the form of four small devices that must each be plugged in or powered by batteries.

SENDING

Level 1

Duration: Concentration

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 2 for the sorcerer, none for the target.

This spell allows the caster to send a message to someone far away. This spell can only be used to contact hu-

mans with at least one level of Hyperspatial Exposure. However, it can also be used to contact all known alien and inhuman beings, including Great Old Ones and other hyperspatial beings.

The sorcerer must have some sort of connection to the target, which can be anything from a photograph or personal possession to an artifact used by a non-human or ab-human species. In the latter case, the spell simply allows the character to contact the nearest member of that species. This spell can be cast in one of two ways. The caster can either use this ritual while awake and attempt to make contact with a waking target, or the caster can go into a deep trance and attempt join a dreaming target in their dreams. In the second case, the target and the sorcerer both end up in the Dream Realm, and the target always vividly remembers this dream.

If the target is asleep when a waking sorcerer attempts to contact them, or if the target is awake when a sorcerer attempts to contact them via dreams, then the spell does not work, but the sorcerer learns that the target is either awake or asleep. Using this spell to contact a hyperspatial being like a flying polyp automatically produces a Level 3 Hyperspatial Exposure and using it to contact a Great Old One is always a Level 4 Hyperspatial Exposure. In both cases, this experience is exceptionally disorienting and uncomfortable.

If used while awake, the sorcerer can either deliver a short message, or if the target is willing, can initiate mental contact with the target. Contact with another person is relatively easy, but if the person is not expecting such a contact, they may assume they are daydreaming or that they are having a very unusual psychic experience. The spell lasts for as long as the sorcerer is willing to communicate with the target. However, this communication requires intense concentration and the sorcerer cannot perform any other actions while using this spell.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

These devices are typically small objects meant to fit comfortably in the sorcerer's hand or to wirelessly connect to the sorcerer's mobile link. Alien-made devices may look like statues or small and strangely carved baubles. Although most devices made by the OPS can be used to contact anyone the user knows, either asleep or awake, sorcerers can also create devices specifically designed to contact a single entity. Also, a device can be created so that it allows either sleeping and waking contacts, or both.

Some of the most dangerously insidious alien relics are devices that are designed to facilitate sleeping contact with a hyperspatial being or Great Old One. All someone need do

is fall asleep within a few meters of such a device, and their dreams will be haunted by this being. A few nights of such contact can shatter a person's sanity. Such devices have been made by both aliens and insane human sorcerers.

THE VOORISH SIGN

Level 1

Duration: Concentration

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 1 for the sorcerer, or possibly higher for anyone who uses this spell to view hyperspace.

This spell allows the sorcerer to perceive both active hyperspatial energies and different levels of hyperspace in the sorcerer's present location. Using this spell allows the sorcerer to perceive open gateways and other active hyperspatial devices and spells, as well as the locations previously used to create gateways. In addition, this spell allows the sorcerer to see invisible objects or creatures, as well as creatures lurking in portions of hyperspace corresponding to the sorcerer's current location. This spell is most commonly used to locate the site of previous Gateway spells and to see invisible objects or creatures. However, it can also be used to observe some of the inhabitants of various levels of hyperspace that dwell near the Earth. Unfortunately, these perceptions are two-way, allowing the inhabitants of hyperspace to also see the sorcerer. Some of the more powerful of these beings are capable of briefly gaining access to our dimension and may take an unhealthy interest in strange beings that suddenly appear to them.

This spell allows the sorcerer to choose to view all of the levels of hyperspace at once, to only examine specific levels of hyperspace, or to only see active hyperspatial energies, and to specifically not observe any of the myriad levels of hyperspace. This last choice is the most common way for the Voorish Sign to be used. It allows the sorcerer to see the location of present and past Gateway spells, invisible creatures, and other active spells, but does not risk being seen by any of the inhabitants of hyperspace. Regardless of how it is cast, this spell also automatically allows sorcerers to see if they are being observed using the Dho Hna spell, and to use the Voorish Sign to observe the sorcerer who is observing them. This spell remains in effect as long as the sorcerer is concentrating on maintaining it. This concentration is relatively easy and is not interrupted by anything other than the sorcerer focusing all of their attention on some other activity, such as combat, or casting another spell. Using this spell in R'lyeh or some similar location strongly associated with a Great Old One or Other God is exceptionally dangerous. Doing so automatically causes

a Level 3 Hyperspatial exposure, and if the entity notices and takes an interest in the viewer, this can easily become a Level 4 or even a Level 5 exposure.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

The simplest technosorcerous version of the Voorish Sign is the Tillinghast viewer. This device allows everyone within its area of effect to perceive one or more levels of hyperspace, or to see traces and hyperspatial stresses of current or recent sorcery or previously used gates. The operator must make an Intelligence + Engineering roll to use the device correctly and see the desired phenomena. This device can be used without tuning, but doing so results in the device allowing everyone within the field of effect to view a wide and essentially random array of hyperspatial dimensions. In addition to being confusing, using the device in this fashion is exceptionally dangerous, since this device also allows the denizens of hundreds of dimensions of hyperspace to see into the physical world. Since some of these creatures can briefly reach into other levels of hyperspace and are often either inhumanly curious or simply hungry, uncontrolled viewing of hyperspace is not recommended.

During the later days of World War II, the Nazis created a device that duplicated the effects of this device over an area several hundred meters on a side. It was just as unfocused as the original Tillinghast viewer and thus allowed hungry and powerful creatures from the further realms to be able to access the physical world. The result was a device that caused a great deal of terror and confusion, as soldiers on both sides vanished into hyperspace or were partially devoured by horrible monsters that suddenly appeared and then vanished as they moved out of the device's area of effect. The one limitation on this device is like other examples of technosorcery, the operator had to activate the device and keep it running. Since the operator was no more protected from attack by hyperspatial creatures than anyone else in the area of effect, few operators survived to operate this device more than once or twice.

The effects of the Voorish Sign spell or Tillinghast viewer can also be haphazardly replicated by certain drugs: see p. 59 in Chapter Two: Civilians and Operatives.

ELDER SIGN

Level 2

Duration: The spell creates an enchanted marking or object that lasts until it is destroyed.

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 1 for the sorcerer.

The magical sigil created by this spell emits hyperspa-

tial energies that repel hyperspatial and hyperspatially altered entities, such as servitors of the other gods or flying polyps as well as mutants or aliens that have significant hyperspatial connections. This includes mi-go and humans with hyperspatial augmentations. The Elder Sign does not harm these creatures, but its presence drives them away. All such entities, including any human who has been mutated by a Level 5 Hyperspatial Exposure, must make a non-doubled Willpower roll to avoid moving at least five meters away from the Elder Sign. Aliens like moonbeasts or yaddithi that lack hyperspatial augmentations are unaffected by this spell, as are hereditary mutants like ghouls or deep ones and humans who have Level 4 Hyperspatial Exposure.

Entities that succeed at any of these rolls may act normally, but still cannot approach an Elder Sign at a distance closer than one meter. However, while some books of mythos sorcery claim that the Elder Sign is all-powerful, it has no effect on either Other Gods or Great Old Ones. These entities are completely unaffected and researchers believe that these powerful beings do not even notice its presence. Elder Signs either consist of drawing that are at least several inches across or objects the size of a human fist. They can have almost any shape and are usually made from some durable material like metal, stone, or shatter-resistant glass. The most well known are the fist-sized star-shaped "stones" found in the Antarctic city of the Elder Ones, presumably created to defend against flying polyps and such lesser soldiers in the ancient war.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

These devices create Elder Signs. The simplest applies a special sigil made of conductive inks onto any smooth solid surface. However, 3-D printers that create Elder Sign objects also exist. A jury-rigged, single use version of this device is simply an object empowered with the Elder Sign.

HYPERSPATIAL MUTATION

Level 2

Duration: Permanent

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 2 for the sorcerer.

This hideously simple spell fills a single target with vast amounts of hyperspatial energy. The sorcerer can use this spell to automatically give any single target any desired level of Hyperspatial Exposure, from 1 to 5. The sorcerer must choose which level of exposure to give the target when they perform the ritual, and this ritual can only raise the target's level of Hyperspatial Expo-

sure. This ritual cannot be used to lower a target's level of Hyperspatial Exposure. No rolls to resist this spell are possible. The target must be present during the ritual, but need not be willing. Unwilling targets must be bound, unconscious, or otherwise restrained. The OPS forbids Operatives from using this spell.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

This device is often made into a slightly bulky glove containing complex electronics, operated by touch. Because of the powerful energies involved, the user must touch the glove to the target for at least 5 minutes to produce the desired level of exposure.

OPEN GATEWAY

Level 2

Duration: One Hour, or until closed.

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 2 to the sorcerer, level 2 to anyone traveling through it. Transformational gateways provide a level 3 exposure to anyone traveling through the gateway.

Using the Gateway spell leaves a lasting mark upon the structure of reality. If a sorcerer knows of the location of such a previous casting, or can find it using a spell like the Voorish Sign, or a Tillinghast viewer, then they can use this relatively simple spell to re-open the gateway. The major disadvantage of this spell is that it does not allow the sorcerer to know where the gateway leads. The only way to learn this is to either use the Dho Hna Formula to observe what is on the other side of the gateway, or to actually travel through it. As with the Gateway spell, this spell can produce either either a normal or a transformational gateway, depending upon which type the original Gateway was. A gateway opened using this spell lasts one hour or until closed. The Open Gateway spell can also be cast in reverse, in order to close a gateway that is already open.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

Two types of devices duplicate the effects of the Open Gateway spell. The first exactly duplicates the effect of this spell. However, technosorcerers who know this spell can also create another device, called a paired gateway. Creating a paired gateway requires the sorcerer to build two devices that are then separated. These devices are hyperspatially linked, and form a hyperspatial gateway between them when both are activated, even if no previous gateway was ever created between these two locations. To use a paired gateway, one of the two devices must be set up in a pre-determined location before these devices are

separated. Then, the two devices are calibrated, and the second device is moved to its new location.

At this point, the two devices are linked, but they must both be calibrated, a process that requires approximately two minutes. At the end of this time, the gateway automatically forms within one turn of both devices being activated. Until one of the two devices is moved, they do not need to be recalibrated. Instead, users merely need to activate both devices and wait one turn for the gateway between them to form. As long as they are not moved or damaged, these linked gateways can function indefinitely and require no knowledge or adjustment to use.

PROTECTIVE WARDING

Level 2 or 3

Duration: As long as the objects marking the warding remain in place and undamaged.

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 2

This spell provides protection from magic and from intrusions by hyperspatial creatures. The level 3 version also provides protection from all forms of psychic contact and intrusion. If successfully created, the Level 2 version stops all spells cast by any sorcerer with a Willpower less than the sum of the Intelligence + Occultism the sorcerer uses to cast the spell. The Level 3 version also prevents any form of psychic intrusion by anyone with a Willpower less than the sum of the Intelligence + Occultism that the sorcerer uses to cast the spell. Both versions of this spell must be cast over an enclosed area. This area can be mobile like a car, or part of a larger structure, like a hotel room. A sorcerer could even ward a tent. This ward must be cast upon an area and only protects individuals inside this area. Casting this spell involves placing objects around the perimeter of the area or at minimum, in the four corners of a room or vehicle. This spell lasts until these objects are disturbed or damaged. Both versions of this ward also provide everyone inside the protected area with a +4 bonus to all rolls to resist Hyperspatial Exposure.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

Older versions consisted of a series of four warding devices wired together with a long, thin cable. Modern versions are usually wireless and involve four small devices that either have their own batteries or plug into the outlets near the appropriate corners of the location they protect. An even more durable version of this warding can be built into the walls of buildings or vehicles, and is included in most official OPS facilities, as well as in the hulls of all dragonfly drive spaceships.

INVISIBILITY

Level 3

Duration: Up to one hour per point of the Sorcerer's Willpower.

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 2 for the Sorcerer, Level 4 for the target.

This spell renders the target completely invisible by transporting them partially into one of the lower levels of hyperspace. While invisible, the target cannot be seen or photographed with visual, ultra-violet, or infrared light. In addition, they are sufficiently shifted out of the physical world that they also cannot be noticed or tracked by smell. However, radar and sonar can be used to detect the presence of invisible beings, and they can still be heard, touched, and affected with ordinary weapons. Invisible characters can act normally, and perform attacks or other obvious actions, while still remaining invisible. Becoming invisible causes the target to partially dwell within the fabric of hyperspace, which is disturbing, uncomfortable, and incurs a high level of hyperspatial exposure. The OPS forbids operatives from using this spell except under extreme circumstances because of the terrible toll it takes on the sanity of those who use it. However, the existence of this spell is one of the reasons that Tillinghast viewers are commonly used to OPS investigative and strike teams.

SIGN OF KOTH

Level 3

Duration: Instant

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 2

Casting Time: Unlike all other sorcery spells, casting the Sign of Koth requires only one minute for meditative or scientific sorcerers, and only 5 minutes for sorcerers using physical rituals. Activating a technosorcerous device to use this spell requires only three turns.

This spell acts to disrupt all hyperspatial connections. It can be used to close gateways and dispel active hyperspatial magics like the Voorish Sign or Dho Hna spell. If used on an already dormant hyperspatial gateway, it completely removes all traces of the spell and makes the Open Gateway spell useless for affecting this location. This spell can also be used to eliminate nearby spells or other hyperspatial disturbances.

The Sign of Koth must be used in a directed matter, where it affects a single known hyperspatial disturbance. The target must therefore know exactly what they are trying to dispel. The instant this spell is used, the targeted effect ends. Also, if the Dho Hna spell is used to spy upon

a location where this spell is used, that spell is also ended. The Sign of Koth also immediately ends any hyperspatial summoning in progress. However, if a creature has already been summoned, it remains in the physical world even after this spell has been cast. This spell does not banish hyperspatial entities back into hyperspace. The other downside is that the sorcerer must be within five meters of the spell they wish to end or the location that the Dho Hna ritual is being used to observe. The Sign of Koth doesn't work from further away.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

The most common form for this device is simply a box with dials for targeting, and a button to activate it. Some versions look like high tech guns – aim the muzzle at the target, adjust the settings, and fire.

SUMMON SERVITOR OF THE OTHER GODS

Level 3

Duration: This spell summons the entity for a number of hours equal to the number of Success Levels the sorcerer rolled on the spell.

Hyperspatial Exposure: 2 for the sorcerer for casting the spell. Anyone in the presence of the servitor experiences a Level 1 hyperspatial exposure.

This spell allows the sorcerer to temporarily summon and control a being known as a servitor of the other gods (see p. 231 for attributes and other details). This entity is under the control of the sorcerer for the entire duration of the spell. If the sorcerer falls asleep or is knocked unconscious, the servitor continues to perform the action it was previously directed to do and awaits further orders once finished. However, if the sorcerer is killed, the servitor is instantly freed.

Once free, most servitors depart for their home dimension in hyperspace, but many of them first lash out at anyone or anything nearby, and some decide to remain and cause more enduring havoc. Also, once free, they will attempt to bring any nearby hyperspatial devices back to their home dimension. A failed casting of this spell causes the servitor to appear, but not be under the sorcerer's control. A single sorcerer or a single technosorcerous device cannot summon more than one of these entities at a time.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

This device is most often created in the form of a flat disk 30 centimeters in diameter, which generates a hyperspatial field that summons the entity.

DHO HNA FORMULA

Level 3 or 4

Duration: Concentration

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 2 or 3 for the sorcerer, and level 2 or possibly higher for anyone who uses this spell to view hyperspace.

This spell allows the sorcerer to view distant locations and even other dimensions of hyperspace. The simplest use of this spell is to observe a destination that the sorcerer has previously observed or visited. Sorcerers can also use this spell to view any location that they have seen photographs or video images of, and can also see the most recent location where an object they have touched resided for more than a few days. Sorcerers can attempt to use this spell to observe locations that they know of but have not seen, or even which they have only heard rumors of. However, the difficulty of the spell roll is higher. See the Dho Hna Difficulty Table below.

The Dho Hna Formula often acts oddly if the sorcerer does not know exactly what they are looking for. The sorcerer may see a location that looks very similar to the one they wish to see, but which is in actuality not the same location at all. If a rumored location doesn't exist, then the sorcerer sees either nothing at all or a confusing mélange of nonsensical images.

The Level 4 version of this spell allows the sorcerer to observe events in other times. To use this spell to view the past or the future, the sorcerer specifies a rough date and receives images. This spell is not exact, so visions of a region 100 years ago could easily be off by a year or two, and attempting to see events a million years ago could result in the image being off by as much as a ten thousand years. Also, as with everything to do with the past and future, neither one is fixed, and so any information gained is likely to be somewhat inexact. However, when attempting to view the past, the sorcerer can use an object from the past to help focus the spell. One technique popular with biologists is using a fossilized creature to

observe what it looked like when it was alive.

Using this spell to view other levels of hyperspace is just as risky as using the Voorish Sign. Many powerful hyperspatial creatures can see anyone who is looking at them, and a few can quite literally reach through the spell to abduct or devour the sorcerer. Also, simply using this spell can put the sorcerer at risk. Examining the more distant and exotic levels of hyperspace automatically gives the sorcerer and anyone else who views these images a Level 2 Hyperspatial Exposure. Using this spell to look at an Other God or Great Old One automatically causes a Level 3 Hyperspatial Exposure, and if the entity notices and takes an active interest in the viewer and looks back, this can easily become a Level 4 or even a Level 5 exposure.

This spell remains in effect as long as the sorcerer concentrates on maintaining it. This concentration is relatively easy and is not interrupted unless the sorcerer focuses all of their attention on some other activity, such as combat, or casting another spell. If performed as ritual magic, this spell can produce either physical images and sounds of the location, or images that exist only in the mind of the sorcerer and anyone else assisting in the ritual. The choice between physical images and mental visions must be made when the sorcerer learns the spell.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

Devices that produce this spell are usually boxes designed to be connected to the screens of computers or other view screens. However, they can also be connected either wirelessly or with wires to a psi link to deliver images and sounds directly to the sorcerer's sensory nerves.

COMPULSION

Level 4

Duration: Indefinite – targets may make one roll per week to attempt to throw off the effects of this spell and must make a total of (10 minus Willpower) Success Levels to end the effects of the spell.

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 2 for the sorcerer, Level 1 for the target.

Unlike most hyperspatial spells, this spell does not directly affect the physical universe, it affects the minds of intelligent beings. When it is cast, the sorcerer must choose both a clearly defined target and a specific desired action. The target must be physically indicated in some way, using a lock of hair, a photograph, a blood sample, or the target's physical presence. The caster can extend this to include all descendants or immediate blood relatives of the target, but

DHO HNA DIFFICULTY TABLE

SUCCESS LEVELS	SUBJECT
3	A present-day location the sorcerer has visited or previously observed.
4	A location in another time that the sorcerer has visited or previously observed.
+1	The sorcerer only has images of or artifacts from the location or time.
+2	The sorcerer only has descriptions or rumors about of the location or time.

the total number of targets affected at once cannot be larger than the sorcerer's levels in the Sorcery Quality.

The desired action taken must be stated in a direct and obvious fashion, but can include anything from the target moving to a specific distant land to seeking out information about a distant ancestor or learning about sorcery. This spell also automatically causes the target to gain Level 1 hyperspatial exposure. At this point, the target's newly opened mind becomes subject to half remembered dreams and subconscious thoughts about the intended action. This spell influences minor hyperspatial entities to regularly send thoughts about performing the desired action deep into the target's subconscious.

Targets may make one (undoubled) Willpower roll per week to resist this spell. A success means that the target continues to resist the action. However, even a single failure causes the target to pursue the action. If the target successfully makes a number of Success Levels equal to 10 minus their Willpower, then they have successfully resisted the spell. Success Levels gained on successive rolls are cumulative. A target with a Willpower of four who rolled four Success Levels to resist the spell one week, and two Success Levels to resist the spell the next week, would have successfully thrown off the effects of this spell.

If the spell would cause the target to do something they find morally reprehensible, extremely dangerous, or drastically at odds with their lifestyle, the target automatically resists its effect. If the desired action is something the target would have absolutely no interest in and which would be somewhat troublesome or seems extremely foolish, but not dangerous or reprehensible, then the target gains a +1 bonus to all rolls to resist the spell. For all other actions, the target gains no bonus to the roll to resist the spell.

The most insidious feature of the Compulsion spell is that the target thinks the compelled action is their own idea. They will find reasons to rationalize moving, leaving their job, beginning to seriously study sorcery, or whatever action they are compelled to perform, and if questioned about their actions, will defend their actions to their loved ones and co-workers.

Like any other hyperspatial spell, it can be undone using the Sign of Koth. However, this spell only removes the effects of the Compulsion spell, not any habits that the target may have built up. Once a target has begun performing or preparing the actions they have been ensorcelled into performing, they will have justified these actions to themselves and as a result will not automatically cease these actions just because the Compulsion spell ends. However, if this spell is dispelled, the course of action caused by

the spell becomes less important to the target, and if it obviously conflicts with the target's other emotional and practical imperatives, the target will soon cease pursuing these activities and will be somewhat puzzled by and upset with themselves about their previous actions. If the action was not something that the target found problematic or in conflict with the rest of their life, then once the spell ends, the action continues unless the target is convinced or magically compelled to cease this action. This spell is highly illegal unless used by the OPS or a law enforcement agency to prevent an exceedingly serious crime, like mass murder, starting an interspecies war, or summoning a Great Old One. Improper use of this spell almost always results in criminal charges being filed against the sorcerer.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

A device used to produce this spell is relatively large and usually consists of a box with a sensor plate for the sample from the target, and either a microphone for the sorcerer to speak into or a link-rig that goes on the sorcerer's head.

GATEWAY

Level 4

Duration: One hour per Success Level rolled – hyperspatial traces of the gateway are normally permanent unless removed.

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 3 to the sorcerer, Level 2 to anyone traveling through it. Transformational gateways provide a Level 3 exposure to anyone traveling through the gateway.

This spell allows the sorcerer to open a gateway through hyperspace, from one location in the physical world to another distant location in the physical world, through which people and objects can move. This spell makes a direct connection between two locations. With one step, it's possible to cross 1,000 kilometers or even 1,000 parsecs.

This connection is two-way, so anything on the other side can move though as well, and anyone who passes through the gateway can easily return as long as the gateway is maintained. The gateway appears to be a circle of shimmering swirl of multicolored light, through which observers can catch blurry and exceedingly brief glimpses of what lies on the other side of the gateway. The standard gateway is three meters in diameter, but by making one additional Success Level on the spell roll, the size of the gateway can be varied from one to five meters in diameter. Once created, the size of the gateway remains fixed until the spell ends or it is dispelled.

Using this spell requires the sorcerer to know the destination. Ways of knowing a destination include having vis-

ited it, looking at photographs or video images of the target, using an object known to come from the desired destination in the ritual, viewing the destination through a telescope or live video link, or watching the destination using the Dho Hna spell. See the Gateway Difficulty Table for details.

One major limitation of this spell is that it is not precise. The gateway always randomly appears within 500 meters of the desired location. The gateway never appears underground, except within a basement, cavern or other open area. Also, the sorcerer can also make certain that the gateway appears closely above a solid surface, if a solid surface is available. However, the sorcerer cannot control the exact location of the gateway. Using it to break into a building is effectively impossible. Also, the exact nature of the solid surface can vary greatly – characters walking through the gateway might find themselves inside an ancient ruin, standing on a window ledge 20 stories in the air, or in the middle of a busy street.

GATEWAY DIFFICULTY TABLE

SUCCESS LEVELS	SUBJECT
4	A location the sorcerer has visited or previously observed or that the sorcerer can now view in real-time images.
+1	The sorcerer only has images of or artifacts from the location.
+2	The sorcerer only has descriptions or rumors about the location.

An intrinsic property of all Gateway spells is that they allow the passage of solid objects, but uncontained liquids and gases cannot pass through them. As a result, opening a gateway onto the Moon does not cause the air in the room where the gateway is opened to escape to the Moon, just as opening a gateway deep underwater does not cause the room where the gateway is opened to swiftly fill with water. Solid objects and living beings can travel through a gateway as easily as they can step through a conventional doorway. However, once a person or object touches a gateway, they have begun traveling through and are almost instantly pulled through the gateway and deposited on the other side. This process is painless and harmless, though conditions elsewhere aren't always.

The primary risk in all gateway travel is that the traveler will step through into a hostile or instantly deadly environment. Whenever possible, anyone traveling through a gateway first sends some sort of probe. OPS probes contain sensors and simple methods of locomotion to send them back through the gateway. An examination of the

sensor recordings indicates if the prospective travelers will be safe on the other side of the gateway. Although it is possible to construct gateways from the physical world to one of the dimensions of hyperspace, traveling through a gateway to any but the most shallow zones of hyperspace kills living beings and instantly renders automated probes and similar devices useless. (For the effects of being in the lower levels, see the Invisibility spell, p. 155.)

More daring sorcerers can create gateways that automatically adapt travelers to conditions on the other side. These gateways are known as transformational gateways. Walking through a transformational gateway that leads deep under the ocean would result in the travelers sprouting gills and gaining other adaptations to life underwater, just as walking through a gateway to the moon results in a transformation into an exotic life form capable of long-term survival in vacuum. The general form of the traveler remains the same, so a human would remain a biped with arms, legs, and a head, but the transformations can be extremely radical. However, the individual is instantly transformed back to their original form once they travel through this or another transformational gateway back to their original location or a similar location. This transformation is both painless and instantaneous.

Transformational gateways are no more difficult to cast than the normal Gateway spell. However, they are rarely used, since the transformation induces an automatic Level 3 Hyperspatial Exposure in all travelers. Ordinary use of a Gateway spell is considered somewhat risky, because it induces an automatic Level 2 Hyperspatial Exposure in all travelers, but the risk of Level 3 exposure is sufficiently high that transformational gateways are only used in extreme circumstances. Every year a certain number of special permissions are made to allow scientists to perform extraordinary field research in areas where they could not normally survive.

All gateways leave an imprint on reality, allowing someone to use the Open Gateway spell to re-open the gateway, and lowering the difficulty of casting the Gateway spell from the same point to the same destination by two Levels. This dimensional weakness can remain for centuries, unless the gateway is closed using the Sign of Koth. Both ordinary and transformational gateways remain open for one hour per Success Level rolled, unless they are closed earlier.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

Technosorcerous gateways are always built in the form of advanced circuitry attached to or built into some sort of doorway. By carefully entering coordinates, this gateway can literally be made to open anywhere. However, the

calculations and adjustments take at least four minutes and require the same knowledge of the destination as all other versions of this spell. In addition, any time the device is moved to a new location, the destination must be reset and the calculations and adjustments redone. The smallest portable gateways can fold into a large briefcase.

REVERSE MUTATION

Level 5

Duration: Permanent

Hyperspatial Exposure: Level 2 for the sorcerer

This difficult and demanding spell allows the sorcerer to drain levels of Hyperspatial Exposure from a target, permanently reducing the target's level of Hyperspatial Exposure. This spell drains the energies out of the target and grounds them. It cannot remove either Level 1 Hyperspatial Exposure or Level 5 Hyperspatial Exposure but can reduce any exposure in between these two levels. Performing this spell automatically reduces the target's level of Hyperspatial Exposure by one Level (to a minimum of Level 1).

Repeated uses of this ritual can further reduce Hyperspatial Exposure. Also, any additional Success Levels beyond the five Success Levels needed to cast this spell further reduce the target's exposure. For example, if the sorcerer rolled seven Success Levels when casting this spell, they could reduce the target's level of Hyperspatial Exposure by up to three levels (to a minimum of one level). The target must be present during this ritual, and sorcerers can use this spell on themselves. This ritual cannot affect Hyperspatial Exposure caused by hyperspatial augmentations, unless those augmentations have already been removed.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

These devices are always large and bulky. Most often they resemble other large portable piece of electronic equipment. They contain several electrodes that the user must connect to the target. Due to the difficulty of grounding the hyperspatial energies, the target must be connected to the device for at least 10 minutes.

RULES FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL GATEWAYS

When a character steps through a transformational gateway, their body changes so they can automatically survive in the environment at their destination. Stepping through a gateway into an ocean would provide the character with gills as well as the type of skin and other adaptations suitable for a salt-water environment, while stepping through a gateway to the surface of a star would transform the character into a living, roughly humanoid blob of intelligent plasma. The appearance of transformed individuals changes drastically, but they can still use the same tools, if these tools can survive in the new environment.

Characters who step through to the surface of a star would find all their equipment instantly vaporized, an effect which makes scientific observations rather difficult. Assume that characters retain the same Attributes and skills. In general, the only changes are that characters gain +1 Strength for every 25% that the gravity is higher than Earth's. A character stepping through a transformational gateway onto a world with a gravity of 1.6 Gs would gain +2 Strength. Other than such changes in Strength, assume that characters transformed by transformational gateways are otherwise identical in their Attributes, Qualities, Skills, and Disadvantages, but generally appear to be hideously inhuman – typically being covered in slimy amphibian skin, an airtight jointed exoskeleton, or perhaps a scaled hide.

Sorcerers can create a transformational gateway that allows a human to “safely” visit the further dimensions of hyperspace. However, the transformation needed to allow a human to survive in any of these dimensions creates an automatic Level 5 Hyperspatial Exposure in anyone who travels through such a gateway. No roll is necessary or even possible; the individual becomes an insane inhuman monster with hyperspatial powers and permanently remains in this state. Human minds and bodies are insufficiently resilient to endure such a drastic transformation unchanged. The OPS also forbids remaining in a transformed form for more than 24 hours, since remaining in an inhuman form for too long causes the individual to begin thinking increasingly less like a human. Every 24 hours characters who have been transformed by a transformational gateway must make a Willpower (undoubled) roll, failure means the individual becomes as mentally inhuman as someone with Level 4 hyperspatial exposure and treats their new form as natural. These individuals will strongly resist any attempts to

SUMMON GREAT OLD ONE

Level 5

Duration: Instant: the spell instantly calls the entity into the physical world.

Hyperspatial Exposure: 3 for the sorcerer for casting the spell, and then 3 to 5 for being in the presence of a Great Old One. The longer the sorcerer is around the Great Old One, the higher the level of exposure becomes. Additionally, different versions of the spell may cause different manifestations of the Great Old One: some have a more limited ability to induce Hyperspatial Exposure, while others can reach Level 5.

Casting Time: Because of the great power involved in casting this spell, it requires one hour to cast using any form of ritual magic and 20 minutes to activate a technosorcerous device.

This spell summons a Great Old One. The sorcerer must learn a different version of this spell for each Great Old One. Versions exist for all known Great Old Ones, including those that humanity has never heard of, and for Great Old Ones with variable form, like Nyarlathotep, more than one summoning exists. Also, the effects of the Elder Weapon means that summoning Cthulhu would only cause this hideous being to remain on Earth for a number of minutes equal to the number of Success Levels rolled by the sorcerer. Summoning Hastur causes the sorcerer and anyone nearby to immediately begin to suffer from the Hastur infection. One spell for summoning Nyarlathotep causes this being to possess someone nearby and communicate with the sorcerer, which induces Level 4 Hyperspatial Exposure in the possessed individual and Level 3 in the sorcerer. Failing to cast Summon Great Old One correctly always results in the sorcerer's hideous death.

SAMPLE TECHNOSORCEROUS DEVICES

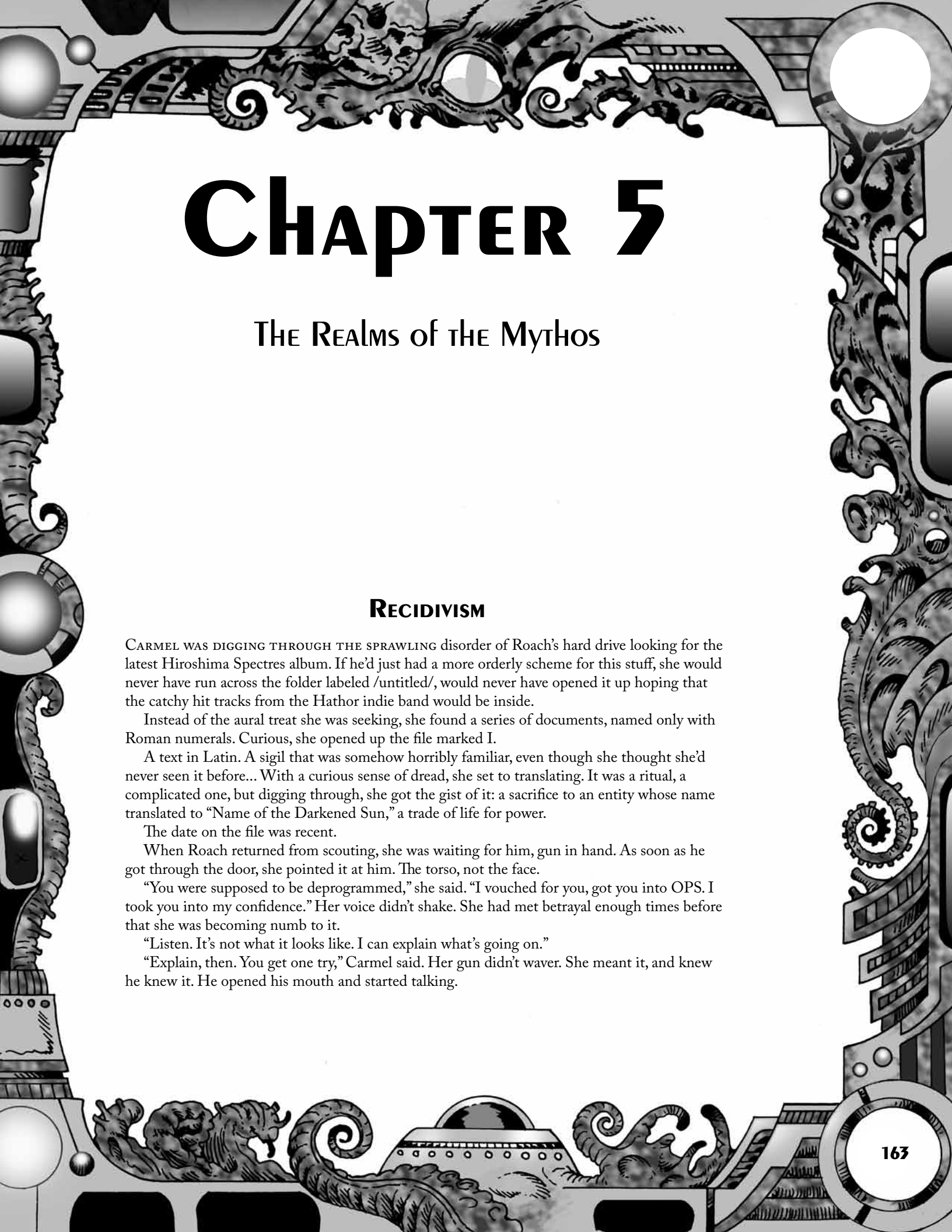
Human sorcerers cannot create technosorcerous devices to perform to duplicate this spell, but they can jury-rig such devices. However, alien devices exist.





I have whirled with the earth at the dawning,
 When the sky was a vaporous flame;
 I have seen the dark universe yawning
 Where the black planets roll without aim,
 Where they roll in their horror unheeded, without knowledge or lustre or name.
 I had drifted o'er seas without ending,
 Under sinister grey-clouded skies,
 That the many-forked lightning is rending,
 That resound with hysterical cries;
 With the moans of invisible daemons, that out of the green waters rise...
 I have scanned the vast ivy-clad palace,
 I have trod its untenanted hall,
 Where the moon rising up from the valleys
 Shows the tapestried things on the wall;
 Strange figures discordantly woven, that I cannot endure to recall.

- H. P. Lovecraft - *Nemesis*



Chapter 5

THE REALMS OF THE MYTHOS

RECIDIVISM

CARMEL WAS DIGGING THROUGH THE SPRAWLING disorder of Roach's hard drive looking for the latest Hiroshima Spectres album. If he'd just had a more orderly scheme for this stuff, she would never have run across the folder labeled /untitled/, would never have opened it up hoping that the catchy hit tracks from the Hathor indie band would be inside.

Instead of the aural treat she was seeking, she found a series of documents, named only with Roman numerals. Curious, she opened up the file marked I.

A text in Latin. A sigil that was somehow horribly familiar, even though she thought she'd never seen it before... With a curious sense of dread, she set to translating. It was a ritual, a complicated one, but digging through, she got the gist of it: a sacrifice to an entity whose name translated to "Name of the Darkened Sun," a trade of life for power.

The date on the file was recent.

When Roach returned from scouting, she was waiting for him, gun in hand. As soon as he got through the door, she pointed it at him. The torso, not the face.

"You were supposed to be deprogrammed," she said. "I vouched for you, got you into OPS. I took you into my confidence." Her voice didn't shake. She had met betrayal enough times before that she was becoming numb to it.

"Listen. It's not what it looks like. I can explain what's going on."

"Explain, then. You get one try," Carmel said. Her gun didn't waver. She meant it, and knew he knew it. He opened his mouth and started talking.

EXPLORING THE UNIVERSE

With telescopes, automated probes, sorcerous gateways, and dragonfly drive starships, humanity has explored their solar system and begun to learn the mysteries of the rest of the galaxy. By 2030, humanity has visited several dozen extra-solar planets and placed colonies on a number of worlds both inside and outside the solar system; the fledgling explorers have begun learning about these worlds in almost as much detail as they know their home-world Earth, although this section represents only a tiny fraction of the universe.

SPACECRAFT & SPACE TRAVEL

In the 1960s and 70s, spacecraft were powered by monatomic hydrogen rockets. By the early 1980s, spacecraft powered by hyperspatial velocity multiplication drives replaced these rockets. These vessels were much faster than the earlier rockets, but even the swiftest journey to Mars required almost a month, and a voyage to Jupiter still took at least six months. The stars remain closed to humanity.

In 1994, space travel was transformed by the development of the Gilman-Hawking drive, more popularly known as the dragonfly drive. Watching a dragonfly drive spacecraft take off from Earth is always an impressive sight. As soon as the drive turns on, the ship lifts slowly into the air, and anyone with one or more levels of Hyper-spatial Exposure sees the four long “wings” of hyperspatial energy that propel it through the cosmos.

The UN and the governments of various wealthy and powerful nations own the vast majority of the approximately 400 dragonfly drive vehicles currently in service. These dragonfly drive starships are the only space ships humanity currently possesses, and are used for everything from interstellar exploration, to cargo and passenger transport to the Moon and Mars. Currently, transnational corporations own 80 dragonfly drive vehicles and 14 are owned by very rich individuals.

The largest dragonfly drive vessels are the transports. Each transport is 200 meters long, 40 meters in diameter and can either carry 4,000 passengers stored in hibernation, as well as 30,000 cubic meters of equipment for a colony or almost a thousand tons of cargo to or from a colony or mining station. Transports have a crew of 20 people who remain awake for the entire journey, while any passengers must remain in hibernation. The smallest dragonfly drive vessel is the OPS explorer vessel – each spacecraft is 50 meters long and 10 meters in diameter. Each vessel has a crew of 4 to 6 OPS operatives and can land on any habitable world.

THE SOLAR SYSTEM

The solar system is a bleak and inhospitable place, and none of the other planets or moons are easily habitable by humanity. However, humanity has colonized both Luna and Mars and has discovered intelligent, if reclusive life

DRAGONFLY DRIVE OPERATIONAL DETAILS

This drive connects the structure of the ship to one of the more exotic levels of hyperspace, where inertia is reduced by a factor of ten thousand and hyperspatial currents move at up to 2,000 times the speed of light. If the surrounding gravity field is higher than 0.01 G (such as within 60,000 km of Earth), the drive only allows the spacecraft to move at speeds of up to 10 kilometers/sec. When used in gravity fields between 0.01 G and 0.0001 G; the drive has a maximum speed of 5,000 kilometers/sec. In zones with lower gravitation, the ship travels at the velocity of the hyperspatial currents, around 2,000 times the speed of light.

In the solar system, spacecraft must be halfway between the orbit of Mars and the asteroid belt to go faster than light. When the spacecraft passes into or out of a zone of gravitational attraction that limits its speed, the vessel's speed instantly adjusts to the new maximum velocity, and the passengers and crew feel the ship faintly shake. A craft leaving from Earth must spend almost 14 hours traveling at lower speed through the solar system, until it is far enough from the sun to go faster than light.

While they are under power, all dragonfly drive vessels possess both inertial damping and artificial gravity, which permit both high acceleration and rapid maneuvering without any discomfort for people on board the vessel. Everyone on a dragonfly drive starship feels a constant gravity that can be set anywhere from 0.01 to 5 Gs, but must be consistent throughout the starship. Both the artificial gravity and the inertial damping end the second the starship's engines are turned off. The nature of their drive also means that starships can land and take off at very slow velocity. When they land and take off, they look like huge weightless balloons, and do not require anything more than calm water or a mostly-flat and sturdy surface to land on.

on Jupiter's moon Europa. Since the late 1990s, most space exploration has focused on exploring worlds around other stars, but a few mysteries remain within the solar system.

LUNA

Population: 50,000

Luna was the first world visited by humanity, and has been inhabited for more than 40 years. Most professional space travelers now regard it as a backwater. The initial pull to visit Luna was the prospect of exploring alien ruins. The great race of Yith and the mi-go both spent time on Luna. The mi-go set up mining stations, and the Yithians extensively studied the moon shortly after they arrived in the solar system, building several research bases. However, the Yithians departed from Luna less than a million years after they arrived, and the mi-go soon extracted all of the minerals they considered valuable from the Lunar surface. As a result, both species have been away for over 200 million years, and have only left behind ruins stripped of most valuable equipment. By 2000, researchers had explored the known alien ruins on Luna, and only fragmentary remains of one additional mi-go mining station have been discovered since then. Despite their name, the moonbeasts have not apparently visited Luna in the waking world; their connection with the place is only in the dream realm.

Other than alien ruins, Luna has little to offer. While Mars is now partially terraformed and has native life, Luna is a small and barren world with rather hostile conditions and a high cost of living. The Lunar population has remained stable for the last decade, with approximately 50,000 people living there.

For some time, Luna was a center for mining materials used for the construction of space stations and space ships. This activity primarily centered on the side farthest from Earth. Low gravity and lack of atmosphere meant early dragonfly drive ships could land and take off from Luna with ease, carrying mined materials into orbit far more cheaply than from Earth or other large planets. However, refinements in the dragonfly drive that were completed in 1998 allowed dragonfly drive ships to more easily take off and land on larger worlds, reducing the economic edge Lunar mining used to provide. Lunar mining has become increasingly automated, now, and economy has gradually shifted from a production and commerce economy to a tourism economy: the human species still enjoys the novelty of visiting the moon. Inhabitants offer spacesuit tours outside the tunnels of the lunar arcologies to the major craters and dry seas.

Few people want to live there for long. Luna offers an isolated lifestyle, and those who live there must endure pricy air bills and a diet of packaged food, as well as a serious regimen of exercise to compensate for low gravity effects, but there are always romantics and individualists who find this a small price to pay. These intrepid types and those who have made their life's career on Luna are the longest-term population. Others come and go for business reasons – teachers visiting for a year or two, engineers working for a season before going home – and the “lifers” hold mild disdain for these itinerants, regarding them as little more than annoying tourists.

Two years' residence is required to become a voting citizen. The Lunar Living Party, or LLP, promotes steep taxes for the temporary residents, while the Lunar Development Party, or LDP, regards these travelers as economically important and encourages their activity.

MARS

Population: 530,000

Mars is the fourth most populous off Earth colony. It has also been the beneficiary of more than 30 years of terraforming. At the end of the 1990s, giant solar mirrors were deployed over both Martian poles. These mirrors caused the large subsurface deposits of dry ice located around both poles to sublime into the atmosphere. The result was a profound transformation. In less than 30 years, the average temperature on Mars went from -63°C to -21°C and the atmospheric pressure went from a trace to 22% that on Earth, a pressure equal to the pressure at an altitude of 11 kilometers on Earth. This terraforming effort has allowed humans to walk around on the surface of Mars wearing nothing more than an air mask and a warm coat, and near the equator, even the coat isn't necessary. Humans cannot survive on the Martian surface unprotected, but they can now live there with minimal equipment. The solar mirrors also melted the large deposits of subsurface water at the poles and now Mars has rivers and a few small and shallow seas.

COLONIES AND THE EASTERN EUROPEAN BRAIN TRUST

Currently, Mars it is now home to slightly more than half a million inhabitants, almost all of whom live in one of four domed cities. Although Mars is not at habitable as the various extrasolar colonies, it is far closer, and the fact that it is home to both enigmatic ruins and it is relatively easy to live on makes it a popular destination for people seeking a home off of Earth.

Mars also holds a peculiar distinction in the solar system: its largest domed city, Tsiolkovsk, named for the early 20th century Russian scientist Tsiolkovsky, is a nation in its own right. Almost 300,000 colonists live there. Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, an exodus of Eastern European scientists and independent thinkers came to Mars. A mixture of former Party members who had unsuccessfully tried to create change from within and younger people disillusioned with the new problems that plagued the former USSR, they founded a new country on the core principle of learning from mistakes. Their new system combines Trotskyist theories with recent understandings of human economic behavior, leading to collectivism without repressive policies. Computer systems derived from the 1970s Chilean Project Cybersyn perform economic planning. Tsiolkovsk is a strong participant in international relations and allows open travel.

NATIVE LIFE

The terraforming effort had an unexpected benefit; it revived the native Martian ecosystem. Mars was a harsh, dry, and nearly airless world for hundreds of millions of years and the heyday of Martian life was more than one billion years ago, but a few species survived in dormant form or living beneath the surface. Today primitive native plants have spread over much of the surface and a simple but sturdy ecosystem, including everything from microbes to creatures vaguely similar to arthropods. The largest Martian animals are no larger than a tangerine, but the warmer and wetter regions of Mars are now home to increasingly abundant native life.

Before humanity traveled to Mars, scientists believed the planet had become airless and lifeless naturally and gradually. However, exploration of the Martian ruins discovered in 1986 revealed that slightly more than a billion years ago, Mars was home to an intelligent, technologically advanced species. Because of its proximity to the asteroid belt, Mars was occasionally struck by small asteroids. As the Martians learned the secrets of hyperspatial technology, they attempted to construct a hyperspatial shield around their world to deflect asteroid impacts. Unfortunately, the shield failed in a drastic and horrible fashion. In an instant, the shield ripped away half of Mars' atmosphere and destroyed the planet's magnetic field. The swift drop in temperature caused by the loss of so much atmosphere caused increasing amounts of carbon dioxide to freeze out on the poles, while the loss of the its magnetic field allowed the solar wind to gradually rip away the remainder of the planet's atmosphere. Within three days of this event, more than 95% of the

Martians were dead, and Martian civilization ended.

The few remaining Martians survived in deep canyons where air pressure was slightly higher, but never managed to recover their numbers or the vast majority of their lost knowledge and technology. The Martians survived for almost another million years. However, the difficulties posed by their now harsh and deteriorating environment meant that their technology never again exceeded that of Earth's 19th century. For the last several hundred thousand years of their existence, their species consisted of less than a million primitive savages struggling to survive in an world that eventually had too little atmosphere to allow them, or any other large animals to survive.

Today, these ancient Martian ruins stand as another testament to how even the most advanced species can become extinct and how fragile planets are when faced with the most powerful technologies intelligent species can create. Investigating the Martian ruins is a major effort that has been going on since their first discovery. The remains of the Martians who survived the initial catastrophe are in relatively good condition despite their great age, and the final chapter of the Martian species is now relatively well understood. However, artifacts and records from before the catastrophe are far more fragmentary because so much was completely destroyed when this planet's atmosphere was ripped away and the planet was wracked by massive earthquakes.

EUROPA

Europa is the third world in the solar system known to harbor life, but very little is known about it. Europa is the sixth moon of Jupiter and is covered in a layer of ice more than a kilometer thick. Beneath this ice lies a salty ocean 95 kilometers deep. This ocean is home to life, including the enigmatic Europans. The first human-made robotic probe to land on Europa arrived in 1984, and used a nuclear battery to melt through the ice and deploy a submersible camera. Th rough this camera, humanity glimpsed an alien world filled with exotic life. However, the camera ceased working after only 2 days. When the first human ship landed on Europa in 1985, part of the psychic message they received as strict instructions not to send any more robot probes. Today, Europa remains almost as much of a mystery as it was in 1985. Since that time, there have been a few fleeting psychic contacts between passing human spaceships and the Europans, but humans are not welcome on Europa, and all such conversations are brief and enigmatic.

BEYOND THE SOLAR SYSTEM

The galaxy is filled with stars and planets orbit most of the stable and long-lived stars. However, to their surprise, the first extra-solar explorers found life to be considerably less diverse than expected. Continued exploration, combined with an examination of elder one records and communication with Yithians, revealed the truth. Worlds that independently evolve life are relatively rare. Planets capable of bearing various forms of life are relatively common, but less than one percent of these worlds evolve life on their own. Almost half of the known potentially habitable worlds harbor complex multi-cellular life, because various ancient species, including the elder ones, seeded much of the galaxy with life.

According to ancient elder one records, the discovery of a new world that evolved its own life was always a cause for celebration. Over a few hundred thousand years, elder one ecological engineers would gather biological samples from these naturally lively worlds and seed dozens of planets with life from each one. Earth was one of the rare worlds that naturally evolved life. The elder ones that initially colonized Earth aeons ago spread Earthly life to other worlds in the early days of their colonization, before they lost the ability to easily travel through space.

The result of this ancient seeding of life is that there are now at least several dozen worlds that were seeded with Earthly life between 550 million and 300 million years ago. These worlds offer environments that are almost always habitable to humanity. Humans can digest the proteins, metabolize the vitamins, and grow crops in the soil. Except on one world now inhabited by the descendants of ancient humans, none of the known worlds are home to any strictly pathogenic microbes – though they all have a good complement of the microbes necessary for soil quality and human life – so most now make excellent new homes for humanity.

Worlds inhabited by alien life are far more problematic, since humanity cannot digest alien food and human crops can only grow in alien soil that has been completely sterilized and extensively processed. Much alien life produces substances that are severe allergens or deadly toxins to Earthly life, so many alien worlds are only safe to visit in space suits. However, some of these worlds are less hostile. There is no alien life that humans can subsist off of, but there are three different alien ecologies that humans can live with: ecosystems of plant-animals like those found of Galatea I and Wuste, multi-bodied organisms like those found on Firefly and in a less closely

linked form on Pacifica, and the exotic and heavily engineered biology of Prodígio. A few forms of life on these worlds can be eaten by humans, but provides only empty calories, meaning that humans must grow their own food if they wish to survive on these worlds for more than a few weeks. Species like the elder ones could only colonize a multitude of alien worlds because they used advanced nanotechnology to enable their bodies to make use of alien nutrients and suppress all allergic reactions.

ALIEN INTELLIGENCES & HYPERSPACE

While almost half of all potentially habitable worlds contain life, intelligence only evolves on approximately 20 percent of life-bearing worlds, whether life has arisen there naturally or been seeded. The vast majority of intelligent species destroy themselves or transcend within a few thousand years of developing advanced technology. Humanity has found dozens of worlds across the galaxy where intelligent life once thrived. Some are ruined and lifeless husks; others were less badly damaged and recovered after a few million years; and a few are thriving worlds with empty, decaying cities and no hint of their inhabitants' fate. Humanity has found very few planets with intelligent life, and most contain only primitives. Except for the moonbeasts and the yaddithi, all of the star-faring intelligent species that humanity has contacted are tens of millions of years old.

Like Earth, most worlds that evolve intelligent life occur relatively near the system's star. The gravity and radiation of most stars render the region inhospitable to most hyperspatial life forms, and makes it more difficult for them to manifest. In this energy-rich environment, hyperspatial entities can only appear in these regions when certain celestial alignments occur. On these worlds, life is safe from the worst of these beings' depredations.

Like on Earth, on many habitable alien worlds, the nature of the native germ plasm also produces a neurological barrier to hyperspatial perceptions. With sufficient exposure to hyperspatial energies, life on these worlds can learn to perceive hyperspatial energies and entities, but most life forms that have no hyperspatial exposure cannot innately perceive hyperspace.

All technologically inclined species learn of hyperspace during their atomic age and many learn of it far sooner, as some of the more sensitive members experience the power and the dangers of using sorcery to ma-

nipulate hyperspace. Once a species learns of hyperspace, it can take one of several paths. A few turn their back entirely on all hyperspatial technologies except for research into ways to generate hyperspatial barriers to keep out the Great Old Ones and similar dangers. However, the vast majority of species find it difficult to turn down potential power provided by hyperspatial energies.

Careless species are swiftly destroyed. The galaxy is littered with ruined worlds that were devastated by the uncontrolled release of continent-shattering energies. Many species that survive their first experiments with hyperspace treat hyperspatial energies with great care and wish to have nothing to do with any hyperspatial technologies or entities. Others, like the great race of Yith or the elder ones, carefully regulate these energies: they use them for a few important purposes like psychic time travel or the ability to fly through space, but strictly avoid widespread use of these technologies.

Some species, like the mi-go, take a stranger path. They not only create devices to harness the energies of hyperspace, they also modify their bodies to perpetually interact with hyperspace. Species like the flying polyps go even further and learn to partially transfer their minds and bodies into hyperspace. Doing this renders them far tougher and long-lived than ordinary physical life forms. Such beings also gain exceptionally acute hyperspatial perceptions and are able to understand hyperspace and its inhabitants in a way impossible for beings that exist purely in the physical world.

This connection to hyperspace also renders such beings immune to all of the effects of Hyperspatial Exposure. Stories of the origins of Cthulhu and the other Great Old Ones state that they were once ordinary physical beings who effectively transcended the material world to live in hyperspace. The mi-go are attempting to replicate this transformation, so far without success. The flying polyps attempted to become Great Old Ones, but even their best efforts did not enable them to fully transcend the physical world.

DEEP TIME AND THE FATE OF INTELLIGENT SPECIES

From a human perspective, much of the history of the galaxy seems quite strange. Modern human civilization is less than 6,000 years old and the human species itself no more than a quarter of a million years old, yet there are records of intelligent species that have persisted for hundreds of millions or even billions of years. Part of

this disparity is due to the fact that human civilization is actually far older than commonly known. The previous civilization from the Thurian Age was destroyed by the most recent ice age, which erased all obvious traces of its existence. Similarly, many other species have gone through periods of advanced civilization followed by eras of civilization collapse due to war, natural disasters, or equally severe technological disasters. These cycles of progress and collapse can continue almost indefinitely.

The extreme longevity of some alien civilizations is in part due to the fact that, like the elder ones, the aliens have used genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and other advanced technologies to alter their bodies into ageless forms that are exceedingly difficult to kill. As a result, individuals live for many thousands or tens of thousands of years, which provides a strong stabilizing force for any civilization. A species may not change much over the course of half a million years when this is a member's average lifespan. However, the full truth about the history of galactic civilization is somewhat more complex. Intelligent life that survives to develop advanced technology can have one of four possible fates.

EXTINCTION

The unfortunate fact about most species that manage to develop advanced technology is that most become extinct within 10 thousand years of developing these technologies. Some are victims of alien attack or are destroyed by invaders from hyperspace, others fall victim to natural disasters, but the majority destroy themselves through war or technological accident, typically involving some form of hyperspatial technology. Some species manage to barely survive these catastrophes and eventually regain their lost technology and civilization, at which point the reborn civilization again faces the same four options.

Many intelligent species have evolved in the galaxy, but the majority are now extinct. Everywhere in the galaxy that human explorers travel, they discover both living worlds that once housed long extinct civilizations and worlds blasted and ruined by final disasters that ended most or all planetary life. Planets that used to be verdant living worlds are now airless husks, or rings of shattered fragments. On the least damaged, life experienced massive extinctions and took tens of millions of years to recover.

TRANSCENDENCE

Almost all of those species that do not destroy themselves vanish within 10 thousand years of developing advanced technology. Their exact fate is unknown and perhaps un-

knowable to species that have not also made this step. Most researchers believe that these species transfer their consciousness into hyperspace, where they become immortal, hyper-intelligent beings. A few scholars believe that the entire species either becomes part of an existing Other God or creates a new such being, but this theory is no more than conjecture.

Regardless of their exact fate, the species never again has contact with the physical world, and all information about this transcendence asserts that it is a wondrous transformation. Unfortunately, this process of transcendence is quite difficult and often very risky. As a result, numerous species have destroyed themselves making this attempt. Those that succeed usually leave behind worlds that are completely intact, but devoid of all intelligent life. More than 95% of all intelligent species follow one of the two above paths – extinction or transcendence, and humanity has discovered dozens of ruined worlds and a smaller number of empty ones. However, there are two other, less common options.

STASIS

Eventually, every species that does not transcend reaches the end of the science and technology their minds can comprehend. They create no important new breakthroughs. The species may continue to gather more data and learn more of the history of the universe and the beings that live within it, but long lifespans and modified bodies have slowed the evolution of their intelligence beyond the point where their brains and senses can accommodate new discoveries and technologies.

The severity of this limitation varies from one species to another, and is usually encountered within 5,000 years of the species developing advanced technology. At this point, the only paths to new knowledge and new technology involve either transcendence or making use of science and technologies of aliens with different cognitive limitations. This second approach is fraught with risk because any alien science and technology that can help a static species' extend its capabilities is by its nature beyond the comprehension of the species that borrows or steals it. Attempting to work with alien science or technology has resulted in the extinction of quite a number of intelligent species. However, it has also helped a few species transcend.

Some species survive, but do not transcend, either because they do not wish to take the risks involved, or because they lack the ability or desire to transcend. The reasons are not known, but one radical theory claims that contact with the legendary Great Old One Nyarlathotep

is in some way necessary for a species to transcend. The elder ones are a perfect example of beings that lacked the will to transcend, while the yaddithi are learning that despite their best efforts, they may be incapable of transcending without help.

Most species that do not transcend learn to modify their bodies to be exceedingly durable and enduring, becoming nearly immortal. This personal immortality almost always results in the species and their civilization also becoming extremely long-lived. Many species that endure in stasis avoid adopting or studying hyperspatial technology or science because of its dangers. Species like the elder ones or the mi-go endured for hundreds of millions of years by honing their bodies and their civilizations to a point of inherent stability. However, the price for this stability is quite literally stasis.

Art styles and popular tastes may change slightly, but the species as a whole changes very little, either mentally or physically. A species unwilling or unable to transcend faces two possibilities: survival or extinction. As a result, static species usually become exceptionally conservative. They typically limit their biological variability. Members of the species who alter their bodies or minds outside of accepted limits are either stopped, destroyed, or exiled. Such exiles might transcend or self-annihilate, but the bulk of the species can persist for a billion or more years. The great race of Yith is a unique case: while generally a static species, they avoid either complete stasis or too-rapid change by transferring their consciousnesses into a series of drastically different alien bodies, and this controlled infusion of new information has kept them vital for almost one billion years.

Few species reach stasis, and fewer still maintain it for more than a million years, but those that do usually become important species in the galaxy simply by virtue of their great age, the knowledge they have gathered, and the time they have had to explore and colonize large portions of the galaxy. No species lasts forever. The last remnants of the elder ones, one of the most ancient physical species, are dwindling and likely to vanish within another hundred million years.

PARTIAL TRANSCENDENCE

This option is by far the rarest and also the most terrible. In their effort to transfer themselves into hyperspace, the species partially transcends, becoming practically immortal and far more powerful, both individually and collectively, than they previously were. However, instead of abandoning the physical universe and dwelling solely in the exotic dimensions of hyperspace, the species maintains a form of

WORLD CATEGORIES

All of the following worlds are divided into one of four categories:

Earthlike: These worlds are home to life derived from Earth. The air and water are safe for humans, humans can eat most plants and animals and survive indefinitely on them. In addition, the life follows a generally Earthly body plan, with green plants, arthropods, and in most cases, something like vertebrate life. Almost all of these planets have been isolated for at least 300 million years, so the life present on these worlds rarely resembles modern Earthly life, but it all looks like life that could have evolved on Earth.

Safe: These worlds are home to alien life not intrinsically deadly to humanity. The life on these worlds is profoundly alien, and may consist of entities with no earthly analogs, like mobile carnivorous fungus-like creatures or oceans that are actually huge gelatinous colonies of bacteria-like organisms. Humans can walk around on these worlds without space suits, but cannot eat the food or grow crops in the soil without sterilizing it.

Hostile Biology: The life on these worlds is not merely alien; it is antithetical to human life. These worlds have gravity, air pressure, and temperature that are all survivable for humanity, and their air contains sufficient oxygen to breathe, but the native biology renders these worlds deadly. Local life forms may excrete deadly toxins on their skin, they might exhale trace amounts of a compound that acts like nerve gas on humans, or perhaps their proteins are sufficiently incompatible that breathing in air that contains pollen, tiny scavengers that live on dust, and other biological detritus triggers a life-threatening allergic reaction in humans. Humans can safely visit these worlds if they remain in space suits and can even breathe the air and drink the water if they wear a suit equipped with specially designed air and water filters. If exposed to the local environment without such a suit, humans die in no more than several hours, and sometimes in a few minutes, depending upon the exact nature of the world.

Hostile Environment: Any world that falls outside the safe range for temperature, radiation, atmospheric pressure, or atmospheric composition is considered a hostile environment. Gas giants, worlds with little or no atmosphere, and both roastingly hot and freezingly cold worlds are all hostile environments. All of the other planets in the solar system are considered hostile environments. In general, humans without space suits die within a minute or two on these planets.

limited connection to the physical universe. No one knows if some species attempt to retain their connections to the physical while transcending, or if partial transcendence is always the result of a failed attempt at transcendence. Regardless of the answer, partial transcendence always carries a price. The species becomes dependent upon the physical world and its inhabitants. Most of these species must feed upon the psychic energy of physical beings to survive. A few feed solely upon non-sentient creatures, but the vast majority must feed upon the psychic energies of intelligent beings.

The degree and details of this transcendence varies from one species to another. Some species, like the flying polyps, have just barely transcended. They have few permanent connections to hyperspace and their bodies remain mostly part of the physical world. As a result, they can subsist upon simple minds and consume much of their energy in a more conventional fashion. However, greater degrees of transcendence are more common.

The few humans who know of these partially transcended beings call them the Great Old Ones. Such species or entities can persist for many billions of years, since the individual members are very difficult to destroy and can only die if they are deliberately destroyed by energies that are almost impossible for a non-transcended species to generate or understand. If placed in a sufficiently hostile environment or deprived of food, members of a partially transcended species suffer pain and hunger, but will not die. At most, they eventually shift mostly into the furthest depths of hyperspace and enter a near-timeless sort of hibernation that automatically ends when psychic nourishment again becomes available.

While these species are always brilliant and capable of thoughts and perceptions impossible to non-transcendent beings, they are also changeless. Partially transcended beings seem incapable of altering their fundamental nature, and none of them have ever been known to fully transcend.

Trapped between states of being, these species haunt the galaxy for hundreds of millions of years. They become each others' enemies because they compete for resources. Universally, they consider physical beings to be either food, vermin, or potential sources of amusement. While some primitive or power-hungry non-transcendent species may worship partially transcendent beings, hoping for power in return, more advanced and sensible non-transcendent species do their best to either avoid or repel partially transcended beings they encounter because they are vastly powerful and capable of wiping out entire civilizations through their psychic feeding.

Some partially transcendent species are interested in

the physical universe as more than just a source of food. The worst seek to conquer worlds, build cities, or enslave entire species of physical beings. The Cthulhoids are an example of this sort of species. Other partially transcendent beings have strange and indirect interactions with the physical world. They feed upon psychic energies while only ever appearing in ways that cause those who encounter them to have no clue that they are intelligent or even beings. The psychic infection known as Hastur is an example of this type of exotic being.

MAJOR EXTRA-SOLAR WORLDS

Six of the following seven worlds are all home to large human colonies and the seventh contains several large research bases. OPS explorers have extensively surveyed all of these worlds and certified them as safe for colonization or extensive scientific and commercial research. However, humanity has been exploring the stars for less than 40 years, so both the OPS and most sensible colonists realize that there may be many surprises waiting on even the oldest and most placid-seeming colony worlds.

ERIDANOS

Type: Habitable in the trenches, Hostile Environment on the surface.

Gravity: 0.91 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, 0.18 atm (surface) 0.45 to 0.90 atm in the deeper trenches

Water: 25% of the surface is covered with water, most of this water is ice.

Population: 2.8 million

Colonized: 2002

First discovered in 1999, Eridanos, casually called "Eri", is a large, dry, rocky world with a thin atmosphere and deep canyons. The surface of Eridanos is an enormous, cold desert: far from inviting. The air pressure is less than one fifth of Earth's, and the landscape is bleak, dry and cold. There is little liquid water, and even the ice caps are relatively small. Life survives here, but only slow-moving animals and hardy plants make their home in this harsh environment. The air pressure on the surface is only 18% that of Earth, which is equal to the air pressure almost 13 kilometers above Earth's surface. Humans require breathing masks to survive on the surface.

Approximately 600 million years ago the elder ones or some other species seeded Eridanos with Earthly life. At this time, this world had an atmosphere almost as thick as Earth's and water covered almost two thirds of the surface. This all changed approximately 110 million years

ago, when some ancient catastrophe ripped away most of the planet's atmosphere and three quarters of its water. The removal of the majority of Eridanos' oceans meant that what little atmosphere remained was thicker in the ocean bottom, three kilometers below the previous sea level. Eridanos' ocean bottoms cracked and buckled in a reaction to the sudden removal of the billions of tons of water that had previously occupied this planet's ocean basins. Within 50,000 years slightly over one eighth of this world's surface was covered with a network of deep rifts and trenches. Most of these cracks connect with at least a few other rifts, but some are entirely isolated.

The habitable portions of Eridanos consist of a multitude of deep, lush canyons, surrounded by the planet's bleak and barren surface. There are many hundreds of these canyons, many of which are as much as 13 kilometers (eight miles) deep and up to 80 kilometers (50 miles) wide. In these trenches, Eridanos' atmosphere is thick enough for humans to breathe without respirator masks. 6 km below the surface, the air is a fraction more than half the thickness of Earth's and by 13 km below Eridanos' surface, air pressure has risen to 90% of Earth's. Everyone can easily tolerate the deeper portions of Eridanos' trenches and most can adapt to life as high as 6 km below Eridanos' surface, whether naturally or by the use of simple medical adaptations to increase their ability to oxygenate their blood. With the most extensive augmentations, some people can comfortably live even higher, up to 3 km below the surface. Here, air pressure is only 30% of Earth normal, and tiny outposts inhabited by modified outsider types and religious and criminal organizations live in shallow canyons accessible to no one else.

The bottoms of Eridanos' many trenches are filled with rivers, or in the case of the largest canyons, long narrow seas. The early explorers named Eridanos after a Greek mythological river for this reason. Around half of the planet's water is in these rivers and oceans, while most of the rest lies frozen in the large northern polar ice cap. This ice cap partially melts and sublimates in the spring and summer months causing seasonal rains and flooding. Flooding can be quite severe in a few of the steeper rift valleys; the depth of an ocean can increase by as much as a half-kilometer from in a matter of weeks. In time, these narrow oceans evaporate to their previous depth and the whole cycle begins again. While the thicker atmosphere and abundant water of the various rifts has encouraged life to grow and flourish, the yearly floods, and occasional earthquakes have made even these environments somewhat treacherous. Visitors to Eridanos are warned to always consult their

mobiles when venturing into uninhabited areas and keep track of the local weather warnings.

NATIVE LIFE

The disaster radically transformed life on Eridanos. The vast majority of life was unable to adapt to the harsh conditions on the surface, and either died or retreated into the newly exposed rift valleys where the atmosphere was thick enough to support them. A group of four-legged desert-dwelling warm-blooded vertebrates had previously evolved from fish with a bony shell and kept this shell when they ventured out on land. Their shells helped protect them from heat and moisture loss. As the world recovered these creatures, called derms, adapted and thrived in the new thinner, drier atmosphere. Within 30 million years derms were the dominant animals both on the surface and in the vast network of rift valleys.

A few of the derms evolved a very tough and airtight skin. These adaptations allowed them to more easily survive periods of drought as well as allowing them to venture into Eridanos' barren, harsh, surface for short periods. These creatures also have highly efficient respiratory and circulatory systems, similar to those of whales, effectively providing them with a biological space suit. Several dozen species of derms can remain on the surface for hours or even days. This ability to live on the surface for a short period of time has allowed many derms to range more widely for food than their competitors as well as allowing them to travel between nearby rifts.

Eridanos' surface is largely barren, with most of the land covered in lichens and sparse vegetation similar to desert plants like sagebrush and tumbleweed. In this harsh environment, the most common life forms are quite small. Almost all life on the surface consists of crea-

tures related to insects and spider that move slowly and feed upon the plants. Few creatures living on the surface are larger than a housecat. However, the surface is home to a few large animals, all of which are derms that alternate between life on the surface and life in the rift valleys. The most dangerous and famous is the spitting python, an armored serpent-like creature that averages nine meters long. This creature moves slowly in an almost torpid state until it detects prey with its keen smell and vibration sense. It can move quite swiftly when it senses prey and can also spit a paralytic neurotoxin up to five meters. It the surface's most formidable predator.

Beneath the surface desert, the many rifts are veritable jungles of life. The canyons have denser atmosphere, abundant water, and lush and verdant plant-life. In their lowest reaches, almost all of the rifts support an environment similar to a tropical jungle or a temperate rain forest, depending on the latitude. Thick vegetation, abundant animal life and constant damp are all hallmarks of the Eridanos rifts. Higher up the rifts become more like meadow, savanna, and open forest.

THE COLONY

Eridanos was the first world opened for colonization, and has been home to human colonies since 2002. Most of the population lives in the rift valleys. The only settlements on the surface are pressurized research or mining stations. However, the surface remains an ever-present feature of life on Eridanos.

Today, Eri has a population of close to three million people. Colonists come to Eridanos because of how lush and fertile the various rift valleys are, and also for the spectacular scenery. Also, it is an ideal world for multinational colonization, since each nation can colonize a

Name: Spitting Python

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Constitution 4, Intelligence 1, Perception 5, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 14, Combat 14, Brains 8

Life Points: 52

Speed: 8

Special Abilities: Infrared Vision, Natural Armor 6, Poison

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	14	11	Slash/Stab + Strength 4 poison
Dodge	14	—	Defense action
Spit Poison	12	—	Strength 4 poison, 5 meter range

separate set of linked rift valleys. Currently, Eridanos has colonies settled by the US and China, each of which is home to almost a million colonists, as well as an EU colony of 450,000, a Brazilian colony of 60,000 and a large Israeli colony, Emek Emet - "the valley of truth" - home to around 500,000 colonists. The US colony is approximately equally composed of immigrants from the US and from Mexico and South and Central America.

The world's dense core and unusual geological history has provided it with an abundance of mineral resources, including a profusion of heavy elements like gold, iridium, and platinum, as well as large concentrations of uranium and other radioactive elements. The surface life has proven fascinating to biologists, as well as a source for various unusual and medically useful biological compounds. Also, several plants growing in the deep rift valleys have become popular culinary spices on Earth.

Most cities on Eri are built along the walls of the deeper rift valleys and are heavily vertical, with large elevators every few blocks. The oldest and largest US city, Jefferson, is built in a narrow, temperate rift valley that is 12 kilometers deep. Jefferson is located 11 kilometers below the old sea level, where the air pressure is 0.85 atmospheres. Here, the valley is almost 4 km across. Jefferson is home to more than half a million inhabitants and is built on both sides of the rift valley. Originally, three bridges built at different altitudes connected the two sides of the city, but these bridges have expanded into platforms that are each more than half a mile wide and contain an abundance of shops and open public spaces.

ERIDANOS' SECRETS

Because Eridanos' surface is habitable to the mi-go, a group of renegade mi-go who wish to engage in trade outside the restrictions of the treaty their species has with humanity have recently constructed a small and well concealed base and begin trading with US miners who travel to the surface. These mi-go specialize in selling various new and untested biological augmentations, in return for elder one or Yithian artifacts smuggled from Earth, other artifacts from other worlds, and some of the rarer biological materials gathered from the deepest portions of various rift valleys.

Miners exploring the surface also recently uncovered evidence of an ancient intelligent civilization that predates the catastrophe that ripped away Eridanos' atmosphere. This species seems to have attained a very high level of technology and was utterly destroyed by the catastrophe. Further explorations to discover more about this civilization have just begun. Most archeolo-

gists believe that the inhabitants of Eridanos destroyed their world during a civil war. However, the truth is that the world was destroyed in a war between the inhabitants and a hyperspatial Great Old One that attempted to conquer and feed on this planet.

One of the artifacts that has been recovered is a plate of some exceptionally hard silvery green material engraved with unknown symbols. Several individuals who have examined this plate have come down with the beginnings of the Hastur psychic infection. Hastur cults have previously been unknown on Eridanos, but several are now in the process of forming.

WEI-MING

Type: Habitable

Gravity: 1.1 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, 1.1 atm

Water: 49% of the surface is covered with water

Population: 1.4 million

Colonized: 2006

Wei-Ming was seeded with Earth-derived life half a billion years ago. Life evolved and thrived on this relatively dry world. By 400,000 years ago a sentient species had evolved on Wei-Ming. Like most of the life on this world, the Mingans were six-limbed vertebrates covered with large bony plates and long silky fur. 19,000 years ago the Mingans were a technically advanced culture who had explored their solar system and were starting to explore the stars beyond their world. 16,000 years ago, the Mingans destroyed themselves in several disastrous wars that used both anti-matter and hyperspatial weapons. In the end, all inhabited areas of Wei-Ming were reduced to huge regions of molten glass and the few Mingans who survived this holocaust died from radiation and the resulting climatic catastrophe as the dust raised from the various blasts obscured the sun for many decades. Over the next several thousand years, the ecosystem on Wei-Ming largely recovered from this disaster, but the Mingans were extinct within a century of their final war.

In 2005, a Chinese expedition arrived in the Wei-Ming system. The crew of the ship saw evidence of the ancient war from orbit. They could also tell that this war was far more recent than most of the other ruined worlds they'd encountered and they hoped to find valuable alien artifacts. This hope was soon realized. Over the next few years, several archeological teams were sent to learn more about the fate of the Mingans, and to uncover any useful artifacts they may have left behind. In the 25 years since the Chinese first came to Wei-Ming a number of important discover-

ies have been made, including one 18 years ago that led to the development of significantly improved superconducting batteries and other discoveries that have improved the speed and efficiency of dragonfly-drive starships.

The war that destroyed the Mingans left massive scars that are even visible from orbit. Almost one quarter of the land area of Wei-Ming is made up of swaths of blackened glass. Although this war occurred 16,000 years ago, only a few primitive plants and small animals have managed to re-colonize the edges of these glassy burned-off areas. The only things which disturb the terrain of these blasted plains are partially fused mountains and the melted remains of the Mingans' nearly indestructible metallo-plastic buildings. However, while much of the land area of the world was converted to slag, life flourishes on the rest. Almost half the remaining habitable land area of Wei-Ming consists of thick, 100 meter tall, jungle. These jungles are deep, primeval rain forests, which are difficult to explore and yield up their secrets quite slowly.

Between the jungles and the glassy burnt off areas, much of the land is scrub, savannah and desert. From orbit Wei-Ming is a four colored world, the blue of oceans, the black of the blasted areas, the green jungles and the tan and khaki of savannah and desert. Geologists and biologists believe that Wei-Ming used to have a much greater degree of ecological diversity, but the war turned everything that wasn't jungle into desert, scrub, or savannah.

Before the last Mingan war, Wei-Ming is believed to have been a rather mild and temperate planet, which even then contained large jungles. The Mingan weather is anything but mild today. The thick atmosphere and the climactic disturbance produced by the burned-off areas gives rise to enormous thunderstorms and high winds. Every year, Wei-Ming experiences several thunderstorms that deliver over 10 cm of rain in a single hour. The dense jungle deflects and channels these torrential rains. However, in the scrub, savannah, and desert regions the danger of flash floods is very real.

THE COLONY

Since its life originally came from Earth, humans can eat most animals and plants on Wei-Ming and while a quarter of the world is a blasted ruin, any radioactivity faded long ago and some of the jungle plants produce edible and nutritious fruits. Various grains grow well on the more fertile portions of the savannah. While originally settled to investigate the Mingan ruins in more detail, Wei-Ming has become a popular colony world with Chinese immigrants. Today, it is home to a Chinese colony with more than one million settlers, including districts

of immigrants from other Asian nations. It also hosts archeological research stations run by both the EU and the US and a small permanent OPS base trusted with examining new artifacts and discoveries.

NATIVE LIFE

Although derived from Earthly life, Wei-Ming's life took a different path. Most larger life forms on Wei-Ming are massive and heavily built. Most Mingan life is also armored. Mingan vertebrates possess six limbs whose bodies and heads are covered with inter-locking bony plates and whose limbs are covered in silky, often long, fur. Most animals either walk on six limbs, or they walk on four limbs and their remaining pair of limbs have been transformed to serve some specialized purpose like feeding or defense.

Slashers are a typical, mid-sized carnivore that hunt in the jungles and on the edges of the savannah. They weigh around 100 kg, stand over one meter at the shoulder and vaguely resemble armor-bodied bears with an extra pair of slender, muscular, limbs each ending in a single large curved claw. They are free to use their four legs for running and climbing, while the slashing limbs serve to catch and kill prey. Normally, the Slashers keep their hunting limbs tucked up against their bodies. When these limbs are extended, they are generally stalking their prey. These and other similar life forms are quite willing to hunt human prey and everyone who ventures into the jungles of Wei-Ming does so armed.

However, not all Mingan life is quite so dangerous. The closest living relative of the extinct Mingans is the local equivalent of a monkey known as a Hanu, called for the noise it makes when excited. The Hanu is a small creature weighing around 30 lb. Its head and body form a smooth, immobile, bony oval, with two large eyes. The Hanu has six long, furry, limbs, four of which are adapted for climbing and limited manipulation, while the front two have six long, mutually opposable fingers set radially around a central palm. Hanu are as bright as chimpanzees, and are calm and good-natured unless threatened or harmed. There is evidence that the Mingans kept them as either pets or servants and some colonists keep them as pets today.

THE MINGANS

Mingans evolved from arboreal ancestors like the Hanu and looked similar, except archaeological evidence shows that they weighed between 50 and 80 kilograms (110 to 170 lb) and stood a little over one meter high at the shoulder. Images of the Mingans show elaborate coloring and braiding of this fur in high-status Mingans. Mingan culture seems to have been highly stratified into

three large castes which were each responsible for various tasks. There do not appear to have been any physical differences between the castes. Casting for life occurred when the individual was a young adult and was based on a complex series of rituals and aptitude tests.

The details of what each caste did remain unclear. There was a notable amount of mobility within a given caste, and an unbreakable taboo against moving between castes. Mingan life was clearly delineated along the lines of these three castes, with different devices and types of dwellings being used by members of each caste. The castes were independent and rather isolated from each other. Social status was measured inside a class rather than between classes. The castes seem to have only interacted while working, and been socially isolated from one another, with different sections of a city being given over to each caste.

There are no intact Mingan cities; however, several of their smaller settlements escaped becoming plains of glassy slag. While all of these settlements endured both minor bombing and 16,000 years of age, Mingan architecture was made of advanced plastic-metal composites, far more durable than any material that can be created by humanity. A number of Mingan devices also still work. However, many operate according to principles far outside the range of existing science. So far, attempts to duplicate or understand these devices have failed. Some of most impressive devices that have not been locked away by either the Chinese government or the OPS are now on exhibit in at the local archeological institute museum.

THREE OF THE MOST PROMINENT EXHIBITS ARE:

- A rounded cube with a removable lid. When the lid is closed time passes exactly $1/144$ th as fast inside the box as outside of it.
- A small telescope-like object that separates into two parts. Looking through the lower section lets a viewer see through the upper section, as long as the two sections are less than 170,000,000 km apart. The strangest thing about this device is that light passes from the upper section to the lower section instantaneously, as long as the pieces are less than three light-minutes apart.
- A small black cylinder large enough to fit comfortably in two hands. Anything that is non-living and is small enough to fit inside it, such as a pen or a wristwatch, may be pushed gently into the top surface of the cylinder. The cylinder gains neither weight nor inertia and half a cubic meter worth of objects can fit inside.

Attempting to overfill the cylinder or pressing the blue symbol on the side twice causes all stored items to seemingly fall through the bottom on the cylinder. When examined with various technologies, including x-ray scans, the cylinder always appears solid and devoid of internal structure.

HATHOR

Type: Habitable

Gravity: 0.70 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, 1.2 atm

Water: 80% of the surface is covered with water.

Population: 1.3 million

Colonized: 2007

Hathor is smaller than Earth, with a lower surface gravity and a significantly smaller land area. In most other ways, Hathor is exceedingly earth-like. The air and water are both safe and healthy for humans and except in the polar regions temperatures are well with most people's comfort range. Hathor is a somewhat cooler world than Earth. Temperatures almost never rise above 90 F, even at the equator. However, the lack of polar continents serves to moderate the climate, and so while the continents closer to the poles have cold winters, the temperatures rarely become as cold as similar latitudes on Earth.

Most of the land area of this world consists of numerous islands and small continents. The six equatorial and temperate continents are all quite lush and habitable, hence the planet's naming after an ancient Egyptian goddess of nourishment and joy. The oceans are full of life and are all quite shallow, with an average depth of little over a kilometer. The only true environmental dangers on Hathor are hurricanes and volcanism. The large ocean area and the slightly higher air pressure combine to make this world's hurricanes significantly more powerful than Earth's. However, improved weather forecasting helps reduce the impact of these storms. Hathor is also slightly more tectonically active than Earth. Geological and biological evidence suggests that continental drift is almost twice as fast as on Earth, and that the various small and mid-sized continents have been in contact with each other regularly over the last 100 million years. So far, all human colonies have been built well away from known fault lines.

NATIVE LIFE

Life is abundant on Hathor, but it is not quite as diverse as life on Earth, because seed life was only introduced from Earth 300 million years ago. The vertebrates on Hathor are four-limbed and covered by smooth, slightly

rubbery, skin, not unlike the skin of a dolphin or whale. On land-dwelling species, this skin has toughened so that it no longer needs to remain wet and is covered by a short, downy coat of brightly colored plush fur for insulation and display. Flyers on Hathor use wings made from flaps of skin, like bats and pterosaurs. Feathers and long fur never evolved on this world.

Much land-dwelling life on Hathor is either amphibious or able to fly, and some of it can exist equally easily in the air, on land, and in the oceans. Some species of triphibian creatures, including the air shark, begin life as ocean-dwellers and mature into pteranodon-like fliers with long teeth and large mouths. They live on land when they are not in the air. Wyverns are a species of huge 120 kg omnivorous flyers, similar in appearance of huge, smooth-skinned bats with long muscular tails. Using a mixture of selective breeding and a small amount of genetic engineering to help speed the taming process, in the last 25 years, they have been sufficiently domesticated to serve as flying mounts for individuals who are skilled at working with them.

This world's low gravity also means that many life forms are bipedal and most have a long, attenuated look. The plants are similarly tall; the local equivalent of trees look somewhat like enormous, slender stalks of broccoli and often grow more than 60 meters tall, with the tallest species being almost 150 meters tall. The wood of many of these trees is moderately hard and comes in a wide variety of colors and grain patterns. This wood, as well as the large bamboo-like reeds which grow close to rivers and lakes served the inhabitants as an important building material and are also a major luxury export.

Large forests cover the interior of most continents. This world's generally wet and rainy climate means that most of these forests are similar to temperate and sub-tropical rain forests. Inside these forests, small rivers cross the landscape and moss-like plants hang from

the trees. The coastal regions, as well as areas located on the lee side of the numerous volcanic mountain ranges are notably drier. While the few true deserts are all quite small, large areas of savanna and open forest exist in drier areas. Hathor never developed true grasses but durable succulent-like plants have turned the ground in such areas into vast greenish purple carpets.

THE COLONY

The EU opened one continent to colonization in 2007, and a total of 680,000 people have settled there. More than 40,000 of the colonists are Russians who applied for permission to settle in this colony. Other large contingents of colonists come from Britain, Germany, Australia, Turkey, and South Africa. In 2012, the Japanese also obtained permission to found a colony on another continent, and today almost 100,000 of the colonists are from Japan. In 2016, a joint US-Mexican colony was founded on a third continent and currently has a population of 500,000. All of the colonies have avoided settling in the deep forests. These settlements are all located on this world's savannas and open forests. In part, this was done in an effort to avoid widespread ecological destruction, and in part to avoid the mildly poisonous plants found in many forests.

Few land animals are capable of successfully attacking prey as large as a human. Generally, walking in a wilderness area on Hathor is as safe as walking in a park. However, the seas are far more dangerous. A number of species of large, predatory sea-life quickly discovered that humans were edible. Most vehicles traveling on or over the oceans carry chemicals designed to repel native predators, in case the vehicle sinks or crashes.

THE SPIDERS

One of the most interesting aspects of life on Hathor are the so-called Spiders.

These creatures are small, intelligent amphibious beings whose hind limbs are divided into two pairs of closely set

Name: Hanu

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Constitution 2, Intelligence 1, Perception 3, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 10, Combat 13, Brains 8

Life Points: 18

Speed: 14

Special Abilities: Extra Arms, Natural Armor 3

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Claws	14	7	Slash/Stab
Grapple	16	—	Resisted by Dodge
Dodge	13	—	Defense action

Name: Slasher

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Constitution 4, Intelligence 1, Perception 3, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 16, Combat 15, Brains 8

Life Points: 46

Speed: 37

Special Abilities: Extra Legs, Natural Armor 6

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Claws	15	28	Slash/Stub
Dodge	15	—	Defense action

legs well adapted for both swimming and walking. This type of limb doubling is moderately common on Hathor, and also appears in a number of flying species. The spiders have ovoid bodies set on these four legs, with two long, multi-jointed arms as manipulators. Like much life on this planet, the Spiders have no separate neck and head. Their brains are contained in the main body compartment, and sensory organs are located in several places. The spiders are approximately the size and mass of a large dog.

The Spiders have developed a copper age technology and live in the shallow inland sea of a single large continent that has been placed off-limits to all colonization. Visiting to this continent, popularly known as Spiderland, is carefully regulated, and civilian colonists and visitors can only go there on official tours. Researchers from both the OPS and various private organizations have been studying the spiders through telescopes and via remote drones, but have not attempted to make any form of contact with them. The spiders are the only living intelligent species on any world seeded with Earth life and tourism to see them has become a moderate source of income for Hathor.

EDEN

Type: Habitable

Gravity: 0.72 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, 0.8 atm

Water: 92% of the surface is covered with water.

Population: 700,000

Colonized: 2011

Eden is the third moon of a large gas giant, Draco, around half the mass of Jupiter. Draco is a warm gas giant, of the type that is common throughout the galaxy. Eden has one large continent, called Marsh, a few islands and a vast ocean. All the islands on Eden are within 2,500 kilometers of the main continent, and so the vast majority of the planet is single vast ocean. Eden is geologically very quiet, with few volcanoes and earthquakes, low, rolling, mountains, and relatively slow continental drift. The at-

mosphere is slightly thin, but still comfortable to breathe. There is little of mineral wealth on Eden and heavy metals are less abundant than on Earth. The planet's primary resource Eden is land. The continent of Marsh is located in the northern temperate zone and is composed almost exclusively of open land dotted with numerous lakes. Eden contains a wealth of arable land as well as excellent fishing.

NATIVE LIFE

Life on Eden is fairly primitive and was originally seeded from Earth 300 million years ago. There is abundant life in the oceans, but little of it has come out on land. The majority of land plants are similar to reeds and ferns. Woody plants never evolved on this world. Similarly, the land-based life is almost exclusively composed of various amphibious creatures and an abundance of insect-like creatures and creatures similar to some of the smaller reptiles. The largest land animal on Eden has a mass of 23 kg (50 lb) and is the size of a medium sized dog. Eden's seas are very different. While no bony creatures are larger than a great white shark, some of the invertebrates grow to truly enormous sizes. The largest life forms in the oceans of Eden are the huge raft-jellies which float on and just under the surface of Eden's ocean. Raft-jellies can grow up to 1.5 km on a side and support a host of small amphibious life on their upper surfaces. The largest raft-jellies are sturdy enough to support the weight of several hundred adult humans. While they are quite flexible and ripple and sway in the waves, adventurous tourists and locals have taken vacations on the raft-jellies, amid their miniature forests of amphibious plants and animals. Also, many of the native plants and animals life are edible and some have become popular exports. Edenic seafood is a luxury in much of the first world.

THE COLONY

Russia founded a colony on Eden in 2011, and the discovery of the alien ruins in 2013 prompted the Japanese to found a colony in 2014. The Russian colony declared

its independence in 2022 and loosely allied itself with the EU. Since 2022, there has been an influx of immigrants both from the EU and from various parts of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The Russian colony has a population of 610,000 and the Japanese colony, Ebisu, has a population of 90,000. In addition, a Canadian archeological station is located on one of the smaller islands.

ALIEN RUINS & MYSTERIES

Although intelligence never evolved on Eden, humanity is clearly not the first intelligent species to visit this world. On nine of the smaller islands, though not on Marsh, there are extensive alien ruins built by a large amphibious intelligent species referred to as the dodecs, who whose remains indicate that their biology was not derived from Earth. The dodecs seem to have been octopus-like beings, approximately the mass of large cows, with a 10-meter span measured from tip to tip of the longest two of their 12 tentacles. The first dodec ruins appeared around 54,000 years ago, and then vanished mysteriously 45,000 years ago. There is no evidence of war or conflict on Eden and no reason why the aliens left. Currently archeologists are exploring these ruins.

The truth of the matter is that the dodecs never left. They arrived a few thousand years before the majority of their species transcended. Some of the dodecs on Eden transcended and vanished from the physical universe, while the few that remained acquired knowledge of hyper-advanced genetic engineering techniques given to them by individuals who were in the process of transcending. The remaining dodecs used this knowledge to alter their biology to fully adapt themselves to life in Eden's Earth-derived ecosystem and to greatly increase their size, intelligence, and their psychic powers. Today, approximately 20,000 dodecs live in the deep oceans of Eden, feeding on raft jellies and engaging in brilliant and utterly inhuman science and philosophy.

These beings have given up all technology as unnecessary and use their vast minds and psychic powers to attempt to understand the secrets of the universe, while remaining in communication with other powerful psychic species like the Europeans. Humanity has only been on Eden for 19 years and the dodecs have not yet noticed their presence. Having no use for the land, they would not object to humanity living there, but would react violently to any threat to their safety.

Name: Air Shark

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Constitution 4, Intelligence 1, Perception 5, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 18, Combat 15, Brains 8

Life Points: 50

Speed: 54 (flying)

Special Abilities: Enhanced Sight, Enhanced Smell

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	13	28	Slash/Stab
Dodge	15	—	Defense action
Ram	15	22	Bashing

Name: Wyvern

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Constitution 4, Intelligence 1, Perception 3, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 20, Combat 12, Brains 8

Life Points: 54

Speed: 48 (flying)

Special Abilities: Enhanced Sight, can be ridden

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	10	16	Slash/Stab
Dodge	12	—	Defense action
Talons	12	16	Bashing

Name: Spider
 Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Constitution 3, Intelligence 2, Perception 2, Willpower 2
 Ability Scores: Muscle 8, Combat 11, Brains 10
 Life Points: 21
 Speed: 28/28 (swimming)
 Special Abilities: Amphibious, Enhanced smell, Extra Legs, Night Vision,

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Punch	11	4	Bash
Dodge	11	—	Defense action
Spear	11	8	Slash/Stab
Thrown Spear	11	5	Slash/Stab

FIREFLY

Type: Safe

Gravity: 1.03 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, 1.9 atm (1.2 atmosphere on the inhabited plateau)

Water: 65% of the surface is covered with water.

Population: 80,000

Colonized: 2019

Firefly consists of a single massive equatorial continent surrounded by a vast ocean. Both on land and in the ocean, dark purple plant-like organisms cover the surface. In the ocean, huge mats of tough kelp-like algae lie just under the surface of the water. Most of the land area is covered by a great forest. Each tall stalk supports a trio of huge leaf-like structures that overlap with the leaves from other stalks, forming a forest canopy that allows little light to reach the world's surface. Even at mid-day, the area beneath the forest canopy has the same amount of light as a clear full moon night on Earth. The world underneath the canopy is mostly lit with extensive bioluminescence, which the plants and animals use to communicate with one another, much as plants and animals use chemical signals on our world. Glowing seeds and fruit and glowing animals adorn this twilight world. All of these signals form an extremely complex visual language. This jungle is also exceedingly hot and humid; Firefly's thick air holds heat and moisture exceedingly well; the average temperature is between 50 C (120 F) & 55 C (130F), with humidity always in excess of 80%.

NATIVE LIFE

Life on Firefly may look like it is divided into mobile animals and stationary plants. The reality is more exotic. Firefly's life is divided into more than two dozen vast, competing multi-bodied organisms, known as metas.

Each meta is a single vast symbiotic super-organism that covers thousands of square kilometers. In each meta, there are animals that trim off diseased portions of leaves and distribute the seeds of plants, while feeding off the plant life in return. Some animals exist only to travel to a location and die, in yearly migrations, in order to provide nutrients for a nutrient-poor region. These super-organisms are actually intelligent and self-aware, although none of them are yet aware of humanity. The various metas trade, cooperate, and engage in wars against one another. Some metas are larger than others and occasionally, a meta is destroyed and consumed by one or more enemies, just as occasionally two metas exchange genetic material and create a new meta. Although metas lack any internal conflict, conflicts between one meta and another can become exceptionally vicious, and are fought with everything from heavily armed and armored creatures that guard borders and attack rival metas to plants that produce and distribute deadly toxins designed to slay organisms belonging to a different meta.

THE COLONY

Normally, settling on a world inhabited by an alien ecosystem is difficult and dangerous, but Firefly is unusual because the metas that live on land all form thick forests that require the world's dense atmosphere to thrive. Recent geological activity raised a large plateau almost four kilometers above the surrounding landscape. With an area of slightly more than five million square kilometers (two million square miles) this plateau is less than 3% of the land area of the planet's single continent. It is also exceedingly uninviting to the various metas because the air pressure up on this plateau is less than two thirds what it is on the surface and the plateau is also considerably cooler and dryer than the surface, with temperatures typically ranging from 20 C to 40 C. Coincidentally, these conditions are

ideal for humans. Three metas have colonized the edges of the plateau, but the interior is barren except for a few mobile meta components that scavenge for trace minerals to carry back to their forest homes. As a result, more than three million square kilometers of land on Firefly are habitable and before human colonization were claimed by nothing more than a few lichen-like organisms.

The colony on Firefly was originally settled in 2014 as a biological research station. However, when researchers discovered that only small amounts of soil sterilization were necessary to allow human crops could be grown in the plateau's thin soil, colonists from India used India's first starship to come here in 2019. The Hindi name for the planet is Juganū. Today, the colony has a population of 80,000 and is growing rapidly. Many colonists make their income by donning armored environment suits and heading into the meta jungles to gather plants and animals, since many contain unique and valuable biological compounds, including a few that have led to the discovery and synthesis of important medicines as well as others that are potent euphoric hallucinogens.

FIREFLY MYSTERIES

So far, the metas are unaware of the colonists. All the various metas know is that mobile components that venture onto the plateau often either vanish, because the colonists collect them, or are incapable of gaining access to some regions that are now protected by fences and other barriers. However, recently one meta has become aware of the presence of new life on the plateau and now wonders if this life is part of some other meta's secret plan. Similarly, human researchers understand that Firefly's biology is unique and have a general understanding of the metas' biology, but do not yet know the metas are intelligent entities.

If humanity makes contact with one or more metas, the metas will have great difficulty understanding the existence of separate individuals. However, if contact goes well, the metas may be willing to trade their various biological creations for metal tools and other technologies, and will be especially interested in hyperspatial technologies, which none of the metas understand. Contact with the metas is certain to destabilize the politics between the various metas.

PACIFICA

Type: Safe

Gravity: 1.4 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, 3 atm

Water: 100% of the surface is covered with water

Population: 16,000 + 600 in orbit

Opened For Research Bases: 2021

Pacifica, with three times the mass of Earth and almost half again its diameter, lacks all land, and its oceans are over 150 km deep. The ocean floor consists of various types of exotic high pressure ice rather than rock or mud. Researchers believe that worlds like Pacifica occur when a planet like Uranus or Neptune ends up in an orbit similar to Earth's. Although explorers have found more than half a dozen such superocean worlds, Pacifica is the only one that harbors an ecosystem and atmosphere that are relatively safe for humanity to interact with. The rest of the superocean worlds discovered have been either lifeless or home to life that exists in exotic atmospheres of nitrogen, ammonia, and carbon dioxide. Explorers continue to search for an ocean world with Earth-derived life, but have so far failed to find one.

RESEARCH BASES

Pacifica's gravity is too uninviting for anyone to wish to establish a colony, but its unique biology has attracted much interest. Discovered in 2019, corporations from China, the US, and Japan have formed several large research bases on Pacifica since it was opened to research bases in 2021. The various facilities on Pacifica employ highly skilled researchers who come from many different countries to study the unusual life as well as the sea's biochemistry. US and China corporations are also engaged in projects to mine the exotic ice at the ocean floor, since the chemicals produced as part of its unusual state have important industrial applications.

All of these bases are artificial floating islands with limited propulsion. They ride low in the water to avoid the powerful hurricanes that periodically disrupt all air traffic on this world. Although its unique biology and geology interest many researchers, Pacifica is a difficult world to visit, since the high atmospheric pressure and the high gravity make life here difficult and uncomfortable. Residents or visitors without the Pressure Tolerance modification need to take weekly shots to prevent mild nitrogen narcosis caused by the high atmospheric pressure. Failure to take these medicines results in a -1 penalty to all rolls involving either Intelligence or Perception. Residents who live on Pacifica for more than a month or two tend to develop a higher Strength in response to the gravity.

As a respite from the surface conditions, the various nations working on Pacifica cooperated to build a large space station that orbits this world. When hurricanes are not preventing surface to orbit travel, researchers regularly visit this station, known as Comfort Station, to enjoy Earthlike gravity and air pressure. Comfort Station has a permanent population of 600, as well as an average of 1,500 visitors from the surface. Despite its size, it is an exceptionally cosmopolitan station, with abundant food and entertainments for

residents of all three cultures. A small amphitheatre in the heart of Comfort Station regularly hosts famous performers. According to rumors, the station is also a prime site for industrial espionage and various backroom deals between representatives from various corporations and nations. Residents of Pacifica use a small fleet of eight large space planes to travel between the surface and Comfort Station.

NATIVE LIFE

Initial research revealed that life on Pacifica is distantly related to life on Firefly. Both were seeded from a common world many hundreds of millions of years before. Much life on Pacifica consists of highly flexible creatures who can modify their shape almost as well as amoebas or shoggoths. Known collectively as morphs, the largest of these creatures are somewhat larger than the largest whale to ever swim Earth's seas. Pacifica is also home to strange crystalline appearing life popularly called spikes. Spikes consist of porous carbonate structures, like coral that are infused with a matrix living tissue. This coral grows complex joints, allowing these creatures to move as well as Earthly vertebrates. Most of these creatures grow fractally and are between the size of an earthly bee and a small whale, but one species grows to truly vast size, forming large artificial islands that float on and beneath the surface, typically ovoid shapes between 10 meters and eight kilometers in diameter and half that thick. Known technically as ogygias and more commonly as ogees, these islands consist of a complex and exceedingly dense network of jointed limbs that can gradually change shape.

These islands also hold a wide variety of life, including smaller spikes and several types of morphs. This life dwells both inside the network of limbs and on the surface of the ogee. These surfaces are often covered in vegetation that has evolved specifically to live on ogees. Ogees are common and their total area covers almost 1% of Pacifica's surface. To avoid disturbing the native life and also so they don't have to deal with the invasive growth of the spikes that make up the structure of the ogees,

none of the research stations are located on any of the ogees, but several stations use their propulsion systems to keep them within a few hundred meters of a large ogee.

One of the oddest features of Pacifica is that all but the most primitive life on this world is obviously psychic. Psychics who visit this world report strange and complex dreams taking place in a bizarre oceanic Dream Realm, as well as a low level psychic "background noise" while they are awake. Although no one has yet pieced together the truth, some of this psychic "noise" comes from the exotic ice on the ocean floor. Some sections of ice are undergoing complex sets of electrochemical interactions that cause them to function as giant, psychic minds. Several hundred separate ice-minds, both highly intelligent and incredibly alien, exist on Pacifica. These minds have a dim awareness of the life in Pacifica's oceans, but little understanding of the physical world or the ability to act in it. These minds have also not yet become aware of the humans on this world, except perhaps in the same way the humans have noticed them: as a curious, unidentifiable sort of "noise".

COLOSSUS

Type: Mixed Safe & Habitable

Gravity: 0.87 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, pressure 1.2 atmospheres

Water: 60% of the surface is covered with water.

Population: 420,000

Colonized: 2022

This unique world is the first, and so far the only artificial planet discovered by humanity. Colossus is 220,000 kilometers in diameter, and consists of a series of several hundred large continents separated by wide seas. Colossus was obviously artificial, since it is unlikely that a natural terrestrial planet could be that large and have an Earthlike gravity. Detailed observation with radar and other sensors revealed that Colossus is an artificial shell built around a gas giant world located at a distance around its sun similar

Name: Attack Mobile

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Constitution 4, Intelligence 3, Perception 4, Willpower 5

Ability Scores: Muscle 18, Combat 16, Brains 12

Life Points: 60

Speed: 37

Special Abilities: Extra Arms (1 pair), Extra Attack, Night Vision, Natural Armor 8, Increased Speed.

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	14	28	Slash/Stab
Claw	16	22	Slash/Stab
Dodge	16	—	Defense Action

to Earth's distance from the Sun. This gas giant is slightly smaller than Jupiter and provides the gravity for the inhabitants of the artificial world that surrounds it. Colossus has a surface area is almost 300 times that of Earth, leaving room for many trillions of potential inhabitants. However, not all of it is habitable by humans. Different continents on Colossus are home to different entirely different ecosystems from different worlds.

OPS has performed a general orbital survey of Colossus. However, because of this world's vast size, explorers have only visited 173 of Colossus' 542 continents. So far, explorers have discovered alien ruins from six different alien species on 23 of these continents. Colossus also has contains 21 different ecosystems from different planets, but it only contains four different biologies. All life on Colossus originally evolved on one of four different worlds, one of which was Earth. The three other worlds are all home to life that is biologically compatible with humans and are categorized as safe for humans. Life from each of these worlds was seeded onto dozens of other previously lifeless planets aeons ago, and then hundreds of millions of years later, some unknown alien intelligence took samples of life from these four worlds that evolved their own life and life from the 17 other worlds that had been seeded with life, and seeded it on Colossus.

ROLEPLAYING OPPORTUNITIES ON COLOSSUS

As the largest colony planet, with a total land area that will take humans centuries to explore, Colossus holds nearly infinite possibilities for encounters. Long-lost subterranean human civilizations, thriving colonies of alien races once believed extinct, entire countries full of moon-beast slaves or worshippers of an unheard-of Great Old One, even a new species in the process of transcendence. Opportunities for genre-crossing abound: maybe one continent holds a group of well-preserved Earth humans kidnapped from any major era of history, or their descendants. Whatever did happen to Ambrose Bierce, anyway?

According to current data, six continents were seeded with life from Earth, and at least 47 continents were seeded with life from worlds that were previously seeded with life from Earth. Initial exploration of eight of these continents indicate that all are suitable habitats for humanity. Colossus was created approximately 1.4 million years ago and the continents inhabited by life derived from Earth were all populated approximately 1.2 million years ago. Hominid remains have been found on four of the six continents derived from Earth, and two continents that are

relatively near one another were once home to a thriving and advanced hominid civilization that spread from one continent to the next 110,000 years ago and then vanished mysteriously approximately 100,000 years ago.

OPS teams have been exploring these hominid ruins since they were discovered 11 years ago, but most proved to be very badly decayed. The vast majority of post-industrial data produced by these hominids was stored electronically on chips that decayed into chipped and ruined fragments tens of thousands of years ago. Information about the history of these people is largely limited to exceedingly fragmentary evidence. Also, although these hominids built their later cities from exceedingly durable materials, these cities were not built from the same nearly ageless materials used by the elder ones or the great race of Yith, and after 100,000 years all that is left of the cities and other worlds of these ancient hominids are badly decayed ruins. There is no indication that they were destroyed by warfare or invasion by hyperspatial beings – they simply seem to have vanished in less than a century, and most researchers who understand the concept believe that they transcended.

Other Intelligent Life: Brief surveys of Colossus' continents have not produced any evidence of current intelligent inhabitants. There is no radio traffic, but some species use other forms of communication, and the presence of bioluminescent life-forms on many of the continents has made identifying possible cities though the presence of lights very difficult. The sheer size of Colossus makes determining the presence of any other intelligent life difficult, especially if this intelligent life uses technology that is substantially different from human technology. Despite the entire planet having been mapped from orbit, the mass of data generated by this mapping is so large that so far only one third of it has been analyzed in detail. Currently, OPS is certain that there are no land-based civilizations that cover multiple continents, but undersea intelligences or intelligent beings that exist only on a portion of a single continent are both possible. In addition, while the surface of Colossus consists of a layer of rock and soil over one kilometer thick, seismic sensors reveal an extensive network of tunnels beneath this seemingly natural surface. Explorers have not yet gained access to these tunnels and it is possible that entire civilizations exist deep beneath Colossus' surface.

THE COLONY

Both to study the local ruins, and because Colossus offers an abundance of habitable land, the OPS declared this world open for limited colonization in 2022. OPS

officials decided that the evidence of several civilizations, including one human or near-human civilization, having thrived on Colossus for thousands of years indicates that the world is relatively safe for humanity. The colony of Colossus is located on the continent of Prasong – named after the first explorer to visit this continent. Prasong is one of the two continents that the ancient hominids inhabited. Today, the city of Prime on the continent of Prasong has a population of more than 200,000 Chinese colonists. Another 120,000 multinational colonists, primarily from North America, Africa, and the Middle East, live in three smaller US-founded cities within 1,500 kilometers of Prime. OPS lists Colossus as being riskier than other extra-solar colonies, because of the ill-understood diversity of life present on this world, but the vast potential for exploration and the fame and wealth some colonists have achieved through discoveries of ancient ruins continue to entice prospective colonists.

MINOR WORLDS

The following are brief descriptions of worlds that humanity has visited but has at most small research stations on.

WUSTE

Type: Safe (but difficult to survive on)

Gravity: 0.89 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, 0.6 atm

Water: 17% of the surface is covered with water, in the form of small lakes and small polar caps

Discovered: 2013

Wuste is a giant desert, baked by ultraviolet light from its brilliant blue-white F6 star. To protect itself from the ultraviolet rays, almost all life on this world evolved underneath the sands, creating an elaborate sub-surface ecosystem. All life on Wuste shares characteristics of both plants and animals. Some of the more plant-like organisms grow on the surface in wide flat sheets with long tap roots reaching down to subsurface water. Most grow in the sand itself. Light filters down through the first meter or so of the desert and here mobile algae-like plant-like organisms grow intermixed with the sand, watered by evening and morning mists. These subterranean organisms feed on a complex ecosystem of creatures that swim and tunnel through the sand beneath. These eyeless creatures see using sonar and infrared light and some are predators large enough to easily devour humans. There are sizeable areas of subsurface water that nourish local life, while also providing enough soil moisture to enable creatures in these areas to construct long lasting tunnels,

many of which are reinforced with various silk or wax-like biological products. Some of these tunnel-reinforcing compounds have a high commercial value.

Most of these tunnels are between one and four meters in diameter and many are inhabited by a dozen or more species, including a few that deliberately grow fungi-like organisms for food. Some of these tunnel networks are relatively small; others are elaborate branching constructs that stretch for many dozens of kilometers. Wuste seems devoid of intelligent life, but a few traces of ancient alien visitors have been detected at several locations on the surface.

CINDER

Type: Habitable (in the caverns) Hostile Environment (on the surface)

Gravity: 0.87 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, 0.7 atm in the caverns, no atmosphere on the surface

Water: 21% of the caverns contain water; the surface is burnt and barren.

Discovered: 2016

Cinder circles a red giant star. Seeded with life 550 million years ago, 200 million years ago, it was thriving and filled with life, but as its star aged and expanded, the increased heat first boiled Cinder's oceans and then baked the rock. Today, the surface temperature is almost 150 degrees Celsius during the day. However, life endures deep below the surface. When the star first began to expand 150 million years ago, Cinder was inhabited by a highly advanced technological species. They refused to work with hyperspatial technologies and could not travel to other stars, but they dug a network of huge caverns far below their world's surface. Here, protected from the heat above by more than four kilometers of rock, on a world where most geothermal activity faded hundreds of millions of years before the star expanded, these beings constructed a subterranean refuge for themselves and much of the world's life. Today, all life on Cinder is contained in a series of caverns between 100 meters and 10 kilometers in diameter. These caverns all interconnect, forming a complex network that stretches for thousands of kilometers. Access to the surface comes through vast tunnels 50 meter across, drilled through the rock. Humanity has found five such tunnels, two of which still have functional elevators.

The aliens vanished almost a million years ago, but the strange ecosystem they created remains. Most caverns are well lit with the power of exceptionally durable solar cells; in a tenth of the caverns, these lights have mostly failed

and provide no more illumination than a moonlit night. These strange and perpetually dark caverns are home to a wide variety of exotic nocturnal life. The aliens were prolific genetic engineers, and dozens of the surviving species are as intelligent as great apes or the smarter monkeys and some seem at least as smart as early pre-humans. As a result, many creatures in Cinder's caverns are capable of both rudimentary communication and relatively complex tool use. Some of these life forms are interested in observing human visitors, and a few species seem drawn to visitors and attempt to help them with various simple tasks.

Humans have not yet fully explored the cavern system. Glyphs mark the walls of some caverns, indicating a navigation system that researchers are currently trying to translate. Some of them indicate resources and points of access, but the linguists studying these caverns have not been able to decipher a particular subset of glyphs that appear in certain caverns – not all caverns, but a small percentage of them. If all of these glyphs were marked on a map of the planet, a pattern of several networks with identifiable center points would emerge.

Glyphs in this particular set are always engraved deeper than the rest of the glyphs. Sorcerers and psychics who examine them detect a unique resonance. One researcher has commented on a similarity between one of the characters and a diagram found in an old manuscript pertaining to Nyarlathotep, but no one has found equivalents for the other glyphs yet. At the center points of the networks, not yet reached by humans, lie immense caverns bereft of light where basalt altars stand ready, covered in engravings of complex diagrams. These altars are some of the most recent constructs found in the caverns. A determined explorer with the right background could experiment with these altars and might be able to discover the mathematical or ritual combinations necessary to activate them.

ERYCINIA

Type: Hostile

Gravity: 0.96 Gs

Atmosphere: Dangerous, 1.2 atm

Water: 81% of the surface is covered with water.

Discovered: 2024

Erycinia is a warm verdant world where the entire land area consists of a pair of large equatorial continents. It was seeded with life from Earth 400 million years ago, contains a wealth of biological diversity, and is inhabited by animals similar to dinosaurs and other Jurassic and Cretaceous inhabitants of Earth. The only reason Erycinia is not open for colonization is that the level of car-

PSI CRYSTALS

These crystals are found only on Erycinia and are typically ovoids that are between five and eight cm across. When in contact with a psychic's skin, a psi crystal provides the psychic with a +2 bonus to their Psychic Art skill. Using multiple crystals provides no additional bonus. These crystals are rare and expensive. Owning a psi crystal costs one quality point or two experience points.

bon dioxide in the atmosphere is 100 times higher than on Earth. While humans can breathe the air, doing so for more than half an hour causes headaches, blurred vision, and shortness of breath. Erycinia was discovered in 2025 by a ship of UK and Australian explorers. Bioengineers are currently attempting to create an augmentation that would allow humans to live here. Until that point, visitors wear space suits or respirator masks with carbon dioxide scrubbers that must be changed every two days. Currently, Erycinia is a small biological research station. This planet has been in the news recently, due to the discovery of rare crystalline nodules that enhance psychic powers.

NATIVE INHABITANTS

Erycinia is inhabited by a species of stone age primitives that resemble intelligent bipedal dinosaurs. These creatures are known as saurs, and while visitors to Erycinia have seen and photographed them, no one has yet captured one and researchers know little about them. Unknown to humanity, 9,000 years ago, the saurs had moderately advanced psychic technology, and physical technology similar to late 19th century human tech, as well as the ability to create various unusual materials, including the psi crystals. Unfortunately, the saurs attracted the attention of a hungry Great Old One, who killed off almost 99% of their species and wrecked the saurs' civilization.

Humanity has so far found little evidence of the saurs' previous civilization. Currently, the only known artifacts are the psi crystals and a curious structure covering several dozen hectares: a walled and roofed complex maze, which is complexly invisible to light from the infrared, visible, and ultra-violet spectra. The material of the maze is as tough as reinforced concrete.

PELLUCIDA

Type: Hostile Environment

Gravity: 0.62 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, 0.1 atm

Water: 12% of the surface is covered in ice

Discovered: 2026

Pellucida used to have an atmosphere half as thick as

Earth's, but 200 million years ago, during an ancient battle between elder one genetic engineers and a Great Old One, the world gradually lost most of its atmosphere. This loss occurred over the course of 60 million years. Life on Pellucida adapted, evolving brilliantly colored, jointed silica shells and silicone skins to protect it from evaporation and ultraviolet light. Today, life on Pellucida is somewhat sparse, but it is also brilliant and striking. Some of this life can survive for days or even weeks in the vacuum of space and researchers are currently studying these creatures to gain information for new augmentations and new space suit designs. Unfortunately, many large life forms on Pellucida hunt any prey that appears to have valuable nutrients, including humans. Life on Pellucida is distantly related to life on Firefly and Pacifica, but is devoid of the psychic powers found in organisms on both of these worlds.

Pellucida also contains ruins of an alien civilization. These aliens appear to have died out approximately 1,800 years ago, just as they were learning to use electricity and artificially generated power. They were killed off by a series of powerful solar flares.

In actuality, the solar flares only killed most of them: survivors retreated to caverns and shadowed areas along the edge of high mountain ranges. They lost almost all of their technology, and their numbers have only recently begun to recover. Human explorers have yet to encounter living members of this species, which look like delicate crystalline 10 legged spider-like beings one meter high and slightly over a meter across. They lack venom and cannot spin webs, but they excel at delicate manipulation and can use all 10 limbs as either manipulators or as feet. These aliens are attempting to regain their technology, and the most advanced groups verge on being able to send and receive radio signals.

PRODÍGIO

Type: Safe

Gravity: .91 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, 1.1 atm

Water: 67% of the surface is covered in water

Discovered: 2028

Discovered by Brazilian explorers in 2028, this world is under careful but discreet observation. From orbit, it appears to be a lush and verdant planet, full of life and possessing clearly artificial weather patterns that give the entire world abundant access to rainfall. A closer look reveals far stranger wonders. This world has an abundance of islands floating in the air. Held up by some unknown

and clearly quite stable form of hyperspatial manipulation, these flying lands hover between 100 meters and four kilometers (two and a half miles) off the ground. The smallest are no larger than a city block, and the largest are almost 16 kilometers (10 miles) across and 1.6 km (one mile) thick. Some are stationary, and a few are connected to the surface by elaborate bridges, but most float at slow speeds between 2 and 20 kilometers per hour, or alternate between remaining stationary and moving at such speeds.

Prodigio has an exceptionally strange and complex ecosystem. Much of its abundant life is at least as intelligent as a monkey and has clearly been genetically engineered. Most of this life is also relatively tame, and some of it seems to be designed for complex tool use. A number of these animals perform maintenance on machines of unknown purpose. In addition, a highly advanced intelligent species inhabits this world. The Prodigians, like most life on this world, are seven-limbed creatures. The Prodigians walk on four legs arranged around their pear-shaped bodies and have three manipulators. Psychics report that all Prodigians they have scanned are part of one of eight vast psychic hive minds that have proven impossible for human psychics to contact.

The members of each hive mind perform incomprehensible tasks using technologies that appear to be part of the natural world. These technologies are far in advance of anything humanity understands. The Prodigians can create flying lands or alter large areas of the landscape within hours or days, all without using any obvious tools or devices. Many researchers believe that much of the surface of this world now consists of a series of powerful technological devices. The most popular current theory is that the Prodigians are on the verge of transcending and are currently engaged in strange and unknowable preparations.

These aliens seem largely indifferent to or unaware of human observers. The two exceptions have been incidents where humans directly interfered with their activities. On the first occasion, the two people responsible vanished into hyperspace and were never seen again. In the second case, the person instantly fell unconscious, was teleported back to their orbiting ship, and awoke with a severe headache and no sense of smell. The headache faded within a few hours, but their sense of smell had to be restored using genetic therapy. Fortunately, the Prodigians seem to care little about humans examining or interacting with most local animals. As long as they leave the Prodigians alone, humans seem to be safe. Small remote drones have captured images of what seem to be a few dozen Prodigians who do not act like they are part

of any hive-mind, but no one has attempted to contact them yet. Humanity has no base on or orbiting Prodigio, and instead performs all observations from visiting starships and six small orbiting observation satellites.

OTHER HUMAN WORLDS

One of the things explorers did not expect to find outside the solar system was other humans, but they have. The end of the 20th century is not the first time humanity has gone to the stars. There are persistent rumors of small human colonies inhabited by people carried to the stars in mi-go brain cylinders and then given new and strange artificial bodies, and two worlds have been discovered where humanity has been living for many thousands of years.

GALATEA I

Type: Safe – with large areas of Earth-derived life, making much of the planet habitable

Gravity: 0.86 Gs

Atmosphere: Breathable, 1.2 atm

Water: 70% of the surface is covered with water; half of this water is actually ice.

Population: 400 million

Discovered: 2017

Humans colonized Galatea I 24,000 years ago. Near the end of the Thurian Age, a small group of desperate inhabitants of the cities of the Sahara grasslands faced both failing harvests and barbarian invaders from Europe, driven south by the encroaching ice sheets. After barely repelling one siege by a barbarian horde and knowing that another would arrive in a few months, a group of sorcerers opened a small Gateway to ready their new home for settlement. Then, using half-understood texts stolen from the serpent people, they performed a massive Gateway spell and carried almost 10,000 of the inhabitants of this

besieged city to safety before the gate collapsed.

The gate transported this small group of bronze age humans, along with extensive supplies and domestic animals, to Galatea I. Galatea I is a tidally locked world circling a small red dwarf star. This world does not rotate; instead, the world's dim red sun remains forever in the same position. The geography of the world is defined by the hot pole that forever points at the red sun, and the cold pole, on the opposite side of the world, forever locked in frozen night. On Galatea, shadows never move and there are no seasons. The entire night-side of Galatea I is uninhabitable, and three quarters of it is covered by a vast ice covered ocean. The area around the hot pole is a blistering desert that is equally hostile to life. The world's cool and shadowy equator is almost entirely encircled by a large ocean, leaving the only habitable area as an approximately 4,000 kilometer wide band of temperate land that lies between the desert around the hot pole and the equatorial ocean. Most of this region is now solely inhabited by Earthly life. Humans on Galatea have spent more than 20 thousand years slowly pushing back the native life from the habitable portions of the world.

Over the last 24,000 years, more than a dozen civilizations have risen and fallen on Galatea I. However, all of them owe their origins to the few thousand Thurian Age refugees. More than 300 of these refugees were skilled in psychic powers and there were 52 sorcerers among this number, most of whom were able to bring along their books. Since the settlement of this world, these books of sorcery have been copied and expanded upon many times. The civilization of Galatea I is pre-industrial, with a level of technology comparable to the late 15th century. Firearms comparable to wheel-lock rifles and pistols are available to the wealthy, and printing presses print numerous books, but there are no power sources more advanced than mechanical windmills and no vessels more advanced than

Name: Saur

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Constitution 3, Intelligence 2, Perception 3, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 12, Combat 12, Brains 10

Life Points: 34

Speed: 28

Special Abilities: Acute Smell/Taste, Acute Vision, Increased Speed, Natural Armor (1 pt), Natural weapons (1 pt), Psychic Sensitivity, Undetectability

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	10	7	Slash/Stab
Dodge	12	—	Defense Action
Spear	12	14	Slash/Stab
Tail	10	10	Bashing

UNIQUE MAGIC AND PSYCHIC POWERS ON GALATEA I

Sorcerers on Galatea I have developed two unique spells based on object enchantment techniques originally derived from the serpent people's sorcery. First, Galatean sorcerers have a version of the Protective Warding spell that can protect an entire city. This spell requires that at least three specially enchanted and engraved plaques or stelae be placed around the city or location being protected. In addition, sorcerers on this world know the secret of either temporarily or permanently enchanting weapons with the ability to affect hyperspatial beings. These weapons allow the wielder to attack entities like Servitors of the Other Gods or Flying Polyps in a way that counters their hyperspatial protection to material weapons. These weapons also ignore that the reduced damage power that purely physical creatures like shoggoths possess. In rules terms, damage done by these weapons is not subject to the reduced damage power and instead affects the target as if they did not possess this power. These enchantments can only be performed on swords, spears, javelins, and other relatively large weapons due to the complex engraving that must be placed on the weapon. These enchantments cannot be applied to bullets or arrows.

Both of these types of magic only work when performed with Galatean sorcery, a unique version of ritual sorcery that can be performed as either meditative sorcery or physical rituals, depending upon the training of the sorcerer. Adapting these spells to any form of Earthly sorcery would require either extensive sorcerous texts or the aid of a Galatean sorcerer who knows these rituals, and would take several months to complete. So far, none of the OPS teams studying Galatean sorcery have managed to gain access to detailed information about these spells.

Galatean psychics have also mastered the Invisibility psychic ability. OPS operatives have encountered evidence of this ability, mostly from local stories, but do not understand its full power and limitations. This ability was originally derived from the serpent people and requires several years of highly specialized training as well as elaborate preparations involving meditation and the use of various hallucinogenic drugs to master.

In addition to attempting to discover how to use these spells and psychic powers, OPS teams on Galatea I are trying to obtain weapons that have been permanently enchanted for use against hyperspatial creatures. Some of the weapons that have already been acquired are owned by or issued to members of OPS strike teams. While some OPS operatives joke about someone going up against a flying polyp with a sword or spear, if such a weapon has been enchanted on Galatea I, it is exceptionally useful for defeating such creatures.

well-rigged sailing ships. In this pre-industrial world, both steam power and electricity remain nothing more than exotic and poorly understood curiosities.

Galatea I is ruled by a class of sorcerer-nobles who excel at magic and psychic powers. Although their magic is slower, more cumbersome, and in some ways less well understood than Earthly sorcery, the sorcerer-nobles of Galatea I are experts at using their magics. Galatean sorcerers and psychics also possess some psychic and magical capabilities unknown on Earth, including powerful wards that can protect a large area from both gates and hyperspatial intruders. These wards surround every Galatean city, and the lack of such wards is an open invitation for another sorcerer-noble to use a gate to send troops into the heart of the city or assassins into the ruler's palace.

Civilization on Galatea I consists of dozens of coastal cities, situated on the planet's equatorial ocean. The planet's human-habitable area is divided into a series of small nations and city-states. Each city or group of cities also controls a large section of the interior, which consists of a mixture of farmland and wilderness areas inhabited by bandits and nomadic barbarians. There is extensive mari-

time trade between the various coastal cities as well as trade with the dozens of both large and small inhabited islands in the equatorial ocean. The largest of these islands is an independent nation almost twice the size of New Zealand, and several other islands are the size of Java. Galatean traders also regularly send expeditions to the other side of the equatorial ocean, to the edge of the world's night side, where all manner of unusual materials can be mined and where exotic native life provides valuable hides, shells, medicines and recreational drugs.

The city-states all have approximately the same level of technology, but their style of government vary wildly. Many are oppressive but functional autocracies. Others are constitutional monarchies or oligarchies, where the populace has a set of guaranteed rights, but are ruled by sorcerer-nobles who are often psychic and who rule with the assistance of powerful psychic agents and assistants. While sorcery is always carefully regulated, in some city-states anyone willing to undergo rigorous training can become a psychic; in others, only the members of certain noble families are allowed to learn these abilities, or access to these powers is controlled by secretive and powerful guilds.

A few of the most oppressive city-states are ruled by despotic and occasionally mentally inhuman sorcerers who worship or make alliances with the flying polyps. These corrupt city-states are loathed and feared by their neighbors; several are sufficiently powerful that their enemies can only move against them when the rulers show signs of weakness or evidence that their inhuman allies are unwilling to aid them.

The Galatean city-states regularly engage in a mixture of trade, raiding, and occasional open warfare with one another. Alliances between the various city-states are in a constant state of flux. Large-scale wars that last more than a few months are rare, but minor sea battles, piracy, and raids on outlying villages are both common. With the exception of various barbarian tribes living in the warmer portions of the planet's temperate zone, all government on Galatea I is dominated by sorcerers, who use their power to retain their authority and to protect their city-states from outside aggression. Sorcerers commonly use the Dho Na Sign and Gateway spells to observe their enemies and to send soldiers and assassins anywhere on the planet in a few hours.

NATIVE LIFE

The current inhabitants successfully introduced sheep, goats, horses, tame wooly mammoths, cats, and dogs to Galatea I, as well as seeds for a variety of useful crop plants, including cotton, flax, wheat, oats, and a number of fruit trees and bushes. But they also had to come to terms with the planet's native life. Fortunately for the ancient colonists, Earth-derived life proved to out-compete the world's native life and over the last 24,000 years, humans and their animals and plants have conquered the world's temperate zone.

However, Galatea's native life continues to inhabit the rest of the planet, from the fringes of the desert surrounding the hot pole, to highly mobile life forms that travel several hundred kilometers into the portion of the world's

dark side that never receives any light. Galatean life has almost no division between animal and plant, and most native life forms can either create food by eating various raw materials and remaining in sunlight, or move around and hunt other creatures for food. These creatures lack all visible eyes and have smooth leathery skins. They can all detect infrared radiation as well as having keen hearing. These life forms are related to the sand-dwelling life forms of Wuste and originally came from the same world.

Due to the moderately dense air pressure and the relatively low gravity, much native life flies. Over the last 20,000 years, animal trainers have captured and trained several unique local animals, including the brath, a huge winged, living airship that is 60 meters long, 15 meters in diameter, and capable of carrying more than a ton of passengers and cargo long distances, at a speed of around 60 kilometers per hour.

ALIEN VISITORS

The mi-go mostly ignore star systems with red dwarf stars, and the elder ones do not inhabit this portion of space, but the flying polyps are relatively common in this area of space and regularly visit Galatea I. Their motives are unclear, but there are several small enclaves of flying polyps on the half of the world that lies in perpetual night, and some make forays into the warm half of this world. Except for a few debased sorcerers who ally themselves with the flying polyps, the locals regard these creatures as the enemies of humanity. When groups or small settlements of flying polyps are sighted, local cities states send out warriors and low ranking sorcerers to slay them.

Flying polyps sometimes trade enchanted items for rare minerals and human slaves. The most despotic city-states sell these monsters all of the war captives that they cannot ransom. This provides these city-states with magical devices found nowhere else, which they use to protect them against neighboring states that seek to destroy them for betraying humanity.

Name: Brath

Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 4, Constitution 40, Intelligence 1, Perception 4, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 106, Combat 13, Brains 8

Life Points: 210

Speed: 60 (flying)

Special Abilities: Extra Arms (tentacles), Enhanced Sight, Natural Armor (2)

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Grapple	16	—	Resisted by Dodge
Tentacle Strike	14	23	Bash

CONTACT

Galatea I was discovered in 2017 by an OPS scouting team. Over the course of 13 years, researchers have infiltrated the populace and learned their language, customs, and history. However, they have not revealed themselves to the inhabitants of Galatea I, both to avoid shocking the populace and because no one is sure of the full extent of the sorcerer-nobles' power.

Today, there are two large teams of OPS agents on Galatea. One continues to study this world and works hard to discover more about the sorcerer nobles and their knowledge of magic and psychic powers. The sorcerer nobles are cautious and paranoid, and all OPS operatives have carefully avoided revealing their presence to any of the nobles. As a result, their ability to infiltrate the sorcerer-nobles and learn the secrets of their magic has been severely limited. The OPS regularly sends teams to attempt different infiltration strategies; most sorcerers are trained from an early age, which hampers the OPS' attempts at deep cover.

The other OPS team consists of a team of physicians and anthropologists who provide covert humanitarian aid by adapting more advanced medical knowledge and techniques to the technology available on Galatea I. While the local doctors have an excellent knowledge of anatomy and use primitive anesthetics for surgery, they lack any more than the most primitive microscopes and had not discovered antibiotics or anesthetics. The OPS team introduced knowledge of how to use and manufacture penicillin 9 years ago and its use has begun to spread across Galatea I, where it is slowly revolutionizing local medicine.

THE GUAN COLLECTIVE

The other group of humans who have been encountered in space claim descent from experimental subjects captured by a group of elder ones who visited Earth more than 50,000 years ago. The elder ones kept humans as something between pets and servants on this world, but approximately 1,200 years ago, this civilization of elder ones either vanished or died off, leaving their human subjects behind. Today, these humans have mastered some of the elder ones' technology and are known to control a series of three worlds. OPS officials believe that these humans may also control several additional star systems.

Although the people of the Guan Collective appear to be fully human, they also claim to have life spans far longer than ordinary humans and to have mastered much of the elder one's technology. However, little is known about these humans or the technology they possess. They

are highly secretive and do not allow outsiders to visit anything other than two space stations that have been specially designated to keep visitors isolated. The details of life of the members of the Guan Collective are unknown, as is the extent of their technology. They are willing to meet with representatives from humanity, but only on these space stations. The members of the Guan Collective are open to limited trade with humanity and are willing to exchange medicines and unique materials, including large quantities of improved room temperature superconductors, for both human cultural information like books or recordings of music or for various handmade goods and works of art. However, the Guan Collective has completely refused to exchange any scientific or technical knowledge.

Landing on or gaining accurate data about conditions on any of the worlds of the Guan Collective is a high priority for OPS, as it learning more about the technology of the Guan Collective. The current assumption is that the Guan Collective are the human successors of a collective of elder ones, and that these humans are now part of a civilization in cultural and technological stasis. So far, the Guan Collective has given no indication of hostility, but the members that OPS agents have encountered also have little interest in making contact with the rest of humanity.

THE DREAM REALM

Just as humanity has begun to explore outer space, it has also started charting the realms of inner space, though explorations of the mysterious Dream Realm. One of the strangest results of humanity beginning to explore psychic powers has been the realization that some dreams have a reality that extends beyond the mind of an individual dreamer. Although many dreams take place solely in the mind of the dreamer, others occur in a psychic realm commonly referred to as the Dream Realm or the Dreamworld. This inner world has been known to mystics for millennia. Psychologist Carl Jung referred to it as the collective unconscious, and some psychic researchers believe that it is the source of all imagination, and perhaps even all thought.

Extensive studies have shown that almost everyone regularly visits the Dream Realm, and most people visit it every night. The vast majority of people who visit this realm have at best only vague and fleeting memories of their time here, but psychics and the few other lucid dreamers who visit it are as conscious and aware in this realm as they are when awake, and for them the Dream Realm can be fascinating to explore.

Time in the Dream Realm passes much faster than in than the waking world. Approximately one day in the Dream Realm passes for every hour a dreamer remains asleep, allowing a dreamer to experience more than a week's worth of events and adventures during a night of particularly deep sleep. Characters in dreams almost never need to sleep, requiring nothing more than a short nap of an hour or two every night.

INHABITANTS OF THE DREAM REALM

More than half the several billion inhabitants of the Dream Realm are effectively scenery. They are creations of collective unconscious thought. These inhabitants have little free will or knowledge, and simply respond as people would expect someone of their occupation and station to respond. Indeed, their attributes can change if a dreamer suddenly regards them differently.

Most of the rest of the inhabitants are actual people dreaming, who are not psychics or lucid dreamers and are thus completely unaware that they are dreaming or that they have a waking life as someone else. These dreamers have free will and knowledge of the world they live in, but know nothing about the waking world. Instead,

NAVIGATING IN THE DREAM REALM

To find and travel to an unfamiliar destination in the Dream Realm, a character must first know the name of this destination and a bit about it. The character must then make an Intelligence + Knowledge roll to find their way to this location. Depending upon how much or little information the character knows about their destination and route, the GM can add or subtract up to 3 points to or from this roll. Also, if the location is known to be generally quite far away from the character's current dream location, then treat all rolls with 4 or 5 Success Levels as if the character rolled 3 Success Levels.

SUCCESS LEVELS	TIME (PASTORAL WORLD, UNDERWORLD, & SPACE SECTOR)	TIME (FUTURE WORLD)
0	Never, or at minimum 6 months	Never, or at minimum 1 month
1	2 months	1 week
2	1 month	3 days
3	1 week	1 day
4	4 days	8 hours
5+	1 day	1 hour

DEATH AND INJURY IN THE DREAM REALM

Individuals who are injured in the Dream Realm heal rapidly. Also, they find themselves unharmed when they awaken. In addition, once they fall asleep again, even the gravest injuries have vanished. Death in the Dream Realm is only slightly more serious. Dying in the Dream Realm causes someone to instantly awaken, shaken but otherwise fine. The individual cannot visit the Dream Realm again for one full month, but can return normally at the end of this time.

Individuals have separate lives and names in the Dream Realm. While such a person is asleep, they remember nothing of their waking life and when awake, they remember at most tiny fragments of their dream life.

Actual dreamers are the rarest category of the inhabitants of the Dream Realm. Less than one in 100 residents of the Dream Realm are psychics or lucid dreamers who are aware that they are dreaming. Many of these individuals find ways to identify themselves to other psychic and lucid dreamers using either their waking name or some obvious detail of their garb. However, others find it useful to keep their identities secret. Several large cities in the Dream Realm have private clubs maintained by psychic and lucid dreamers who share information and are available to help one another with various projects.

VISITING THE DREAM REALM

Ordinary people often visit the Dream Realm, but have no memory of doing so. However, anyone with one or more levels of Hyperspatial Exposure can visit the Dream Realm when they are sleeping and remember their experiences there. Gaining any amount of Hyperspatial Exposure transforms a human into a lucid dreamer. In addition, psychics need only mentally contact other people while falling asleep to bring them along to the Dream Realm. Even individuals who would not normally remember visiting the Dream Realm will do so if taken into the Dream Realm by a psychic.

A psychic can bring a number of non-psychics into the Dream Realm equal to their Willpower. These characters end up within a dozen meters of each other in the Dream Realm, and the psychic chooses where in the Dream Realm the characters will appear. Psychic characters can choose to appear anywhere in the Dream Realm that they have previously visited, but must still physically travel to unfamiliar locations.

Characters normally enter the Dream Realm with average clothing and equipment for the location they are in,

which typically means a single outfit of weather appropriate clothing and a small amount of local cash. A single Success Level on a doubled Willpower roll allows psychic dreamers to equip themselves and their companions with clothing of a particular design, as well as wearable weapons and other portable gear appropriate for the location.

Rolling three or more Success Levels on this roll allows the psychic to provide everyone with mounts and reasonable equipment in saddlebags, a small sailing ship or large car capable of carrying everyone, or some other moderate sized vehicle. Dreamers cannot create huge warships, dwellings or other large structure of objects in the Dream Realm, except by physically building them. There are rumors of exotic magics that allow dreamers to create a small fleet of ships or even an entire city, but they are nothing more than rumor, and most of these rumors involve asking Nyarlathotep for aid, in return for some favor of its choosing.

SECTORS OF THE DREAM REALM

The Dream Realm is divided into four separate sectors – The Pastoral Realm, the Underworld, the Future Realm, and the Space Sector. Each Sector is effectively a different setting or genre of dreaming. Most ordinary dreamers only visit one of these sectors, but psychic and lucid dreamers can visit any of them. Once someone is in the Dream Realm, it is also possible to physically travel from one sector to another.

The borders of these sectors are relatively secure, but within each sector, location is considerably more flexible. In each sector, there are a number of important and well-known locations – the grand city of Celephaïs in the Pastoral World, the lightless Vale of Pnath in the Underworld, the Moon in Space, and a multitude of others. In general, any location with a widely known name is a stable location

in the Dream Realm, and remains consistent in appearance and in the general appearance of its surroundings.

However, the relative positions of these various named locations can shift, in large part because the details of the unnamed and largely uninhabited portions of the Dream Realm vary at the whims and unconscious desires of millions of dreamers. Celephaïs is always in the valley of Ooth-Nargai, beside the Cerenerian Sea, and it is always located in the Eastern portion of the Pastoral World. However, how far Celephaïs is from Ulthar, the Enchanted Wood, or various other locations in the Pastoral World varies.

Sectors within the Dream Realm cannot be mapped. Distances and exact locations shift constantly, and to get from one location to another, intention matters at least as much as actual path or direction. To get from the city of Inganok in the North, to Celephaïs in the East, travelers are advised to cross the Cerenerian Sea to the Eastern continent. Similarly, if individuals traveling overland obtain their directions from an experienced guide, they will be told how the types of trees found in the forest change as they approach the borders of Ooth-Nargai. These directions provide information that dreamers use to both locate their destination and also to subtly and unconsciously warp the surrounding landscape so that they can effectively will themselves to their destination. Any journey requires a few days or weeks if traveling in the Pastoral Realm, the Underworld, or Space, or a few hours or days if traveling in the Future Realm. All journeys are appropriate for their setting – riding or walking through fields and forests, flying a jet car from one mega-structure to another, or climbing through dank and lightless passageways.

On any of these journeys, the traveler's knowledge of their destination matters at least as much as any precise directions they may have. In general, travelers eventually

Name: Ghosts

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 4, Constitution 7, Intelligence 2, Perception 3, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 22, Combat 14, Brains 10

Life Points: 70

Speed: 31

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Enhanced Hearing & Smell, Increased Speed, Natural Weaponry, Night Sight

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	12	27	Slash/Stab, no defense action
Punch	14	19	Bash
Dodge	14	—	Defense action
Kick	13	21	Slash/Stab

USING PSYCHIC POWERS & SORCERY IN THE DREAM REALM

Psychic powers can be used normally in all portions of the Dream Realm. In addition, sorcery is far easier than normal. All sorcery can be successfully cast if the caster rolls a single Success Level. In addition, casting sorcery as a ritual requires only one turn for every level of the spell and all hyperspatial devices require only one turn to warm up and calibrate before they are used. Also, building a hyperspatial device requires only one hour per level of the spell.

In the Dream Realm, sorcery always has obvious visible effects, like blasts or shimmering vortices of energy, or other similar effects related to the spell's purpose. Although all forms of sorcery can be used in both the Underworld and Space, technosorcerous devices do not work in the Pastoral World. Here, sorcery can only be cast as a ritual. The opposite is true in the Future World, where ritual sorcery automatically fails, and sorcery can only be performed using technosorcerous devices. Sorcerers and hyperspatial scientists are known and respected in the Dream Realm. Some of the inhabitants of the Dream Realm who are not aware that they have another life in the waking world are sorcerers or psychics, despite their waking selves not having either ability.

reach their destination, if this destination exists. However, how quickly they find this destination depends a great deal upon both how well they know it and how determined they are to get there.

THE PASTORAL WORLD

To many dreamers, this is the most familiar portion of the Dream Realm. It resembles all the dreams and imaginings of a simpler and more romantic world, a world of chivalry, rolling fields of grain, small farming villages, vast and dark forests that are sometimes haunted, and a few grand and ancient cities. Some of these cities are walled against invaders, while others are large metropolises known for their wondrous architecture and the availability of trade goods from all across this realm. This is a realm of swift sailing ships, roving bandits, shining knights, and the occasional dragon, ifrit, or naga.

The Pastoral World is a world of magic but not of technology. The most advanced technology available is from the early 18th century. There are flintlock muskets, swift and well-built sailing ships fitted with cannon, and the more pleasant cities have indoor plumbing as good as those that the Romans built. However, electricity and other modern wonders do not work in this Sector and

characters who bring devices based on designed created after the early 18th century find that these devices have transformed into their earlier counterparts. A zapper or handgun becomes a wheellock pistol, and a backpack transforms from nylon and other advanced materials to leather and canvas. The Pastoral World is also home to an odd species of cat that is slightly larger than ordinary house cats, as well as being intelligent and psychic. These cats are most common in the city of Ulthar, and are often called Ulthar cats, but they can be found anywhere in the Pastoral World. Ulthar cats are also occasionally found in the Future World and in Space.

LOCATIONS IN THE PASTORAL WORLD

Celephaïs: The only large city in the East, it is said to be the most beautiful city in the entire Pastoral World. It was founded and in fact created by its immortal ruler, King Kuran. He is said to have been an inhabitant of the waking world once, a skilled dreamer who died and moved to the Dream Realm. No one knows if he is some form of ghost, a powerful sorcerer, or something far greater or stranger. There are many rumors of how he created this city, but the truth is a secret known only to King Kuran.

Dylath-Leen: This slightly sinister black basalt city is located in the western half of the continent that covers the West and the South of the Pastoral World. It is the largest city in the Pastoral World, as well as being a major port. It is also the most exotic port in the Pastoral World. Ships from the Moon and other portions of the Space Sector dock here, trading all manner of strange goods.

The Enchanted Wood: In the Southeast lies a huge and exotic forest. In addition to containing a wealth of strange animal and plant life, it is also home to the zoogs, intelligent furred creatures no larger than a small dog. They know many secrets from both the Dream Realm and the waking world, but sometimes have a taste for human flesh. This forest also contains a portal to the Underworld.

Kadath of the Cold Waste: Located far to the North, on the edge of the Pastoral World, Kadath is a vast castle touched by the Other Gods and often visited by Nyarlathotep. Individuals who wish to contact Nyarlathotep sometimes visit Kadath, because doing so is safer than contacting that being in the waking world. Kadath sits atop the tallest mountain in the Pastoral World.

DESCRIPTION

Zoogs are small brown-furred creatures the size of small dogs, that look like small furred elves or monkeys. They get along poorly with Ulthar cats.

THE UNDERWORLD

The strangest and most disturbing portion of the Dream Realm is the Underworld. This is the realm of nightmares, dark nights, and hungry monsters. Although it seems to lie underneath all portions of the Dream Realm, characters can only gain access to this sector from a few locations, such as the Enchanted Wood in the Pastoral World or the Sprawl's Undercity in the Future World. The Underworld consists of an endless series of caverns lit only by phosphorescent fungi growing on the wall.

The Underworld is home to several different intelligent species. The most numerous are ghouls, who seem to be the dream selves of ghouls from the waking world, just as the inhabitants of the Pastoral and Future worlds are the dream selves of humans from the waking world. Tens of thousands of ghouls inhabit the tunnels of the Underworld, and there is a thriving ghoul civilization. These ghouls even maintain a large library of occult and mundane works – some written by humans and stolen by the ghouls and others written by ghouls in their inhuman tongue. Ghouls in the Dream Realm are on average somewhat less aggressive and less worried about secrecy than their counterparts in the waking world.

Ghosts are the next most common intelligent inhabitant of the Underworld. Standing almost three meters tall, their hooved, kangaroo-like legs allow them to hop quite rapidly, faster than humans can walk or run. Ghosts are carnivores, and not particularly picky about their prey. They prefer dining on gugs, but eat humans or ghouls if given the chance. Fortunately, ghosts die instantly if touched by even a single ray of sunlight and so cannot leave the Underworld except at night.

DESCRIPTION

After a moment something about the size of a small horse hopped out into the grey twilight, and Carter turned sick at the aspect of that scabrous and unwholesome beast, whose face is so curiously human despite the absence of a nose, a forehead, and other important particulars.

— H.P. Lovecraft

The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath

Gugs are huge and misshapen giants almost five meters tall, with vertical mouths and eyes on stalks on the sides of their head. They dwell in the cyclopean city known as the Tower of Koth, located beneath the Enchanted Wood in the Pastoral World. Due to an ancient curse, they are incapable of leaving the Underworld.

Name: Ulthar Cat

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Constitution 2, Intelligence 3, Perception 4, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 8, Combat 13, Brains 12

Life Points: 9

Speed: 21

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Acute Hearing & Smell, Night Sight

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	12	2	Slash/Stab
Claw	12	2	Bash
Dodge	12	—	Defense Action

Name: Zoog

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Constitution 2, Intelligence 2, Perception 3, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 8, Combat 12, Brains 10

Life Points: 12

Speed: 12

Special Abilities: Acute Hearing & Smell, Night Sight

Drama Points: 0-2

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	12	2	Slash/Stab
Claw	12	2	Bash
Dodge	12	—	Defense Action

DESCRIPTION

It was a paw, fully two feet and a half across, and equipped with formidable talons. After it came another paw, and after that a great black-furred arm to which both of the paws were attached by short forearms. Then two pink eyes shone, and the head of the awakened gug sentry, large as a barrel, wobbled into view. The eyes jutted two inches from each side, shaded by bony protuberances overgrown with coarse hairs. But the head was chiefly terrible because of the mouth. That mouth had great yellow fangs and ran from the top to the bottom of the head, opening vertically instead of horizontally.

— H. P. Lovecraft

The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath

LOCATIONS IN THE UNDERWORLD

Other than the a few distinct locations, the vast majority of the Underworld is a seemingly endless series of caverns and tunnels inhabited by ghouls, ghastrs, gugs, and a variety of cave-adapted animals.

Vaults of Zin: This huge cavern adjoins the cemetery of the gugs and is home to many hundreds of ghastrs who attempt to feast on all visitors.

Vale of Pnath: This is the deepest known crevice in all of the Underworld. Here, the ghouls of the Underworld dump their refuse. Dholes, vast worms, the smallest of which are a half-kilometer long, burrow through this crevasse. OPS explorers know that on other worlds vast infestations of dholes have destroyed almost all life, and while they only appear in Earth's Dream Realm, OPS investigators keep careful watch for their appearance in the waking world.

Crag of the Ghouls: Located near both the Vale of Pnath and the towering peaks of Thok, this is where many Underworld ghouls dump their refuse so it falls into the Vale of Pnath. This crag also adjoins the ghouls' largest underground warren in the Underworld, a warren that includes their large and famed library. Humans who have proven themselves to be friends or allies of the ghouls are occasionally allowed to visit this library, where they can learn many secrets that can be found nowhere else.

THE FUTURE WORLD

This realm holds dreams about an amazing or terrifying future. Much like the Pastoral World, this realm consists of a series of continents separated by oceans, but the landscape of the Future World is vastly different from the Pastoral World. The Western Continent contains various ruins and decaying cities, many still inhabited.

The Northern Continent contains vast gleaming metropolises and huge arcologies, as well as huge swaths of genetically engineered farmlands and equally engineered wilderness. The inhabitants of several of the more wild-seeming lands in the Future World use genetically engineered animals and plants in place of most or all conventional technologies. These lands may look like ordinary jungles or temperate forests, but are actually thriving nations where the inhabitants live in vast arboreal cities.

The Future World's Southern continent is a single vast city stretching across the entire continent, and in the East, a shallow sea dotted with coral atolls and other small islands is home to several advanced aquatic civilizations. Most of the inhabitants of the Future World are human, but in this realm, humans include cyborgs and genetically enhanced humans. In addition, there are a few cities and even a district of the Southern continent city, inhabited by technologically advanced cats, ghouls, and zoogs. Aliens also occasionally visit from the stars and planets of the Space Realm.

LOCATIONS IN THE FUTURE WORLD

The Sprawl: Located in the far north of the future world, this metropolis covers dozens of square kilometers and is built on two levels. There is the wealthy Upper City, an elegant wonder of parks, monorails, jet cars, and gleaming buildings of steel and glass. The lowest levels of the Upper City stand 20 meters above the ground, supported by many hundreds of pillars. In the dark regions below the Upper City lies the Under City, a city consisting entirely of low structures that do not reach the floor of the Upper City and the first six stories of the tall towers that make up the Upper City. The buildings of the Under City are factories and dwellings that are ugly, utilitarian, and generally poor.

The Sprawl is a city divided by the tensions between rich and poor, between upper-dweller and under-dweller. Depending upon the style and expense of their dress and equipment, every visitor will be shown either up or down. Visitors can freely leave the Sprawl if they have a vehicle or can afford passage elsewhere, but they are not free to travel from the level assigned to them to the other level, unless they need to do so for purposes of their job or some similarly important reason. The Upper City is a realm of luxury and comfort, while the Under City is a poor and somewhat lawless place where anything in the Future World can be bought and sold, including all manner of information. Even secrets from the waking world can sometimes be bought and sold in the Under City. The lowest levels of the Under City also connect to the Un-

derworld. Ghouls mix freely with humans in a few of the most run-down and dangerous regions of the Under City, and residents of these areas know that anyone who falls asleep in a deserted public area may never be seen again.

Sky City: Located near the center of the Future World, at the southernmost tip of the northern continent, Sky City is built on and around the bottom terminus of a huge space elevator that stretches thousands of kilometers straight up into the Space Sector. Eight kilometers high, Sky City is the tallest city in the Future World. The upper portions are pressurized and temperature-regulated due to the cold and low pressure. The entire city is an enormous mega-structure, one great building built around the 100-meter wide cable of the space elevator. Although travelers can take rockets into space from elsewhere in the Future World, Sky City's space elevator is the easiest way to enter the Space Sector, and Sky City is home to many thousands of human and alien visitors and immigrants from the Space Sector. Sky City is also on the coast and serves as a port for seagoing ships. Tens of thousands of kilometers above, at the end of the space elevator is High City, which is a space station in the Space Sector that is also part of Sky City, as well as being one of the larger spaceship docks in the Space Sector.

The Ruins: This blasted region lies at the far western edge of the Future World and is largely isolated from the rest of this sector by high mountains, vast distances, and the dangerously radioactive Plain of Glass. The Ruins were mostly destroyed by a vast nuclear war centuries ago. Today, the radiation has decreased so that only the area immediately around the various large craters remains dangerous, and these are all clearly marked at night by a pale blue glow. The Ruins consist of the remains of three large and highly advanced cities and dozens of kilometers of overgrown wilderness between them. Although sparsely inhabited, the Ruins are home to primitive savages, a variety of exotic mutant humans and animals, and a few bands of survivors who are attempting to rebuild. Safely crossing the Plain of Glass is sufficiently difficult that few travelers from the rest of the Future World visit The Ruins. However, there are rumors that buried vaults beneath at least one of the three cities in this region contains knowledge found nowhere else, and so The Ruins attract the occasional treasure-seeker. The Ruins also contain an entrance to the Underworld; the portions of the Underworld that adjoin it are home to the most hideous and dangerous of the mutants.

Trassor Th e Endless: Th e southern continent of the Future World consists of a single vast city covering

hundreds of thousands of square kilometers. The tallest buildings are nearly three kilometers high, and both underground magnetic trains and automatically controlled flying cars carry residents from one end of Trassor to the other in no more than an hour or two. Trassor is home to several hundred million residents and it has a large spaceport where rockets journey to and from the Space Sector daily. Trassor is home to many different breeds of humanity, including cyborgs, various human animal crossbreeds. In addition, there is a sector of the city set aside for aliens, including a large contingent of technology-using ghouls and a section of zoogs.

SPACE SECTOR

This portion of the Dream Realm is a fantastic version of outer space. Here, all possible dreams of space can be found. This is the largest of the four Sectors of the Dream Realm, but also by far the more sparsely inhabited. The worlds, moons, asteroids, and space stations are separated by vast distances. The portions of Space over the Pastoral World are filled with worlds inhabited by humans with strangely colored skins, and exotic sailing-ship-like vessels that travel through space and are crewed by sword wielding swashbucklers. The portions of Space that hang over the Future World are filled with rocket ships, rotating space stations, and explorers and traders in space suits, carrying laser pistols and similar gear.

Almost anything can be found in space, including truly alien worlds. One of the disturbing aspects of Space in the human Dream Realm is that it connects to the Dream Realms of other species, including alien species on other worlds. These alien Dream Realms always require long journeys to reach, but adventurous dreamers can encounter a multitude of species.

Unless a dreaming character enters mental contact with a hyperspatial or partially hyperspatial entity, events in the Dream Realm cannot increase an individual's degree of Hyperspatial Exposure. Unfortunately, a few of the beings found in alien Dream Realms seek to make mental contact with visitors, which can result in characters waking up mentally different from when they went to sleep. However, venturing into alien Dream Realms has also allowed some daring dreamers to return with alien knowledge and sometimes even information about the location of new habitable worlds. Contact with alien Dream Realms also poses a risk for the human Dream Realm, since it could potentially be invaded by dangerous aliens or hungry hyperspatial entities. Various heroic dreamers have helped fend off such incursions, and the OPS recruits some dreamers specifically to look for evidence of such dangers.



LOCATION IN SPACE SECTOR

The Moon: The moon was home to invading moon-beasts, until they were driven off almost a century ago. Now it contains some relics of these invaders which OPS is eagerly investigating. The Moon is also currently home to a large colony of intelligent and psychic Ulthar cats, who have a moderately good relationship to OPS agents willing to treat them with respect.

Mars: The dreams of the long-dead Martians dwell in caverns and underground cities, while on the surface human settlers, miners, and explorers live amidst an exotic desert ecology of ancient canals and strange beasts.

The Rotten World: A ringed planet located beyond the solar system that has been destroyed by dholes. No native life other than lichens and insects remain in its thin atmosphere, but there are ruins of a vanished inhuman civilization, and several groups of human or partly human space pirates make this world their base. One group of pirates uses a ruined city as their hideout, and two other others have their bases in caverns located in small asteroids that are part of the rotten world's rings.

Syracuse Station: A large rotating space station several kilometers in diameter, which is home to more than 100,000 residents and half that number of visitors and short-term residents who come from the space ships that regularly dock here. Syracuse Station is also home to a small colony of Ulthar cats, and these cats are often found onboard space ships that dock here.

THE DREAM REALM AND THE WAKING WORLD

The Dream Realm has been a topic of legends, stories, and the tales of mystics for centuries, but once psychic powers were made public in the 1960s, the existence of the Dream Realm became publicly known and psychics began making money teaching people how to visit it or taking them along for journeys. During the 1970s, visiting the Dream Realm became a fad, but interest eventually waned for all but a relatively small subculture of dreamers. The 1977, 14 dreamers arranged to keep themselves dreaming while their bodies starved to death in the hopes of remaining forever in the Dream Realm. This well-publicized mass suicide caused many people to regard dreamers as potentially unstable and led to laws against taking minors along on lucid dreams.

Today, the Dream Realm remains a place of wonder and entertainment for a subculture with an interest in having dream adventures, as well as a source of information for

OPS operatives. OPS offers rewards for reliable information about new alien presences or other unusual information and almost half of the information OPS obtains about activities in the Dream Realm comes from amateur dreamers.

APPENDIX: ANIMALS

Here are short statistics on some earthly and alien animals that Operatives and Civilians may encounter in their adventures. Unintelligent animals never have Drama Points.

Name: Attack Dog
Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Constitution 2, Intelligence 1, Perception 4, Willpower 3
Ability Scores: Muscle 10, Combat 14, Brains 8
Life Points: 17
Speed: 28
Special Abilities: Enhanced Smell
Found On: Earth, any Human Colony, Galatea I, the Dream Realm

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	14	9	Slash/Stab
Dodge	14	—	Defense Action

Name: Falcon
Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 6, Constitution 2, Intelligence 1, Perception 5, Willpower 3
Ability Scores: Muscle 8, Combat 14, Brains 8
Life Points: 11
Speed: 58 (flying)
Special Abilities: Enhanced Sight, Increased Speed
Found On: Earth, Galatea I, the Dream Realm

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	12	3	Slash/Stab
Dodge	14	—	Defense Action
Talons	14	3	Slash/Stab

Name: Riding Horse (or Zebra)
Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Constitution 4, Intelligence 1, Perception 3, Willpower 3
Ability Scores: Muscle 18, Combat 12, Brains 8
Life Points: 60
Speed: 58
Found On: Any Colony, the Dream Realm

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	12	—	Defense Action
Trample	12	26	Bashing

Name: War Horse (or Zebra)
Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 4, Constitution 5, Intelligence 1, Perception 4, Willpower 4
Ability Scores: Muscle 22, Combat 14, Brains 8
Life Points: 75
Speed: 69
Found On: Galatea I, the Dream Realm

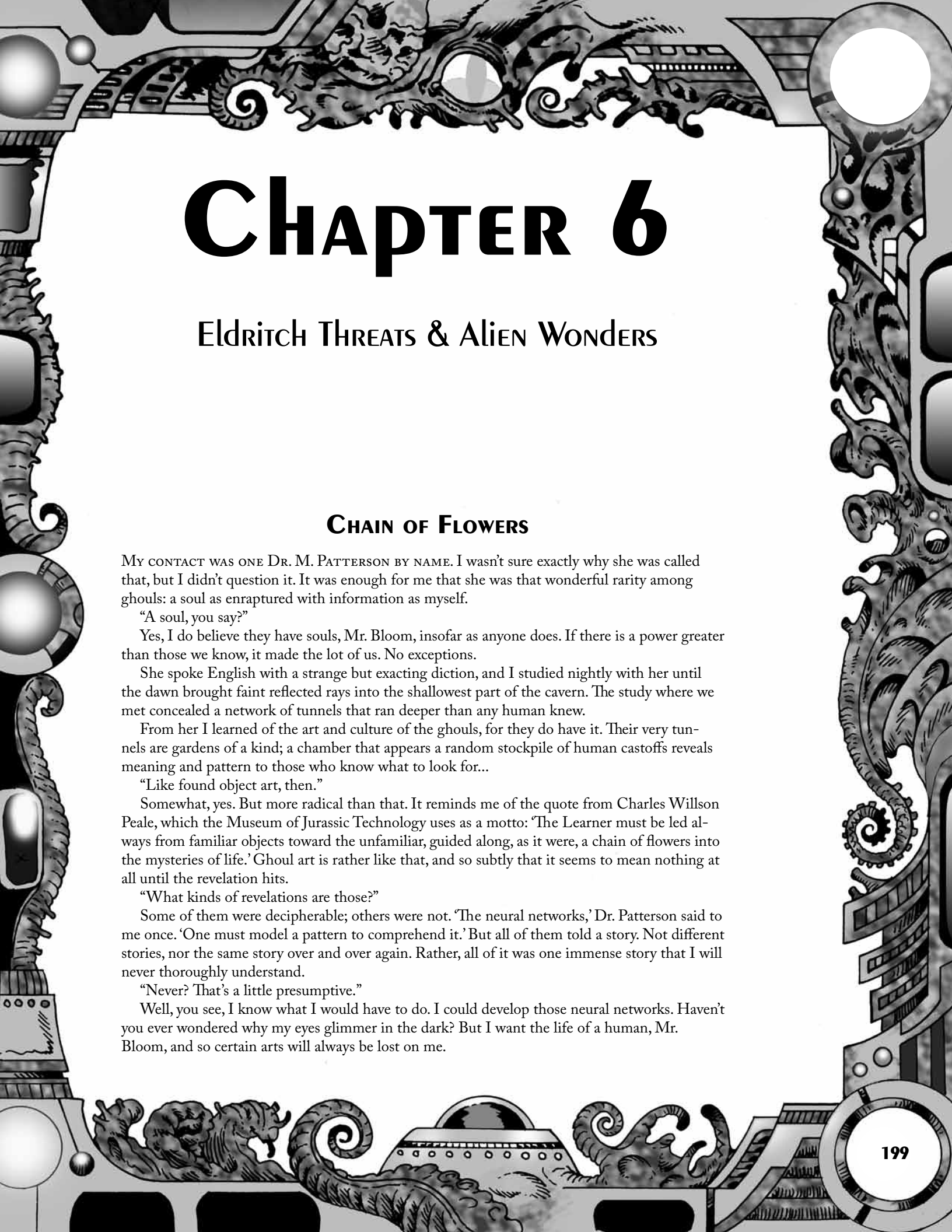
MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	14	—	Defense Action
Trample	14	35	Bashing



Poor devils! After all, they were not evil things of their kind. They were the men of another age and another order of being. Nature had played a hellish jest on them - as it will on any others that human madness, callousness, or cruelty may hereafter dig up in that hideously dead or sleeping polar waste - and this was their tragic homecoming. They had not been even savages-for what indeed had they done? That awful awakening in the cold of an unknown epoch - perhaps an attack by the furry, frantically barking quadrupeds, and a dazed defense against them and the equally frantic white simians with the queer wrappings and paraphernalia ... poor Lake, poor Gedney... and poor Old Ones! Scientists to the last - what had they done that we would not have done in their place? God, what intelligence and persistence! What a facing of the incredible, just as those carven kinsmen and forbears had faced things only a little less incredible! Radiates, vegetables, monstrosities, star spawn - whatever they had been, they were men!

H. P. Lovecraft - *At the Mountains Of Madness*

A decorative border surrounds the page, featuring intricate mechanical and organic designs. On the left, there are gears, a large eye-like lens, and a tentacle-like structure. On the right, a large circular lens is at the top, followed by a vertical column of mechanical parts and a tentacle. At the bottom, there are more gears, a dome-like structure, and tentacles. The entire border is rendered in a detailed, etched style.

Chapter 6

Eldritch Threats & Alien Wonders

CHAIN OF FLOWERS

My contact was one Dr. M. Patterson by name. I wasn't sure exactly why she was called that, but I didn't question it. It was enough for me that she was that wonderful rarity among ghouls: a soul as enraptured with information as myself.

"A soul, you say?"

Yes, I do believe they have souls, Mr. Bloom, insofar as anyone does. If there is a power greater than those we know, it made the lot of us. No exceptions.

She spoke English with a strange but exacting diction, and I studied nightly with her until the dawn brought faint reflected rays into the shallowest part of the cavern. The study where we met concealed a network of tunnels that ran deeper than any human knew.

From her I learned of the art and culture of the ghouls, for they do have it. Their very tunnels are gardens of a kind; a chamber that appears a random stockpile of human castoffs reveals meaning and pattern to those who know what to look for...

"Like found object art, then."

Somewhat, yes. But more radical than that. It reminds me of the quote from Charles Willson Peale, which the Museum of Jurassic Technology uses as a motto: 'The Learner must be led always from familiar objects toward the unfamiliar, guided along, as it were, a chain of flowers into the mysteries of life.' Ghoul art is rather like that, and so subtly that it seems to mean nothing at all until the revelation hits.

"What kinds of revelations are those?"

Some of them were decipherable; others were not. 'The neural networks,' Dr. Patterson said to me once. 'One must model a pattern to comprehend it.' But all of them told a story. Not different stories, nor the same story over and over again. Rather, all of it was one immense story that I will never thoroughly understand.

"Never? That's a little presumptive."

Well, you see, I know what I would have to do. I could develop those neural networks. Haven't you ever wondered why my eyes glimmer in the dark? But I want the life of a human, Mr. Bloom, and so certain arts will always be lost on me.

HUMAN THREATS

Even in *Eldritch Skies*, humanity is sometimes its own worst enemy. Mythos cults can be a deadly threat. In addition to kidnapping or brainwashing people and occasionally performing acts of human sacrifice, mythos cults also serve either aliens unwilling to abide by treaties with humanity, or more commonly, deadly and terrible hyperspatial beings like the flying polyps or the Great Old Ones. Mythos cults help these beings achieve their horrific agendas and may even attempt to assist them in overrunning the Earth.

CULTIST

Most cultists don't have vast sorcerous powers; all they have is a devotion to their inhuman masters and a willingness to follow the leader or leaders of their cult. Some are eccentric scholars, others are brutal thugs with an allegedly holy mission, and many are simply greedy and willing to trade the safety of their species for whatever benefits they can get for themselves. However, all of them are dangerous.

These fanatics and cult foot soldiers do everything from preach on street corners to kill the cult's enemies.

CULT LEADER

Most cult leaders are sorcerers and many are psychics. Most are not all that physically imposing, but they may be able to influence others with their psychic powers, and they have both summoned beings and devoted cult members to do

their bidding. Some cult leaders have Level 4 Hyperspatial Influence and thus are both completely insane by human standards and may possess various Inhuman Psychic Powers.

Cult leaders regularly seek to find new members, and occasionally look for potential human sacrifices that no one will miss when they are gone. Most are highly charismatic individuals.

When a cult leader gains Level 4 Hyperspatial Exposure, they come completely under the sway of whatever mythos beings they serve and their motivations become strange and terrible. They also can now gain psychic abilities well beyond those possible for ordinary humans.

When a cult leader has had sufficient contact with hyperspatial beings, their minds snap and reform into a pattern far different from the human norm. Most learn to fake sanity for brief periods, but anyone spending much time with them will know that something is deeply wrong with them. Unfortunately, most cultists don't see this as a problem. In general, the sense of community generated by cult behavior, the leader's charisma, and cleverly constructed rationales that sound like good ideas at the time provide a framework for manipulating people, whether or not these rationales relate to the real and incomprehensible motivations involved.



Name: Cultist Thug

Motivation: Obey their cult leader, beat up or kill enemies, serve the Great Old Ones.

Species: Human

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Constitution 3, Intelligence 2, Perception 2, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 12, Combat 13, Brains 10

Life Points: 34

Speed: 18

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Natural Toughness, Hyperspatial Exposure 1

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	13	—	Defense Action
Grapple	15	—	Resisted by Dodge
Knife	13	9	Slash/Stab
Pistol	13	15	Bullet
Punch	13	9	Bash

Name: Cult Leader

Motivation: Serve the Great Old Ones or other inhuman masters, control their flock

Species: Human

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Constitution 3, Intelligence 4, Perception 3, Willpower 4

Ability Scores: Muscle 10, Combat 10, Brains 14

Life Points: 30

Speed: 15

Drama Points: 2

Special Abilities: Psychic (Psychic Sensitivity, Emotional, Influence), Sorcery 3 (Avoidance Ward, Dho Na Formula, Summon Servitor of the Other Gods), Hyperspatial Exposure 3

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	10	—	Defense Action
Pistol	10	13	Bullet
Punch	10	5	Bash
Sorcery	16		

Name: Crazy Cult Leader

Motivation: Serve the Great Old Ones or other inhuman masters; perform unknowable actions for unknowable reasons

Species: Human (more or less)

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Constitution 3, Intelligence 3, Perception 3, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 10, Combat 10, Brains 12

Life Points: 30

Speed: 15

Drama Points: 2

Special Abilities: Psychic (Psychic Sensitivity, Emotional, Influence, Hypnotic Command (see p. 203 below)), Sorcery 3 (Sending, Summon Servitor of the Other Gods), Hyperspatial Exposure 4

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	10	—	Defense Action
Pistol	10	13	Bullet
Punch	10	5	Bash
Sorcery	15		

HYPERSPATIAL EXPOSURE AND CONTACT RATINGS OF AB-HUMANS AND ALIENS

Psychics can mentally contact almost any alien or ab-human, but doing so is often far from a good idea. Every non-human creature has a Contact Rating, which is the number of Success Levels the psychic needs to roll to successfully make contact with the alien's mind. Psychics who successfully make contact with alien minds can read the alien's thoughts, but this is never an easy or comfortable process, and the psychic must also make a Fear Test or recoil in confusion and disorientation after only a brief glimpse of the alien's mind.

Aliens that have an innate connection to hyperspace or which are partly or fully hyperspatial beings have two Hyperspatial Exposure Ratings. The first one is the degree of exposure gained for being in their presence; the second is for making psychic contact with them. Aliens that are ordinary biological organisms always have an Exposure Rating of 0 for both their physical and mental presence. However, aliens that have incorporated hyperspatial devices and hyperspatial energies into their bodies can be dangerous to psychically contact. Until researchers have had a chance to evaluate an alien species' degree of hyperspatial connection, telepathic contact with a newly discovered alien species is considered exceptionally dangerous and is not recommended except in emergencies.

PLAYING ALIENS AND AB-HUMANS

Because they are so mentally alien, players cannot play aliens or ab-humans in Eldritch Skies. These characters are supposed to be inherently somewhat enigmatic and confusing. Players who wish to play characters that are not entirely human should consider playing humans with deep one or ghoul ancestry. Such characters are still mentally human, at least if they are raised with humans, and so are far better choices for roleplaying in this setting.

ALIENS & AB-HUMANS

One of the most important truths of the Cthulhu Mythos is that aliens are profoundly alien in both mind and body. Nothing that evolved on another planet is humanoid and aliens do not think like humans. No one is ever going to sit down with a mi-go, elder one, or a member of the great race of Yith and share a joke or feel a strong sense of emotional connection. Their minds and emotions are radically different from our own.

In addition, one of the terrible facts about excessive exposure to hyperspace is that it can warp human minds sufficiently that they eventually snap and become equally alien, creating an alien in a human body. By that same token deep ones and ghouls are both descended from humans. Although humans can be transformed by blasphemous rites into either deep ones or ghouls, neither of these species of ab-humans have anything remotely like a human psychology - the process of transformation from a human to either type of being warps the person's mind so that it also ceases to be a human mind with human thoughts and emotions. Also, when a human undergoes level five Hyperspatial Exposure, not only does their body become as twisted and inhuman as their mind, it becomes empowered with hyperspatial energies, and so they often gain unusual abilities.

When interacting with aliens or ab-humans, most humans, including most trained OPS contact personnel, cannot help but treat them like they would other humans. Inhuman creatures think in different ways, but humans dealing with them are often lulled into the delusion that they can predict the others' actions with the same sense of empathy they would use to understand members of their own species. But all such efforts are ultimately false. However, that does not mean that some degree of mutual understanding is impossible. Most of the aliens humanity has encountered are technically advanced species who have made many of the same discoveries that humanity did and have a similar understanding of physics, chemistry, astronomy, and mathematics.

Although most of these species also have a profound understanding of the laws of hyperspace, humanity is in the process of gaining this same understanding. While entities that live partially or entirely in hyperspace are essentially incomprehensible, aliens like the elder ones or mi-go and ab-humans like deep ones are all physical beings living with the same physical laws that humanity does. As a result, humans who work extensively with members of an alien species can learn to gain a limited

understanding of the technical prowess of a particular alien and may learn to respect or disdain that alien's competence at some profession shared by both species, like mathematician or archeologist.

This mixture of practical and professional understanding and emotional incomprehension is extremely confusing for many humans, and presumably for many aliens. The only exception to this confusion comes when dealing with the members of the great race of Yith, who often seem far more human than other aliens. The reason for this is that the only Yithians that humanity interacts with are those that have previously possessed one or more human bodies and now have years or decades of experience at interacting with humanity. What appears to most humans as similarity is simply the result of the knowledge gleaned from interacting with humans in a human body.

As profound as the mental differences between humans and aliens are, they are not so severe that they inhibit all interaction. Humanity has made treaties and engages in trade with several species. Every species of alien that humanity has encountered has goods that they want and goals they wish to achieve, as well as some concept of relative value. As a result, exchange and negotiation are possible even between species. Neither side may understand the other at all well, but everyone can express their needs. However, such treaties can be difficult to forge and there are a few species like the Europeans who want nothing from humanity other than to be left alone. Also, because aliens are so difficult to understand, it's very easy for humanity's meeting with another species to go exceptionally badly. The war with the moonbeasts is merely one example of what can go wrong when meeting aliens. Telling allies from enemies is far from easy when they both have interests and desires that are to some degree incomprehensible.

ALIEN AND AB-HUMAN ABILITIES

Humans can gain a wide range of special abilities, including sorcery, psychic power, and a variety of augmentations. However, alien and ab-human beings possess other stranger and often more dangerous powers and abilities that have proven impossible for humanity to learn or duplicate. The following are the most common of these powers. Directors are also encouraged to create new and different powers for aliens and ab-humans.

INHUMAN PSYCHIC POWERS

Some aliens and ab-humans, and all humans who have reached Hyperspatial Influence Level 4 or 5, have minds

that can learn strange and powerful psychic powers far beyond those that ordinary humans can learn. Operatives and Civilians in Eldritch Skies cannot learn any of these powers. The only exception is that psychics on Galatea I have mastered the Invisibility psychic ability. OPS researchers are currently investigating how their own psychics can learn this ability.

HYPNOTIC COMMAND

15-point Power

The psychic can dominate the victim, forcing him to obey almost any command. To use this power, the target must be able to clearly hear the psychic's voice. Every time the psychic tries to command the victim, roll Willpower + Psychic Art vs. the target's Willpower (doubled). If the victim loses, they must comply with the order. Some commands may be so much against the victim's self-preservation instinct or moral code that he gains bonuses (+1 to +5) to resist (at your Director's call). Targets also automatically make a second roll to resist obviously suicidal orders, like an order to shoot themselves in the head. The psychic can also use this ability to erase existing memories or to create false memories. However, as when using a hypnoscope, being reminded of the truth causes erased memories to return and false memories to be gradually replaced with true ones.

ILLUSIONS

14-point Power

This ability can be used to create realistic illusions, including illusory landscapes. These illusions have no substance. They can be seen, heard, and smelled, but they cannot affect the physical world beyond that level. Illusions are created with a Willpower + Wildcard (Illusions) roll. They can be as large as Willpower + Psychic Art cubic yards + one additional cubic yard per Success Level rolled. It takes at least two cubic yards to create an illusionary human. Illusions can be maintained as long as the character wills it; serious distractions like combat or being attacked force the character to make a Willpower + Psychic Art roll to avoid losing the illusion. Also, maintaining illusions in combat or similar conditions requires the use of multiple actions.

Illusions can be used to duplicate all of the effects of the invisibility power as well as to allow psychics to disguise themselves as other people, or even other humanoid creatures. These illusions are psychic in nature and so can only be seen by living beings. They are invisible to mechanical sensors. However, they can be seen by anyone who can directly see the psychic, including people looking through telescopes or

binoculars. These illusions do not show up on photographs, recorded videos, or even on live video feeds.

INVISIBILITY

7-point Power

The alien can psychically render itself invisible. Cameras, alarm systems, and other devices will still detect the being, but people cannot see it, unless they are watching through a video screen. Those who cannot see the alien can still hear and smell it normally. Also, living beings who become aware of the alien character's presence, through bumping into it, being in hand-to-hand combat with it, or some similarly obvious means can react normally to its presence as long as they are certain of the character's approximate location. Anyone who is certain of the character's presence and location may make a Willpower + Perception roll to be able to see the character's outline. Each Success Level allows the person to roughly see the character for one turn. The person can roll once a turn for as long as he is certain of the character's location (typically by touch). Once the person succeeds or if someone else points out the character's location, the person can continue to roll until the character gets out of line of sight for at least one full turn.

POSSESSION

15-point Quality

This is the ability to inhabit another body and take control of it. Taking over another person requires a Resisted Roll of Willpower + Psychic Art vs. the target's Willpower (doubled). The possessing entity is in control of the target body for 30 minutes per Success Level of the Willpower Roll. At the end of this period of time, the possessing psychic may try to extend the length of the possession, but on the second time, it will suffer a -2 modifier to its Willpower Roll. Further attempts are possible, but the negative modifier is greater with each subsequent attempt; -3 for the third time, -4 for the fourth, -5 for the fifth. While the character is possessing someone, its own body is completely helpless. It can feel pain in its body, but reacting instantly ends the possession attempt.

If the possessing character manages to succeed in five possession attempts in a row, it gets to control the target body for the length of an entire day. This cycle can be repeated for an indefinite length of time, as long as the possessing psychic can consistently win five possession attempts in a row despite the negative modifiers.

INHUMAN PHYSICAL QUALITIES & POWERS

Only aliens and monstrous ab-humans with 5 levels of Hyperspatial Influence can possess these abilities. These physical capabilities are partially hyperspatial in nature and are incompatible with ordinary minds and bodies. Some of these qualities and powers are also suitable for creating alien species.

EXTRA/LIMITED LIMBS

Variable Quality or Drawback

Most hyperspatial mutants remain humanoid, but some transform into hideously inhuman forms. For some mutants, having additional limbs is purely cosmetic. However, if the extra limbs provide the creature with a significant benefit, use the rules below. Aliens also often possess this Quality or Drawback.

Extra Arms: each additional pair gives a +1 to close combat maneuvers (grappling, punching and parrying unarmed attacks, or armed attacks if wielding weapons). The mutant can also wield multiple weapons. However, increasing the number of attacks per turn requires the Extra Attacks Quality (see below). These arms can be normal limbs, branching tentacles, or any other possible manipulator. Cost: 3 points per extra pair.

Extra Legs: Having four legs add 10 kilometers per hour (equal to +5 meters per second) to the mutant's running speed. Having additional legs adds nothing to the creature's speed. Going faster requires the Increased Speed Quality below. Cost: 2 points.

Extra Attacks: The creature's limbs are coordinated enough that they can attack targets at the same time. These extra attacks or actions suffer from no penalty, but must involve the use of the extra limbs (so, no extra Dodge Maneuvers would be allowed, for example). The number of extra attacks cannot exceed the number of extra limbs. Cost: 15 points per extra attack/action.

Legless: The creature lacks functional legs, and instead crawls or slithers. It may have a snake-like body, or might be an amorphous blob. Reduce the creature's Speed by half. Cost: This Quality is a 2-point Drawback.

EXTREME NATURAL WEAPONRY

3-point Quality

Some aliens and ab-humans have teeth and claws far larger and more deadly than those that can be added to a normal human. These creatures have teeth like a shark

or claws like a tiger or a grizzly bear. These weapons do slash/stab damage of 4 x Strength and cannot be hidden – they are terrifyingly visible.

FAST REGENERATION

3-point Quality

The inhuman creature's wounds literally close before your eyes. This creature heals a number of Life Points equal to its Constitution every minute.

INCREASED SPEED

Variable Quality

Some mutants or aliens can move much faster than ordinary humans. Each point spent on this Quality increase the mutant's running speed by 10 kilometers per hour (equal to 5 meters per second). No creature can take more than 5 levels of this Quality.

INVISIBLE

20-point Power

Some entities cannot be seen through normal means because they have been partially shifted into hyperspace. Invisible creatures can still be heard though and some sensors may detect them. See p. 111 for information on fighting invisible foes. This Quality costs a base twenty points, and the invisibility may be turned off and on at will. If the invisibility drops for at least a Turn when the creature attracts attention to itself (such as by attacking someone), the cost is reduced to ten points. This power always increases the Hyperspatial Exposure caused by the creature's presence by +1.

MONSTROUS ATTACK

Variable Power

The creature has a horrific and exceedingly dangerous attack not dependent on its Strength. The exact form can vary: jets of acid, gouts of flame, bolts of electricity, or simply raw hyperspatial energies are all possibilities. In close combat, the creature uses Dexterity+ Brawling to attack, for ranged attacks, the creature uses Dexterity + Gun Combat. Ranged attacks normally have the same range as a pistol. Creatures whose attacks have the same range as a rifle do only half damage. There are three types of attack. All of this damage is treated as fire damage (see Chapter 3), except that this damage never causes the target to catch on fire.

Minor: The attack inflicts 20 points of damage. It costs four points for close and eight for ranged.

Major: The attack inflicts 30 points of damage. It

costs seven points for close and 12 for ranged.

Deadly: The attack inflicts 50 points of damage. It costs 15 points for close and 20 for ranged.

REDUCED DAMAGE

Variable Power

Either because some or all of their body resides in hyperspace, or because their physiology has been reinforced with hyperspatial energies, some creatures take less damage from attacks than normal physical beings. This power comes in two levels. The first reduces damage by half, while the second divides damage by five. Damage is rounded down, to a minimum of one point. In all cases, the base damage is adjusted after Success Levels have been added. Damage type modifiers are not applied. This power always increases the Hyperspatial Exposure caused by the creature's presence by +1. The cost of the trait depends on what form of damage is affected. Only fully hyperspatial beings can possess the version of this quality that reduces all forms of damage.

Everything: Applying Reduced Damage to all injuries costs five or twenty points, respectively.

Kinetic Attack: Various hyperspatial implants and natural hyperspatial abilities allow some physical beings to shunt a portion of kinetic damage from bullets, blades, or falling rocks into hyperspace, where it dissipates harmlessly. The cost for the first level quality is three points; ten points for the second level.

TELEPORTATION

Variable Power

Certain creatures with hyperspatial powers can teleport themselves and anyone or anything they can carry to a familiar location. A creature with a Brains score of 13 or higher can perform this feat as one combat action. Creatures with lower Brains scores must spend an entire turn concentrating and performing no other action in order to vanish at the end of the turn. If they are interrupted, then they cannot teleport in that turn. Creatures can teleport no more often than once every minute.

TELEPORT DISTANCE TABLE

ABILITY COST	DISTANCE
7 points	100 kilometers
10 points	1,000 kilometers
12 points	Anywhere on the planet

INHUMAN ALLIES & FOES

The following section contains descriptions and rules for the various aliens, ab-humans, and hyperspatial beings that humanity has encountered either through direct contact or through archeological remains on Earth or on some other world.

AB-HUMANS

Humans (and other life forms) that are exposed to sufficiently high levels of hyperspatial energies mutate and change. Most of these mutations are highly idiosyncratic and produce unique and horrible monsters. However, lower-level long-term exposure to hyperspatial energies often results in a consistent species. The two known examples of these new species are deep ones and ghouls.

HYPERSPATIAL MUTANTS

Ab-humans like deep ones and ghouls are the descendants of people who experienced gradual long-term hyperspatial exposure. The result of this exposure is a series of extreme, but also regular transformations that are fully heritable. In vivid contrast, humans who experience a sudden Level 5 Hyperspatial Exposure transform in a more drastic and horrible fashion. In the course of a few hours, or occasionally in a few seconds, their flesh rends and twists and they become not merely inhuman, but also utterly unique. It's impossible to come up with any sort of consistent description for such creatures, because each mutant is different from all others.

DESCRIPTION

The thing that lay half-bent on its side in a foetid pool of greenish-yellow ichor and tarry stickiness was almost nine feet tall, and the dog had torn off all the clothing and some of the skin. It was not quite dead, but twitched

NAMING CONVENTIONS

Why are lowercase names used for the majority of species in Eldritch Skies? We keep descriptive or short-hand species names in lowercase and capitalize species names derived from a place-name or other proper noun. Deep ones just derive their name from living undersea, whereas, while nobody is sure whether the Great Race of Yith is named after a place or a person, they're certainly named after something. We've tried to follow this convention throughout.

silently and spasmodically while its chest heaved in monstrous unison with the mad piping of the expectant whip-poor-wills outside... It was partly human, beyond a doubt, with very manlike hands and head, and the goatish, chinless face had the stamp of the Whateleys upon it. But the torso and lower parts of the body were teratologically fabulous, so that only generous clothing could ever have enabled it to walk on earth unchallenged or uneradicated.

Above the waist it was semi-anthropomorphic; though its chest, where the dog's rending paws still rested watchfully, had the leathery, reticulated hide of a crocodile or alligator. The back was piebald with yellow and black, and dimly suggested the squamous covering of certain snakes. Below the waist, though, it was the worst; for here all human resemblance left off and sheer phantasy began. The skin was thickly covered with coarse black fur, and from the abdomen a score of long greenish-grey tentacles with red sucking mouths protruded limply.

Their arrangement was odd, and seemed to follow the symmetries of some cosmic geometry unknown to earth or the solar system. On each of the hips, deep set in a kind of pinkish, ciliated orbit, was what seemed to be a rudimentary eye; whilst in lieu of a tail there depended a kind of trunk or feeler with purple annular markings, and with many evidences of being an undeveloped mouth or throat. The limbs, save for their black fur, roughly resembled the hind legs of prehistoric earth's giant saurians, and terminated in ridgy-veined pads that were neither hooves nor claws. When the thing breathed, its tail and tentacles rhythmically changed colour, as if from some circulatory cause normal to the non-human greenish tinge, whilst in the tail it was manifest as a yellowish appearance which alternated with a sickly grayish-white in the spaces between the purple rings. Of genuine blood there was none; only the foetid greenish-yellow ichor which trickled along the painted floor beyond the radius of the stickiness, and left a curious discoloration behind it.

— H.P. Lovecraft

The Dunwich Horror

Needless to say, such an incomprehensible creature is hardly playable in the long term. When this type of transformation happens to a player's Hero due to extreme circumstances in the game session, it is left to the Director's discretion what happens next. If it seems dramatically appropriate, the player may continue controlling their character as a monstrous mutant – perhaps attacking the other Heroes, or making one last tragic attempt to communicate a piece of information – for the duration of the

MUTANT ANIMALS

Although the circumstances are rarer, humans are not the only creatures that can become hyperspatial mutants. Ab-human species like ghouls and deep ones can also be mutated in this fashion, and so can animals. A few dangerously insane cults use hyperspatially mutated dogs to guard their temples or compounds, and occasionally animals will be mutated accidentally. However, the vast majority of hyperspatial mutants were once human. Generating hyperspatial mutants from animals, deep ones, or ghouls, is identical to generating them from humans, except that basic template used is that of a dog, ghoul, or deep one, instead of an ordinary human.

scene, but after the scene is over, the hyperspatial mutant, if still living, becomes a part of the Supporting Cast.

If possible, Directors are encouraged to narrate the player through the surreal experience of such a transformation, giving the player an opportunity to experience the breaking and remaking of the Hero's mind. Plotting the fate of the hyperspatial mutant and collaboratively guiding the way a character's human personality transforms under the onslaught of physically and mentally warping energies can make the event more horrible and more wondrous, while also giving the player closure regarding their suddenly unplayable character. The new hyperspatial mutant might be destroyed by the Heroes and their allies in its first scene, but if not, an ambitious Director can make an antagonist from the luckless former Hero. The scope is limitless, and such a compelling adversary can drive an entire story arc.

CREATING HYPERSPATIAL MUTANTS

When creating hyperspatial mutants, the first step is to add between 5 and 15 Attribute points. For relatively weak mutants, add only 5 Attribute points, while the most powerful gain up to 15 Attribute points. Divide these Attribute points in any way you wish. The mutant's original human Attributes can also be rearranged, reducing Intelligence to an animalistic level or reducing Willpower to such a degree that the creature has absolutely no self-control or any ability to do anything other than blindly react to its environment in anger and fear.

Mutants with inhuman levels of Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution are most common, but equally inhuman levels of Intelligence, Willpower, and Perception also occur. The mutant may become tougher, adding up to 5 levels of the Hard to Kill Quality, or between 10 & 50 Life Points, or possibly both. Then, select between 10

and 25 points of Qualities. Natural versions of Augmentations are common, especially Natural Armor, Natural Weaponry, Life Support, and Improved Senses, as are almost any other Quality, including Psychic Powers, Sorcery, and hideous natural versions of any of the mi-go hyperspatial Augmentations. Hyperspatial Mutants also often possess inhuman psychic powers. One hyperspatial mutant might be a hulking brute that can rip cars in half, while another might be a horrific super genius with potent psychic abilities and the ability to create technosorcerous devices. However, regardless of their particular abilities, all of them are hideous, giving them an Appearance of -5. Hyperspatial Mutants normally have a Hyperspatial Exposure rating of 1/2, but those that have hyperspatial powers, such as those duplicating the power of any of the mi-go hyperspatial augmentations gain a +1 to both of their Hyperspatial Exposure ratings.

BRUTISH HYPERSPATIAL MUTANT

This amphibious monster looks vaguely like a mottled blue-green amphibious gorilla. Its mind was ripped away by its transformation and now it sees humans as both prey and threats. It hides in lakes and other bodies of water when threatened and emerges at night to hunt.

Name: Brutish Hyperspatial Mutant

Motivation: Survive, eat, and kill

Species: Ab-Human Mutant

Contact: 2

Hyperspatial Exposure: 2/3

Attributes: Strength 9, Dexterity 6, Constitution 8, Intelligence 1, Perception 5, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 24, Combat 16, Brains 8

Life Points: 118

Speed: 42/42 (swimming)

Drama Points: 3

Special Abilities: Amphibious, Extreme Natural Weapons (huge fangs and claws), Fast Regeneration, Improved Senses (Sonar & Enhanced Smell), Increased Life Points (+40), Monstrous Attack (minor, hyperspatial energy), Natural Armor (8 points of armor), Reduced Damage (half, kinetic attack)

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	13	—	Defense Action
Claw	16	40	Stab/Slash
Grapple	18	—	Resisted by Dodge
Monstrous Attack	16	24	Fire

BRILLIANT HYPERSPATIAL MUTANT

This monstrous entity is dangerously brilliant and considers itself to be far superior to ordinary humans. It works in the shadows, turning people into its thralls. This creature is attempting to acquire ancient artifacts that it hopes will boost its already potent psychic powers so that it may rule an entire city or even a nation.

Name: Brilliant Hyperspatial Mutant

Motivation: Gain power, acquire ancient artifacts, transform humanity into its thralls

Species: Ab-Human Mutant

Contact: 2

Hyperspatial Exposure: 1/2

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Constitution 4, Intelligence 8, Perception 5, Willpower 6

Ability Scores: Muscle 16, Combat 13, Brains 22

Life Points: 46

Speed: 24

Drama Points: 3

Special Abilities: Psychic Sensitivity, Clairvoyance, Hypnotic Command, Illusion, Insight, Natural Armor (2 points of armor), Possession, Regeneration, Teleportation (7 points, 100 km range)

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	13	—	Defense Action
Pistol	13	15	Bullet
Punch	13	13	Bash

DEEP ONES

Archeologists and a few daring interviewers and diplomats have pieced together the history of the deep ones. Approximately 5,000 years ago, a small group of Polynesians settled a now-sunken island located less than 100 miles from the ruins of the Cthulhoid city R'lyeh. No more than a century or two after the island was settled, hyperspatial fluctuations brought Great Cthulhu and its spawn both closer to Earth and closer to awareness. The resulting levels of hyperspatial radiations were relatively low, but over the next century, the inhabitants of the island gradually changed. In part, these changes were driven by these islanders regularly fishing the waters above and near R'lyeh and eating the catches. After no more than a century, the hyperspatial energies faded, but by this time the inhabitants had been forever transformed into the first deep ones. The constant low level exposure, combined with the proximity to R'lyeh helped create a new Earthly species that share some characteristics of Cthulhu's dread spawn while still remaining vertebrates. The deep ones retain mitochondria and a high level of DNA similarity to humans and other earth-based organisms.

These creatures abandoned their island and moved to the undersea mountain ranges near R'lyeh. Here, they studied the ancient inhuman ruins and between their centuries-long lives and the proximity of some of the knowledge contained within R'lyeh, after 2,000 years they had developed advanced, but exotic technologies, including sorcerous devices sculpted from carefully carved constructs of quartz crystal and polymetallic nodules from the seabed.

Today, deep ones use both ritual sorcery and technosorcery. However, they build technosorcerous devices larger than those made by humans. The minimum size of deep one technosorcerous devices is the minimum size of human-made devices for a spell one level higher. A deep one device that duplicates the effects of a level 2 sorcery spell would be the same size as a human-made device that duplicated the effects of a level 3 sorcery spell.

During the first millennia of the deep ones' aquatic existence, Cthulhu and its spawn remained dreaming in the most distant portions of hyperspace. As a result, the deep ones developed independent of Cthulhu's influence. When Cthulhu's connection to Earth next grew stronger, the deep ones had no interest in becoming its thralls and moved away from R'lyeh to spread across all of Earth's oceans.

Being limited by their aquatic environment and less focused on progress and change than humanity, the deep ones spent the next 2,800 years living their long alien lives deep under the sea. During this time, small groups of deep ones visited various Pacific islands and a few coastal locations across the globe, setting up arrangements with small groups of isolated humans that had elements of both trade and worship. These interactions supplied the deep ones with precious metals and other commodities far easier to acquire or create on land. The deep ones also mastered various relatively simple hyperspatial technologies and learned how to deliberately transform humans into deep ones.

The lives of the deep ones changed in the first few decades of the 19th century, as European explorers and steamships took hold of the oceans. The deep ones noticed the spread of humanity and the advances in human naval technology and grew concerned for their own future. At this time, the Pacific deep ones used their sorcerous technology to sink the island of their human ancestral origin, in order to cover up traces of their existence.

A few European and American sailors heard stories of the deep ones from Polynesian islanders. Most dismissed them or added them to the many other stories of sea monsters and mysteries of the deep. However, a New England sailor named Obed Marsh learned of these beings and how humans could occasionally join their num-

ber. Marsh then used a mixture of force and bribery to convince several islanders to teach him the ritual to contact the deep ones. Casting this ritual before he went to sleep, deep ones from the 2,500 year old Atlantic city of Y'ha-nthlei showed up in his dreams. They revealed to Marsh evidence of their power and their centuries long lives, and Marsh agreed to a foul bargain.

These deep ones helped him in return for his promise to recruit his townspeople for transformation so they could report on events in America. During a midnight meeting on the New England coast, the deep ones used their hyperspatial technologies to change Marsh so that he would transform into one of their kind over decades and that all of his children would have similar biology. Then they gave him several devices, disguised as carven idols, that would induce similar heritable transformations in anyone who spent time in their proximity.

Marsh returned to Innsmouth, and by the dawn of the 20th century, almost everyone unaffected by these transformations had left Innsmouth, and there was a substantial colony of deep ones off the coast, in the undersea caverns of Devil's Reef. These deep ones consisted of both the transformed residents of Innsmouth and deep ones from Y'ha-nthlei who have come there to learn about the human world.

In 1928, after learning of the deep one infestation of Innsmouth, the US government sent agents in to capture all residents showing signs of inhuman ancestry, while also using depth charges to badly damage the Devil's Reef colony. As was stated in Chapter One, this event

Name: Deep One Soldier or Criminal

Motivation: Either to serve the deep one species or to sell their own species out for profit.

Species: Deep One

Contact: 2

Hyperspatial Exposure: 0

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Constitution 4, Intelligence 3, Perception 3, Willpower 4

Ability Scores: Muscle 20, Combat 14, Brains 12

Life Points: 64

Speed: 24 (swimming), 12 (walking)

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Amphibious, Increased Life Points, Natural Weapons 1, Natural Armor - 2 points, Psychic Sensitivity, Sorcery 2 (most often found among criminals)

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Claw	14	17	Slash/Stab
Dodge	14	—	Defense
Grapple	16	—	Resisted by Dodge
Spear	14	27	Slash/Stab

marked the point where the US government learned of the deep ones and began to seriously investigate Earth's inhuman inhabitants & alien visitors.

In the mid 1930s, the US government launched several secret investigations into the nature of the deep ones, but the outbreak of World War II ended most of these programs, aside from monitoring to ensure that the deep ones would not interfere with submarine traffic or serve as agents for the Axis. However, between the evidence uncovered by early investigations, and the creation and use of the first nuclear weapons, the deep ones realized that they needed to act. They feared that the outcome of an all-out war between humans and deep ones was far from certain. Even if the deep ones won, many of their cities would be destroyed.

In 1949, a group of deep ones from Y'ha-nthlei sent a human who was in the process of transforming into a deep one to make contact with the United Nations Security Council. Via telepathic contact with their semi-human representative, a group of deep one leaders let the Security Council members know that future attacks on deep ones would guarantee reprisals and that humanity must strictly limit its



undersea activities. The deep ones pledged that if they were left in peace, they would do the same with humanity.

In addition, they agreed not to transform any unknowing or unwilling humans into deep ones and they would leave human shipping alone. Under these rules, humanity was permitted limited access to undersea mining and drilling and well as undersea exploration that avoided deep one cities, but humanity was prohibited from creating long-term undersea settlements or interfering with deep one activities.

One of the first major tests of this treaty came in the late 1960s, when several corporations began studying the feasibility of establishing permanent underwater research bases and a group of visionaries began considering the idea of undersea cities. Both of these activities were in direct violation of the secret treaty with the deep ones, and so OPS agents worked to covertly discredit these efforts.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANITY

Deep ones largely avoid contact with humanity. Their treaty with the UN forbids humans from visiting or spying on their settlements without permission from deep one city leaders, and the vast majority of deep ones have little interest in contact with the surface world. However, occasionally scholars, sorcerers, scientists, and poets who wish to contact them are given permission to visit a deep one city.

Because the deep ones transformed slowly from a human origin, they can still interbreed with humans, and sometimes do; in particular, Marsh's sub-race, who begin life as humans and slowly change, often pass along their genes in the surface world before developing their aquatic traits and beginning their descent. Members of both species may try to prevent this kind of thing, but since the transformation occurs after adulthood, there will always be some hybrids unaware of their origin.

Also, while their minds are as alien as their bodies, deep ones society is also home to a few criminals and treaty breakers. Some of these aquatic lawbreakers are willing to trade everything from treasure from sunken ships to Cthulhoid relics or hyperspatial devices made by deep ones in return for goods that range from alien relics or human drugs, to various human technologies. A few have even been willing to trade much in return for being smuggled off Earth and onto another world. Almost all of the deep ones who ask for this service are fleeing from the justice of their kind.

DESCRIPTION

Although some popular writers describe them as "fish-men", in actuality, a more accurate description would be fish frogs that can walk upright on two legs.

"...Their predominant colour was a greyish-green, though they had white bellies. They were mostly shiny and slippery, but the ridges of their backs were scaly. Their forms vaguely suggested the anthropoid, while their heads were the heads of fish, with prodigious bulging eyes that never closed. At the sides of their necks were palpitating gills, and their long paws were webbed. They hopped irregularly, sometimes on two legs and sometimes on four."

- H.P. Lovecraft

The Shadow Over Innsmouth

Self-sufficient in their underwater home, deep ones have few tools. OPS operatives are most likely to encounter deep one guards or deep one criminals, both of which appear very similar to human eyes.

GHOULS

The origin of ghouls remains a mystery which the ghouls themselves are not interested in revealing, even if they know the answer. Tests on deceased ghouls have clearly revealed them to be related to humanity, and most researchers assume that they speciated as the result of a mass exposure to powerful hyperspatial energies at least 25,000 years ago. However, their origins are sufficiently distant that a few researchers believe they may have diverged from humanity as long as 100,000 years ago and a few scholars believe that they are not actually derived from humanity at all, but instead used magic to come to Earth from some exotic parallel world.

Nonetheless, we share a similar percentage of our genetic code with ghouls as we do with other primates. Studies on ghouls' mitochondrial DNA have turned up conflicting evidence with regards to their origins. The matter is complicated by uncertainty on how much interbreeding has taken place in the meantime, and by unique protective factors in the ghouls' DNA replication process, perhaps evolved to prevent them from taking harm from embalming compounds, such as formaldehyde, that they ingest as a side effect of their diet.

Regardless of their origins, ghouls are subterranean carnivores with a taste for well-aged carrion and a preference for human meat. As a result, most ghouls gain the majority of their sustenance from dining on human corpses. Ghouls live in subterranean colonies of between several dozen and several tens of thousands of ghouls. In these colonies, ghouls have a complex, but brutal culture, where the strong and the powerful dominate the weak. There are various rules and customs that limit how much some ghouls can oppress one another, but their culture is considerably more brutal and violent than any functional

human culture and has a level of violence comparable to various warlike and feuding groups of human nomads or of the most violent most modern criminal subcultures. Sorcery use is rare among ghouls, but it is known and skilled sorcerers are respected. All ghouls sorcery is ritual sorcery performed using physical rituals.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANITY

One of the paradoxes of the ghouls is despite their having separated off from humanity well before the deep ones, ghouls are somewhat more human in both mind and body than deep ones and they are far more interested in humanity. Many ghouls collect and use the various goods that humanity discards, while also dining on the corpses of the dead. Although almost all deep ones ignore humanity, ghouls depend upon humanity for their substance and many of their tools.

Ghouls wish to remain secret, and to avoid both widespread panic and public interest in dangerous topics, the nations of the Security Council also wishes to keep the ghouls' existence a secret. This fact has been communicated to the ghouls, as has the fact that unprovoked attacks on living humans will be met with deadly force. However, because there is no treaty and in fact formal diplomacy at all, OPS policy regarding ghouls is far less rigid than that regarding deep ones. OPS operatives are free to kill any ghouls who attack humans, but should refrain from entering ghouls' lairs or threatening their young.

Ghouls are known to use human agents, most of whom serve the ghouls in return for various forms of aid or occasionally buried treasure. Careful research has also revealed the existence of human half-breeds and changelings who possess the dark-adapted eyes and strength of ghouls, but which are otherwise indistinguishable from ordinary humans without extensive medical tests. One of the ghouls' most infamous habits is abducting human infants and young children. Many are abducted from outside of the home and out of their parents' sight and are presumed to have been kidnapped by human criminals. However, some are replaced by changelings left by the ghouls. Ghouls can interbreed with humans, but many of them regard half-human children as less desirable than either purebred ghouls or human children, so half-breed children are often abandoned in this fashion.

These half-breed children initially seem almost indistinguishable from ordinary human infants and children, lacking the muzzle and vaguely hoof-like feet of purebred ghouls. A few abandon their human lives and find their way back to the warrens of the ghouls, but most grow up thinking of themselves as human, never know-

ing the origin of their ability to see in the dark or their taste for well-aged meat. The lives of the human children abducted by ghouls are far different. Most are trained as servants, spying on the human world for their ghouls' masters. As part of their training, these children are taught to implicitly trust and obey their ghouls' masters and those who resist this training are killed.

When they become adults, these human captives venture forth into the human world doing the ghouls' bidding and almost never attempt to escape or to reveal the nature of their masters to other humans. Human servants who attempt to do either are hunted down and killed. The ghouls' human servants keep track of threats to the ghouls from humanity and help the ghouls to acquire human tools and weapons. The servants' most important role is making certain that the ghouls have access to human graveyards.

A few human children abducted by ghouls eventually become ghouls themselves at the culmination of exotic sorcerous rituals. These rituals seem to only work on certain children, likely indicating that these children have some trace of ghouls' ancestry that these rituals can bring out. Half-breed ghouls are sometimes subjected to these same rituals. Ghouls tolerate both human servants and other ghouls, but dislike and distrust adult ghouls' half-breeds. OPS keeps track of all known human agents of the ghouls and does not attempt to recruit known human agents. However, individuals with ghouls' ancestry are regularly recruited by the OPS if they do not currently have ties to the ghouls.

Unlike their treaties with the deep ones, the United Nations has no treaty with the ghouls. In part, this is because the ghouls lack nations and mostly lack organization on a level greater than their individual colonies. In addition, most ghouls have no interest in interacting directly with humanity.

The total number of ghouls is unknown, but most either live in caverns beneath large human cities or in caverns that have access to the various human-made tunnels beneath these cities. Because some ghouls are skilled sorcerers and use sorcery to communicate with ghouls in other colonies, any large-scale attack on any colony of ghouls would be taken as a threat by many ghouls in other colonies and could result in devastating attacks on humanity by both ghouls and the beings they summoned. OPS estimates of the total number of ghouls indicate that an all out campaign of extermination would result in a protracted war that humanity would easily win, but which would result in millions of human deaths. (Indeed, an interesting and morally troubling storyline might see the Heroes summoned to prevent such a war – by taking down a human vigilante organization that has prepared to strike first.)

This combined with the fact that OPS is far from confident on their estimates of the ghoule populations keeps interactions between OPS and the ghouls to a minimum unless the ghouls begin attacking humans or there is some risk that the general public may find out about ghouls.

The veil of secrecy drawn over the existence of ghouls leads to interesting interactions on the edge of the need to know. For instance, pediatricians can't help but notice the night-adapted eyes of ghoule changelings; in medical school textbooks these are documented as an interesting human mutation and little more. Occasionally, pockets of knowledge crop up among the general populace, and OPS tries very hard to keep these discredited. Internet links leading to too-accurate information go dead; a few self-discrediting "conspiracy wonks" are allowed to keep publishing on badly edited sites, and some operatives join their communities to feed them bad information.

The exception to the rule of non-interaction is that OPS has a handful of ghoule informants. Like all intelligent beings, different ghouls have different interests, and the loose nature of ghoule culture allows individual ghouls a large amount of freedom to pursue various hobbies and interests, at least as long as these hobbies and interests do not interfere with the activities of more powerful ghouls. A few ghouls are skilled if inhuman scholars who study ancient ghoulish records and collect all manner of human books. Some scholarly ghouls have even managed to gain access to the internet via equipment and accounts purchased or stolen by their human

servants, and a few of these ghouls are willing to exchange knowledge and favors with skilled human scholars who share their areas of interest. In a handful of cases, human scholars and on even more rare occasions human artists have spent considerable amounts of time with these ghouls. These connections between some eccentric humans and a few equally eccentric ghouls are the closest thing to friendship between humans and any alien or ab-human species.

DESCRIPTION

"It was a colossal and nameless blasphemy with glaring red eyes, and it held in bony claws a thing that had been a man, gnawing at the head as a child nibbles at a stick of candy. Its position was a kind of crouch, and as one looked one felt that at any moment it might drop its present prey and seek a juicier morsel. But damn it all, it wasn't even the fiendish subject that made it such an immortal fountain-head of all panic- not that, nor the dog face with its pointed ears, bloodshot eyes, flat nose, and drooling lips. It wasn't the scaly claws nor the mould-caked body nor the half-



Name: Hungry Ghoule

Motivation: Catch and devour human prey

Species: Ghoule

Contact: 2

Hyperspatial Exposure: 0

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Constitution 5, Intelligence 2, Perception 4, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 18, Combat 13, Brains 10

Life Points: 54

Speed: 24

Drama Points: 0-1

Special Abilities: Enhanced Smell, Natural Weapons 1, Night Vision, Psychic Sensitivity

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Claw	13	15	Slash/Stab
Dodge	13	—	Defense
Large Knife	13	21	Slash/Stab
Thigh Bone Club	13	31	Bash
Throw Knife	12	18	Slash/Stab

hooved feet— none of these, though any one of them might well have driven an excitable man to madness.”

— H.P. Lovecraft
Pickman's Model

Most ghouls are content to feed on buried and abandoned human corpses, but some decide that killing people is an easy source of new corpses. These predators are the ghouls most commonly encountered by OPS operatives in the line of duty, and are most dangerous in packs, which consist of up to a dozen ghouls.

Even ghouls have eccentric scholars. Many are sorcerers, and some of them are willing to exchange knowledge with humans. Of course, they'll only deal with humans who possess knowledge they are interested in, and ghoulish interests can be very strange indeed.

ALIENS

Name: Ghoul Scholar

Motivation: Obtain Obscure & Eccentric Knowledge

Species: Ghoul

Contact: 1

Hyperspatial Exposure: 0

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Constitution 4, Intelligence 4, Perception 4, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 16, Combat 12, Brains 14

Life Points: 46

Speed: 21

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Enhanced Smell, Natural Weapons 1, Night Vision, Psychic Sensitivity, Sorcery 2

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Claw	12	12	Slash/Stab
Dodge	12	—	Defense
Large Knife	12	17	Slash/Stab
Pistol	12	14	Bullet

The following are some of the more common alien species that humanity has encountered. Regardless of whether humanity has encountered these beings in archaeological sites, on modern-day Earth, or out among the stars, all of these beings are highly distinct from humanity both physically and psychologically. Although trade and peaceful coexistence is often possible, mutual understanding is difficult.

ELDER ONES

The elder ones are one of the oldest and, at least to human eyes, strangest of the known alien species. They are

radially symmetrical columns of flesh adorned with five tentacular legs, five flexible branching arms capable of both strength and micromanipulation on the nano-scale, five eyes, and a strange five-lobed brain. This species is the most successful and widespread of the known sentient species. The first evidence of their presence in the galaxy is more than one billion years ago, and their first evidence on earth is approximately 750 million years ago, near the end of the Precambrian. The elder ones' home planet remains unknown, but they colonized many hundreds of worlds, preferring to settle on worlds that had recently developed multi-cellular life or on lifeless worlds that they seeded with life.

Fossil evidence on Earth and dozens of other worlds suggests that the elder ones engineered local life forms for greater complexity and in some cases created entirely new varieties of life. Their reasons for these actions remains unknown, but their efforts seem to have been responsible for the present form of several inhabited worlds, including Earth. The Cambrian explosion of multicellular life may represent a work of elder one "terraforming." The elder ones were masters of nanotechnology. Their two greatest achievements were their sentient nanotechnological servants, the shoggoths, and incorporating nanotechnology into their own bodies so as to make the elder ones' bodies exceptionally tough and durable. This originally amphibious species' bodies can survive the vacuum of space or the upper atmosphere of a gas giant world like Jupiter, and can still endure high-oxygen atmospheres like the one they created on Earth.

Instead of ritual sorcery, elder one manipulations of hyperspace use various types of technosorcery. The elder ones created advanced nanotechnologies capable of utilizing hyperspatial energies. When activated, this nanotechnology wrapped around the elder one, and used hyperspatial energies to warped space sufficiently to allow it to literally fly through hyperspace. This flight was similar to but somewhat less advanced than the versions of hyperspatial flight used by the mi-go. One of the great advantages of this type of technology is that it allows the elder ones to fly through hyperspace without the need for spaceships, but avoided the need to permanently tie their bodies to hyperspatial mechanisms or to incorporate hyperspatial organs in their bodies. Unfortunately, hyperspatial nanotechnology is difficult to maintain, and some elder one colonies lost the knowledge of how to maintain or manufacture it, and thus the ability to travel to the stars.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANITY

Name: Elder One Researcher
Motivation: Study and experiment with living beings, gain knowledge
Species: Elder One
Contact: 3
Hyperspatial Exposure: 0
Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Constitution 7, Intelligence 6, Perception 4, Willpower 3
Ability Scores: Muscle 20, Combat 12, Brains 18
Life Points: 82
Speed: 17 (walking), 33 swimming, 106 (flying)
Drama Points: 0-2
Special Abilities: Amphibious, Biofilter, Extra Arms, Increased Speed (flying), Natural Armor 6, Psychic Sensitivity, Regeneration, Spectrum Vision, Temperature Tolerance

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	12	—	Defense Action
Disintegrator Pistol	12	23	Energy Damage +
Foot Tentacle	11	16	Bash
Grapple	12	—	Resisted by Dodge

With the exception of several dozen individuals in suspended animation in the Antarctic ice, the elder ones are extinct on Earth. Their species survives largely unchanged on a few known worlds, and possibly on other unknown planets. They are no longer a dominant force in the galaxy and have vanished from almost all the worlds they previously inhabited. Not merely static, the elder ones are in active decline and seem bound for extinction. Some of those that survive remain at least mildly interested in acquiring new knowledge and are sometimes willing to trade with other species. However, surviving elder ones all belong to an ancient and decadent civilization that regards human visitors as little more than potentially interesting vermin.

Interactions with elder ones are always potentially dangerous, but also hold the potential for great knowledge. Even with their previous grandeur long passed, the elder ones – at least those who have retained their knowledge – remain the premier nanotechnologists in the galaxy as well as skilled bioengineers. The fragments of elder one knowledge humanity gained from their Antarctic city gave humanity many inventions, including the dragonfly drive. In addition, the tidbits of knowledge humanity has acquired from brief visits to worlds still inhabited by elder ones have provided the basis for several important medical advances and the creation of several new varieties of crop plants.

DESCRIPTION

At the Mountains of Madness describes elder ones as “eight feet long all over. Six-foot, five-ridged barrel torso

three and five-tenths feet central diameter, one foot end diameters. Dark gray, flexible, and infinitely tough. Seven-foot membranous wings of same color, found folded, spread out of furrows between ridges. Wing framework tubular or glandular, of lighter gray, with orifices at wing tips. Spread wings have serrated edge. Around equator, one at central apex of each of the five vertical, stove-like ridges are five systems of light gray flexible arms or tentacles found tightly folded to torso but expansible to maximum length of over three feet. Like arms of primitive crinoid. Single stalks three inches diameter branch after six inches into five substalks, each of which branches after eight inches into small, tapering tentacles or tendrils, giving each stalk a total of twenty-five tentacles.

At top of torso blunt, bulbous neck of lighter gray, with gill-like suggestions, holds yellowish five-pointed starfish-shaped apparent head covered with three-inch wiry cilia of various prismatic colors...

“Five slightly longer reddish tubes start from inner angles of starfish-shaped head and end in saclike swellings of same color which, upon pressure, open to bell-shaped orifices two inches maximum diameter and lined with sharp, white tooth like projections – probably mouths. All these tubes, cilia, and points of starfish head, found folded tightly down; tubes and points clinging to bulbous neck and torso. Flexibility surprising despite vast toughness.

“At bottom of torso, rough but dissimilarly functioning counterparts of head arrangements exist. Bulbous light-gray pseudo-neck, without gill suggestions, holds greenish five-pointed starfish arrangement.

“Tough, muscular arms four feet long and tapering from seven inches diameter at base to about two and five-tenths at point. To each point is attached small end of a greenish five-veined membranous triangle eight inches long and six wide at farther end.”

– H.P. Lovecraft

At the Mountains of Madness

Except for those who have sunk too far into decadence and decay, elder ones are curious, especially about alien life. However, their knowledge is vast and most are only willing to communicate with individuals who offer them new knowledge.

SHOGGOTHS

These beings were originally the semi-sentient nanotechnological servants created by the elder ones. Capable of transforming into any shape and of transforming their appendages into any possible tool, they were the ultimate machines, capable of doing everything from moving large

amounts of earth and stone to building complex electronics or performing delicate surgery. The complexity of their programming and the advanced nature of their cognitive processors allowed each shoggoth to learn how to better perform its tasks and more easily anticipate the needs of the elder ones. Unfortunately, this same capacity for learning also endowed some of the most advanced shoggoths with the ability to gradually grow in both intelligence and self-awareness until they were independent beings that were almost the intellectual equals of the elder ones. One Earth, the shoggoths wiped out the elder ones, and only a handful of survivors remain in suspended animation.

Shoggoths are just as potentially immortal as the elder ones, but cannot reproduce themselves without the aid of now lost advanced technology, OPS estimates that no more than a thousand active shoggoths remain on Earth. However, each one is a large and dangerous entity. OPS also believes several thousand more may still wait buried in Antarctic ice or locked away in "unbreakable" prisons, waiting for foolish or greedy humans to release them.

The surviving shoggoths have an instinctive horror of captivity or servitude and attempt to destroy anyone who attempts to capture or control them. Also, they currently have no use for humanity and typically either kill or avoid any humans they encounter. However, researchers believe that if the shoggoths ever learned that human nanotechnology might be able to allow them to reproduce, they would take a far greater interest in humanity.

They were normally shapeless entities composed of a viscous jelly which looked like an agglutination of bubbles, and

each averaged about fifteen feet in diameter when a sphere. They had, however, a constantly shifting shape and volume - throwing out temporary developments or forming apparent organs of sight, hearing, and speech in imitation of their masters, either spontaneously or according to suggestion.

They seem to have become peculiarly intractable toward the middle of the Permian Age, perhaps one hundred and fifty million years ago, when a veritable war of resubjugation was waged upon them by the marine Old Ones. Pictures of this war, and of the headless, slime-coated fashion in which the Shoggoths typically left their slain victims, held a marvelously fearsome quality despite the intervening abyss of untold ages.

— H.P. Lovecraft

At the Mountains of Madness

Shoggoths are clever in an inhuman way, with problem-solving abilities like those an artificial intelligence might exhibit. They are also determined and deadly. Fortunately, they mostly avoid humans. So far, the worst incident involving a shoggoth occurred when an Indian corporation illegally airlifted a shoggoth from Antarctica and took it to a remote laboratory in order to study it. It escaped and killed most of the researchers and destroyed part of a village before OPS operatives were able to destroy it. Unfortunately, various corporations are still fascinated with the commercial potential of these creatures, and illegally try from time to time to capture and study them in the intent of creating unintelligent versions. History often repeats itself.

EUROPANS

These exotic beings are the only aliens discovered living elsewhere in the solar system. Although a few psychics have experienced dreams or visions relating to their existence throughout human history, the existence of the Europans was not discovered by humanity until 1985, when a secret joint US-British expedition landed on Europa. This frozen moon of Jupiter has a crust of ice between one and five km thick over a vast, world-spanning and totally lightless ocean 100 kilometers deep. The expedition carried with it a miniature submarine powered by nuclear batteries, which also powered a heat-drill that would have allowed the submarine to tunnel through the ice in less than two weeks.

Less than a day after the drilling had begun, the Europans made their presence known. Since the vessel came out of hyperspace near Europa, most of the crew had experienced strange and somewhat disturbing dreams, and the two psychics on the crew noticed a nearly constant feeling

Name: Shoggoth

Motivation: Devour elder ones or any other intelligent being

Species: Shoggoth

Contact: 4

Hyperspatial Exposure: 0

Attributes: Strength 12, Dexterity 3, Constitution 16, Intelligence 2, Perception 1, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 30, Combat 13, Brains 10

Life Points: 122

Speed: 29 (crawling), 29 swimming

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Amphibious, Fast Regeneration, Legless, Natural Weaponry 1, Psychic Sensitivity, Reduced Damage (Kinetic x 5), Spectrum Vision, Temperature Tolerance

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	12	—	Defense Action
Envelop & Crush	14	63	Bash - only action possible in turn
Pseudopod Stab	12	27	Slash/Stab
Pseudopod Strike	12	39	Bash

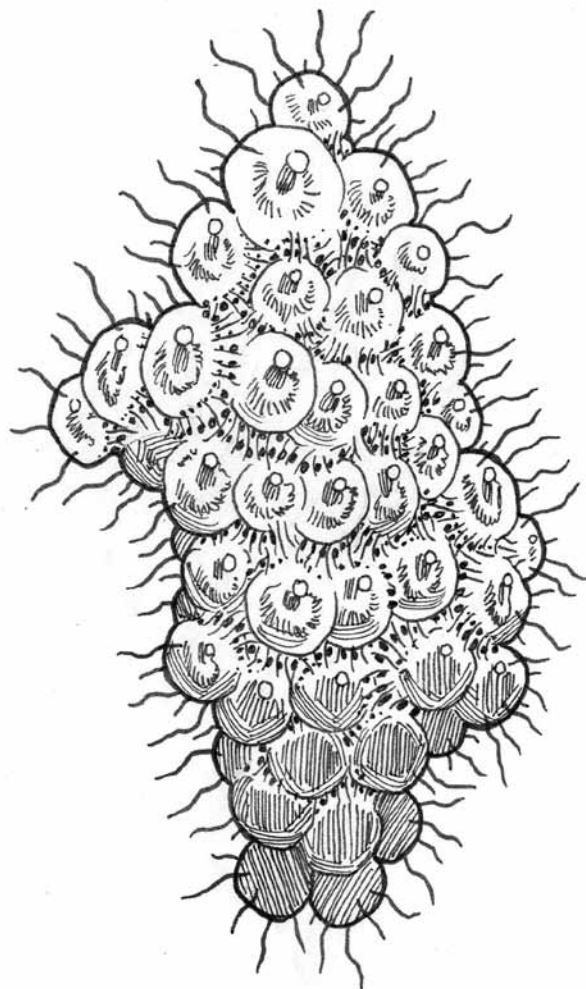
of being under careful observation, along with occasional flashes of a profoundly inhuman mental presence.

When the submarine had been melting its way through the ice covering the European ocean for 14 hours, the crew of the submarine found themselves radioing their space ship and calling for the cable attached to the submarine be used to haul the submarine in at emergency speeds. Meanwhile, both psychics, one on the ship and the other in the submarine, were overwhelmed with visions of vast and ancient intelligences lurking below the European ice. Later analysis of these images using psi-link recordings indicate these creatures appeared to be some sort of strange colonial organisms composed of thousands of jellyfish-like creatures neurally connected to one another. The psychics also both reported a firm impression that these creatures were not native to Europa, that they were found in many similar worlds throughout the galaxy, and that they were not interested in contact with outsiders. Immediately after this message, both of the remote probes that had been tunneling into the ice ahead of the submarine vanished and a shock wave badly damaged the submarine, killing most of the crew. At this point, Europa was declared off-limits.

In 1991, an unauthorized attempt was made to open a hyperspatial portal into the European ocean, which resulted in a small explosion as the portal generator catastrophically failed. By 2002, interstellar explorers had discovered three other Europa-like worlds inhabited by these creatures, as well as half a dozen similar worlds that had their own exotic native ecosystems but were devoid of European life. The reception of visitors on one of those worlds was similar to that received at Europa. When a ship attempted to land on the second it mysteriously exploded. However, the reaction of the third world, named Marius after the discoverer of Europa, was far different.

A psychic on the ship that visited this frozen extrasolar world made contact with these creatures and then the crew found themselves compelled to land. At this point, cameras on the ship record the entire crew falling into a coma-like trance and the psychic vanishing from sight. Eighteen hours later, the crew reawakened and the psychic reappeared. The Europeans on Marius were curious about the human visitors. They mentally scanned the crew and teleported the psychic into an air-filled pocket under the ice in order to more easily communicate with him.

Because of the Europeans' affinity for hyperspatial energies, the psychic suffered a Level Three hyperspatial exposure, while the remainder of the crew suffered Level Two exposure. When the ship's xenobiologist regained consciousness, she



Name: European Information Trader

Motivation: Exchange knowledge with worthy beings

Species: European

Contact: 3

Hyperspatial Exposure: 0

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Constitution 3, Intelligence 7, Perception 5, Willpower 7

Ability Scores: Muscle 8, Combat 11, Brains 20

Life Points: 26

Speed: 21 (swimming)

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Amphibious, all psychic powers (both human and inhuman), sorcery

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	11	—	Defense Action

found she possessed a moderate degree of knowledge about the history and biology of the aliens now known as Europeans.

After the psychic recovered, he also reported a strong sense that future visits might be welcome. Since that initial visit in 2002, seven other vessels have visited Marius. Six of these expeditions immediately departed when the entire crew developed severe headaches and the ships' psychic began screaming and writhing in pain, and only recovered once the vessel was at least 100,000 km from the planet. In all cases, the psychic reported a vehement feeling of rejection.

The seventh ship was again forced to land, and the crew was rendered unconscious for 6 hours, after which time they had all suffered Level 2 hyperspatial exposure, and had only vague memories of the encounter. However, a crew member who was a skilled mathematician awoke with a valuable insight into hyperspatial mathematics. The OPS directorate now assumes that these Europeans are engaging in some unusual form of trade and regularly send other vessels into orbit around Marius.

Attempts to send vessels more often than once every 1.3 Earth years result in the crew of the ship all suffering disturbing visions that produce seizures in almost half of the crew and cause any psychics to fall unconscious from intense pain. One psychic involved in such a failed mission died of a brain aneurysm, but an autopsy revealed that signs of the aneurysm were present before the incident, leading to the conclusion that the Europeans had been executing normal defenses rather than trying to kill him intentionally.

Some of the humans who have undergone successful contact with the Europeans remember a sense of community and belonging deeper than anything they are capable of experiencing normally. They usually recover from this, especially the psychics, who can make mental contact in other ways, but a few particularly "touched" individuals feel a deep loss after the contact has concluded, knowing that the sense of pure unity they sensed from the alien race will never and can never belong to them as humans.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANITY

The Europeans' motives are unknown and perhaps unknowable. They seem determined to completely control the extent and nature of their contact with humanity. What they might wish from humanity is unknown, but so far, humanity has gained several new insights into dimensional mathematics from these contacts.

DESCRIPTION

No human has even seen a European visually, and this is unlikely to change. Psychic impressions indicate that each European seems to consist of a cluster of dozens or perhaps

THE THEORY & PRACTICE OF TIME TRAVEL

Discussions with Yithian scientists have revealed to humanity the general theory of time travel. The most basic truth is that the only stable point is the present. Both the past and the future diverge, with divergence increasing the further one looks or travels into the future or the past. Time is not fixed in either direction. Rather, it is subject to the limitation that all possible pasts must lead up to the present, just as all possible futures must begin with present events. The Yithians understand this and plan their future actions based on a combination of what events are the most likely outcomes of their present, and the fact that some events are overwhelmingly likely. For example, the comet striking the Earth, ending the Cretaceous era and causing the extinction of the dinosaurs, is overwhelmingly likely. And, while the causes vary, in almost all possible futures humanity has departed from the Earth 130 million years from now, and some variety of intelligent arthropod has either evolved or been artificially created to provide a new home for the Yithians. One major limitation to time travel is that it is remarkably easy to become lost in time – to "jump tracks" when traveling back and forth. Unless a time traveling device is in some way anchored to the iteration of the present where it is first activated, time travelers usually find that they have returned to a present day different from the one that they left. Except when permanently transferring their minds to a new inhabitant in the future, Yithians always maintain a low-level psychic link between the body they are currently occupying and their original body. This link automatically allows a Yithian to return to their own body, rather than simply to a version of themselves occupying a very different timeline.

hundreds of jellyfish-like organisms that link together into a hive mind using both psychic powers and contact between specialized nerve-like tendrils. Psychic impressions also reveal that there are at least one million European cluster-individuals on Europa and several million on Marius. They excel at psychic powers, possessing all known powers and perhaps further abilities, and are also highly skilled sorcerers, practicing meditative sorcery.

GREAT RACE OF YITH

One of the strangest alien species known to humanity are the great race of Yith. In part, their enigmatic nature comes from the fact that instead of physically traveling from one world to another, they use advanced psychic technologies to allow them to transfer the consciousnesses of their species from one set of host beings to another. Some theories speculate that they may even have evolved as non-material consciousnesses in their prehistoric origins, making it more natural for them to become “unstuck in time.”

The early history of the Yithians is unknown. However, shortly before the Permian-Triassic Extinction, caused by the last major battle between Cthulhu and the elder ones, the Yithians projected their minds into an exotic non-sentient species of fungi that had been created by the flying polyps. The Yithians allied with the elder ones to imprison the flying polyps. At this point, the Yithians lived on Earth, building an advanced civilization. They also sent the minds of their scholars, scientists, and historians millions and even hundreds of millions of years into the future and learned of humanity and of the possible course of the next billion years of Earth's history. The Yithians also learned of the meteor that would end the age of the dinosaurs. For some reason, they did not wish to avert this disaster – instead they projected the minds of their entire species almost 200 million years into the future, into the bodies of a highly intelligent species of beetle.

Yithians have vast knowledge, but avoid overuse of hyperspatial technologies. They use these technologies for time travel and antigravity and to create force fields, but otherwise rely upon advanced conventional technologies, including portable fusion reactors and similar wonders. Members of the great race never practice ritual sorcery. The hyperspatial powers that they use are all controlled by means of technosorcerous devices. Also, although the Yithian's native psychic abilities are limited, they can build advanced psychic devices designed to mimic almost all psychic powers.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANITY

Humanity interacts more easily with the great race of Yith than with any other alien species, because all Yithians that humans have interacted with have extensive experience dealing with humans. These consciousnesses inhabit human bodies to interact with humans. The only time that humans interact with Yithians in other bodies is by the Yithians' unique cultural exchange program, as it were: when the human is in the past and inhabiting the same type of body.

Across all of human history, there have been small human

cults dedicated to working with Yithian scholars, but all of these cults were highly secretive and quite small. The members of these cults aided possessed humans and occasionally even offered up their own bodies for temporary possession, in return for small tidbits of knowledge, including advanced science and engineering and knowledge of the future.

OPS researchers have now determined that a number of technological anachronisms, including the famous Baghdad battery from 200 CE and the fact that it was used for electroplating, have their origins in the small bits of knowledge great race cults managed to obtain from their alien patrons. However, the Yithians made certain to avoid giving out any knowledge that would have changed the course of history substantially; historically, they chose subjects whose reports would be easy to discredit.

All of this changed in 1956, when OPS experiments with using hypnosis to enhance psychic powers were by chance used on someone who had been possessed by the Yithians. These efforts accidentally released partial memories of the time that this person spent in the Yithian city of Pnakotus more than a decade before. This revelation was immediately shared with the United Nations Security Council. Further study revealed that these memories were associated with the excavation in Australia's Great Sandy Desert that revealed

Name: Great Race Researcher

Motivation: Gain knowledge from other species

Species: Great Race of Yith

Contact: 2

Hyperspatial Exposure: 0

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 4, Constitution 8, Intelligence 8, Perception 6, Willpower 6

Ability Scores: Muscle 22, Combat 13, Brains 22

Life Points: 68

Speed: 18 (sliding on muscular pad)

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Infrared Vision, Legless, Natural Weaponry, Psychic Sensitivity, Rapid Healing

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	13	—	Defense Action
Claw	13	19	Slash/Stab
Zapper	13	19	Electrical (treat as bullet damage)
Zapper (stun)	13	15	Bash, roll vs. stunned to remain conscious*

* The target must make a Constitution doubled roll at a penalty of five plus the Success Levels of the attack. On a failure, the victim is knocked out. Even if the target manages to stay conscious, the shock gives her a -2 penalty to all actions (including resisting another shock) for the next four Turns. Multiple shots have cumulative penalties.

Name: Yithian Researcher Possessing a Human

Motivation: Gain knowledge from other species

Species: Great Race of Yith (mind) in a human body

Contact: 1

Hyperspatial Exposure: 0

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Constitution 3, Intelligence 8, Perception 6, Willpower 6

Ability Scores: Muscle 10, Combat 12, Brains 22

Life Points: 30

Speed: 18

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Psychic Sensitivity,

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	12	—	Defense Action
Hypnoscope	—	—	See description
Zapper	12	18	Electrial (treat as bullet damage)
Zapper (stun)	12	5	Bash, roll vs. stunned to remain conscious*

* The target must make a Constitution doubled roll at a penalty of five plus the Success Levels of the attack. On a failure, the victim is knocked out. Even if the target manages to stay conscious, the shock gives her a -2 penalty to all actions (including resisting another shock) for the next four Turns. Multiple shots have cumulative penalties.

the ruins of Pnakotus 20 years before. A year later, routine covert psychic examination of OPS personnel revealed that one of them was possessed by a member of the great race. The Security Council immediately held an interview with this being and revealed much of the knowledge that OPS had already gathered about the Yithians.

One of the senior OPS directors who was present at this meeting then suggested an alliance. The Security Council and the various member nations all agreed to assist visiting Yithians in return for access to limited amounts of Yithian scientific and technical knowledge. The Yithian responded that this proposal was consistent with one of the various time-lines they approved of and agreed to carry this message back to the fellow members of its Knowledge Confraternity.

Within four months, the agreement was signed by the member nations of the UN Security Council and a large Yithian Knowledge Confraternity based in the city of Pnakotus in the mid Cretaceous. The Yithians have categorically refused to give humanity any technology relating to time travel, or anything too far in advanced of humanity's current technology. Also, to avoid becoming dependent upon an alien species or taking on a trojan horse, the Security Council agreed by a narrow vote to only accept scientific information and engineering knowledge compatible with humanly known principles. As a re-

sult, the Yithians only provide humanity with knowledge that can be verified and used to create new technologies, rather than plans for constructing devices that operate on principles no human understands. As a result, the alliance with the Yithians has helped advance human science and technology, but has not caused a radical transformation.

The most significant advances have been in all facets of materials technology. The superconducting batteries introduced in 1978 were largely based on Yithian-derived knowledge, as are the wireless tasers and the chemicals used in both artificial gills and the oxygen recycling systems in spacecraft. More broadly, access to Yithian knowledge has allowed human researchers to avoid various blind alleys in their research and to create microelectronics that are more advanced than anything ever created by the Yithians.

In return for this knowledge, Yithians are freely offered volunteer hosts in academic and engineering fields, as well as assistant xenodiplomats and a wide variety of other personnel. In addition, OPS and the governments of the various member nations of the Security Council offer the Yithian visitors a high degree of access to various governmental and corporate facilities. In the process of switching bodies and visiting the Yithian civilization human hosts undergo Level 2 Hyperspatial Exposure.

The Great Revelation of 1987 released a vast amount of knowledge about secret contacts and treaties with aliens, but this information did not include anything about the Yithians. These beings and their knowledge of the likely course of history remain a closely guarded secret. The Yithians and the UN Security Council both agreed that public knowledge of time travel would prove disruptive for the human species. As a result, along with the ghouls, the Yithians remain one of two non-human species whose existence on Earth still remains a secret. Because there are never more than a few dozen Yithians on Earth at any time and all of them reside in human bodies, their discovery by outsiders is unlikely.

DESCRIPTION

The Yithians are "immense rugose cones ten feet high, and with head and other organs attached to foot-thick, distensible limbs spreading from the apexes. They spoke by the clicking or scraping of huge paws or claws attached to the end of two of their four limbs, and walked by the expansion and contraction of a viscous layer attached to their vast, ten-foot bases."

— H.P. Lovecraft

A Shadow Out of Time

Yithians in their prehistoric cone-shaped bodies cannot be found in the present day, but if OPS operatives travel to the distant past, they might encounter such a being.

All known Yithians walking the Earth in the pres-

ent day are possessing human bodies. Some of them may accompany teams of OPS investigators or explorers on their missions. Individuals transferred in this fashion retain their skills, as well as their Intelligence, Perception, and Willpower, but use the physical attributes and abilities of the body they now inhabit.

Mi-Go

The mi-go are an advanced and relatively widespread species who inhabit more than a one hundred planets within 400 parsecs of the Solar System. Their nearest planet, Yuggoth, is a small, frigid world orbiting a brown dwarf star located half a parsec from Earth. Although they are an immensely adaptable species and can live briefly on Earth and other terrestrial planets, they greatly prefer the cold and dim light of Yuggoth and similar worlds and only colonize planets around brown dwarf stars.

However, the mi-go require various transuranic elements for some of their exotic technologies and these elements are easiest to obtain in the ore veins of water-bearing terrestrial planets like Earth. The mi-go from Yuggoth have been mining various deposits on Earth for tens of millions of years, in large part because it is by far the closest source of these elements. In addition, Earthly life produces various biological materials that the mi-go find valuable, but difficult to synthesize.

Because of their exotic physiology, mi-go are only comfortable on Earth in cold environments at least two miles above sea level. They can survive in the thinner air of this environment for several months, but can only remain at sea level in temperate climates for a few days before they are forced to return to space. As a result, the mi-go are completely uninterested in conquering Earth. Instead, they regard it as a valuable source of various valuable raw materials as well as a useful source of information about various other alien species. However, the mi-go are also aware of the effects of the Elder Weapon and the hyperspatial proximity of the trapped Cthulhoids. The mi-go wish to avoid any action that could lead to the release of the Cthulhoids or any reversal of the effects of the Elder Weapon. As a result, they attempt to stop any hyperspatial manipulations that might reverse the effects of the Elder Weapon. Their interest in keeping the Cthulhoids trapped is one of few motives these profoundly alien beings share with humanity.

The mi-go excel at genetic engineering and have an excellent biological technology, but have a limited understanding of other forms of technology. They largely use non-biological technologies when no biological option is available, such as

when constructing their few space ships. They are highly skilled at the use of hyperspatial technologies, and create technosorcerous devices that they implant in their bodies.

This species is also highly psychic. All mi-go share a low-level constant psychic link with all other members of their species. Individual mi-go retain separate identities, but they can easily share their thoughts with each other. They constantly share powerful emotions and especially striking or powerful thoughts and can deliberately communicate with any member of their species anywhere. Renegade mi-go can keep secrets from the rest of their species, but doing so is considered to be unnatural and is also forbidden.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANITY

The mi-go are mildly transcendent beings who have engineered themselves to have partial connection to hyperspace, which allows each individual mi-go to fly through deep space by means of what amounts of a built-in dragonfly drive. Their connection to hyperspace also renders these beings highly resistant to most damage and connects the entire species into a partial and limited group mind. Unlike beings like the flying polyps, which have a significantly greater connection to hyperspace the mi-go are not sufficiently alien that trade and treaties are impossible, but they are the most mentally alien beings that humanity regularly interacts with.

In the early 1960s, human psychics working for OPS established communication with the mi-go. Prior to this time, the mi-go were exceedingly secretive and avoided contact with humanity. However, the birth of the human space program and active attempts to contact them encouraged some of the mi-go to agree to make contact with humanity's representatives.

The mi-go demanded the right to continue to gain access to rare minerals and biological samples. They were initially unwilling to trade for these commodities, preferring to continue to freely gather them. However, when offered access to a limited amount of data gathered from great race and elder one artifacts, the mi-go agreed to these conditions. Trade with the mi-go was initially very limited and was handled exclusively by OPS. However, this trade increased significantly after the 1987 Great Revelation, when the truth about the mi-go to become public. The OPS brokers all legal trade with representative of this species, and for the past 40 years, various corporations and national governments have attempted to find various commodities to trade to the mi-go in the hopes of obtaining some of their artifacts or biological knowledge.

One reason the mi-go are eager to gain access to all knowledge that humanity acquires from other advanced



Name: Mi-Go Explorer

Motivation: Acquire new knowledge and new technologies, learn how to transcend into hyperspace

Species: Mi-Go

Contact: 3

Hyperspatial Exposure: 2/2

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Constitution 3, Intelligence 4, Perception 3, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 12, Combat 14, Brains 14

Life Points: 44

Speed: 21 (walking), 210 (flying)

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Attack Field, Biofilter, Defensive Field, Extra Arms, Insight, Hyperspatial Flight, Hyperspatial Manipulators, Increased Life Points, Natural weapons 1, Psychic Link (to all mi-go), Psychic Sensitivity, Psychic Visions, Regeneration, Spectrum Vision, Temperature Tolerance

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Attack Field	—	20	Bash*
Claw	15	10	Slash/Stab
Dodge	14	—	Defense Action
Grapple	17	—	Resisted by Dodge
Hyperspatial Disruptor	14	53	Bash

* This damage affects everyone who physically attacks the mi-go or comes within a few inches of the mi-go when this field is active. Grappled individuals are automatically affected by the attack field.

** Energy damage halves the value of all physical (but not hyperspatial) armor, and then doubles damage (like a bullet). This weapon can disintegrate all matter not reinforced by hyperspatial energy.

alien species is that the mi-go wish to more fully become creatures of hyperspace, but lack the knowledge of how to do so. After millions of years of work on this problem, as a species they understand that their only hope of success is obtaining knowledge from other more advanced species, and so they wish to gain access to the various artifacts that humanity has uncovered on Earth and other worlds.

One of the secrets that humanity does not know about the mi-go, is that this species is tough and persistent, but they lack the brilliance of the elder ones or the Yithians. Most mi-go advances of the last 200 million years were based on knowledge obtained from other species. Because of a possible threat that they pose if they gain more access to hyperspace the great race refuses to trade with the mi-go, and the fact that some among the great race trade with humanity causes the mi-go to be willing to trade with humanity.

DESCRIPTION

"In The Whisperer in the Darkness, Lovecraft describes the mi-go as 'a sort of huge, light-red crab with many pairs of legs and with two great batlike wings in the middle of the back.'

They sometimes walked on all their legs, and sometimes on the hindmost pair only, using the others to convey large objects of indeterminate nature."

Mi-go consider humans to be interesting, but have not yet decided if they have the potential to be either useful allies or problematic rivals. They make deals or work with humans if doing so is to their advantage.

MOONBEASTS

Few details are known about the mysterious moonbeasts, but the OPS understands that they are not to be trusted and that they are at war with humanity. The first information about the moonbeasts come from early 20th century records of interactions in the dreamlands, where moonbeasts had invaded the dream realm counterpart of Earth's moon and performed occasional trade and slave raids in the Dream Realm's Pastoral World. In the late 1930s, an alliance of dreamers and the Dream Realm's intelligent cats drove the moonbeasts from the moon and out into the depths of the Dream Realm's space. There is no clear evidence that moonbeasts have ever visited Earth's moon in the waking world, but most researchers believe that their capture of the moon in the Dream Realm was in some way a preparation for invading Earth.

The next contact between humanity and the moonbeasts occurred in 2012, when a newly established extrasolar mining station on Epsilon Eridani II sent a message that they had made contact with a new alien species that was interested in trade. When an OPS contact team reached this world, they discovered the small human colony vacant. A few fragmentary recordings that were left behind indicated that the colony was visited by aliens that came as traders, but when the aliens found that the colonists were few in number and poorly defended, they captured and enslaved the several hundred residents of the colony. All records of the aliens' appearance seem to have been deliberately erased.

A similar incident occurred in 2015, on Eden, two years after the Russian colony there was founded. This colony was slightly larger and considerably better armed and several inhabitants of the colony had read about the incident on Epsilon Eridani II. As a result, the colonists were far more suspicious and when the moonbeasts attempted to capture them, the colonists fought them off and badly damaged their ship. An autopsy on a moonbeast killed during the attack revealed that its body contained advanced nanotechnology similar to that used by the elder ones. However, the weapons and tools found on the bodies of the slain moonbeasts were only slightly in advance of those used by the colonists.

Since that encounter, moonbeasts have made raids on two other colonies as well as attacks on three small research

bases. They have also opened hyperspatial gateways from distant ships to the outskirts of several colony worlds, where they sent through ab-human slaves to subvert and control the populace. These slaves concealed their mutations with bulky clothing and pretended to be smugglers from Earth offering various advanced electronics; the goods, as it turned out, broadcast advanced subliminal messages designed to increase trust of the moonbeasts and their servants. The moonbeasts' servants, generally attempt to purchase high-end electronics and hyperspatial technologies. When dealing with criminals, they also attempt to purchase slaves.

Three of the moonbeasts' ab-human servants have been captured, two of which were originally abducted from the colony on Epsilon Eridani II. The third is believed to have originally come from Galatea I. In 2016, the OPS issued warnings about moonbeasts and their servants to all the nations of the Earth. Evidence of moonbeast activity has not been reported on Earth, but the OPS does not know if this is merely because it has not yet been discovered. In 2021, the crew of the Chinese starship Wang Wei successfully fought off a moonbeast attack that occurred shortly after their ship landed on a remote planet. After this incident, the UN Security Council declared that a state of war existed between humanity and the moonbeasts, and this war continues today. However, instead of battles, there have been raids by the moonbeasts, as well as three attacks on grounded moonbeast ships. No moonbeast colonies have yet been discovered and their homeworld is unknown.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MOONBEASTS

The moonbeasts are exiles and scavengers. 150 years ago, more than 70,000 moonbeast rebels were exiled from their home world because of their illegal experiments with hyperspatial technologies. Since this time, they have stolen and adapted starships, inoculated their bodies with a version of elder one nanotechnology, and raided for slaves. Because much of the technology the moonbeasts steal or acquire is too alien for them to understand, they use enslaved aliens to assist them in adapting technology for their use. These aliens are enslaved using carefully controlled hyperspatial exposure combined with nanotechnological brain alterations. Moonbeasts now live in a slave society with three times as many slaves as moonbeasts. Almost all of their slaves are humans or yaddithi, although they have also begun enslaving the primitive "spiders" of Hathor.

Because of their limited understanding of the technologies involved, almost half of the intelligent beings the moonbeasts attempt to enslave die during this process. Although the technology they have used to reinforce their bodies is quite advanced, the average level of moonbeast technology

is only a few decades in advance of humanity's current technology. Moonbeasts practice sorcery by building technosorcerous devices, but they are incapable of learning Level 5 sorcery and find all sorcery difficult. When possible, they prefer to steal hyperspatial devices created by other species.

There are no moonbeast colonies; currently they live on their ships, the largest of which are home to 9,000 moonbeasts each. Since the total population of moonbeasts is only 120,000, they are not a serious threat to Earth. However, a concentrated moonbeast attack could potentially capture most small colonies.

The moonbeast home world has not yet been discovered by humanity. Their technology is only slightly in advance of humanity's, except that they are a static society that has banned all use of hyperspatial technologies. As a result, they cannot travel to the stars and can only use fusion rockets to explore their solar system. These moonbeasts have no interest in enslaving others, but are exceptionally distrustful of any outsiders who use hyperspatial technologies.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANITY

The moonbeasts see humanity as a weak species that is relatively easy to enslave. Records by psychics and dreamers from the early 20th century refer to human slaves of the moonbeasts as the "Men of Leng"; these captured humans have been mutated, their minds and bodies made less human, to effect complete loyalty to their moonbeast masters. They have horns, as well as hoof-like claws similar to those of ghouls. These telltale marks, found on someone who otherwise appears human, are proof that this individual is a slave of the moonbeasts.

DESCRIPTION

"For they were not men at all, or even approximately men, but great greyish-white slippery things which could expand and contract at will, and whose principal shape - though it often changed - was that of a sort of toad without any eyes, but with a curious vibrating mass of short pink tentacles on the end of its blunt, vague snout."

— H.P. Lovecraft

The Dreamquest of Unknwon Kadath

The moonbeasts' borrowed nanotechnology allows them to rapidly regenerate from injuries and to temporarily reshape their bodies, flattening them to less than six inches thick or extending their limbs more than two meters from their squat bodies.

Moonbeasts see the universe in terms of predators and prey, and anyone that they can enslave or steal from is just waiting to become their prey. To a moonbeast raider, every human is a lesser being and a potential slave.

Name: Moonbeast Raider
Motivation: Acquire new technologies and slaves
Species: Moonbeast
Contact: 2
Hyperspatial Exposure: 1/1
Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Constitution 4, Intelligence 3, Perception 3, Willpower 2
Ability Scores: Muscle 16, Combat 13, Brains 12
Life Points: 46
Speed: 21
Drama Points: 0-2
Special Abilities: Biofilter, Reduced Damage (kinetic/2), Infrared Vision, Regeneration, Temperature Tolerance

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	13	—	Defense Action
Disintegrator Pistol	13	23	Energy Damage*
Strike	13	13	Bash
Grapple	15	—	Resisted by Dodge

*Energy damage halves the value of all physical (but not hyperspatial) armor, and then doubles damage (like a bullet). This weapon can disintegrate any matter not reinforced by hyperspatial energy.

Name: Man (or Woman) of "Leng"
Motivation: Obey and protect their moonbeast masters
Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Constitution 3, Intelligence 2, Perception 2, Willpower 2
Ability Scores: Muscle 10, Combat 13, Brains 10
Life Points: 34
Speed: 18
Drama Points: 0-2
Special Abilities: Natural Toughness, Hyperspatial Exposure 4

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	13	—	Defense Action
Grapple	15	—	Resisted by Dodge
Knife	13	7	Slash/Stab
Disintegrator Pistol	13	23	Energy Drain*
Punch	13	7	Bash

*Energy damage halves the value of all physical (but not hyperspatial) armor, and then doubles damage (like a bullet). This weapon can disintegrate any matter not reinforced by hyperspatial energy.

DESCRIPTION

They leaped as though they had hooves instead of feet, and seemed to wear a sort of wig or headpiece with small horns. Of other clothing they had none, but most of them were quite furry.

— H.P. Lovecraft

The Dreamquest of Unknown Kadath

The moonbeasts use exotic hyperspatial devices to transform ordinary humans into half-human creatures that are both insane and utterly loyal to the moonbeasts. Reversing this transformation is difficult and requires both extensive medical treatment and the Reduce Exposure spell.

SERPENT PEOPLE

These ancient alien beings are the only 'aliens' native to the Earth. They evolved 80 million years ago and built a small but thriving civilization during the Cretaceous. They excelled in sorcerous enchantment and in psychic powers and were also skilled chemists. They perform hyperspatial sorcery as ritual sorcery and have their own unique version of scientific sorcery.

When an asteroid impact ended the age of the dinosaurs, the serpent people's civilization died with it. In the desperate years immediately after the impact, more than half a million serpent people used advanced drugs to enter a state of suspended animation where they could sleep for millions of years, awakening when the world was more conducive to their return. Most of these sleepers congregated in one of three large and well-protected caverns. Meanwhile, the rest of the surviving serpent people attempted to rebuild their civilization. Because of the difficulties of life on the surface immediately after the asteroid impact, these serpent people retreated to caverns, where they could build a carefully maintained self-sustaining civilization.

This new civilization never equaled the heights of their Cretaceous glory. Within 5 million years, it had fallen, and only primitive and savage serpent people lived beneath the Earth, where most eventually died out. The caverns of sleeping serpent people continued to slumber, but the devices that were supposed to awaken two of the caverns failed, and the third ran far slower than expected. The first cavern of serpent people woke up slightly more than 200,000 years ago. They built a small civilization under North Africa.

45,000 years ago, a faction ventured to the surface, to both rebuild an empire on the surface and to search for the two other groups of sleepers. Despite time and continental drift, they found one of these caverns, and awakened the serpent people within. Together, the two groups of serpent people united and built an empire on

Name: Civilized Serpent Person

Motivation: Restore the glory of their species

Species: Serpent Person

Contact: 2

Hyperspatial Exposure: 0

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Constitution 4, Intelligence 4, Perception 5, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 10, Combat 14, Brains 14

Life Points: 34

Speed: 27

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Infrared Vision, Natural Armor 2, Natural Weaponry 1, Psychic Sensitivity, Rapid Healing

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	16	7	Slash/Stab + Strength 6 Poison* Must Grapple first; no defense action
Dart Pistol	14	12	Bullet + Strength 6 poison*
Dodge	14	—	Defense Action
Tail Sweep	13	9	Bash

* This poison is a paralytic that drains dexterity. At the serpent person's choice, it can either kill or merely paralyze and incapacitate their victim. Victims roll once every minute.

the surface. Their numbers were slightly less than a quarter million, but they were able to tame and educate the savage stone age humans, and soon gathered an empire of almost 10 million human servants. The serpent people then formed several different kingdoms, using both modern humans and Neanderthals as their servants and soldiers. Their kingdoms covered Africa, most of Europe, and the northern portions of North America.

When the humans overthrew them, the remnants of the serpent people retreated underground, their spirit broken. Most of their caverns were destroyed by the last ice age. However, some survived. Today, most are now savage cavern-dwellers whose limited intellects cannot fully comprehend the half-ruined wonders around them, but there are a few small pockets of civilized serpent people in deep caverns beneath both Europe and Africa, as well as a single enclave of civilized serpent people beneath northern Colorado.

All of these small pockets of reptilian civilization still retain legends of the lost third cavern of serpent people who have been sleeping for the last 65 million years. This cavern holds by far the largest of the three groups of sleepers, more than a quarter million serpent people, as well as a wide array of books and tools. If these sleepers were awakened, and the serpent people decided to attempt to retake the surface from humanity, the result could be the beginning of a terrible war.

There are also three serpent people interstellar colonies founded by serpent people fleeing the destruction of their Thurian Age civilization by human rebels. One colony has reverted to savagery and another is a small but thriving independent civilization on a world where conditions are similar to Earth's early Cretaceous Period. The third consists of another thriving civilization of more than a million serpent people ruling over several tens of millions of human slaves, most of whom are kept enslaved using will-sapping drugs. The OPS has yet to find any of these three worlds.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANITY

Human scholars have learned of the serpent people's dinosaur-age civilization and discovered records of the two known caverns of sleeping serpent people who formed the basis of the civilization of the Thurian Age. Knowledge that a third cavern of sleeping serpent people may still exist is limited to the upper echelons of the OPS, who instruct agents to keep track of any anomalies that might indicate the discovery of this aeons-old vault. Although the OPS knows of the existence of small groups of degenerate and savage serpent people, they also keep this knowledge secret, to keep explorers or would be monster-hunters from accidentally encountering ghouls instead. Even the OPS does not know of the existence of the few small colonies of civilized serpent people that still exist deep beneath the Earth.

RELATIONS BETWEEN SERPENT PEOPLE AND GHOULS

The serpent people are not the only underground civilization. However, there are not more than a total of 20,000 civilized serpent people living in several isolated communities and there are at least several million ghouls. The serpent people understand that the ghouls could wipe them out at any time. These subterranean serpent people are exceedingly isolated and inwardly focused, but occasionally trade with neighboring colonies of ghouls. Some ghouls find the drugs and other chemical creations of the serpent people useful, but most are either contemptuous of or mildly hostile to the serpent people, who they regard as a relic species that will soon become extinct.

Approximately 50,000 barbaric and savage serpent people also exist, but they have learned to fear and avoid ghouls, since ghouls have no qualms about killing and eating them. To avoid ghouls, the degenerate serpent people traverse only the deepest caves and almost never come to the surface. Several groups of ghouls have enslaved a few thousand of these savage serpent people.

Name: Degenerate Serpent Person

Motivation: Kill Intruders

Species: Serpent Person

Contact: 2

Hyperspatial Exposure: 0

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Constitution 4, Intelligence 2, Perception 4, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 14, Combat 14, Brains 10

Life Points: 42

Speed: 27

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Infrared Vision, Natural Armor 2, Natural Weaponry 1, Psychic Sensitivity, Rapid Healing

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Bite	16	11	Slash/Stab + Strength 6 Poison* Must Grapple first; no defense action
Dodge	14	—	Defense Action
Spear	14	18	Slash/Stab
Tail Sweep	13	9	Bash

* This poison is a paralytic that drains dexterity. At the serpent person's choice, it can either kill or merely paralyze and incapacitate their victim. Victims roll once every minute.

DESCRIPTION

The serpent people are slender, exceedingly flexible reptilian humanoids that stand between five and six feet tall, with scaled skin, flexible tails that are between three and four feet long, and fanged snake-like heads set atop slender and flexible necks.

Civilized serpent people consider humans lesser beings, but also realize that they are greatly outnumbered. They kill outsiders without hesitation to keep the location of their small cities secret. However, if someone has something of value to offer them, the serpent people are willing to talk. Of course, they could just as easily decide to capture the outsider and use a mixture of psychic interrogation and truth drugs to break their will and obtain whatever information they may possess.

These hulking brutes enjoy mammalian prey and hate intruders. They can speak, but are far more interested in killing and eating humans than in conversing with them.

YADDITHI

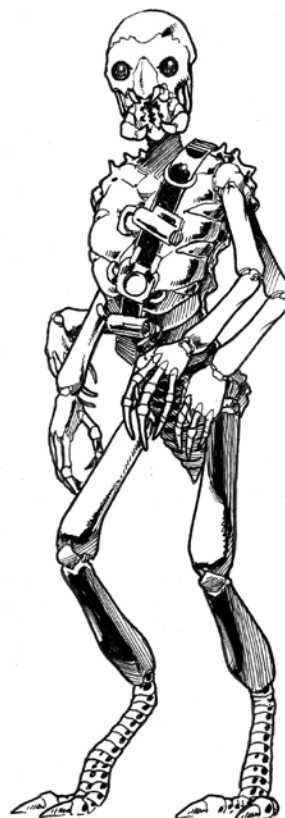
These insect-like aliens became a star-faring civilization 8,000 years ago, but were soon forced to abandon their home world, because it became infested with the giant wormlike beasts known as dholes 7,000 years ago. Almost 4,000 years ago, dholes rendered the yaddithi home world uninhabitable. Fortunately, by this time the yad-

dithi had founded almost a dozen colonies on other worlds. Although they are prodigious explorers, the yaddithi breed quite slowly and are not particularly inclined to colonize more than these worlds.

The yaddithi are also a perfect example of a technologically stagnant species. To advance further they would need to alter their minds and to expand their studies of hyperspace, and the vast majority of this species is unwilling to do either. The belief that early hyperspatial experiments attracted the dholes to their home world serves to further reinforce this prohibition. Today, they live their 500 year long lives on their dozen colonies while a few daring explorers seek answers to mysteries in the far ends of the cosmos, hoping to find another answer as to how their species can gain in knowledge and power without either becoming insane hyperspatial beings or destroying themselves. The yaddithi are curious about other species, but are more interested in exchanging knowledge than in trade, especially since most members of this species distrust alien technology. The yaddithi avoid all interactions with hyperspatial beings, and are forbidden by law and custom from summoning servitors of the other gods. However, they are skilled sorcerers, using both scientific sorcery and technosorcery to perform spells and create technosorcerous devices.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANITY

Humanity has not yet made contact with the yaddithi. However, one yaddithi explorer recently visited the human colony on Colossus and reported back the discovery of a newly star-traveling species at the edge of the regions these creatures have explored. This initial report included the fact



that it appeared that humanity had advanced technologically with great speed and that studying or contacting humanity might prove to be dangerous, but that contact with humanity might also help end the yaddithi's long technological stasis. Currently, whether and how to interact with humanity is a subject of extensive debate, a debate that could be come to a head if a human starship discovered a yaddithi ship or a yaddithi inhabited world.

DESCRIPTION

The yaddithi are "rugose, partly squamous, and curiously articulated in a fashion mainly insect-like yet not without a caricaturish resemblance to the human outline."

— H.P. Lovecraft

Through the Gate of the Silver Key

Oddly, these beings are some of the most humanoid aliens humanity may encounter. However, at first glance they appear to be bipedal insects with two hind limbs, four complexly articulated forelimbs, complex multi-jointed mouthparts, a scale-like and slightly wrinkled carapace, and eyes that appear to be featureless shining black orbs.

Yaddithi are found either on one of the few worlds they inhabit or in their light wave envelope spacecraft, which are far smaller than human dragonfly drive starships. The smallest of these starships is no larger than a large van and can be piloted by a single yaddithi.

Name: Yaddithi explorer

Motivation: Curiosity and greed

Species: Yaddithi

Contact: 2

Hyperspatial Exposure: 0

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Constitution 3, Intelligence 4, Perception 2, Willpower 3

Ability Scores: Muscle 10, Combat 11, Brains 14

Life Points: 30

Speed: 18

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Natural Armor 3, Natural Weaponry 1, Psychic Sensitivity

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Claw	11	6	Slash/Stab
Dodge	11	—	Defense Action
Laser Pistol	11	22	Bullet Damage*

* This weapon shoots a beam of coherent light that can burn a hole in almost any substance.

ALIEN TECHNOLOGY

The following is a list of some of the alien technology operatives and civilians may encounter.

Elder One Disintegrator Rod: This flashlight-shaped device has ridges designed to make it easier for elder one tentacles to grip. The weapon does 20 points of Energy damage and has rifle range. If this weapon does damage equal to the target's total life or damage points, the target is completely disintegrated. Moonbeasts occasionally use elder one disintegrators that they have recovered from ancient ruins, but cannot duplicate these advanced weapons. Unlike the other weapons listed here, disintegrators literally never need to be recharged and never run out of power.

Great Race Zapper & Hypnoscope: These devices are identical to human versions, except that they are slightly larger and blockier and designed for use with great race manipulators.

Mi-Go Hyperspatial Disruptor: This weapon is identical to the human version, except that it is a teardrop shaped object approximately the size of a mango. It fires 14 shots before it must be recharged.

Mi-Go Brain Cylinder: *"There, in a neat row, stood more than a dozen cylinders of a metal I had never seen before - cylinders about a foot high and somewhat less in diameter, with three curious sockets set in an isosceles triangle over the front convex surface of each."* - H.P. Lovecraft - *The Whisperer in the Darkness*

These cylinders are designed to indefinitely hold the conscious, living brains of intelligent creatures, including humanity. Because the mi-go often do need starships to travel from star to star, they sometimes carry passengers, but can only do so in this reduced form. In the cylinder, the brains are in an induced sleep until they are either implanted in a body or connected to various sensory and communication devices. Connecting a brain to an input or output device instantly awakens it. Different devices can duplicate the effects of any known human or alien sense. Human brains are typically connected to a pair of cameras and a microphone to allow the individual to see and hear, and a speaker to allow the individual to speak.

Humans almost never travel in this manner today, but brains in these cylinders do not age and can remain alive

ENERGY DAMAGE

Some alien weapons do Energy damage. This devastating type of damage halves the value of all physical (but not hyperspatial) armor, and then doubles damage (like damage from a bullet).

and in induced sleep for many centuries. Some individuals placed in cylinders as long ago as the 17th century can still be found in old and hastily abandoned mi-go enclaves on Earth, or occasionally other planets. A few have been captured by moonbeasts.

Individuals in these cylinders retain their Intelligence, Perception, and Willpower, as well as all of their Skills and all purely mental qualities or Drawbacks, like Eidetic Memory, Iron Mind, or Humorless. If placed in a new body, the character gains the body's Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, life points, and all physical Qualities like Acute Senses, Hard to Kill, or Blind. Humans in brain cylinders retain and can use all psychic powers but cannot perform sorcery in this form.

Both mi-go and human science can easily return a human brain in a brain cylinder into a human body. Any human in a brain cylinder has a minimum of hyperspatial exposure level 2, and some have higher levels of exposure. Brains with hyperspatial exposure five are visibly inhuman and mutate any human body they are placed in.

Serpent Person Dart Gun: This small weapon fits easily into a serpent person's palm and uses a powerful spring to fire darts at pistol range. Every pistol holds eight small darts, usually tipped with either a Strength 6 non-lethal paralytic agent that reduces Dexterity or a Strength 6 lethal poison that first paralyzes the target and then forces the victim to roll once a minute to avoid losing Constitution.

Yaddithi Laser: A complex, vaguely pistol shaped weapon that fires a coherent beam of green light. It does 20 points of bullet damage and has rifle range. It fires 50 shots before it must be recharged.

HYPERSPATIAL BEINGS

Although the emotions of normal alien races do not easily translate to humanity, there are still some points of contact. Humans and physical aliens can exchange knowledge and goods and come to diplomatic agreements. Beings that mostly or entirely inhabit hyperspace are far more alien and lack any common points of reference with humanity. Dwelling in this mind-shattering environment as an immortal, multidimensional being removes even those points of similarity we have with beings like the elder ones or the mi-go. As a result, the thoughts and desires of hyperspatial beings are literally incomprehensible to humans. Psychics who attempt to read the minds of hyperspatial beings may gain a few snippets of information, but most of what they receive is chaotic and bizarre. Professionals in the field have related this confu-

sion to Abbott's Flatland; a three-dimensional slice of multi-dimensional thinking just comes out wrong.

The only meaningful contact between hyperspatial beings and humanity comes in the forms of deliberately sent dreams and visions. These contacts are mostly comprehensible, solely because hyperspatial beings are mentally far superior to humanity and are capable of sending simple messages if they wish a human to accomplish some goal for them. The visions humans receive from hyperspatial beings are little different from the commands people give to dogs and other domestic animals.

Psychics who receive such messages and attempt to make contact to better understand the request learn nothing and may have their minds blasted into inhumanity. There are no treaties or negotiations with hyperspatial beings; their deals with humanity are inherently destructive and interacting with them is exceptionally dangerous. The OPS policy on all hyperspatial beings is that they are to be driven off, banished, or if possible destroyed. Although almost all are ageless and exceedingly durable, all entities except the Great Old Ones and the Other Gods can be killed, and OPS strike teams have become quite skilled at destroying them.

THE COLOR OUT OF SPACE

The OPS assumes that all beings that exist partially in hyperspace are like flying polyps and were once a physical alien species that managed to partly translate itself into hyperspace. The color out of space puzzles researchers because it seems to be a completely unintelligent entity that exhibits no intelligent behavior and cannot be reached by psychic contact. Most researchers believe that it is either some sort of naturally occurring creature or the result of a horribly botched attempt at transcendence that left the species partially in hyperspace but entirely devoid of intelligence. A few researchers believe that the color out of space is an entirely self-contained intelligent entity whose mind exists in its own psychic realm and has no need or interest to communicate with the physical world.

Humanity has had three contacts with this entity or entities in the last century and there are older records that may indicate previous contact. Two of the more recent incidents were on Earth in the 20th century, and third occurred on Hathor in 2009. The creature seems to be able to fly through hyperspace and has only been encountered in Earth and Hathor, leading researchers to speculate that it is attracted to worlds bearing abundant life. The creature seems to visit planets to feed, grow, and perhaps to breed.

The known life-cycle of the creature is that it arrives

Name: Color out of Space

Motivation: Eat Life

Species: Color out of Space

Contact: impossible

Hyperspatial Exposure: 2/n/a *

Attributes: none

Ability Scores: none

Life Points: 100

Speed: 1 (flow slowly)

Drama Points: 0

Special Abilities: Immune to all damage except from electricity.
Reduced Damage (electricity/5)

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Eat Life	Automatic	1/LP turn	Bash
Radiation (low)	Automatic	1 LP/3 hours	Bash
Laser Pistol	11	22	Bullet Damage*

* The Color Out of Space is immune to all forms of psychic contact

on a planet as a meteorite. The meteor's outer shell being is composed of an exotic and exceptionally tough substance secreted by the creature, and the interior contains the creature itself. In form, the creature is a substance somewhere between a glowing animate liquid and a partially hyperspatial substance like the unnatural flesh of flying polyps. Once the creature lands, it gradually consumes the meteor's outer shell and flows into life-bearing soil. The creature emits alpha and beta particles sufficient to register as a minor radiation hazard on a Geiger counter. It also seems to in some fashion devour life-energy.

Within a week of arrival, the creature has spread itself over an area as much as a mile across and every animal and plant, including any humans within this area loses one LP every three days. This damage cannot be healed unless the individual spends more than a full day away from the creature. The creature also forms a central core of glowing liquid which feeds far more voraciously and devours one LP every Turn from every life form within 10 yards. Also, even without this life-energy drain, spending more than a day or two in close proximity to the creature's core would cause radiation sickness. Except for the glowing liquid core, the creature is invisible while it is feeding, since it lurks in the soil. However, its effects are obvious as everything within the affected area begins to sicken and die.

Affected animals, plants, and people gradually become grey and frail or brittle and eventually die and rapidly crumble to dust. Any animal or person who suffers more than five points of damage from the creature also must make a non-doubled Willpower roll, with a penalty equal

to one fifth (round up) the damage this person has suffered. Individuals who succeed in this roll can freely leave the creature's vicinity, but anyone who fails refuses to leave and finds various rationalizations for staying despite their increasingly poor health.

After several months, all life within the affected region is dead and the creature comes to the surface, where its glow is easily visible. It then coalesces and launches itself into space, where it soon forms another meteorite. Sometimes, it leaves a portion of itself behind, which spreads to a healthier area of land and begins the process of feeding on life again.

The creature is resistant to all temperatures, and chemicals as well as all forms of physical force. It suffers minor damage from electricity, but can easily be destroyed by a hyperspatial disruptor. Destroying the creature's core instantly kills the entire creature. When the OPS learns of a possible incident involving this creature they send Operatives to immediately evacuate the area and search for the creature's core while armed with electric cannon and a hyperspatial disruptor.

DHOLES

One of the most dangerous hyperspatial beings do not actually live in hyperspace. Dholes are gargantuan worms that are typically between 200 yards and half a mile long. They travel freely in hyperspace, and researchers believe that they hibernate there, but they eat and breed in the physical world. Dholes exist in both the Dream Realm and the physical world, and they eat planets. No one knows how they find a planet, but when they do, they send out some form of unknown call. Within a few decades, the world is infested with dozens and then hundreds of dholes, that soon breed into tens of thousands.

While a single dhole can be destroyed, once a world has become infested with dholes, there is no known way to free it of this infestation. Even if all of the dholes are destroyed, more soon return. At best, their attack on the world can be slowed. If unchecked, a full infestation can render a world entirely lifeless within 1,000 years. Using powerful weapons and hyperspatial sorcery to destroy and confine dholes can provide a world with as much as another 2,000 years of life, but eventually it is doomed. The only way to save a world is to destroy the first dhole before others of its kind arrive.

Dholes are assumed to be unintelligent animals and no one has ever managed to communicate with them. Their presence in the Dream Realm does not seem to indicate that they have or will soon invade a planet in the

physical world, but the OPS keeps a careful watch for dholes on Earth and all Earth colonies, as well as in the Dream Realm. Dholes fear light and only surface from their vast burrows at night.

DESCRIPTION

Below him the ground was festering with gigantic Dholes; and even as he looked, one reared up several hundred feet and leveled a bleached, viscous end at him.

– H.P. Lovecraft

Through the Gate of the Silver Key

An average adult dhole is 500 yards long and 20 yards in diameter. It tunnels through solid rock and can devour literally any physical object. Dholes vanish into hyperspace to recover if they are badly damaged.

Name: Ravenous Dhole

Motivation: Devour Worlds

Species: Dhole

Contact: impossible

Hyperspatial Exposure: 2/n/a *

Attributes: Strength 50, Dexterity 2, Constitution 20, Intelligence 1, Perception 2, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 106, Combat 10, Brains 8

Life Points: 290

Speed: 33 (burrowing)

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Reduced Damage (all/2), Natural Weaponry 1, Regeneration, Vanish into hyperspace ***

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Crush	10	101	Bash
Devour	10	101	Slash/Stab
Laser Pistol	11	22	Bullet Damage*

* Dholes are immune to all forms of psychic contact

** Dholes are too large to dodge attacks.

*** Dholes must spend three turns completely immobile in order to vanish into hyperspace. They can be freely attacked during the first two of these turns, and vanish during the third.

GREAT OLD ONES? OUTER? OTHER?

Terminologies vary in the world of Lovecraftian gaming, but in Eldritch Skies we've elected to use this system of nomenclature: Great Old Ones are defined by their partial transcendence, and the fact that they still interact with the physical world and intelligent beings. The Other Gods – the term used by Lovecraft for entities of a greater scale and higher level of transcendence – do not, as a rule, care to come down and play. As such, we've elected to classify Nyarlathotep as a Great Old One: as a messenger to the lesser species such as mankind, he/she/it enjoys this same kind of transitional status.

FLYING POLYPS

Like the mi-go, these creatures are an ancient species with an interest in both Earth and in hyperspace. They are highly intelligent, mostly solitary predators who developed advanced technology and learned to shift most of their mass into hyperspace several hundred million years ago. Their partially hyperspatial nature protects them from most dangers and they can escape harm by shifting more of their mass into various hyperspatial dimensions, thus rendering themselves invisible. However, they always retain a connection to the physical world, which prohibits them from moving through solid barriers and performing other feats easy for beings that can exist fully in hyperspace. Their connection to the physical world also provides them with a serious vulnerability – they are as vulnerable to electricity as any normal physical being – but also creates a limited ability to control winds. They age and die slowly, over hundreds of millions of years.

Although they used to be large colonies of flying polyps on Earth, the great race of Yith imprisoned them in deep and powerfully warded caverns more than 250 million years ago. Over the last 30 million years, the wards on these caverns have occasionally decayed. When the wards on one set of caverns finally fails, the flying polyps typically leave Earth and head off into the galaxy. A few individuals remain on Earth, where they attempt to feed upon humanity and other animals.

Flying polyps are profoundly hostile to humanity and to almost all other physical beings. They regard all intelligent beings who do not exist at least partially in hyperspace as prey, tools, or vermin. Some flying polyps attempt to psychically contact humans, promising vast power in return for release from their captivity. These incidents form the basis of many legends of djinni and demons bargaining for release and then punishing or slaying those foolish enough to release them.

The greatest threat presented by flying polyps is to any one unfortunate enough to discover one of the caverns where a colony of them has been imprisoned. Although their numbers have dwindled over the millennia, due to the release and escape of some members of the species and due to gradual die-offs, each occupied cavern still holds between a few and several dozen elderly flying polyps, all of which are both hungry and eager to use a human to help break the wards keeping them imprisoned.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANITY

Of all of the inhuman species on Earth, the flying polyps are the most consistently hostile. They are a predatory species and have no compunctions about preying upon weaker sentient beings. OPS has issued a public warning about

the types of caverns these beings are imprisoned in, and geological and spelunking societies warn their members to avoid deep caverns in areas where polyps are known to be imprisoned. There is little risk of anyone looking for flying polyps discovering ghouls instead, since flying polyps are all imprisoned in a few local areas, including the central Australian desert, northern Canada, and the Arabian Peninsula, and these areas also have little ghoul activity, because ghouls wish to avoid contact with flying polyps.

DESCRIPTION

"There were veiled suggestions of a monstrous plasticity, and of temporary lapses of visibility, while other fragmentary whispers referred to their control and military use of great winds. Singular whistling noises, and colossal footprints made up of five circular toe marks, seemed also to be associated with them."

— H.P. Lovecraft

A Shadow Out of Time

Flying polyps usually attack and kill lone humans, but they are cautious and deliberate and can instead choose to kill hundreds or thousands by psychically contacting humans to act as their cats paws.

Name: Hungry Flying Polyp

Motivation: Slay or conquer lesser beings

Species: Flying Polyp

Contact: 4

Hyperspatial Exposure: 3/4

Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 5, Constitution 6, Intelligence 4, Perception 4, Willpower 4

Ability Scores: Muscle 26, Combat 16, Brains 14

Life Points: 74

Speed: 66 (flying)

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Control Wind, Invisible (when not attracting attention), Reduced Damage (all/5)*, Psychic Sensitivity, Regeneration

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	16	—	Defense Action
Sucking Wind	18	—	Resisted by Dexterity + Constitution **
Tentacle Strike	16	34	Bash

* Flying polyps take normal damage from all electrically-based attacks, their damage reduction power does not affect attacks made using electricity.

** If the flying polyp wins, reduce the target's Speed by 6 points. If the target's speed is reduced to 0, the target cannot move.

SERVITORS OF THE OTHER GODS

Ancient sorcery spells called these polymorphous creatures "servitors of the other gods". Other equally ancient occult texts refer to these creatures as "larval other gods". However, modern researchers believe these beings are simply entities that inhabit the furthest levels of hyperspace. Little is known of these beings. Some seem no more intelligent than animals, while others are at least as intelligent as humans, but their intelligence is of such a different nature and they come from such an alien environment that mutual understanding is essentially impossible and anything but the simplest communication is difficult. Like all other life-forms, these creatures are often hungry and many are capable of feeding on humans and other physical life forms.

Humans generally encounter these entities in one of two circumstances: when using the Voorish Sign spell or a Tillinghast viewer to peer into the furthest regions of hyperspace, or when using the spell Summon Servitor of the Other Gods. In the first case, these beings are seen in hyperspace, where some of them can even briefly reach into the physical universe to draw people or objects into their realm. In the second case, these beings are under a powerful mental compulsion that forces them to obey the summoner's orders in the physical world. This compulsion only ends with either the end of the duration of the spell or the summoner's death. Unlike flying polyps, they do not seem to behave maliciously toward humans, but will occasionally kill their summoner if not directed clearly. Nobody is certain whether being in servitude upsets them or whether these attacks result from thoughts and motivations beyond human ken.

Servitors of the other gods are purely hyperspatial life-forms, but being summoned into the physical world limits their abilities. When summoned into the physical world, they cannot pass through physical objects. While in hyperspace and seen with the Voorish Sign or a Tillinghast viewer, they can freely move through solid objects and can reach into the physical world at any point in the spell's or device's area of effect. Like all hyperspatial creatures, they are highly resistant to physical attacks. In hyperspace, they can float and fly, but when summoned they must crawl, with surprising speed, on their many tentacles. They come in a range of sizes; the largest seem like the harbor some alien intelligent and the smallest seem nearly mindless.

DESCRIPTION

Foremost among the living objects were inky, jellyfish monstrosities which flabbily quivered in harmony with the vibrations from the machine. They were present in loathsome profusion, and I saw to my horror that they overlapped; that they were semi-fluid and capable of passing through one another and through what we know as solids. These things were never still, but seemed ever floating about with some malignant purpose. Sometimes they appeared to devour one another, the attacker launching itself at its victim and instantaneously obliterating the latter from sight.

— H.P. Lovecraft
From Beyond

Looking like some hideous combination of a jellyfish and an octopus with many exceedingly muscular tentacles, these creatures are both incomprehensible and deadly. These creatures range from the size of gorilla to the size of a large horse.

Name: Servitor of the Other Gods

Motivation: Unknownable if not summoned. If summoned – obey summoner's commands. Occasionally, if not given clear commands, they will escape or destroy the summoner.

Species: Servitor of the Other Gods

Contact: 4

Hyperspatial Exposure: 2/3

Attributes: Strength 7, Dexterity 4, Constitution 4, Intelligence 3, Perception 4, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 20, Combat 13, Brains 12

Life Points: 54

Speed: 12 (crawling on tentacles), 120 (flying through hyperspace)

Drama Points: 0-2

Special Abilities: Reduced Damage (all/5), Fast Regeneration

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Constrict	15	39	Bash, must grapple first; no defense action
Dodge	13	—	Defense Action
Grapple	15	—	Resisted by Dodge
Tentacle Strike	13	24	Bash

Lesser servitors resemble smaller versions of the servitors of the other gods, but are near mindless creatures that are too dimwitted to be of use to most summoners. They are relatively abundant in hyperspace and range from the size of an average dog to the size of a somewhat small person.

Name: Lesser Servitor

Motivation: Unknownable if not summoned. If summoned – obey summoner's commands. Occasionally, if not given clear commands, they will escape and attempt to attack or flee.

Species: Lesser Servitor

Contact: 4

Hyperspatial Exposure: 2/3

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Constitution 2, Intelligence 1, Perception 4, Willpower 2

Ability Scores: Muscle 12, Combat 11, Brains 8

Life Points: 30

Speed: 6 (crawling on tentacles), 60 (flying through hyperspace)

Drama Points: 0

Special Abilities: Reduced Damage (all/5), Fast Regeneration

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Constrict	13	18	Bash, must grapple first; no defense action
Dodge	11	—	Defense Action
Grapple	13	—	Resisted by Dodge
Tentacle Strike	11	11	Bash

GREAT OLD ONES

Great Old Ones are semi-transcendent entities of incredible power that exist mostly within hyperspace. An important characteristic of all Great Old Ones is that they used to be more ordinary alien beings. In several cases, entire alien species have transformed in this manner. Other times, only one or a handful of individuals of a species transformed. Through a difficult process of directed biological, psychic, and technological development, these beings ascended to become far more intelligent, powerful, and dangerous.

As mentioned earlier, the partial transcendence of the Great Old Ones is one of four possible fates of intelligent species. It's clear that this sort of partial transcendence, where some or all members of a species transform themselves into hyperspatial beings that maintain a connection to the physical world, is exceedingly rare. Each such transformation is highly idiosyncratic. A few beings, like the Cthulhoids, can physically manifest as powerful intelligent beings capable of building cities and ruling worlds; most interact with the physical world far less directly. Some researchers believe that entities like Hastur may not even be aware of the physical world. However, one universal fact of all Great Old Ones is that they must feed on the psychic energies of intelligent beings

CTHULHU & ITS SPAWN

Cthulhu is the most infamous of all of the known Great Old Ones. Although most occult records speak solely of Cthulhu, it was only the greatest and most powerful of an entire species of almost half a million monstrous transcendent beings. This species has been in its current state for well more than one billion years, and nothing is known of their origins or their physical form. Dreams and vision of Cthulhu by humans it has contacted show it as a winged, octopus headed giant, but most researchers believe that this form has far more to do with the tendency of the human imagination to imagine godlike beings as humanoid than with how these beings actually appeared. What is known is that the Cthulhoids first came to Earth almost 300 million years ago.

Even the records of the elder ones give no reason for almost the entire species to migrate to Earth, but it is clear that they came to build cities and to feed upon the psychic energies of Earth's inhabitants. While beings that can inhabit the many dimensions of hyperspace do not need to build cities or even to manifest physical bodies, the Cthulhoids did both and clearly found these behaviors important, or at least enjoyable. Their psychic feeding had a serious impact on Earthly life, and was much of the cause of the Permian-Triassic Extinction Event. After a lengthy mixture of war and tense truce with the elder ones, Cthulhu and its spawn were trapped in hyperspace using a weapon created by the elder ones and the Great Race of Yith. The nature of this weapon is unknown, and human researchers simply refer to it as the Elder Weapon.

THE EFFECTS OF THE ELDER WEAPON

This powerful device was exceptionally unstable, and could only be used once. Since its use, Cthulhu and all of its kind that came to Earth have been trapped in the most distant dimensions of hyperspace, making them almost completely unable to manifest into the physical world. Before this weapon was used, the Cthulhoid species existed primarily in hyperspace, but could manifest in the physical world for extended periods of time. Like all Great Old Ones, they could not dwell in the physical world, but they were capable of visiting it at will.

Even the elder ones and the great race working together could not find a way to permanently destroy a species that had ascended into hyperspace, but they could contain it. The Elder Weapon altered the Cthulhoids so that they could no longer interact with the "levels" of hyperspace that were usually most easily accessible from the

physical world. The Cthulhoids were forced to inhabit realms of hyperspace where time passed exceptionally slowly and where their prodigious minds were forced into a dream-like state. This same weapon also kept them from manifesting anywhere in the physical world further than a few hundred miles from their capital city of R'lyeh. The Cthulhoids could no longer roam among the stars, and in fact could now only appear for at most brief moments near their now-sunken city.

Occasionally, shifts in hyperspatial currents have roused the Cthulhoids to greater wakefulness, allowing them to use their massive psychic powers to contact intelligent beings on Earth. There have been brief periods where Cthulhu and its species could physically manifest or make contact with Earth, approximately every thousand years. Even then, Cthulhu has not been able to physically manifest for more than a few minutes at a time. However, several thousand years ago, a hyperspatial shift that lasted several decades allowed Cthulhu to direct powerful hyperspatial energies into humans dwelling near R'lyeh, creating the first deep ones.

The effects of the Elder Weapon were designed to last for more than a billion years, but the actual duration remains unknown. 250 million years have passed, and the temporal records of the Yithians indicate that the Cthulhoids should remain confined for at least the next 300 million. However, what one technology can create, another can undo.

Although no one alive has any understanding of the operating principles of the Elder Weapon, if someone were to discover its secret, they might be able to build a device to undo it. Cthulhu originally created the deep ones for just this purpose, but they proved to be both insufficiently obedient and less inclined to innovation than humanity or many other intelligent species. After this, the Great Old One turned most of its limited, dream-like attention towards human cultists. Today, Cthulhu is marginally more aware than before, and has more cultists and others willing to attempt to aid it, fed by dreams of future power or the desire to have their enemies devoured or driven mad.

OTHER CTHULHOIDS

Almost the entire Cthulhoid species was trapped on Earth by the Elder Weapon. However, a few were not. No one knows if these beings were scouts, rebels, or criminals, but none of them ever come to Earth or even into the Solar System. Most researchers assume that they fear being trapped by the energies of the Elder Weapon. However, a few dozen solitary beings still haunt other worlds around other suns. If one ventures into a star sys

Name: Cthulhoid

Motivation: Freedom, Power, and Food

Species: Great Old One

Contact: 4

Hyperspatial Exposure: 4/5 (roll once an hour)

Attributes: Strength 30, Dexterity 10, Constitution 30, Intelligence 10, Perception 10, Willpower 10

Ability Scores: Muscle 66, Combat 26, Brains 26

Life Points: n/a+

Speed: 60 (walking), 240 (flying)

Drama Points: 5

Special Abilities: Psychic Sensitivity, all listed psychic powers, Sorcery 10, all known sorcery spells.

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Claw	26	67	Slash/Stab
Devour	28	157	Slash/Stab
Drain Life Force *	—	5	Bash
Grapple	28	—	Resisted by Dodge
Touch **	28	—	Automatic Level 5 Hyperspatial Mutation

+ Cthulhoids can be banished into hyperspace, but they cannot be killed. A single attack capable of delivering more than 100 LP of damage banishes the Cthulhoid back into hyperspace for one hour. However, unless the local structure of hyperspace has changed, or the creature has some reason not to return, it can return at the end of that hour.

++ All Cthulhoids are too large to dodge attacks.

* No roll is required and this damage cannot be resisted unless the wearer is protected by an Elder Sign or a Protective Ward. It affects everyone within a 5 kilometer radius and is applied once every 30 minutes.

** If a Cthulhoid actually touches someone, if it does not simply rend or devour this person, then the unfortunate victim immediately gains 5 levels of Hyperspatial Exposure. Physical contact with such a powerful hyperspatial entity instantly warps and mutates the victim.

SPECIAL CTHULHOID ABILITY

Visionary Contact: The Cthulhoid sends a human or other physical being a brief message. In addition to delivering the message, this contact also gives the target a Level 2 Hyperspatial Exposure.

tem, the rest of its kind will not travel there until it has departed. These creatures are less powerful than Cthulhu, but few humans would notice this difference. The OPS has had two encounters with these beings on worlds they have surveyed, but thankfully no Cthulhoids have ever visited a human colony – at least not yet.

RELATIONS WITH HUMANITY

Cthulhu and those of its star spawn that are trapped on Earth seek freedom. When the Elder Weapon's power briefly wanes, they can gain enough access to the physical world to invade people's dreams or to send them brief visions. They can also contact humans or aliens who are in proximity to an ancient Cthulhoid artifact. These visions are either promises of great reward or threats of dire punishment, both of which are sent in an effort to cause the person contacted to do their bidding.

DESCRIPTION

It represented a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind.

– H.P. Lovecraft

The Call of Cthulhu

Although Great Cthulhu itself is somewhat larger and more powerful, all of members of this hyperspatial species typically appear, at least on Earth, as twisted humanoid between 20 and 30 yards tall.

The sight of one of these beings, and most especially Great Cthulhu itself is one that every OPS agent dreads. Most records of contact with Cthulhoids end with a statement by OPS operatives that they have encountered one of these foul beings and are going to attempt to deal with it. Then nothing more is heard, and neither the operatives nor the Cthulhoid are ever seen again.

HASTUR & THE KING IN YELLOW

Although most researchers and several of the more accurate older books of occult knowledge classify Hastur as a Great Old One, other researchers disagree. The most accurate term for Hastur is a psychic disease. One current theory is that Hastur exists partially within hyperspace and partially within the minds of people afflicted with this disease.

The effects of different outbreaks of this disease are always highly idiosyncratic, but there are several general points of commonality. The infection can spontaneously occur in lone individuals, or a small group of individuals, numbering as many as two dozen, all become fascinated with the same idea. This idea is typically expressed

in some form of shared art, such as a mural, a series of paintings of the same scenes, a play, an anthology of short stories, or even simply group storytelling. The art or stories these people produce all share a few distinctive features, usually including characters and objects with similar names and locations, such as the King in Yellow, Queen Cassilda, Aldones and Camilla, the city of Carcosa by the cloud-lake Hali, the Pallid Mask, and the infamous Yellow Sign.

As far as researchers can tell, Hastur is another name for the King in Yellow. After creating and sharing some form of art involving these characters, places, and objects, the victims of this psychic disease begin exhibiting far more disturbing behavior. Suicide and murder are two common results. Murders committed by the infected are almost always justified by the infected as euthanasia, even if the murder victim clearly attempted to violently resist. Infected individuals are also likely to develop an interest in the occult and on a few occasions spontaneously manifest psychic powers, which remain after recovery. Psychic Links with the other infected members of the social group also sometimes appear; these fade afterward.

Fortunately, this psychic infection is only mildly contagious beyond the person or group initially affected. Individual instances of infection rarely spread beyond small groups. Also, after a few instances of suicide or murder, many of the affected individuals throw off the psychic infection, and are at a loss to explain their previous behavior.

However, most afflicted individuals fail to recover from this contagious madness without help. If the members are arrested or are otherwise forcibly separated from each other and their art, most recover. Some victims go permanently or temporarily insane during the process of recovering from this infection, but most are simply very shaken. If not stopped, most victims will eventually either be arrested for murder or commit suicide, but some simply vanish. No one knows what happens to these victims, but OPS researchers suspect that they accidentally or deliberately open hyperspatial gateways to some unknown destination. Some Carcosa theorists believe the destination must be the lost city itself.

The details of infection remain somewhat unclear, but usually begin in one of two ways. Either one person begins having a series of vivid dreams about Hastur and the other characters and objects involved in this infection, or one or more individuals encounter a work of art made by previous victims. Individuals who lack all hyperspatial exposure are immune to infection. They never have dreams of Hastur and universally find the artwork produced by previous victims to be both inexplicable and

uninteresting. However, psychics, occultists, hyperspatial researchers, space explorers, and the small percentage of the human population who is born with one level of Hyperspatial Exposure are all potential victims.

ACQUIRING THE HASTUR INFECTION

Only individuals with at least one level of Hyperspatial Exposure can become infected. Most people who catch this psychic infection have either carefully read or examined a work of art made by another victim, or they have encountered some other connection to Hastur, such as a Sending or Summon Great Old One spell designed to contact Hastur. When exposed to such an artwork or device, the individual must make a doubled Willpower roll, subtracting their level of Hyperspatial Exposure. Failure indicates that the individual begins to succumb to the infection and gains a 1-point mental problem – mild obsession Hastur. Also, occasionally someone without any such connection spontaneously begins having dreams of Hastur and must make the same roll to resist the obsession.

If at this point, the person is distracted by other concerns and does not have access to any further contact with Hastur or with other affected people, the obsession fades by one point each week. However, if the person is left alone, then the obsession increases to severe and then deranged, with the obsession automatically increasing by one point per week if the individual is not treated or at least distracted from these thoughts. In addition, the affected individual's level of Hyperspatial Exposure increases, if applicable, so that it is always at least equal to number of points in the obsession. The obsession can reach a maximum level of three points, as detailed in the Drawbacks section of character creation, thus producing a maximum of three levels of Hyperspatial Exposure.

The OPS and various national governments now have standard protocols for Hastur infections. The first step is quarantine and preventing affected individuals from collaborating with each other. The next step is trying to find the source artwork, and confiscating this and all art produced by the infected individuals. Some incidents of mass suicide, serial murder cults, and dangerous occult activity have occurred in association with Hastur infections – an infamous 2005 bioterrorism incident in the Prague subway resulted from one such, though that information was not released to the media – but usually these cults are discovered before more than one or two people have died.

The OPS works to quickly eliminate all manifestations of the Hastur madness, both because of the danger presented by those who have been afflicted, and also be-

cause the OPS fears that if not stopped, some of the larger groups could eventually spread, especially if the individual or group produces writing or works of art that are displayed to general public. Also, many researchers fear that some of the artwork and murders committed by those afflicted with this madness may be the part of some exceedingly elaborate form of hyperspatial sorcery, and the OPS wish to keep such rituals from ever being completed.

As for the artwork itself, standard procedure originally required destroying all copies after the investigation was concluded. This was overruled in the early 2000s when two operatives who had grown up in the former Soviet Union walked off the job in disgust, saying they would not work for an organization that burned books. One of the operatives was later found to be infected, which created some debate on the matter, but by then the policy had changed, and their superiors stood by the decision on its own merits. Currently, the OPS keeps Hastur-related art, writing and music in a heavily secured vault in Finland.

EPIDEMIOLOGY & FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

Studying a mind virus without spreading it is a toothy problem. Knowledge of the narrative of Carcosa and the names, places and ideas associated with the King in Yellow are not themselves dangerous. What, then, defines the mental subversion associated with Hastur? Researchers have determined that what makes these artworks infectious is what makes them artistic: namely the quality of passion and inspiration.

Gleaning knowledge from a piece of Hastur-related art requires exposure to the art and its passion. A person who has been thus exposed will have a hard time conveying the information forward without allowing their own acquired obsession to appear in it. Even a terse message can inadvertently convey poetic feeling, and even the worst of poets may write great works under the influence of the King in Yellow.

OPS has settled on the following methodology: they allow a well-trained operative who has become infected, purposely or by accident, to study the artworks in isolation. The operative makes a report which an individual with no hyperspatial exposure then summarizes and re-writes. (Individuals without any exposure usually have trouble gleaning clear information from the art itself: a painting that seems murky and confusing to an uninfected human will carry clear implications for someone more sensitive to its meanings.)

The OPS then decontaminates the first operative, and anyone else exposed as a civilian or in the line of duty, through a "boot camp" procedure that fills the days completely with mathematics lessons, language lessons, and intense physical activity until the infected parties have forgotten what made Carcosa so important. The procedure succeeds in 90% of

cases, though people who have undergone it report a sense of loss, as though a vivid and beautiful dream has faded.

There are many theories about the origin of the Hastur infection. The fact that individuals can be infected without any known prior contact with Hastur-associated artwork has convinced most researchers that its ultimate source, at least currently, may be the Dream Realm. One theory suggests the Hastur infection is an intrusion from an alien Dream Realm. Hastur may actually be a Great Old One that dwells in the Dream Realm and spreads to susceptible individuals.

What, then, of the fall of Carcosa and the strange, ephemeral, tragic story of Yhtill? Two schools of thought exist: some argue that these were real locations once, and perhaps represent the first civilization where Hastur emerged. Others say that Hastur and Carcosa come from the same Dream Realm and have no relation to realspace history.

NYARLATHOTEP

Nyarlathotep is a paradox and a mystery to the OPS. The OPS has records that indicate that a being by this name can appear independently or as a possessing spirit; that it can take on many forms, has great charisma, and leads people to perform strange and sometimes dangerous feats of sorcery, science and engineering. They know that Nyarlathotep is in some way associated with mysterious beings known as the Other Gods. Ancient alien records reveal little or nothing about this being.

What the OPS does not know is that Nyarlathotep is a Great Old One who partially transcended into hyperspace by becoming the avatar and intermediary of the Other Gods. Nyarlathotep appears to some species and not others; the knowledge it brings provokes them to transcend, partially transcend, or to destroy themselves. The way that Nyarlathotep picks its victims or protégés is unknown, and perhaps unknowable. However, species who never see Nyarlathotep are unlikely to transcend or partially transcend. Alien species that survive for millions of years may do so in part because Nyarlathotep ignores them.

Nyarlathotep never appeared to either the elder ones or the yaddithi, but it has appeared to both humanity and the moonbeasts. The moonbeasts hounded all of those who had been touched by Nyarlathotep and all of those with any levels of hyperspatial exposure into exile centuries ago. These exiles now live on spaceships, exploring various dangerous alien technologies. Nyarlathotep, once an obscure occult presence on the borders of human consciousness, began to intervene more actively in the early 20th century. This being sent psychic visions to Nikola Tesla, to the psychiatrist who invented the first link crown, the Nazi scientists who developed the first hyperspatial weapons during

World War II, and later to the physicists and engineers who developed the dragonfly drive.

Like the other Great Old Ones, Nyarlathotep has difficulty communicating with humans who lack any Hyperspatial Exposure. It can easily communicate with anyone with one or more levels. Most often Nyarlathotep speaks to individuals in dreams and visions that they take for bursts of inspiration, but it can also possess unknowing people or appear as a psychic illusion that dozens or even hundreds of people can see.

If those humans who had seen Nyarlathotep compared notes, there would seem to be no similarity between their visions except two: Nyarlathotep, when in human form, almost always appears as a vision of otherness, and as a powerful and charismatic figure. Throughout most of human history, Nyarlathotep has often appeared as male, as this corresponded with the images of power most prevalent in the public consciousness; in recent years, the gender of its form has depended more on the psychology of its audience.

Nyarlathotep encourages individuals to experiment with hyperspatial devices and other technologies, including genetic engineering and psychic enhancement, that relate to knowledge that may lead to transcendence. Nyarlathotep's motives for this are unknown, but the results of its influence can be wonderful or terrible, and Nyarlathotep's influence provides no protection against terrible accidents that can destroy a building, a city, or even an entire planet.

Regardless of how it appears, Nyarlathotep is exceptionally charismatic. Those to whom Nyarlathotep appears may or may not remember the entity itself, and often report gaining some unusual inspiration or hearing a stirring speaker whose words sparked new ideas. However, if a psychic was in contact with someone who Nyarlathotep appeared to, the psychic could detect its presence. Discoveries inspired by Nyarlathotep are often game-changers: they can revolutionize technology, but can also be unusually dangerous or destructive. Identifying them and singling them out for careful handling might help humanity survive.

The OPS policy book remains sparse on the subject. Unsure of Nyarlathotep's nature or motivations, they work to prevent and disband obvious cult activity, and to seek out and debrief those individuals who have encountered the entity.

CULTS

Like Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep has various cults on Earth. The most infamous is the Church of Starry Wisdom, a particularly debased mythos cult that first arose in Providence, Rhode Island in the mid 19th century. It disbanded after the authorities began investigating various mysterious disappearances, where people were kidnapped for use as human sacrifices. This cult survived this disband-

ing and throughout the 20th and early 21st century, various branches re-emerged all across the English-speaking world. However, this is far from the only cult devoted to Nyarlathotep. Small cults can be found all across the world. Nyarlathotep promises its cultists that it will slay their enemies and inspire them with visions of new and powerful magics and psychic powers and help them to develop exotic technologies and amazingly deadly weapons.

Several of the Nazi researchers who developed the first hyperspatial weapons belonged to a Nyarlathotep cult. Sometimes, scientists or occultists on the edge of a major advance will dream of Nyarlathotep. It grants few of them knowledge of its identity, but even those who do not understand they are in contact with a Great Old One know they have a special source of inspiration. Several researchers who worked on the Manhattan Project and one who helped develop the dragonfly drive had this sort of half-conscious connection to Nyarlathotep.

Today, cults venerating Nyarlathotep remain popular. Although a number of Cthulhu cults exist, a larger number of mythos cults worship Nyarlathotep. An odd feature of this worship is that some of them know this entity only in a single form and call it by another name entirely. Nyarlathotep gets around, and has chosen the human race as one of its own.

ALTERNATE FORMS

Most often Nyarlathotep appears as a vision of a person, in dreams, or by possessing someone. However, ancient records describe it as the "horror of infinite shapes", and it can appear in a variety of terrible forms. Its nightmare forms are relentlessly deadly, visibly unnatural predators. Nyarlathotep dons these forms in order to hunt anyone who learns too much about it and opposes it. The only protection potential victims have is that Nyarlathotep only attacks in these forms while in total darkness. If even a small light is present, it will flee or at least retreat into darkness.

DESCRIPTION

And it was then that Nyarlathotep came out of Egypt. Who he was, none could tell, but he was of the old native blood and looked like a Pharaoh. The fellahin knelt when they saw him, yet could not say why. He said he had risen up out of the blackness of twenty-seven centuries, and that he had heard messages from places not on this planet. Into the lands of civilization came Nyarlathotep, swarthy, slender, and sinister, always buying strange instruments of glass and metal and combining them into instruments yet stranger. He spoke much of the sciences - of electricity and psychology - and gave exhibitions of power which sent his spectators away speechless, yet which swelled his

fame to exceeding magnitude. Men advised one another to see Nyarlathotep, and shuddered. And where Nyarlathotep went, rest vanished; for the small hours were rent with the screams of a nightmare.

—H. P. Lovecraft
Nyarlathotep

Below is Nyarlathotep's predator form. When it possesses or otherwise appears as a human, it retains the same Brains & Combat Scores, but uses the body's Muscle score and is restricted to the weapons available to that form. In all forms, it is charismatic and it is also terrifying in its obviously inhuman forms.

Name: Nyarlathotep

Motivation: Spread chaos and knowledge & destroy all who oppose it

Species: Great Old One

Contact: 4

Hyperspatial Exposure: 4/5 (roll once an hour) [3/4 if in human form]

Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 5, Constitution 10, Intelligence 10, Perception 10, Willpower 10

Ability Scores: Muscle 26, Combat 16, Brains 26

Life Points: 90

Speed: 45 (walking) 90 (flying)

Drama Points: 5

Special Abilities: Psychic Sensitivity, all listed psychic powers, Regeneration, Sorcery 10, all known sorcery spells.

MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Claw	16	24	Slash/Stab
Dodge	16	—	Defense Action
Life force drain*	18	64	Bash - delivered by touch

* The result of this attack looks like a heart attack

LESSER-KNOWN GREAT OLD ONES

Many beings meet the definition of Great Old Ones; not all of them are listed here. Some appear uninterested in humanity, and are out there preying on or making deals with species unknown and unnamed to us; others are of smaller significance than Cthulhu and Nyarlathotep, and appear to humanity only rarely. The Lovecraft story *Hypnos* gives a great example. The OPS databases, and human history, are full of stories like this: loose-end reports wherein humans describe contact with something larger than themselves, often accompanied by anomalous events. Without more evidence, it's difficult to sort out Great Old Ones from personal gnosis and superstition. A woman reports a "demon" plaguing her son. Is that an

alien being oppressing his mind or the local cultural explanation for his alcoholism? If an isolated incident of hyperspatial contact has driven the young man to drink, it's unlikely anyone will find out for certain.

Directors can take examples of partially transcendent beings from stories beyond the central mythos canon, mythological pantheons, or even science fiction television shows - or invent totally unique Great Old Ones. Even with knowledge of hyperspace, the universe is unknowably immense. OPS doesn't recognize everything in it. Going off the map allows for many kinds of narratives: perhaps the Heroes must fight to understand and defend against a hyperspatial being on a colony planet while armed with no more information than a 50-year-old cache of notes about someone's LSD visions. Maybe the OPS uncovers the existence of a being which seems benign toward humanity but preys on the energies of another sentient species, and the Heroes must decide whether to make a risky intervention. A Series could even center on discovering the true identity of, and vanquishing, the gods of a dead Earth religion.

THE OTHER GODS

Unlike the Great Old Ones, the Other Gods were never members of ancient alien species that partially transcended. Instead, they are active personifications of primordial forces. A reality of the universe is that mind and energy are inseparable, and any sufficiently complex pattern of energy eventually gives rise to intelligence.

Known in various older occult books as the Other Gods, to distinguish them from the various deities worshiped by humanity, these beings can most accurately be described as aspects of the fabric of hyperspace itself. They do not dwell in hyperspace like the Great Old Ones or the various lesser creatures that live there; rather, the Other Gods are hyperspace in some way. The OPS has little solid information about the Other Gods, beyond a few names - Yog-Sothoth, the beyond one, the key and the gate, the opener of the way; Azathoth, the amorphous blight of nethermost confusion; and Shub-Niggurath, the black goat of the woods with a thousand young. Records found on several ruined worlds indicate that making contact with entities that are part of the fabric of hyperspace can sometimes lead to a species' transcendence. While human occultism has a large body of literature on the Other Gods, much of it is patchy and erroneous. Scholars find it difficult to verify one sorcerous ritual against another without actually performing them and risking annihilation.

Humans can only make contact with the Other Gods through the use of rare and powerful alien artifacts. Hu-

manity has not learned how to contact these inhuman beings directly. Unlike the Great Old Ones, who hunger for contact with the physical world and the minds of its inhabitants, the Other Gods need nothing from the physical world and only notice its existence when heavily provoked.

It is difficult but catastrophic to catch the attention of an Other God. To view them dimly as through a telescope might be accomplished by great effort in science or sorcery, and rates no higher than Level 3 Hyperspatial Exposure because of their extreme remove from physicality: oddly safer, though less comprehensible, than contact with the Great Old Ones. Humans “listening in” encounter confusing, dreamlike visions. Occasional insights are possible from these sightings, perhaps information about the Great Old Ones, about hyperspace, or locations and functions of powerful alien artifacts, but this seems to be more the coincidental result of interdimensional contact rather than an intentional message. Sometimes, only nonsense and nightmares result.

Full two-way contact, in the unlikely event that an Other God takes notice, brings the foolhardy individual into an inconceivable and devastating level of oneness with hyperspace. No human who has attempted to visit the exceedingly distant and alien levels of hyperspace where the Other Gods dwell has ever returned.

CREATING ALLIES, ADVERSARIES, AND INNOCENT BYSTANDERS

These are the people the Heroes encounter along the way. Some are nameless background characters, like a cultist thug or a laboratory technician. Others are the Hero's friends and family, their staunch allies and dangerous foes. The Supporting Cast varies from one Episode to the next, but over time, recurring characters can become loved or hated mainstays.

Most Supporting Cast characters do not need full Character Sheets, or even Quick Sheets. For the most minor characters, write down a name and role and a few notes. Your typical corporate bodyguard rarely needs much beyond the basic Attributes and Ability Scores. A victim might only need to say thanks after being rescued. On the other hand, be prepared in case players find these small parts more interesting than planned. Have to hand a few personality attributes – family status, motivations – that allow character development on the spot. After all, players are unpredictable: the Hero hiding behind a rock wall with a random extra, fleeing the moonbeasts, might suddenly decide to make psychic contact or propose marriage.

“Named” roles are more complex—relatives, friends, colleagues, or hated enemies of the Heroes. A Quick Sheet

suffices for mechanics, but also spend time developing that character's personality and attitude. If all the Supporting Cast sound and behave the same, the Series is going to feel dull and flat. A teacher should sound and act differently from an OPS team member, or a Hero's father, or an impoverished teen who dreams of becoming a colonist on an alien planet.

After the players create Heroes, work on fleshing out the people in the characters' lives. If they work in the OPS, you won't need to detail every senior director or repair technician, but writing up the immediate superior, some technicians or research assistants, and perhaps a doctor or psychiatrist, is an excellent idea. Keep them as recurring characters, and if any of them is injured, kidnapped, or killed, their demise will have more than emotional impact than Dead Body #4. Additionally, it's useful to have a roster of Supporting Cast ready to go at a moment's notice. That way, if the Heroes decide to do the unexpected, you have something to throw at them.

DETERMINING ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITY SCORES

Some Supporting Cast are merely opponents for the Heroes to fight. When it comes to that, having their scores handy keeps the action flowing. This does not mean that you have to go through the entire character creation process for each and every enemy the Heroes encounter. Far from it—all you have to do is assign Attributes, put together Ability Scores, figure out any attacks or special abilities the characters have, and you're good to go.

Attributes: Unlike players, you don't need to divide a set amount of points among the six Primary Attributes. Just pick and choose what fits. If you need to stat out a couple of annoying reporters or hanger-on cultists, you could make them average across the board (all 2s), or maybe give them a couple of Attributes at three. For a team of augmented corporate thugs, give them a high Strength (5 or 6), above average Dexterity and Constitution (3 or 4), and average mental attributes. It doesn't matter if the total Attribute points come to 11, 13, or 35: as the Director, you have the final say.

For ab-humans and most aliens, Attributes will be at the high end. After that, just figure out Life Points, add any bonuses for the Hard to Kill Quality, and the Attributes are done.

Ability Scores: Most Supporting Cast members don't need detailed skills. Instead, use the Ability Scores to get a rough idea of what the character can do. As discussed, Ability Scores are determined by the character's Attributes. Most regular folk will have Ability Scores in the 9-13 range. Augmented soldiers, ab-humans and truly extraordinary people will be in the 14-20 range. Hyperspatial beings or

the most deadly ab-human mutants will have even higher numbers. To avoid math and guesswork, consult the Score Tables.

A good quick way to determine Ability Scores is to use the Heroes' skills and Attributes as benchmarks. Take the toughest Hero's Dexterity and Guns or Brawling totals and use it as the base. A generic thug should have a Combat Score within one or two points of the baseline, meaning the best fighter can hit that thug on a roll of one or two. A tougher foe should have a Score of three to five points over the base. That means the Hero will hit on an average roll, but the villain might get lucky. A challenging opponent is going to use base plus six or seven: the heroes need to roll well to hit them or avoid getting hit. And deadly foes have a Score of the base plus eight or more, requiring teamwork or Drama Points to fight them successfully.

Special Abilities: Most people have no unusual powers or abilities. Ab-human, aliens, and augmented humans may have several, from psychic powers to various inhuman abilities. List them in the Quick Sheet so you don't forget that, say, a mutant has 6 point armor.

Combat Maneuvers: Figure out what attack and defense moves the character is likely to use, their applicable Scores, and the damage inflicted (remember to include the Success Level kickers derived from the Scores listed—remember no rolling for most Supporting Cast).

Supporting Example: Most soldiers, thugs, and similar humans have Dodge, Grapple, Gunshot, Kick, and Punch, Maneuvers. Gunshot and Punch use the unmodified Combat Score, Kick uses Combat Score - 1, and Grapple uses Combat Score + 2.

An augmented commando with Strength 5 and a Combat Score of 15 would have the following Maneuvers:

Drama Points: The Heroes are not the only ones with Drama Points. Adversaries also have access to them. Minor characters have no Drama Points; they are not meant to do extraordinary things. An augmented thug has one to three Drama Points, enough to land a blow or two on a Hero before their defeat. A friend or relative of a Hero could have the same amount, to allow for occasional heroics. Major foes could have five to eight Drama Points, and a recurring nemesis could have 10 or more Drama Points in store. Usually, Supporting Cast spend Drama Points for combat purposes (the sample commando above could spend a Drama Point to use the Heroic Feat rule and raise his punch value to 25).



MUSCLE SCORE TABLE

8	Really Weak: Children and the physically inactive fall here.
9-10	Average Person: Your average person who doesn't work out.
11-12	Physically Competent: Someone who works out a bit.
13-14	Augmented or really Tough Human: This is the typical Muscle Score of an augmented soldier. Very athletic normal humans are in the same range.
15-16	Ab-Humans, Heavily Augmented People, and Weightlifters: Anyone at this level is really dangerous and may not be fully human.
17-20	Human Peak: Humans don't come any stronger than this. This level requires both augmentations and extensive physical training.
21+	Superhuman: Ab-humans, aliens, and hyperspatial beings.

COMBAT SCORE TABLE

8	Non-Combatant: With this Combat Score, a character needs to go to Full Offense or Full Defense to be of any use in a fight. People who can't throw a punch to save their lives would have Combat Scores at these levels.
9-10	Average Person: This is someone who knows which end of a weapon to point towards an enemy or has been in a few scrapes in his life.
11-12	Trained Person: This is the Combat Score of a normal human with some training (a beat cop or a regular soldier).
13-14	Augmented or Veteran Fighter: This represents a tough, well-trained human or someone with a few augmentations.
15-16	Elite Fighter: Special force soldiers, OPS strike team members and various ab-humans.
17-20	World Class Warrior: The absolute best of the best, with impressive training and at least a few augmentations. These people are hard to beat—time to break out those Drama Points.
21+	Inhuman: Anything this good is more than human and exceptionally deadly

BRAINS SCORE TABLE

8	Somewhat Dim: This individual is not very smart and not good at using the intelligence they have
9-10	Average Person: Someone of average intelligence who has never really applied themselves to intellectual tasks.
11-12	Smart: Someone with a good education and the smarts to make the most of it.
13-14	Brilliant: Highly educated, very smart, or both.
15-16	Genius: An impressive expert, or someone exceptionally intelligent.
17-20	World Class Genius: Even the experts are going to be impressed with this person's ideas
21+	Inhumanly Brilliant: The greatest human minds in history, and various alien and inhuman creatures whose thoughts defy comprehension.

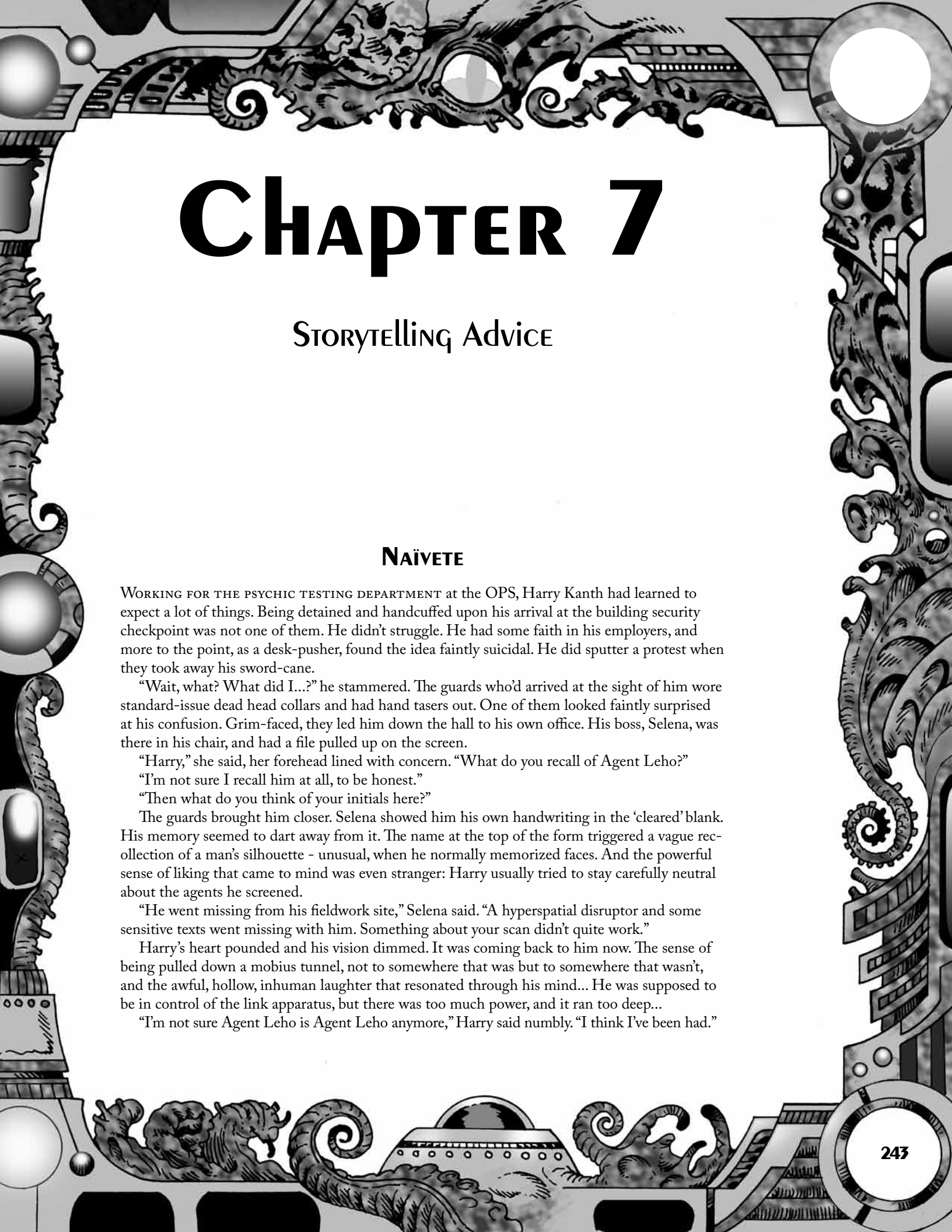
MANEUVERS

NAME	SCORE	DAMAGE	NOTES
Dodge	15	—	Defense action
Gunshot	15	16	Bullet damage (for a standard pistol)
Grapple	17	—	Resisted by Dodge
Kick	14	15 (base 12 +3 Success Levels)	Bash
Punch	15	14 (base 10 +4 Success Levels)	Bash



“South Station Under - Washington Under - Park Street Under - Kendall - Central - Harvard -” The poor fellow was chanting the familiar stations of the Boston-Cambridge tunnel that burrowed through our peaceful native soil thousands of miles away in New England, yet to me the ritual had neither irrelevance nor home feeling. It had only horror, because I knew unerringly the monstrous, nefandous analogy that had suggested it. We had expected, upon looking back, to see a terrible and incredible moving entity if the mists were thin enough; but of that entity we had formed a clear idea. What we did see - for the mists were indeed all too malignly thinned - was something altogether different, and immeasurably more hideous and detestable. It was the utter, objective embodiment of the fantastic novelist’s “thing that should not be”; and its nearest comprehensible analogue is a vast, onrushing subway train as one sees it from a station platform - the great black front looming colossally out of infinite subterranean distance, constellated with strangely colored lights and filling the prodigious burrow as a piston fills a cylinder.”

H. P. Lovecraft - *At the Mountains Of Madness*



Chapter 7

STORYTELLING ADVICE

NAÏVETE

WORKING FOR THE PSYCHIC TESTING DEPARTMENT at the OPS, Harry Kanth had learned to expect a lot of things. Being detained and handcuffed upon his arrival at the building security checkpoint was not one of them. He didn't struggle. He had some faith in his employers, and more to the point, as a desk-pusher, found the idea faintly suicidal. He did sputter a protest when they took away his sword-cane.

"Wait, what? What did I...?" he stammered. The guards who'd arrived at the sight of him wore standard-issue dead head collars and had hand tasers out. One of them looked faintly surprised at his confusion. Grim-faced, they led him down the hall to his own office. His boss, Selena, was there in his chair, and had a file pulled up on the screen.

"Harry," she said, her forehead lined with concern. "What do you recall of Agent Leho?"

"I'm not sure I recall him at all, to be honest."

"Then what do you think of your initials here?"

The guards brought him closer. Selena showed him his own handwriting in the 'cleared' blank. His memory seemed to dart away from it. The name at the top of the form triggered a vague recollection of a man's silhouette - unusual, when he normally memorized faces. And the powerful sense of liking that came to mind was even stranger: Harry usually tried to stay carefully neutral about the agents he screened.

"He went missing from his fieldwork site," Selena said. "A hyperspatial disruptor and some sensitive texts went missing with him. Something about your scan didn't quite work."

Harry's heart pounded and his vision dimmed. It was coming back to him now. The sense of being pulled down a mobius tunnel, not to somewhere that was but to somewhere that wasn't, and the awful, hollow, inhuman laughter that resonated through his mind... He was supposed to be in control of the link apparatus, but there was too much power, and it ran too deep...

"I'm not sure Agent Leho is Agent Leho anymore," Harry said numbly. "I think I've been had."

STORYTELLING IN ELDRITCH SKIES

Although it is perfectly possible to use *Eldritch Skies* to run Series that resemble standard mythos horror, where the Heroes spend their time hunting down mythos monsters and destroying them and not always surviving the outcomes, this game can also do many other sorts of stories. This game can be used to play out stories of heroism and triumph just as well as it does stories of hopeless and doomed struggles against an irresistible foe. *Eldritch Skies* is first and foremost a science fiction RPG and all of the stories of exploration, trade, and conflict found in classic science fiction are ideal choices for this game.

PULP VS. GRITTY SERIES

One of the first choices to make when deciding to be a Director for an *Eldritch Skies* Series is what sort of Series you and your players want. The difference between gritty, cinematic, and pulp Series is ultimately about different approaches to heroism. Heroes in all three types of Series can be equally heroic, but both the ways in which they demonstrate their heroism and the effects of heroic actions are usually quite different. In large part, the choice between these three types of Series is about deciding which approach to heroism works better for you and your gaming group.

GRITTY SERIES

In a gritty Series, heroism is usually about fighting the good fight against difficult or overwhelming odds, which no guarantee of victory. Sometimes, Heroes are certain that their cause is ultimately lost, but that they can make the difference between defeat now or defeat in a few years or decades. Demonstrating heroism in a gritty Series is all about risking your life, doing the right thing, and making hard choices, even when it's clear that no victory is ever complete, that humanity will always face additional dire threats, and that eventually the human species will lose and become another footnote in galactic history. Understanding the inevitability of this outcome, Heroes in a gritty Series nevertheless "rage against the dying of the light". The recent *Battlestar Galactica* TV series and both the *Alien* and the *Terminator* films are good examples of gritty SF.

Another important aspect of gritty Series is that morality is never black and white. Everything is shades of grey, and often a fairly dark grey. Allies may turn out to be secret antagonists or to act as antagonists because they have been forced to do so, the Heroes' superiors and colleagues may betray them, and everyone has at least a few skeletons in their closet, perhaps even actual skeletons. Innocent and

guilty, right and wrong, good or bad are not merely relative, but often exceedingly unclear. The Heroes' superior in the OPS may have literally sold a colony ship filled with thousands of human colonists to moonbeast slave raiders in return for a powerful ancient relic that will protect Earth or one of the larger colony worlds from a deadly threat. Selling colonists into slavery is clearly a heinous act, but the question then becomes, does saving millions, or perhaps billions of lives justify this act?

In a gritty Series, the difference between heroes and villains can often be unclear, and may depend upon what measures of heroism or villainy that the Heroes use. Do the ends justify the means, or are some means too horrific, regardless of the worthiness of the ends that are achieved? In a gritty Series, heroes must be willing to get their hands dirty, but they must also be aware that it can be very easy to slip from being a pragmatic hero to being a hideous villain.

A common aspect of gritty adventures is having to make difficult choices. One possible example that has been used in many gritty stories: the Heroes are in a situation where they need to save a group of innocent people from certain death, and there is no possible way to save everyone. Perhaps they are on a crippled spaceship with a failing life support system. The Heroes must evacuate the passengers, and there are fewer space suits than passengers. Maybe an ab-human mutant is rampaging through a large apartment complex and the Heroes cannot evacuate all of the residents before the mutant reaches them. In such situations Heroes may literally have to decide who lives or dies – or risk even more people dying in a chancy attempt to save everyone. One of the key aspects of gritty adventures is that Heroes must make difficult choices, and this sort of adventure is a perfect opportunity for those sorts of choices. In this style of game, Directors should design such Episodes so that no matter how clever the Heroes are or how well they roll, they will have to make difficult and painful choices.

CINEMATIC SERIES

Heroism in a cinematic Series is about the difficult struggle to achieve victory. Victory is always possible, but is rarely easy. Heroes have to risk their lives, suffer terrible injuries, or perhaps even die, but if they are willing to give their all, they can succeed, and humanity will be saved. Being a hero is about winning through a mixture of cleverness, bravery, and most of all, determination. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Babylon 5*, and *Stargate SG-1* all have cinematic characteristics: the good guys take some losses along the way, but eventually pull through. They don't laugh off their struggles; the protagonists become older and wiser, though, rather than

grim and haunted. Battle scars add character, and mean something. Deaths are usually meaningful sacrifices.

In a cinematic Series, morality is a somewhat lighter shade of grey. The OPS is by and large an organization composed of dedicated, hard-working people who sincerely desire to help the human species and to protect the populace from mythos dangers. Most democratically elected government officials, conventional emergency services personnel, and similar people are also working from good intentions. Corrupt, greedy, and deluded individuals exist in all of these organizations, and occasionally an organization can suffer from widespread corruption, but such incidents are relatively rare, and sufficiently dedicated Heroes can expose and put an end to such problems.

Also, the line between heroes and villains is somewhat clearer. There are acts too horrific for any hero to be able to justify, and while some of the opposition may perform heinous actions in order to accomplish good ends, there are always better, if often more difficult ways to accomplish the same ends. Villainy may result from greed and lack of concern for others, but it can also result from laziness, or unwillingness to trust that there is always a genuinely better solution to every problem. In part, being a hero is about having faith that good actions can produce good results, even when other options may be easier or may appear more certain.

Reframing the gritty adventure idea above as cinematic, one of the key differences is that idea that if the Heroes are clever and work hard, they can generally manage to save everyone. As a result, Directors should almost never design an adventure that includes a "no-win scenario": all Cinematic adventures should include possible ways for the Heroes to avoid difficult and painful outcomes by being sufficiently good at what they do and sufficiently willing to risk their lives. The Heroes might need to spend most of their Drama Points to save all of the passengers on a crippled spacecraft, but they can do it. Alternately, the Heroes might need to spend a few turns fighting an overwhelming foe to allow everyone to escape, thus risking serious injury. In cinematic adventures, if the Heroes are willing to work hard enough and take enough risks, success is always possible, but it needn't be easy.

PULP SERIES

In pulp Series, heroes perform heroic acts, often while demonstrating exactly how impressive they are. Success is not always easy, but with sufficient skill and determination it is always possible, and often managed with style. Also, in a pulp Series, defeat is almost never total. Once the Heroes arrive, if they are remotely successful, everyone they are trying to protect or save will remain safe and unharmed. The

exception is a dramatic death: occasionally, an innocent will die and later be avenged with great fanfare. Or maybe an ally will make up for a past betrayal by sacrificing his life to save the Heroes. And death isn't always permanent. Pulp Heroes are always somewhat larger than life and can accomplish wonders both because of their consummate skills and because luck is most decidedly on their side. Even when a situation looks utterly hopeless, a chance to triumph, or at least to avoid defeat is certain to appear.

Victory may be incomplete, but is largely assured. For example, if a cult run by a dangerous and brilliant ab-human mutant has been kidnapping people for a mass sacrifice, pulp Heroes will almost certainly rescue the kidnap victims, and even capture a few cultists, but the cult's mutant leader may escape unless the Heroes are especially clever. Not being able to save the lives of the kidnapped people would be the sort of grim and terrible failure that does not fit the generally light and optimistic tone of pulp SF, but even the purest and most skilled Heroes can encounter equally skilled Adversaries. It's classic for an antagonist in this type of Series to set up a threat which forces the Heroes to let him or her escape in order to protect innocent lives.

Pulp Series often have a decidedly black and white morality. Heroes attempt to do good for good reasons, and villains perform evil acts either for evil reasons or because they are forced to do the bidding of the true, behind-the-scenes Adversary. As in cinematic series, anyone who is attempting to accomplish positive goals by evil means is grossly misguided, but in a pulp Series, it's generally even more obvious: the villain is thoroughly delusional, or is in part driven by base motives that they are attempting to justify or conceal. This morality also means that with only a few exceptions, organizations like the OPS are composed of heroic and dedicated individuals. Any corrupt, misguided, or evil members are a rare aberration, and are almost never part of any large and dangerous conspiracy within the organization. Someone in the OPS might secretly be a cultist, or be acting under mind control or being blackmailed by the CEO of a corrupt corporation, but all such problems are isolated incidents.

Another mark of pulp SF is that bad things will often happen non-permanently, both to Heroes and to other characters. For example, in a gritty or cinematic Series, a character who undergoes torture will likely be mentally scarred by the experience; in a pulp Series, he'll be cracking jokes as soon as he's out of the chains. Characters both good and evil return from apparent death. Pulp plots assume both physical and mental resilience on the part of Heroes and Adversaries alike. For examples, look to the

TESTING PROCEDURES

OPS agents face Hyperspatial Exposure, alien mind control, and contact with the Great Old Ones. To help make certain that the OPS is not overrun with cultists and the insane, field agents are tested after any encounter with hyperspatial entities, and all OPS personnel are tested on a yearly basis. This testing involves several hours of psychological tests accompanied by a scan using a link crown and advanced software. These tests reveal both the person's level of Hyperspatial Exposure and whether or not the person is possessed, insane, or under some form of mind control, including the Compulsion spell.

The accuracy level of this testing depends upon the type of stories the players and Director are interested in. In a pulp or cinematic Series, the OPS is generally on the side of good, but who knows: your boss, by some wild chance, could be an alien sleeper agent. In a gritty series, there might be deeper corruption – the testing could even be a giant sham. In any case, bribery, sabotage, and similar tactics can occasionally be used to allow someone to deliberately appear sane, unpossessed, or not under some form of mental compulsion. In the absence of such actions, most OPS personnel can be assumed to remain sane and in control of their own minds.

OPS field operatives are required to maintain an average Hyperspatial Exposure level no greater than level two. Since someone with level three exposure can easily become inhumanly insane, operatives who reach level three Hyperspatial Exposure are normally given limited duties for the month they require to return to level two. If they are needed immediately, an OPS sorcerer uses the Reduce Exposure spell upon them.

original *Star Trek* TV show and most superhero comics. Nameless or minor characters sometimes bite the dust at the beginning of an episode, and in the course of the plot all kinds of terrible things can happen to the heroes, but by the end, stolen brains are returned, imminent destruction averted, and the main characters walk off hale and whole.

When running pulp, there is always a way to save all or almost all of the innocents from death, and more so than in cinematic Series, the Heroes can manage this feat simply by taking a careful look at the situation and making some clever choices. The essence of pulp is that Heroes both can save the day and look awesome while doing so.

USING THE OPS

How detailed you wish to make the OPS depends upon the sort of Series you wish to run. However, the organization's

basic profile is the same in any series. The OPS is dedicated to protecting humanity from mythos dangers and weapons, hyperspatial and otherwise, that can cause mass death. The default assumption in *Eldritch Skies* is that the Heroes will be OPS operatives – field agents for the OPS – though it is possible to run a Series with other character types.

Regardless of the details of the Series, Heroes who are part of the OPS are part of a small team of OPS field operatives. Usually this consists of the Heroes, and maybe a Director-controlled ally or two. OPS field teams have a large amount of independence, as long as they complete their mission without breaking OPS regulations or local laws. Violence against innocent bystanders, even accidental, is not permitted, nor is any sort of large scale property destruction without significant extenuating circumstances.

Throwing a resisting bystander out of a car that was about to explode, shooting a cultist who is guarding a dangerous mythos artifact, or blowing a hole in the wall of a warehouse where a human sacrifice is about to take place count as extenuating circumstances. However, shooting a guard or blowing a hole in the wall of a warehouse is not acceptable if the Heroes turn out to be wrong about the location of the dangerous mythos artifact or the human sacrifice and are instead attacking people and property with no connection to mythos dangers. How much the Heroes must obey local laws depends largely on the type of Series you are running, but casual violence and property destruction are never acceptable.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE OPS

The OPS is divided into a number of separate branches. The first major division is between support staff and field teams. OPS support staff includes everyone from clerks, technicians, and lawyers, to researchers who work in OPS laboratories, and physicians working at the hospitals that perform augmentations and serve the unique needs of sick or injured operatives. OPS field teams consist of small groups of highly trained individuals who are sent out on various missions. There are three primary types of field teams – Investigative Teams, Exploratory Teams, and Strike Teams. All three varieties of teams can work either on Earth or in space, but most individual teams specialize in one or the other.

Investigative Teams: Investigative teams look into all manner of potentially dangerous or suspicious activities. These include everything from rumors of a new mythos cult on the planet Eridanos, to odd reports surrounding an ancient archeological site in Greenland, to concerns that the CEO of a major corporation may be making secret and illegal deals with renegade mi-go technicians, or hints that

a terrorist group in Mexico City is attempting to purchase stolen nuclear weapons. Members of an investigative teams work as spies, con artists, thieves, scientists, and engineers, as they look into a wide variety of potential problems.

Sometimes the members of investigative teams can openly identify themselves as OPS operatives who are looking into reports of various problems and irregularities. However, just as often they must go undercover and impersonate smugglers, terrorists, or crooked corporate employees in an effort to uncover well-concealed illegal activities. Regardless of where they are or exactly what they are doing, investigative teams focus on dealing with people. Often these people are criminals, but they can also be misguided, under the thrall of the psychic Hastur infection or other influences, or simply unaware that the strangely shaped objects they are selling or digging up are actually powerful mythos artifacts. The missions of investigative teams focus on a mixture of protecting innocent people from harm and uncovering illegal and dangerous activities and the people responsible for them. On many missions, no one is aware of the presence of an OPS field team until the team members hand the criminals over to local or international justice.

Exploratory Teams: Exploratory teams are in charge of investigating mythos mysteries and determining the potential benefits and dangers of newly discovered planets. They also begin the process of establishing if planets are safe for human colonization or at least settlement by research or resource exploitation bases, and make first contact with newly discovered alien species. Most exploratory teams work outside the solar system, on newly discovered worlds. However, both the various colonized worlds and Earth itself still contain all manner of mysteries.

Exploratory teams obviously focus on uncovering dangers, but they are also responsible for identifying opportunities to advance human knowledge or acquiring valuable natural resources or useful alien technologies and are often at the forefront of helping to advance human knowledge and technology. Team members consist of scientists, engineers, mythos scholars, linguists, experts at survival in difficult conditions, and diplomats trained at dealing with aliens. Most team members are also expected to have some degree of combat experience, since exploring the mythos universe can be quite dangerous.

Strike Teams: Strike teams are soldiers in the fight against mythos dangers. Members of investigative or exploratory teams might need to fight ab-human mutants, hungry ghouls, or hyperspatial beings in the course of their missions. However, strike teams are sent out to

specifically deal with such problems. They are heavily armed and are generally only sent to deal with threats that are too dangerous or unusual for local law enforcement, SWAT teams, or even the local military to handle. As a result, most of their missions involve beings with various inhuman abilities, or criminals or terrorists with illegal and powerful hyperspatial augmentations and devices. They are also sometimes called in to deal with terrorists who have access to other weapons of mass destruction, such as biological or nuclear weapons. Strike team missions are usually straightforward: kill or capture the target, save any victims of the threat, and keep innocent bystanders safe from the threat. Strike team members are commandos, snipers, demolitions, experts, combat medics, and emergency service personnel.

THE OPS IN DIFFERENT SERIES

How the Director portrays the OPS varies depending upon whether they are running a Gritty, Cinematic, or Pulp Series. This choice should influence both how much time the Heroes spend dealing with the rest of the OPS and also the nature of such interactions.

The OPS in Gritty Series: In a gritty Series, humanity is fighting against overwhelming odds, and so it makes sense for people to work together. Since the Heroes are far more vulnerable than in pulp Series, both the players and the Heroes should understand that there is strength in numbers. As a result, the OPS should play a major role in a gritty Series. Heroes often need to call for back up when they face large-scale opposition. Also, these Heroes will regularly be called to act as back-up for other OPS teams. During large assignments, the Heroes will often be working with one or more other OPS teams.

To better fit the mood of this type of Series, the Heroes should periodically have to deal with OPS rules and regulations. These dealings should include having to follow the correct protocols to requisition equipment as well as occasionally having to deal with less than ideal rental cars or hotel rooms because of OPS budget cuts. Also, illegal activities like wiretapping, and breaking and entering require careful proof before they are approved. Heroes who neglect to ask permission before committing crimes face various sorts of censure or punishment, unless they were acting to prevent an immediate threat to someone's life or safety. Sometimes, even if they were, they will have to prove it in a local court.

In a gritty Series, the OPS is also not always a force for good. In addition to the occasional OPS operative or support staff who is a traitor or being blackmailed by

cultists, greedy and amoral corporations, or even aliens, the OPS itself may well have serious problems. In a gritty Series, Heroes who are OPS operatives will have a great deal of contact with the rest of the OPS. Part of this contact should occasionally involve uncovering and dealing with corruption and betrayal within the OPS.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT FOR OPS TEAMS

In addition to the suggested equipment for OPS teams, Directors also have the option of supplying teams with special equipment. This equipment can include technosorcerous devices made by OPS sorcerers, as well as experimental technologies and duplicates of alien devices that are being field tested. Technosorcerous devices should generally be limited to devices that duplicate the effects of level one or level two spells.

Most teams working off world should have a Sending device to allow the Heroes to instantly contact their superiors, as well as an Open Gateway device to allow them to return to Earth easily. A Voorish Sign viewer is an obvious choice for all OPS teams and should generally be standard equipment. Either an Elder Sign or a level 2 Protective Warding device should be almost as common. Also, most teams working on Earth should have an Avoidance Ward device. In general, Directors should provide OPS teams with a total of between three and six spell levels worth of devices. For example, a team working off world might be issued a Sending device, a Voorish Sign device, and an Open Gateway device (a total of 4 spell levels). Experimental and alien devices are discussed in Rewards & Discoveries, and the Director can decide that the Heroes need a piece of special equipment in order to complete a particular mission.

The OPS in Cinematic Series: In a cinematic Series, the OPS is a fundamentally good organization, and traitors and sell-outs are relatively rare. However, that doesn't mean that someone very important in the OPS can't be corrupt, blackmailed, or mind controlled. The OPS requires yearly psychic and psychiatric evaluations, but a lot can happen in a year, and records can occasionally be forged. Heroes in a cinematic Series often won't have as much contact with the rest of the OPS as Heroes in a gritty Series. In cinematic Series, an experienced OPS field team is more independent and less closely supervised. However, unlike a pulp Series, OPS should still feel more like a real organization and less like the background for an action movie. Paperwork and expense

accounts should usually be kept in the background, but Heroes need a good justification for breaking and entering or various sorts of surveillance (at least in nations where it's not already fully legal).

The Heroes should know that if they break local laws without a good reason or if they harm innocent bystanders or cause significant property damage without a truly excellent reason, then they're going to face serious consequences. Breaking into an office won't be a problem if the Heroes find illegal mi-go artifacts or stolen Cthulhoid artifacts inside. Unfortunately, if they don't find such things and have just broken into the office of an innocent, then at best the Heroes will be deported and face serious reprimands from their superiors.

The OPS in Pulp Series: In a pulp series, the OPS is largely an excuse for the Heroes to carry badges and be awesome. The practicalities of paperwork and even the legal niceties of search warrants have little place in a pulp Series: bureaucracy can be an off-screen joke. As long as the Heroes are not investigating someone rich and powerful or shooting unarmed people, legalities can be glossed over, and their OPS badges are sufficient to deal with any repercussions. When investigating someone rich and powerful, even Heroes in a pulp series won't be allowed to break into the person's home or office. Nevertheless, shenanigans like slipping into the places of cleaning staff for a day to search the office will all be forgiven if the Heroes discover proof that this person is buying illegal mi-go weaponry, taking part in a mythos cult, or making back-room deals with ghouls.

With the exception of the rare turncoat or plant, the OPS is a force for good in the world. However, the Heroes don't require much contact with the organization beyond being assigned missions by their immediate superior. In a pulp Series, the Heroes don't need much in the way of back up, and neither do most other teams of operatives. Occasionally, another team may get into trouble and the Heroes are sent to save them and resolve the situation, but in such cases, the Heroes are unlikely to be part of a larger effort – their own efforts should be sufficient to save the other team.

There are several occasions when the Heroes might deal with the rest of the OPS. While the OPS is clearly a force for good in a pulp Series, that doesn't mean the people in charge are always right. It's possible that the Heroes might come into frequent conflict with their superiors in the OPS, simply because the Heroes have reason to believe that the approach their superiors take to a serious problem is doomed to failure.

Perhaps the Heroes are told to ignore a possible cult, because their superiors have received information that it's harmless and not associated with any known Great Old One. (This could be a great opportunity for the Director to introduce an unknown Great Old One.) Maybe one of their superiors has a younger relative like a daughter or nephew in the cult, and is blind to how dangerous it is. In a pulp Series the Heroes would then disregard their orders, reveal the cult to be dangerous, and win the grudging approval of their superiors. Alternately, the Heroes might find themselves in a friendly but intense rivalry with another team of operatives. Perhaps the team is somewhat more experienced and resents the success of the Heroes' team. This could escalate to various low-level pranks and various attempts to show up the Heroes. However, in good pulp fashion, when a crisis comes, the two teams should have to work together to succeed and thus come to respect one another.

CIVILIAN HEROES AND ALL CIVILIAN SERIES

In pulp Series, mixing Operatives and Civilians is perfectly reasonable. In this type of Series, it makes sense that several highly trained OPS operatives or agents of a government intelligence agency might be working with friends or relatives who have far less training, but have a few useful abilities and want to help out. However, mixing character types makes no sense in gritty Series, and should only be done if there's a very good reason to do so in a cinematic Series. Nevertheless, there are ways to make such a cinematic Series work.

If a team of operatives is on a remote colony world that has been cut off from the rest of humanity because the locations of both previous Gateways are now controlled by flying polyps, then having Operatives work with local Civilians for the duration of the crisis only makes sense. This crisis could easily last for as many as a dozen game sessions, and at the end of this, if the Civilian or Civilians have proven themselves to be sufficiently useful, then they might end up joining the OPS. All you need to do is skip the next six months of the Civilians' basic OPS training and make certain that the Civilians' players spend some of their Heroes' experience points on skills they'd likely be trained in. Then, the Series can pick back up, with the Civilians as junior members of the OPS field team. If a Director wants to use both Operatives and Civilians in a cinematic Series, then some justification like this should be present.

The other obvious option for using Civilians is to run an all Civilian Series. Such a Series could consist of any-

thing from a pulp or cinematic Series involving recently trained junior OPS operatives ending up out on their own fighting the mythos, to a series suitable for any style of play, where the Heroes are ordinary people facing extraordinary circumstances. Of course, in the latter case, the question of why the OPS doesn't deal with the problems comes up.

If the Heroes are civilians on an off-world colony or research station, then the answer might be that OPS operatives simply aren't around. In any type of series, the OPS can't be everywhere, and there are problems to be solved. Various mythos threats are present in both off-world colonies and large cosmopolitan cities. However, the exact nature of civilian Series varies depending upon the type of series.

Gritty Civilian Series: The OPS is either corrupt or overwhelmed. There are simply too many problems for the OPS to deal with, and so occasionally ordinary people who have a few unusual abilities must take up the slack. Small and carefully hidden cults are everywhere, most large corporations have illegal deals with the mi-go or other aliens, and criminal gangs regularly use sorcery to murder and intimidate their rivals and victims. Ordinary people must band together and attempt to deal with these horrors.

Cinematic Civilian Series: In isolated off-world areas, the OPS can take days to arrive, so ordinary people must rely upon themselves. Civilian space travelers could be attempting to make their fortune out among the stars, while also helping out people they encounter. Back on Earth, sometimes people become fascinated by mythos mysteries and start out investigating them, then become drawn into dangerous events. At this point, they may also be in a position to resolve some of these dangers. Civilian Heroes could also learn enough to interest someone important who acts as their mentor. Perhaps someone high-up in the OPS or some national intelligence organization worries about a possible leak in the organization, and after watching the Heroes solve a few problems, recruits them to secretly uncover this leak or solve whatever other problem is endangering this person's organization.

Pulp Civilian Series: In a pulp Civilian Series, the OPS can be played for laughs, as the people who show up after the Heroes have defeated the villains and solved the mystery. Perhaps the local OPS operatives are not all that competent, but enjoy taking the credit for problems solved by the Civilian Heroes, who succeed because they are both more clever and far luckier than anyone they have encountered in the OPS. Alternately, the Heroes keep being in the right place at the right time, and eventually they get a reputation so that people come to them for help. If someone is being blackmailed by a cult, they

might not feel safe going to the authorities, but going to a bunch of ordinary people with a reputation for handling mythos problems is a very different matter. Ultimately, in a pulp Series the Heroes succeed while trained professionals do not because they are the Heroes of the Series.

NEW SPELL EXAMPLE – DEFENSIVE FIELD

Here is an example of one possible spell, modeled on the mi-go defensive field augmentation.

HYPERSPATIAL FIELD

Level: 3

Duration: Four hours per Success Level rolled

Hyperspatial Exposure: 2 for the sorcerer, 1 for anyone within a few yards of the field.

The sorcerer creates a field of hyperspatial energy. The sorcerer can craft this field into any simple two-dimensional shape, such as a wall, a box, a sphere or hemisphere or they can create a field that covers and protects either their own body or some other person. When created as a geometric shape, the field is immobile, but if created around the sorcerer or another person, it moves with the person and does not inhibit the person's movement in any fashion.

When casting this spell, the sorcerer must decide if they want to cast it on people or an area and what shape they wish the hyperspatial field to be. If cast on people, the spell protects one person for every Success Level rolled. If cast on an area, the sorcerer can either create a dome, sphere or box one meter on a side or in diameter for every Success Level they roll, or they can create a wall up to two yards on a side for every Success Level they roll. The form of the field is set when the sorcerer casts the spell, and it cannot be changed without dismissing the field and recasting the spell.

Regardless of its configuration, this field provides 10 points of armor and a damage capacity of 50 points. When an attack is made against anyone inside this field or against the field itself, 10 points are subtracted from the attack, and any additional damage reduces the field's damage capacity. When the damage capacity is reduced to 0, the field instantly collapses. Once the field has collapsed, it can only be remade by casting the spell again.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIVES

Series involving independent Heroes need not be restricted to Civilians. Not all Operatives work for the OPS or for government intelligence agencies. The world of *Eldritch Skies* includes freelance sorcerers, powerful independent

psychics, as well as ex-OPS operatives and spies who have retired, been fired, disgraced, or quit in disgust. Creating such Heroes as Operatives rather than Civilians makes sense. These are all Heroes who may possess psychic powers, sorcery, and various augmentations, as well as unusually high levels of expertise in a wide variety of fields.

The major difference between this type of Series and one where the Heroes work for the OPS or some similar agency is that the Heroes don't have superiors giving them assignments. Instead, the Heroes are freelance problem solvers. In a pulp or cinematic Series, they might be disgraced spies or former OPS operatives who are attempting to clear their names or to avoid arrest for crimes they didn't commit, who also travel the US or perhaps the world, defeating various threats.

In a gritty Series, the Heroes may have left or been thrown out of the OPS because of massive internal corruption. Now they work as freelance monster hunters, attacking cults that have paid off the OPS, while also attempting to obtain enough evidence to prove the existence of large-scale corruption.

The Heroes might be freelance space travelers who explore the galaxy by using Gateways and booking passage on dragonfly drive spacecraft. They could be psychics-for-hire who stumble into mythos mayhem. They could also be freelance archeologists, explorers searching for new homes for humanity, tech researchers who encounter alien life while making new discoveries, or simply experienced space travelers who find various ways to make money and solve problems along the way. For further ideas, see the concepts for Civilian Series above, and assume that the Heroes are exceptional people who are not part of any organization.

REWARDS & DISCOVERIES

The most obvious reward for a successful *Eldritch Skies* Episode is saving lives and eliminating deadly threats. However, *Eldritch Skies* is also a game about humanity making its place in the universe. Part of accomplishing this is gaining new knowledge and developing or otherwise acquiring new technologies. Clever Heroes might discover ancient alien records that scholars and scientists could translate and use to develop new scientific and technical advances. However, other more immediate rewards are possible. Heroes who are working on Galatea I may discover the secrets of the unique psychic powers or spells found on that world. Alternately, they could discover some completely new spell or a powerful ancient artifact.

Directors should ensure that new spells or devices are either not too powerful or that the Heroes will eventually be ordered to turn them over to OPS superiors for analysis. In any case, if a Director wishes to reward the Heroes with

some new and unique ability there are several options. A new sorcery spell would be analyzed by OPS researchers for a few months, but once its risks and characteristics have been determined, OPS sorcerers will be free to learn it. Also, if one or more of the Heroes has already learned this spell, they will be largely free to use it as long as it passes a safety review that requires only a few weeks of testing.

Similarly, if the Heroes don't just find one unique alien device, but a cache of a dozen identical devices, then the OPS is likely to allow the team to keep one of these devices, as long as it passes a brief safety review and seems useful to the team's mission. Allowing Heroes to keep alien artifacts they find, even if these artifacts are duplicates of artifacts turned over to OPS researchers is only really suitable for cinematic or pulp Series. In gritty Series, all such artifacts instantly become the property of the OPS and Heroes won't see them again until the OPS succeeds in both duplicating them and proving them to be safe. Of course, in a gritty Series, most alien artifacts are anything but safe and Heroes may simply conceal artifacts they find from their superiors.

CREATING NEW SPELLS AND DEVICES

Directors are obviously free to create whatever spells or alien artifacts that they feel like. However, the existing rules can provide some useful suggestions for possible spells or devices. Any of the mi-go hyperspatial augmentations could be reworked as a device or spell, as can most of the inhuman psychic or physical powers. For example, the Heroes might discover a psychic device that allows any psychic who touches or wears it to use the illusion power or a spell that duplicates the monstrous attack power by creating bolts of hyperspatial energy.

STATIC VS. DYNAMIC EPISODES

When designing an *Eldritch Skies* Episode or planning for an entire Series, one important question to ask is whether your vision of the setting is ultimately static or dynamic. In *Eldritch Skies*, humanity is thriving and beginning to expand outward into a strange and dangerous universe. In static Episodes, the Heroes face a serious threat to humanity. Perhaps cultists are attempting to awaken Cthulhu or draw another Great Old One to Earth, perhaps moonbeasts or some other alien threat is preparing to invade. In this type of Series, the Heroes must defeat this threat and restore the previous status quo. Other threats will undoubtedly arrive later, but the Heroes have saved humanity from at least one major danger.

In a dynamic Episode, the Heroes attempt to change

the status quo in some important fashion. Perhaps humanity fell prey to some danger and suffered a serious setback. Perhaps several colonies were overrun by hostile or incomprehensible aliens and the Heroes seek to liberate these colonies. Alternately, perhaps the Heroes are either seeking to make contact with a rumored alien species or are attempting to discover some powerful alien artifact that offers humanity some new opportunity.

The Heroes could uncover ancient records that lead them to discovering another long-lost human colony or they might discover a world with abundant natural resources that is well suited for human colonization. The change could be as big as the Heroes discovering the legendary Elder Weapon, allowing humanity to perhaps duplicate and alter it, to exile all Great Old Ones from Earth or to protect all of humanity's colonies from hyperspatial invasion – with the entailed risk of botching it up and setting Cthulhu free.

A mix of static and dynamic Episodes can be good choices for an *Eldritch Skies* Series, but choosing to focus mostly on one or the other also works well. An entire Series can be built around solving a single major problem that could be either static or dynamic in nature, or a Series could consist of a mixture of static and dynamic Episodes, as the Heroes both attempt to protect humanity from internal and external dangers, while also helping their species increase in power, influence, and knowledge.

SETTING

When preparing to run *Eldritch Skies*, one of the first choices is where most of the Series will be set. Series can be set on Earth or in space, and space Series can either entail travel or life on a colony planet. Although it's certainly possible to run a Series where the Heroes spend large amounts of time both on Earth and in space, most Series end up with a particular focus on one or the other of these settings. Deciding which of these two settings to focus on is not merely a decision about whether you and the players prefer spaceships and alien worlds to the cities and wilderness areas of Earth, but also what sorts of plots the group prefers. Each of these settings lends itself to specific types of Episodes, and these differences will help to shape a particular Series.

EARTHL Y SERIES

Eldritch Skies Series set on Earth are usually Series about intrigue, espionage, and covert operations. The exact nature of these Episodes depends upon the wishes and talents of the Director and players. Players and Directors who love intrigue and espionage can play long and complicated Episodes were

the PCs start off with vague hints and allegations or blurry photographs taken by spy satellites and painstakingly attempt to uncover the truth about violations of the Dangerous Technologies Treaty, including who is responsible and how to stop them. Such Series can and often should involve questions of loyalty, as Heroes are sometimes asked to weigh their loyalty to OPS against national or personal loyalties. Issues of trust and betrayal will be central, both because Heroes will need to go undercover to gain the trust of various individuals, and because some of their allies and informants will sometimes be lying to them and may be actively working against them.

However, this is far from the only sort of Earth-based *Earth-Skies* Series. For players and Directors who are more interested in direct action than intrigue, Heroes could be part of an OPS strike team, given a clear and specific mission using information obtained by other teams who specialize in espionage and intrigue. This strike team would go in to capture or destroy dangerous technologies and apprehend those responsible for these technologies. This strike teams could also hunt down hyperspatial mutants, flying polyps, and other earthly threats. Instead of spies, the Heroes in this sort of Series are special forces soldiers who have clear and direct missions. Betrayal and discovering that a mission is well more than it seems could complicate some such Episodes, but at least some Episodes will be relatively straightforward mixtures of stealth, reconnaissance, clever tactics, and swift, deadly action.

Alternately, the Heroes might deal with alien beings on Earth as their primary mission. The Heroes would help prevent unauthorized dealings with deep ones or mi-go, while also keeping track of the activities of ghouls and preventing tribes of ghouls from preying on humans who do not venture into their realm. This Series offers some of the greatest diversity in potential Episodes, with the Heroes being called upon to do everything from tracking down renegade deep ones to spying on ghouls and engaging in some mixture of diplomacy, espionage, and deception in their attempts to discover information about local ghoul activities from the ghouls' human servants and allies. Strange friendships could even evolve from uneasy coexistence. The Director could also choose to involve other alien presences on Earth.

An entire Series could focus on mythos cults. While some of this might also involve dealing with treaty-breaking aliens, the focus would be on apprehending the humans who deal with them. Many of the Episodes would deal with cults worshipping Great Old Ones and Hastur infections, and perhaps characters could even learn more about the mystery posed by Nyarlathotep.

DREAM REALM EPISODES AND SERIES

Another option for Earthly Episodes involves the Dream

Realm. When gathering information, especially information about mythos cults, alien incursions, and other such exotic events, one place to search for information is in the Dream Realm. Sorcery, alien minds, and hyperspatial activities all leave their mark on this realm. Some Episodes might involve the Heroes all journeying into the Dream Realm to attempt to contact someone who refused to talk to them while awake, but whose dream-self might be more amenable; to look for distortions in the Dream Realm, or to search out the strange and enigmatic scholars, sorcerers, and sages who can be found there.

Heroes in the average Earth-based Series will visit the Dream Realm infrequently, but it's also possible to set the majority of a Series there. Since the Dream Realm both reflects events in the waking world and produces effects in the minds of people in the waking world, studying and exploring the Dream Realm can provide advance warning of potential problems, such as the growth of dangerous cults or hostile alien activity. In addition, the Dream Realm is known to contain traces of lost knowledge available nowhere else. As a result, a few OPS teams are assigned to monitor the Dream Realm and uncover traces of useful knowledge. A Director could design as many as a half a dozen Episodes where the Heroes journey to the Dream Realm in order to make contact with the ghouls there and gain access to their vast library located in the caverns at the Crag of the Ghouls. Much of these Episodes would consist of performing various services for the ghouls in order to be given access to this library.

A Series of this type can be particularly challenging, since having the Series consist largely of the Heroes' shared dreams can seem fairly abstract. Directors who wish to run a Series that focuses on the Dream Realm should emphasize how the information that Heroes gain affects the waking world. The easiest way to accomplish this is to have the Heroes act in both the Dream Realm and the physical world. Perhaps while they are in the Dream Realm, the Heroes uncover evidence of an alien presence invading Earth, and then use the information they have gained to uncover the threat in the waking world. Alternately, perhaps the Heroes learn some magical secret in the Dream Realm and use it to create a new magical effect or device in the waking world. Regardless of the exact details, the Heroes should have a chance to both explore the exotic wonders of the Dream Realm and use the information they gain in useful ways while they are awake.

SPACE SERIES

The most obvious difference between earthly and space Series is people. In 2030, Earth is a teeming world of

almost 7 billion people, while less than 10 million humans live in non-Earthly locations. The Mars colonies are home to less than half a million people, and even the largest extrasolar colonies each have less than three million inhabitants. Numerous small field stations exist on otherwise uninhabited worlds and moons both inside and outside the solar system, and are home to somewhere between a few and a few dozen researchers and their assistants. As a result, Series set in space involve dealing at least as much with the environment, aliens, alien relics, and exotic ruins as with other humans.

CULTS AND OTHER HUMAN DANGERS

On colony worlds, strangers are worthy of notice, and it's harder to blend into a crowd or to hide among teeming masses of people. Except in the most populous colony worlds, hidden mythos cults are impossible. Instead, these groups only exist if they have taken over an entire settlement. Even then, the cult must take various drastic measures to prevent others learning of their existence. On almost off-Earth settlements, the inhabitants realize that they have only each other to depend upon, and so isolation and excessive secrecy are both regarded as inherently dangerous.

Here, mythos cults, misguided scientists or magicians, or greedy and unscrupulous individuals who are willing to make deals with hyperspatial entities usually do so with the knowledge and support of their entire community. On Earth, Heroes might face a secretive and often half-mad inventor. In space, this same inventor would have been stopped shortly after they started, unless they managed to either convince or coerce the other members of their research station or settlement to cooperate with them. When OPS operatives investigate possible problems on off-world colonies, they often encounter an entire community working together to preserve their secrecy and who may well help each other capture or kill those who attempt to stop them. The inhabitants of this settlement may also be well be in the process to becoming mentally or even physically non-human due to hyperspatial exposure.

EXPLORATION

One of the primary advantages to a space-based Series is that it offers an unlimited number of Episodes involving the exploration of the unknown. Regardless of whether the Heroes are stepping through a gate or traveling in a dragonfly drive ship, when they venture to an unknown world they could find literally anything there. Telescopes and automated probes can provide a moderate amount of information, but neither provides anything like the wealth of information that can be gained by explorers

actually visiting the world. Any such journey could end in encountering a new alien species or perhaps a previously undiscovered set of alien ruins. Alternately, the Heroes could encounter a world that was transformed into a lifeless husk by hyperspatial invaders or, if they are exceptionally unlucky, a living world that is in the process of being destroyed by such an invasion.

Exploration Episodes offer Heroes the chance to discover alien ruins and strange alien technologies, struggle with alien environments and alien animals, and possibly encounter alien intelligences. The heart of all of these types of Episodes is mystery. On Earth, not only do most people understand the basics of how the world works, but in the world of *Eldritch Skies*, anyone can point the camera of their link at something and receive at least some information about it via an augmented reality database. In contrast, being the first visitors on an alien world means that the Heroes literally know nothing about the world. Something that looks like an elegant fern could be a mobile predatory beast, a strange piece of technology, or even a highly intelligent alien.

In *Eldritch Skies*, human science reveals only a small subset of a far greater range of physical laws. Alien science can be used to create technologies that seem completely impossible to humanity. As a result, any newly discovered alien device that the Heroes encounter could potentially do almost anything. Anti-gravity, disintegrator beams, or a device that causes stone or metal to temporarily become as soft as wet clay are all possible.

FIRST CONTACT

A subset of exploration Episodes are first contact Episodes. Although meeting new intelligent aliens is a far less common event than encountering the ruins of a vanished alien civilization, it occasionally occurs. The first question to answer is what sort of alien species it is. Is it in stasis, is it some sort of terrible partially transcended species like the flying polyps, or is it a species that has not yet had to face the prospect of either transcendence or extinction? Encountering aliens with more primitive technologies offers the Heroes the rare possibility of being in a position of considerably power when dealing with aliens. Rather than dealing with monstrous hyperspatial intelligences or the effectively immortal representatives of a civilization older than all vertebrate life, the Heroes may encounter a civilization in the throes of its own industrial revolution, or even one that is still in its equivalent of the Bronze Age.

However, one of the truths of *Eldritch Skies* is that aliens are by definition alien. There are no humanoid

aliens; they are all exotic beings with strange senses, and even the least exotic have difficulty understanding humanity on anything but a purely intellectual level. Heroes can discuss projects of mutual benefit with aliens, they can trade with them, but friendships and any sort of emotional connection will be exceptionally rare.

ENCOUNTERING HUMANS

Although aliens are always exotic creatures, Heroes may also encounter humans in space. Like the inhabitants of Galatea I, during the past 200,000 years, small groups of humans have occasionally gone to the stars. Most have since died out, perhaps leaving fascinating ruins behind. However, others remain.

Some of these humans traveled to the stars there using their own sorcery, but most were taken off world by aliens. Aliens have abducted humans to serve as experimental subjects, servants, or simply to dwell in some sort of exotic zoo. Over the thousands or tens of thousands of years since these humans were taken to the alien world, their alien masters may have become extinct, abandoned them and the world they are on, or simply tired of whatever experiment they were running and let the humans go.

The possibilities of encountering groups of humans who are technologically well in advance of humanity, or who have rendered themselves significantly inhuman in a manner far more subtle than either ghouls or deep ones are especially disturbing and potentially dangerous. The OPS is particularly careful when dealing with any chance of encountering alien worlds inhabited by humans. Alternately, the Heroes might encounter a world inhabited by humans who regard steam trains and steamships as the pinnacle of technological achievement.

SINGLE PLANET SERIES

While space is vast, so are single planets. There is more than enough mystery, wonder, danger, and adventure on any colony planet to keep a group of Heroes busy for an entire Series. Heroes could be civilian colonists on a recently discovered world, anthropologists or OPS researchers secretly studying the inhabitants of Galatea I, or researchers or explorers looking into various mysteries on a newly discovered world. Some OPS personnel are permanently stationed on some of the larger colonies like Eridanos, where they act as a combination of emergency service personnel and on-site investigators of any mysteries that might be discovered. None of the worlds that humanity has visited or colonized has been fully explored and so there are vast opportunities for Heroes to uncover valuable secrets or terrible threats that no one has imagined.

OTHER OPTIONS

For an unusual and action-filled Series, the Heroes might work as search and rescue personnel who rescue people from disasters in space or on various colony worlds. When a call for help comes in, the Heroes fly a spaceship or, if time is of the essence, open a hyperspatial gateway, rescue any survivors, and determine what caused the threat. In such a Series, characters could encounter dangerous alien predators, moonbeast raiders, hungry flying polyps, meteors, stellar flares, or strange and terrible hyperspatial disturbances. It is even possible to run such a campaign so that it is exciting and dangerous, but where no character ever uses a weapon to harm another entity.

TALES OF TIME TRAVEL

Hyperspatial sorcery provides both humans and aliens with the ability to see into the past or the future, and various alien technologies allow beings to either psychically or physically travel through time. After learning about time travel from the Yithians, the OPS developed strict rules governing time travel. Time travel to the future is permitted only by highly trusted agents and is only for the purposes of observation and acquiring knowledge. Also, while the OPS uses hyperspatial scrying to look into the past, travel to the past is strictly forbidden, except in pursuit of other time travelers. However, even with these limitations, an ambitious Director could run an entire Series based on time travel. The Heroes might be observers sent to study various future eras. Naturally, surviving and avoiding capture and discovery can be difficult, much less acquiring useful knowledge for the OPS.

For an even more ambitious Episode or even an entire Series, the Hero may travel into the past in pursuit of criminals, fanatics, or cultists determined to change the past. The journey into the past could be a single Episode, or the Heroes could become embroiled in an extended stay in the past. An exceedingly ambitious Director could even run an all out time-war, where the Heroes stop one attempt to change the past, only to return to their present to find it drastically changed by another temporal manipulation. The Heroes must then venture back in time to attempt to undo the second change and restore history to its correct course, while their enemies attempt to make yet more changes.

An entire Series could be built around Heroes who have just returned from the past surviving in a drastically changed present day, discovering the source of the change, and then going back in time to attempt to undo or prevent this change. Information on running a Series involving extensive time travel is beyond the scope of this book and time travel is widely considered to be one of the most

ambitious and difficult types of Series to run in any game.

However, there are a few hints that can make this sort of Series more manageable. The first is simply to limit the amount of time travel going on. If the Heroes are going back in time and changing the past or attempting to undo changes to the past every session, the Series is likely to rapidly spiral out of control and the present day is almost certain to become increasingly strange. Instead, time travel should be a relatively infrequent event and as OPS operatives, the Heroes should all understand that travel into the past is a risky endeavor and while changing the past is difficult; doing so can have a multitude of unforeseen consequences. As a result, careful research and detailed planning are required to insure that any effort to repair damage to the past is successful. Meanwhile, the Director should document timelines and changes carefully.

If the Heroes return from the past to a changed present, they will need to learn how and why the various changes in time occurred. They might spend one entire Episode learning about the new present and how they can survive and adapt to it, and another Episode discovering what changes were made in the past to result in the changed present. The next few Episodes could cover their attempts to learn about the individuals who changed the past, and who may now also be back in the changed present. At that point, the Heroes can gather equipment and make plans for their journey into the past. Once in the past, amidst the work of survival, the Heroes will need to learn what details of the changed events were not recorded in the history books they read and how they need to adapt their plan. Only then, at least four or five full Episodes after the start of the Series, the Heroes are at last ready to make their first try at preventing or undoing the change to the past that altered their present.

STORY SEEDS

Below are a series of short ideas that can each be expanded into the basis for several *Eldritch Skies* Episodes, and which could perhaps form the start and the core of an entire Series. Directors will need to flesh out and personalize these ideas for their own Series, but if you aren't certain what to do for an Episode, hopefully these ideas will help.

ANCIENT ALIEN RUINS

This idea works on any of the off-world colonies which were previously home to alien civilizations – Mars, Eridanos, or Wei-Ming, as well as on a more recently discovered world where the only inhabitants work on a research or mining station. Regardless of the location, an

PLOTS AND FREE WILL

Games aren't scripted, and the Heroes will act in unexpected ways – that's inevitable. So what happens when characters suddenly decide to go home and rest, skipping the nasty ambush that was going to catch up with them at the abandoned warehouse? Or the Heroes follow the red herring and ignore the clues that lead to real culprit? The Director can choose to let the chips fall where they may—the ambush never happens, or half the city burns down while the Heroes follow a false lead—or can adjust things accordingly. For example, if the ambush is a vital part of the storyline, just relocate it to wherever the Heroes end up. Have the false lead actually contain some clue that points them in the right direction. If the Director does that too much of the time, though, the players will come to realize that no matter what their characters do, it turns out to be right thing.

Sometimes, mistakes should have consequences. Maybe the world doesn't end, but someone gets hurt or killed if the characters screw up – the extent of the backlash depends on the Series type. Don't just "punish" the characters for not following the script. Allow the players to add their own twists. The key is to set up expectations and fulfill them consistently. Consequences for mistakes should fit within the frame of reference – a pulp Series shouldn't kill a character's family on a missed clue, and a gritty Series shouldn't constantly hand over plot resolutions. The players should know what they're getting into.

Try to be flexible with plots and subplots. Too much predestination prevents players from having fun. But don't let the characters get away with totally wrong-headed decisions either. Sounds hard to do? Yes, and sometimes a Director's best attempt at fairness will not sit well with the players. It can be difficult to find a good balance. It does get better with practice. And when you pull it off, you really pull it off: an Episode well done can be a fantastic creative and social experience.

archeologist (who could be an amateur or a professional) discovers a large cache of alien artifacts, including some interesting technological devices. However, one of the reasons that this cache of artifacts survived is that it was hidden by alien cultists who were concealing their activities from the rest of their society. This collection of artifacts includes a device that duplicates the effects of the Sending spell, which causes anyone who falls asleep near the device to enter into contact with a rogue Cthulhoid that was intent on conquering the aliens' world.

The aliens destroyed themselves before the cult could accomplish anything major, but the artifacts remain and the human archeologist who found these artifacts accidentally got into contact with the Cthulhoid and is now its thrall. The archeologist has organized a team of people to study these finds, but this group is actually a mythos cult. The archeologist convinced the other members to take home some of the artifacts to study, and suggested that at least one of these artifacts could be a psychic device designed to enhance dreams. Eventually, all members of the archeologist's team either quit or became cultists. Meanwhile, the Cthulhoid has been teaching the archeologist sorcery, and the archeologist has kidnapped someone else in the colony and is preparing to sacrifice this person in order to summon the Cthulhoid from hyperspace.

There are reports of someone in the colony having gone missing. One of the previous members of the archeological research team contacted the Heroes (who could be either a visiting OPS field team or other colony residents) because he believes that there may be something strange going on with the research team. The former member suspects some sort of illegal activity like artifact smuggling, rather than the existence of a mythos cult.

ATTACKED!

Minutes after the Heroes arrive on a planet to check on a research station housing several hundred people; their dragonfly drive ship is attacked by moonbeast raiders in their own small ship as the Heroes' ship is landing. The raiding ship followed the Heroes' ship to this planet and the moonbeasts are intent on stealing technology and capturing slaves. The Heroes can land their ship, but it is badly damaged. The Heroes' ship requires at least a full day to repair, and the raiding vessel will land just over an hour after the Heroes do. The Heroes need to save the researchers and drive off the moonbeasts. The planet is a habitable world, but the research base is in a clearing in a dense jungle, filled with hungry creatures. The Heroes must help the researchers survive both the moonbeasts and the local life forms.

THE HIDDEN THREAT

This adventure can be run on any large city on Earth. After the accidental interruption of one of their spells, a freelance sorcerer has become a hyperspatial mutant – use the brilliant hyperspatial mutant write-up or create your own mutant. Now, the sorcerer is extremely intelligent, completely insane by human standards, and interested in controlling the city it lives in. Using a mixture of Compulsion spells and inhuman psychic abilities like Possession, Hypnotic Command, and Illusion, the mutant is controlling, possessing, and impersonating various wealthy and powerful people in the city. The mutant is both brilliant and patient, and by the time there is any hint that something is up, it has access to information from all branches of the city's government. As a result, it is aware of any major actions taken by the local government, including any investigations into its activities.

The mutant is also preparing for its first major effort. It has become fascinated with the Hastur infection, and believes that because there is some sort of psychic connection between individuals who are infected together, it could use its psychic powers to control a group of affected people simply by controlling a small number of them. The mutant plans to infect the city's entire police force, and if that works, to then infect the entire city government. In both cases, the plan is two-fold. First, it creates a drug that duplicates the effects of the Hyperspatial Mutation spell. This drug produces a Level 1 Hyperspatial Exposure in everyone who consumes it once, and increases the exposure to Level 2 on a second later ingestion.

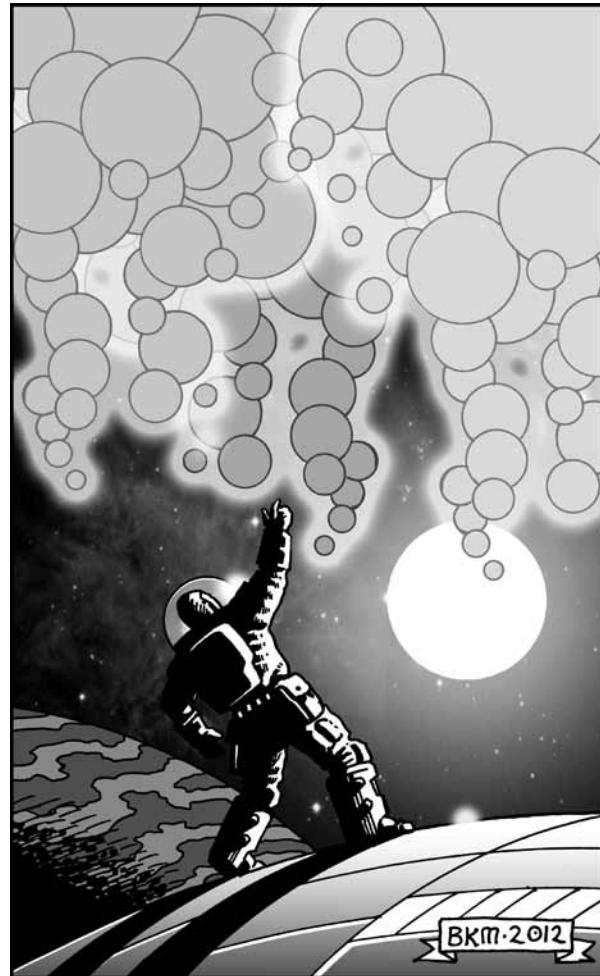
The mutant plans to drug each of the police stations twice, by placing a supply of the drug in the coffee machines and water coolers on two separate days. Afterwards, most of the police should be at Hyperspatial Exposure level 2, and thus be susceptible to a source of the Hastur infection, which the mutant supplies as a series of videos that run as viruses on the computers and mobiles of the police. It will unleash these videos immediately after most of the police in the city attain Hyperspatial Exposure Level 2.

So far, it has managed to deliver two doses of the drug to several police stations. Several days ago, most of the police officers at these stations reached Hyperspatial Exposure Level 2. The OPS (or perhaps some interested private citizens) have received reports of odd behavior by the police in one precinct, and begins their investigation there. Meanwhile, the mutant readies the next stages of its plan.

TECH SMUGGLING

In any large city on Earth, the CEO of a large aerospace corporation that also manufactures cutting edge weapons has made a secret deal with renegade mi-go for a shipment of hyperspatial weapons. The company has been having financial troubles, and the CEO decided that having mi-go weapons to reverse-engineer would help make the company profitable again. The CEO's goal is to have her researchers learn to duplicate and understand these alien weapons well enough to make it look like they came up with the idea for the weapons, enabling the CEO's deal with the mi-go to remain secret.

Unfortunately, the CEO lacked her own contacts with renegade mi-go and used a large Russian criminal gang to facilitate the deal. In return for help making the deal, the gang arranged for the CEO to pay for a large shipment of hyperspatial weapons and augmentations. The CEO kept some of the weapons, while most of them and all of the augmentations went to the criminal gang. Now, the OPS or interested private citizens have learned that there have been an unusual number of crimes committed by hyperspatially augmented criminals, and is attempting to determine where these illegal augmentations came from. The CEO learns of this investigation and fears that the Russian criminal gang will sell her out. She then hires a pair of freelance assassins to kill the two lieutenants of the Russian gang who worked with her on this deal. Now, one of the lieutenants is dead and the other suspects the reason for the attack. The Heroes must find answers before those in the know are killed, and before the entire situation becomes exceptionally violent and the surviving lieutenant begins planning to plant a large bomb in the corporation's headquarters.



CHARACTER CREATION BASICS

The following tables and charts may be used to aid in the character creation process. Further information is provided on the pages cited.

CREATION PROCESS

1. **Choose a concept:** What's your character going to be like? Free-lance sorcerer, professional psychic, OPS undercover operative, interstellar explorer, or whatever.
2. **Choose Character Types:** The Character Type determines the general power level and nature of your character. Operatives are tough and skilled professionals. Civilians are normal people who depend on their wits and luck to survive. Type sets the number of Drama Points (10 for Operatives, 20 for Civilians). See p. 53.
3. **Attributes:** What are your character's natural abilities, both mental and physical? Attributes cost one point per level, to level five, and three points per level after that. At least one point must be put into each Attribute. Human maximum is six. See p. 54.
4. **Qualities and Drawbacks:** What innate advantages or penalties affect your character? A handy list of Qualities and Drawbacks is on p. 57; the details start on p. 58.
5. **Skills:** What does your character know? The possible skills are listed on the character sheet; the details start on p. 80.
6. **Finishing Touches:** This is where you decide the character's name, appearance and other characteristics. Distinctive habits or mannerisms, homeworld, hairstyle, scars, tattoos, music/video tastes.

CHARACTER TYPE CHART

Operative

Attribute Points: 20
Quality Points: 20
Drawback Points: up to 10
Skill Points: 30
Drama Points: 10

Civilian

Attribute Points: 15
Quality Points: 10
Drawback Points: up to 10
Skill Points: 25
Drama Points: 20

Veteran

Attribute Points: 25
Quality Points: 30
Drawback Points: up to 10
Skill Points: 40
Drama Points: 20

STRENGTH TABLE

The Strength Table shows how much a character of any given Strength can lift without much effort. Higher weights can be raised (assume a maximum lifting weight—for brief periods—equal to double the Lifting Capacity), but the character might injure themselves in the process.

LIFE POINT TABLE

Life Points are determined by adding the character's Strength and Constitution, multiplying the result by four, and adding 10. For the math shy, we've done the calculations.

STRENGTH TABLE

STRENGTH	LIFTING CAPACITY
1-5	25 kg x Strength (Strength 5: 125 kg)
6-10	100 kg x (Strength - 5) + 100 kg (Strength 10: 600 kg)
11-15	250 x (Strength - 10) + 750 kg (Strength 15: 2,000 kg/2 tons)
16-20	500 kg x (Strength - 15) + 2,500 kg (Strength 20: 5,000 kg/5 tons)
21-25	1 ton x (Strength - 20) + 5 tons (Strength 25: 10 tons)
26-30	2 ton x (Strength - 25) + 10 tons (Strength 30: 20 tons)

LIFE POINT TABLE

	STRENGTH										CONSTITUTION									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	18	22	26	30	34	38	42	46	50	54										
2	22	26	30	34	38	42	46	50	54	58										
3	26	30	34	38	42	46	50	54	58	62										
4	30	34	38	42	46	50	54	58	62	66										
5	34	38	42	46	50	54	58	62	66	70										
6	38	42	46	50	54	58	62	66	70	74										
7	42	46	50	54	58	62	66	70	74	78										
8	46	50	54	58	62	66	70	74	78	82										
9	50	54	58	62	66	70	74	78	82	86										
10	54	58	62	66	70	74	78	82	86	90										

QUALITIES AND DRAWBACKS TABLE

Acute/Impaired Senses	2-point Quality or Drawback	p. 58
Addiction	Variable Drawback	p. 58
Amnesia	2-point Drawback	p. 60
Astronaut	4-point Quality	p. 60
Athlete	3-point Quality	p. 60
Attractiveness	1-point/level Quality or Drawback	p. 60
Clown	1-point Drawback	p. 60
Contacts	Variable Quality	p. 60
Covetous	1 – to 3-point Drawback	p. 61
Criminal/Insider	2 – or 3-point Quality	p. 61
Danger Sense	1-point Quality	p. 61
Dependent	2 – or 3-point Drawback	p. 62
Eidetic Memory	1 – or 2-point Quality	p. 62
Emotional Problems	Variable Drawback	p. 62
Fast Reaction Time	2-point Quality	p. 63
Genius	5-point Quality	p. 63
Good/Bad Luck	1-point/level Quality or Drawback	p. 63
Hard to Kill	1 – to 5-point Quality	p. 63
Honorable	1 – to 3-point Drawback	p. 63
Humorless	1-point Drawback	p. 64
Iron Mind	3-point Quality	p. 64
Law Enforcement	5 – or 8-point Quality	p. 64
Love	2 – or 4-point Drawback	p. 65
Mental Problems	1 – to 3-point Drawback	p. 65

Minority	1-point Drawback	p. 66
Natural Toughness	2-point Quality	p. 66
Nerves of Steel	3-point Quality	p. 66
Obligation	Variable Drawback	p. 66
Occult Investigator	4-point Quality	p. 67
Outcast/Misfit	2 – or 3-point Drawback	p. 67
Physical Disability	Variable Drawback	p. 67
Poker Face	1 or 2-point Quality	p. 68
Rank	1-point/level Quality or Drawback	p. 68
Reckless	2-point Drawback	p. 68
Recurring Nightmares	1-point Drawback	p. 68
Resistance	1-point per level Quality	p. 68
Resources	2-points/level Quality or Drawback	p. 69
Secret	Variable Drawback	p. 69
Situational Awareness	2-point Quality	p. 69
Sleep Patterns	2-point Quality or Drawback	p. 69
Soldier/Special Forces	3 – or 9-point Quality	p. 69
Special Training	1-point Quality	p. 70
Spy	5-point Quality	p. 70
Talentless	2-point Drawback	p. 70

AB-HUMAN PSYCHIC & SORCERY QUALITIES & POWERS TABLE

AB-HUMAN QUALITIES		
Deep One Hybrid	6-point Quality	p. 71
Half-Breed Ghoul	6-point Quality	p. 71
PSYCHIC POWERS		
Psychic Sensitivity	3-point Power	p. 71
Clairvoyance	4-point Power	p. 72
Emotional Influence	4-point Power	p. 73
Insight	4-point Power	p. 73
Mind Probe	4-point Power	p. 73
Psychic Link	1-point Power	p. 74
Psychic Visions	1-point Power	p. 74
Psychometry	4-point Power	p. 74
Undetectability	4-point Power	p. 74
SORCERY QUALITIES AND POWERS		
Hyperspatial Device	Variable Quality	p. 75
Sorcery	4-points/level Power	p. 75
Spells	Variable Quality	p. 76

AUGMENTATION QUALITIES TABLE

LEGAL AUGMENTATIONS		
Biofilter	2-point Augmentation	p. 76
Enhanced Time Sense	2-point Augmentation	p. 76
Improved Senses		
Echolocation/Sonar	3 or 6-point Augmentation	p. 77
Electrical Sense	3-point Augmentation	p. 77
Enhanced Sense	3-point Augmentation	p. 77
Infrared Vision	2-point Augmentation	p. 77
Low-Light Vision	1-point Augmentation	p. 77
Spectrum Vision	3-point Augmentation	p. 77
Oxygen Reserve	1-point Augmentation	p. 77
Pressure Tolerance	2-point Augmentation	p. 77
Rapid Healing	1-point Augmentation	p. 77
Temperature Tolerance	1-point Augmentation	p. 77
RESTRICTED AUGMENTATIONS		
Amphibious	2-point Augmentation	p. 78
Boost Gland	3-point Augmentation	p. 78
Commando Upgrade	6-point Augmentation	p. 78
Electrical Attack	5-point Augmentation	p. 78
Enhanced Attributes	1 or 3-point Augmentation	p. 78
Natural Armor	Variable Augmentation	p. 78
Natural Weaponry	Variable Augmentation	p. 79
Regeneration	2-point Augmentation	p. 79
Walk Walking	3-point Augmentation	p. 79
HYPERSPATIAL AUGMENTATIONS		
Attack Field	8 or 12-point Augmentation	p. 79
Defense Field	12-point Augmentation	p. 80
Hyperspatial Flight	7-point Augmentation	p. 80
Hyperspatial Manipulators	3-points/level Augmentation	p. 80

COMBAT MANEUVERS REFERENCE TABLE (SEE CHAPTER 3)

NAME	ROLL BASICS	DAMAGE	NOTES
Aiming	Perception + Guns, or Perception + Archaic Weapons, or Brains Score	None	Adds Success Levels to shooting roll see p. 108
Bow Shot	Dexterity + Archaic Weapons - 2, or Combat Score - 2	(4 x Strength) Slash/stab (to maximum of 20)	Ranged attack modifiers, see p. 108
Brain Shot	Combat Maneuver - 4 or Combat Score - 4	Varies by attack	Double Bash damage, triple Slash/stab damage, quadruple bullet damage see p. 108
Break Neck	Strength + Brawling, or Muscle Score	(4 x Strength) Bash	If defender at -10 Life Points, Survival Test or neck broken (dead), see p. 108
Catch Weapon	Dexterity + Brawling - 5, or Combat Score - 5	None	Ranged defense action see p. 108
Choke	Strength + Brawling, or Muscle Score	(Strength - 1) Bash	Asphyxiation see p. 108
Crossbow Shot	Dexterity + Archaic Weapons, or Combat Score	16 Slash/stab	Ranged attack modifiers apply, see p. 108
Decapitation	Dexterity + Archaic Weapons - 5, or Combat Score - 5	Varies by weapon	Total damage multiplied by five see p. 108
Disarm	Dexterity + Archaic Weapons - 2, or Dexterity + Brawling - 3, or Combat Score - 2	None	Resisted by Parry see p. 108
Dodge	Dexterity + Acrobatics, or Dexterity + Archaic Weapons, or Dexterity + Brawling, or Combat Score	None	see p. 109
Feint	Intelligence + Brawling, or Intelligence + Archaic Weapons, or Brains Score	Adds Success Levels to next action	see p. 109
Grapple	Dexterity + Brawling + 2, or Combat Score + 2	None	Impairment varies, see p. 109
Groin Shot	Combat Maneuver - 3	Varies by attack	see p. 109
Gunshot	Dexterity + Guns, or Combat Score	Varies by weapon	Ranged attack modifiers apply, see p. 109
Head Butt	Dexterity + Brawling - 2, or Combat Score - 2	(2 x Strength) Bash	If target grappled, she cannot defend see if attack misses, attacker takes damage p. 109
Jump Kick	Dexterity + Brawling - 3, or Combat Score - 3	3 x (Strength + 1) Bash	Acrobatics + Dexterity roll first and add Success Levels to damage see p. 109
Kick	Dexterity + Brawling - 1, or Combat Score - 1	2 x (Strength + 1) Bash	see p. 109
Knockout	Dexterity + Brawling - 2, or Dexterity + Archaic Weapons - 2, or Combat Score - 2	Half damage of attack	see p. 109
Melee Weapon	Dexterity + Archaic Weapons, or Combat Score	Varies by weapon	see p. 110
Parry	Dexterity + Brawling, or Dexterity + Archaic Weapons, or Combat Score	None	Defense action, -2 against ranged attacks see p. 110
Punch	Dexterity + Brawling, or Combat Score	2 x Strength Bash	see p. 110

Slam-Tackle	Strength + Sports, or Muscle Score	2 x Strength Bash	Football or other roughhousing tackle see p. 110
Spin Kick	Dexterity + Brawling - 2, or Combat Score - 2	2 x (Strength + 2) Bash	see p. 110
Sweep Kick	Dexterity + Brawling - 1, or Combat Score - 1	Strength Bash	Knocks target down, see p. 110
Takedown	Strength + Brawling, or Muscle Score	Strength Bash	Knocks target down, see p. 110
Target Limb	Combat Maneuver - 2 or Combat Score - 2	Normal damage for combat maneuver.	Damage over the target's maximum life points cripples or severs the limb see p. 110
Throw Weapon	Dexterity + Archaic Weapons - 1, or Combat Score - 1	Varies by weapon	Range 2 yards plus 2 yards/Strength, see p. 110
Toss	Strength doubled - 4, or Muscle Score - 4	Strength Bash	Must Grapple first, minimum Strength 4, see p. 110
Wall Flip	Dexterity + Acrobatic - 3, Dexterity + Brawling - 3, or Combat Score - 3	None	Scoring at least on success provides +3 to Defense against all attacks. Behind attacker and automatic initiative next turn see p. 110
Wall Smash	Strength + Acrobatics	Strength x 3 Bash	see p. 111
Whirling Sword	Dexterity + Archaic Weapons - 4 or Combat Score - 4	Varies by weapon	Affects all targets in range, but the character also suffers - 4 to their defense during the turn see p. 111
Wrestling Hold	Strength + Brawling - 2, or Muscle Score - 2	None	Must Grapple first, defender is at - 1 per Success Level, see p. 111

BASE MODIFIERS TABLE

Easy: +5
Moderate: +3 to +4
Average: +1 to +2
Challenging: No modifier
Difficult: - 1 to - 2
Very Difficult: - 3 to - 5
Heroic: - 6 to - 9
Insanely Difficult: - 10 or worse

COMBAT ROLL MODIFIERS

Full Defense: +3 to all defense actions; no attack actions
Full Offense: +2 to all attack actions; no defense actions
Knocked Down: - 2 to all defense actions; no attack actions
Multiple Actions: - 2 per action, cumulative; extra actions limited by Dexterity
Multiple Opponents: +1 per additional person; maximum +4
Short Range: no modifier
Medium Range: - 1
Long Range: - 3

BASE DAMAGE TABLES

Optional Combat Note About Rolled Weapon Damage: If the Director and Players want weapon damage to be more variable, they can use the rolled damage listed in the brackets "[]" rather than the fixed damage listed first. This option is especially useful for gritty campaigns that do not use Drama Points, but can potentially be used in any type of campaign.

WEAPON DAMAGE (SEE CHAPTER 3)

ATTACK	BASE DAMAGE	NOTES
Assault Rifle	16 [D8 x 4]	Bullet; can fire bursts; see p. 115
Axe	5 x Strength [(D8+1) x Str]	Slash/stab; can use two hands; see p. 115
Axe (thrown)	4 x Strength [D8 x Str]	Slash/stab; see p. 115
Baseball Bat (or any heavy blunt weapon)	4 x Strength [D8 x Str]	Bash; can use two hands; see p. 115
Baton (or any small blunt weapon)	3 x Strength [D6 x Str]	Bash; see p. 115
Big Assault Rifle	20 [D8 x 5]	Bullet; can fire bursts; see p. 115
Bow	4 x Strength [D8 x Str]	Slash/stab; maximum damage 20; see p. 116
Break Neck	4 x Strength [D8 x Str]	Bash; must Grapple; see p. 108
Choke/Strangle	1 x (Strength - 1)	Victim cannot breathe; see p. 108
Crossbow	16 [D8 x 4]	Slash/stab; see p. 116
Crossbow Pistol	10 [D6 x 3]	Slash/stab; see p. 116
Electric Cannon	5 [D6+2] or 24 [D8 x 6]	Knockout effect; see p. 116
Hand Taser	5 [D6+2]	Knockout effect; see p. 117
Head Butt	2 x Strength [D4 x Str]	Bash; see p. 109
Hyperspatial Disruptor	Instantly Fatal or 30 [(D8+1) x 6]	Fire; see p. 117
Jump Kick	3 x (Strength + 1) [D6 x Str +1]	Bash; add Success Levels of Dexterity + Acrobatics roll to damage; see p. 109
Kick	2 x (Strength + 1) [D4 x (Str+1)]	Bash; see p. 109
Knife	2 x Strength [D4 x Str]	Slash/stab; see p. 117
Knife (small)	2 x (Strength - 1) [D4 x (Str-1)]	Slash/stab; see p. 117
Knife (large)	3 x Strength [D6 x Str]	Slash/stab; see p. 117
Knife (thrown)	2 x (Strength - 1) [D4 x (Str-1)]	Slash/stab; see p. 117
Knife (large, thrown)	3 x (Strength - 1) [D6 x (Str-1)]	Slash/stab; see p. 117
Pistol (small)	9 [D6 x 3]	Bullet; see p. 117
Pistol (standard)	12 [D6 x 4]	Bullet; see p. 117
Pistol (large)	15 [D6 x 5]	Bullet; see p. 117
Pistol (huge)	18 [D6 x 6]	Bullet; see p. 117
Punch	2 x Strength [D4 x Str]	Bash; see p. 110
Quarterstaff	3 x (Strength + 1) [D6 x (Str +1)]	Bash; uses two hands; see p. 117
Rifle (hunting)	20 [D8 x 5]	Bullet; see p. 117
Shotgun (12 gauge)	20 (D8 x5)	Bullet; see p. 117
Shotgun (20 gauge)	12 (D6 x4)	Bullet; see p. 117
Slam-Tackle	2 x Strength [D4 x Str]	Bash; knocks target down; see p. 110
Sniper Rifle	20 (D8 x5)	Bullet; +3 to hit if braced; see p. 117
Spear	3 x (Strength + 1) [D6 x (Str+1)]	Slash/stab; uses two hands; see p. 118
Spear (thrown)	3 x Strength [D6 x Str]	Slash/stab; see p. 118
Spin Kick	2 x (Strength + 2)	Bash; see p. 110
Submachine Gun	12 [D6 x 4]	Bullet; can fire bursts; see p. 118
Sweep Kick	1 x Strength	Bash; knocks target down; see p. 110
Sword	4 x Strength [D8 x Str]	Slash/stab; see p. 118
Sword (large)	5 x (Strength + 1) [D10 x (Str+1)]	Slash/stab; see p. 118
Takedown	1 x Strength	Bash; knocks target down; see p. 110
Toss	1 x Strength	Bash; knocks target down; see p. 110
Tranquilizer Gun	1	Puts target to sleep; see p. 118
Wall Smash	3 x Strength [D6 x Str]	Bash; see p. 111
Zapper Pistol	5 [D6+2] or 20 [D8 x4]	Bash + Knockout effect or Bash; see p. 118
Zapper Rifle	5 [D6+2] or 20 [D8 x4]	Bash + Knockout effect or Bash; see p. 118

AUGMENTATION DAMAGE (SEE CHAPTER 2)

ATTACK	BASE DAMAGE	NOTES
Electrical Attack	16 [D8 x 4] or 5 [D6+2]	Bash or Bash + Knockout effect see p. 78
Small Claws	2 x Strength [D4 x Str]	Slash/stab see p. 79
Large Claws	3 x Strength [D6 x Str]	Slash/stab see p. 79
8-point Attack Field	20 [D10 x 4]	Bash see p. 79
12-point Attack Field	30 [D10 x 6]	Bash see p. 79

HEAVY WEAPONS (SEE CHAPTER 3)

ATTACK	BASE DAMAGE	NOTES
Anti-Aircraft Missile	50 [D10 x 10] blast of 10 [D4 x 5]	Divide armor by 2 see p. 119
Anti-Tank Rocket	35 [D10 x 7] blast of 15 [D6 x 5]	Divide armor by 5 see p. 119
Satchel Charge	42 [D6 x 14] blast of 12 [D6 x 4]	see p. 119

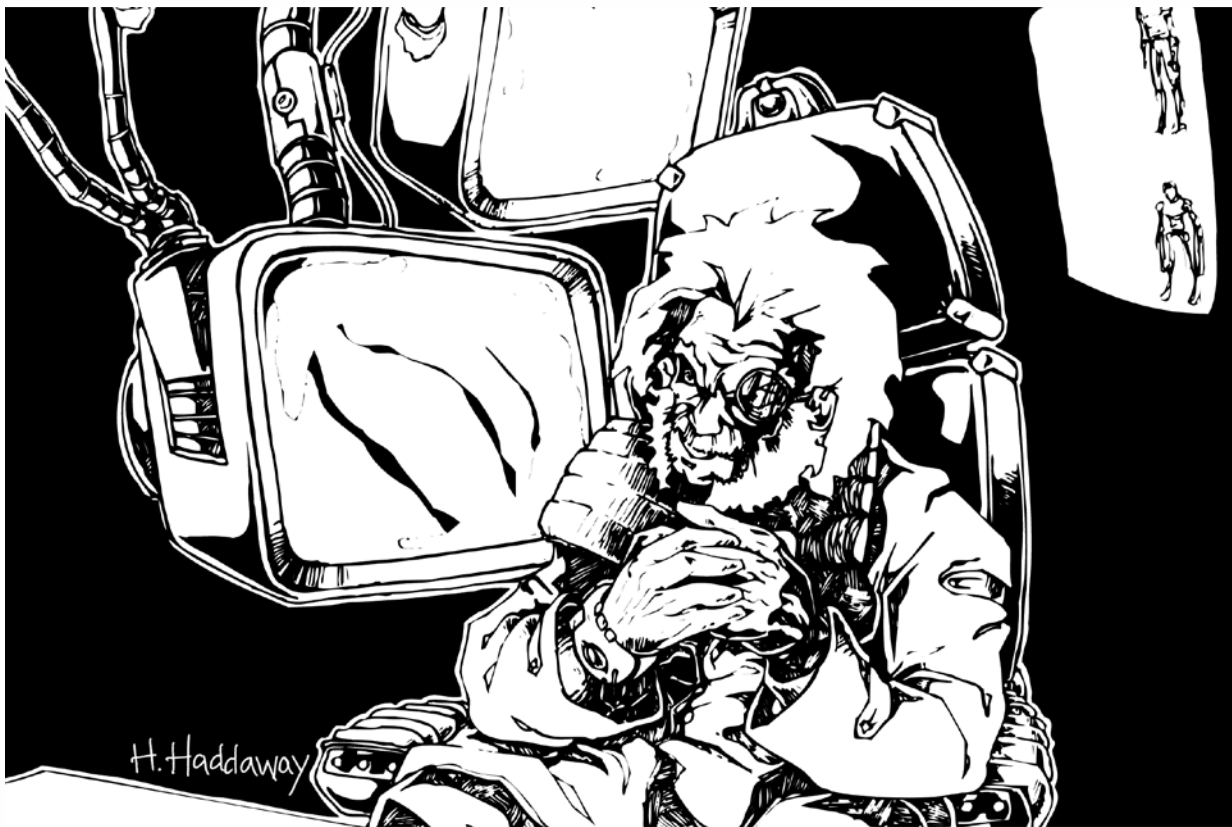
ALIEN ATTACK DAMAGE (SEE CHAPTER 6)

ATTACK	BASE DAMAGE	NOTES
Extreme Natural Weaponry	4 x Strength [D8 x Str]	Slash/stab see p. 204
Monstrous Attack (minor)	20 [D10 x 4]	Fire see p. 205
Monstrous Attack (major)	30 [D10 x 6]	Fire see p. 205
Monstrous Attack (deadly)	50 [D10 x 10]	Fire see p. 205
Elder One Disintegrator Rod	20 [(D8+1) x 4]	Energy see p. 227
Serpent Person Dart Gun	1	Dart carries poison see p. 228
Yaddithi Laser	20 (D8 x5)	Bullet see p. 228

ARMOR TABLE (SEE CHAPTER 3)

ARMOR TYPE	ARMOR VALUE	NOTES	COST
Leather Jacket	2	Typical biker jacket	-3
Bulletproof Vest	10 (5)	Bulky, use second value for Slash/stab attacks	-2
Covert Armor or Chameleon Covert Armor	8 (4)	Looks like a blazer, motorcycle leathers, or a trench coat; use second value for Slash/stab attacks	0/+1
Combat Armor or Chameleon Combat Armor	12	Worn by soldiers in combat and SWAT teams	+1/+2 (Restricted)
Space Suit	4	Bullet or Slash/stab damage in excess of this armor causes the suit to leak	+1
Armored Space Suit	14	Bulky, this suit can repair up to 4 point leaks, but more than 18 points of Bullet or Slash/stab damage causes the suit to leak	+2

Notes: Chameleon armor changes color to roughly match the background. It provides a +3 bonus to all stealth rolls. However, it does not make the wearer invisible or allow them to hide in plain sight. See chameleon jumpsuit for details on how it works.



UNISYSTEM CONVERSION NOTES

The **Unisystem** is the heart of several different games with varying backgrounds and settings, but all focused in the horror genre. For those who are interested, check out *CJ Carella's WitchCraft*, a roleplaying game of magic and dark secrets or *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, a roleplaying game of zombie survival horror. Other Unisystem games and supplements are also available—lots of information can be found at <http://edenstudios.net/unisystem/>. All these games can be purchased at the store you picked up this sparkling tome.

If you already play one of our other **Unisystem** games, you may have noticed a few differences between those versions and the current one. It's the same basic system though. So, for people who want to combine *Eldritch Skies* with the shadowy world of *WitchCraft* or the splatterpunk horror of *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* (or vice versa), here're a few guidelines to do so.

THE EASY METHOD

This one requires little or no effort: just take character sheets and start rolling dice. For the most part, you can

use an *Eldritch Skies* character in any other **Unisystem** game. The Attributes are the same. The skills are different, but their values are the same. You have to decide whether you'll use the flat damage system or the dice-based system, but that's it. A more detailed conversion process is described below.

CHARACTERS

We simplified character creation in the *Eldritch Skies RPG*, both to make things easier for new players. Here are the differences between the two versions.

ATTRIBUTES

The Primary Attributes are the same, but we removed two Secondary Attributes. In addition to Life Points and Speed, other games have Endurance Points (they represent the character's stamina, and how soon she will need to take a break or pass out) and Essence Points (the character's inner energy, the strength of her soul, so to speak, used mainly for magic). All these values can be calculated using the *Eldritch Skies* Attributes for other Unisystem games, or dropped for the *Eldritch Skies RPG*.

QUALITIES

Other than a few minor changes, Qualities work about the same in both versions. Other games have many more Qualities, some of which are less useful in an *Eldritch Skies* game, but that's the major difference. Some of the Qualities from the *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* RPG SF supplement *All Tomorrow's Zombies* may be especially useful.

SKILLS

There are 21 skills in *Eldritch Skies*, and dozens and dozens of assorted skills and skill types in other **Unisystem** games. Instead of Guns, there are skills for each type of gun (like Pistol and Rifle), for example. If you want to take a character from the *Eldritch Skies RPG* and “convert” it to a more complex **Unisystem** version, review each of the 21 skills, and give the character two points per level up to level 5 (and five points per level after that), and use those points to “buy” regular **Unisystem** skills that fall within the *Eldritch Skies RPG* skill's purview. The new skills should be no more than one level higher than the *Eldritch Skies RPG* skill.

Example: The OPS Strike Team Commando has 4 points in the Guns skill. To convert this character to other **Unisystem** games, use 8 points and buy assorted Guns Skills. The maximum level in any one Guns Skill would be 5. The more varied skill set is more realistic (people shouldn't excel at everything), but the tradeoff is time and more stuff to keep track of.

COMBAT MANEUVERS

The Maneuvers (*Eldritch Skies RPG*) or Moves (*Mystery Codex*) differ between the systems. The Director should pick the list she likes best for her game.

RULES

The basic mechanic works the same—roll a D10, add the appropriate Attributes and skills and so on. A few details are different, however.

FEAR TESTS

Fear Tests are a bit more complex in other **Unisystem** games. The sub-systems can be interchanged though, so Directors should choose which one to use.

DAMAGE

In the *Eldritch Skies RPG*, base damage is a flat value, with Success Levels added to that number, unless the Director decides to use the optional rule for rolled damage. In other **Unisystem** games, damage is usually rolled randomly with assorted types of dice (four-sided, six-sided, and so on). Armor also has a random value in other **Unisystem** games. Again, the Director must decide which sub-system to use.

The *Eldritch Skies RPG* version has the advantage of being faster and not needing as many dice. The dice-based version gives you more variation and less predictability—a hit may just scratch a character, to kill her outright.

SORCERY

Magic in the *Eldritch Skies RPG* is highly idiosyncratic and meant to mirror the exotic nature of mythos hyperspatial sorcery. It is not the same magic system you'll find in other **Unisystem** games, like *WitchCraft*. You can pick and choose which one to use, or try to have both systems together—call 'em Magic and Hyperspatial Sorcery, for example. In other **Unisystem** games, magic usually has an Essence cost (see the **Attributes** section above). An Essence Point cost may be assigned to *Eldritch Skies RPG* spells based on the spell's Power Level, using the Essence Point Assignment Table.

If you use this Essence Cost, eliminate the repeated casting penalty—the cost replaces it as a limiting factor. Characters with Sorcery get an additional five Essence Points per level (the Extra Essence Quality found in other games can be acquired as well). Characters who know Hyperspatial Sorcery do not need the Essence Channeling Quality.

ESSENCE POINT ASSIGNMENT TABLE

POWER LEVEL	ESSENCE COST
1	2
2	4
3	9
4	16
5	25
6	36

SERENDIPITY

"THEY COULD HAVE US FOR TREASON, Commander Aronson," Frank said.

Outside the failing American module, the cosmonauts stood among the crumbling remains of alien constructions, awaiting their answer. Peter's palms sweated in their gloves. "Or we could all die here, and never carry our knowledge back to Earth," he said. "I vote for the court-martial."

"We could try to build the gateway ourselves. If this stuff is too classified to even ask ground control about -" It was too classified for Frank to have known about it before the Soviets brought up the idea, but Peter didn't care to point that out.

"It's too dangerous for us to try the ritual with fewer than four good minds," Peter said.

"We know they know," interjected Ann. "They know we know. We aren't giving up anything they don't already have."

"Treason it is," Frank said. They put their helmets on and walked out through the airlocks onto the lunar surface.

The cosmonauts' methods were slightly different from American sorcery protocols. Vladimir dragged the stylus through the lunar dust, Alek steadying him in the low gravity. Peter felt guilty for trying to memorize their diagrams, but anything he'd observed would stand in his favor, should it come to a treason trial. As the US astronaut with the most knowledge and authority, he risked the most if it went against him.

"Where do we go?" Yuri had asked, and Peter answered: "We don't know for sure. That's the risk of working on the fly. I'm going to try for Canada. But regardless of where we land, we have *got* to keep our story straight. Those of us standing here know this technology, but if the populace finds out..." Yuri had made the throat-cutting gesture across the neck of his spacesuit, and nodded, slowly.

They needed more universally understood gestures. So close to the tenth anniversary of the Mars incident, Peter

knew only too well they courted disaster. A misspoken coordinate, a language failure... He wouldn't let it happen. He *would* see his children again.

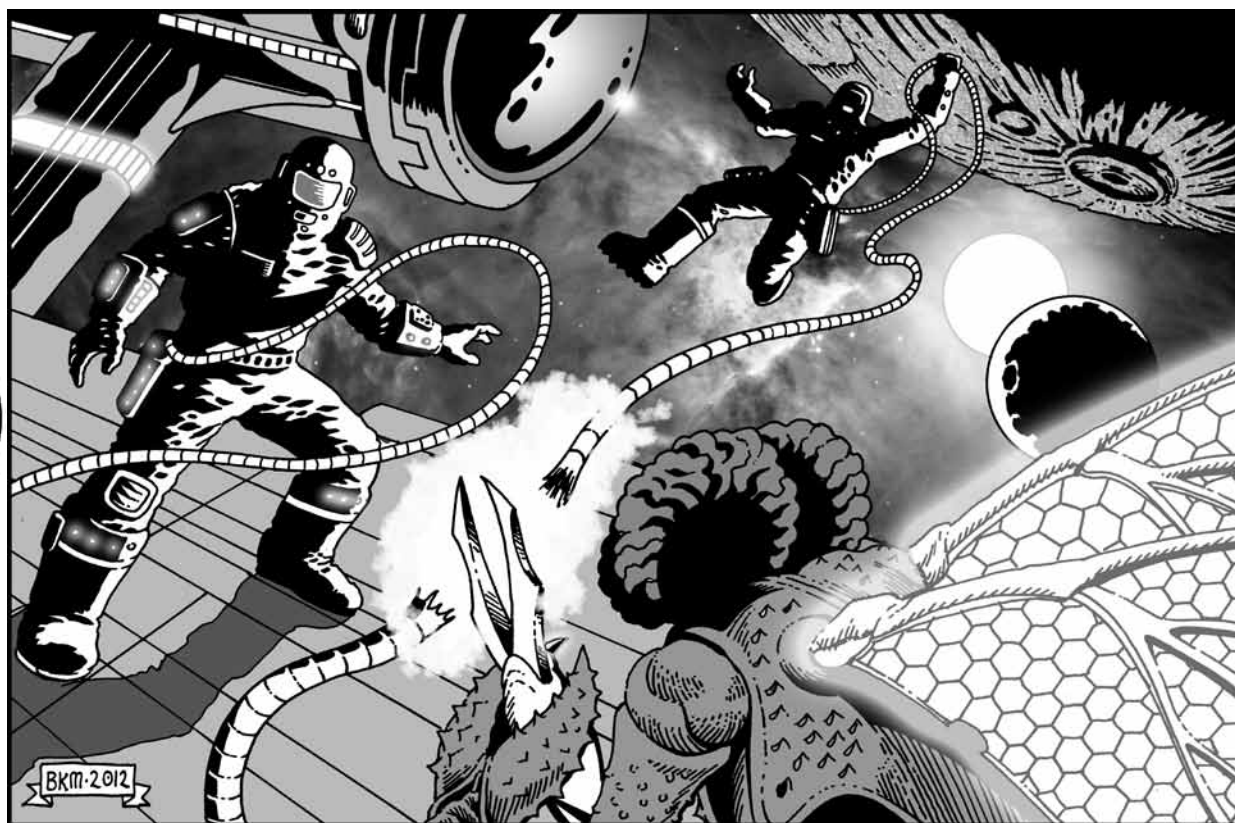
"Commander Aronson." Ann spoke in the barest whisper, not through the radio but helmet-to-helmet. "I don't think the diagrams match our math." Just the words sent a cold sweat down him. Staring at the lines, Peter did some numbers in his head. She was right, damn it, and it was too late to start over. The hyperspatial energies were building. The ritual couldn't be stopped; it would rip through the fabric of the universe if they let go now. He dared not speak up, lest Yuri panic and lose control of it. "Commander Aronson?" Ann whispered again.

"I've got this. Begin the chant on cue." She looked at him, distressed, but reactivated her radio. Yuri had begun to repeat the words aloud. His intonation was right, at least. They still had hope. Everyone joined on the next repeat.

Peter had to choose his moment. There'd be a narrow window of time to draw another line leading up to the aperture, a vector that would reconcile the incompatible diagrams. Just as the first chant ended, and before the second... Would they keep chanting, no matter what happened? The others were just support, but Yuri was the principal, and if he broke his concentration... Peter stared at Yuri desperately, hoping his eyes were enough to transmit the message: *TRUST ME*.

The pause came. Peter bent down and drew a line in the moondust. Vladimir exclaimed something in Russian, and Peter caught the gist: *the American, he's betraying us!* He couldn't stop to look at Yuri and see how the leader was reacting. He could only finish the careful arc of it, measuring angles in his mind, and start the chant again, desperately hoping the others would take the cue.

Yuri's voice joined with his, bold and unwavering. The others chanted with them, finishing the structure of lines and sound that reached beyond the seen world. Reality tore open, and they stepped through.



CHARACTER NAME

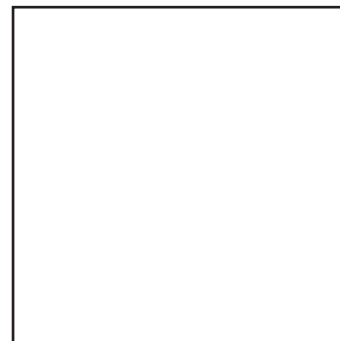
CHARACTER Type

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

LIFE POINTS:

DRAMA POINTS:

EXPERIENCE POINTS:



CHARACTER PICTURE/DRAWING

ATTRIBUTES

STRENGTH

INTELLIGENCE

DEXTERITY

PERCEPTION

CONSTITUTION

WILLPOWER

Useful Information

INITIATIVE (DEX + D10)

PERCEPTION (D10 + PER + NOTICE)

SPEED (CON + DEX M/SECOND)

NOTES

SUCCESS

9-10
11-12
13-14
15-16
17-20
21-23
+3

LEVELS Table

1 SUCCESS
2 SUCCESSES
3 SUCCESSES
4 SUCCESSES
5 SUCCESSES
6 SUCCESSES
+1

Skills

ACROBATICS

ART

ARCHAIC WEAPONS

BRAWLING

COMPUTER

CRIME

DOCTOR

DRIVING

ENGINEERING

GUNS

INFLUENCE

KNOWLEDGE

LANGUAGES

NOTICE

OCCULTISM

PILOTING

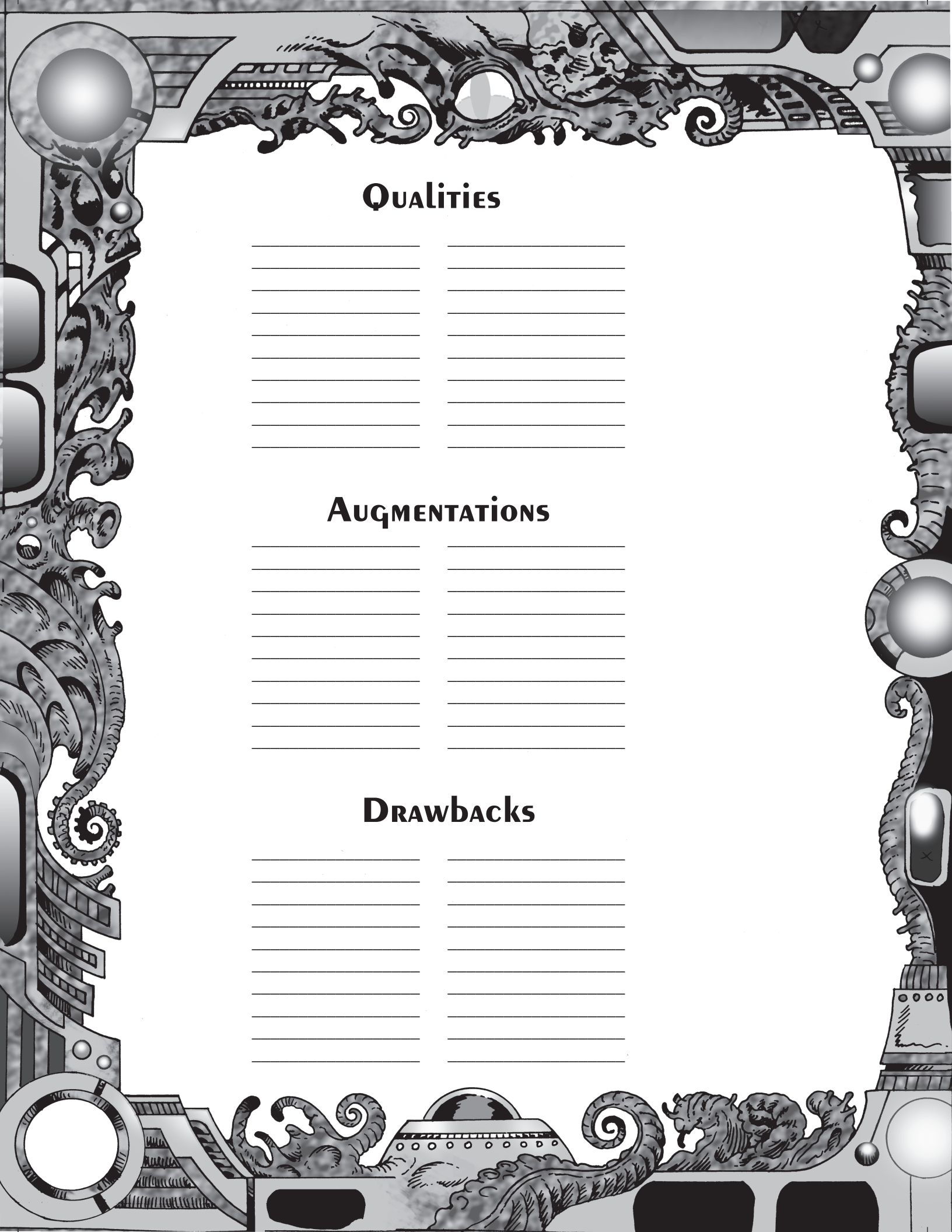
PSYCHIC ART

SCIENCE

SPORTS

WILDERNESS

WILD CARD



Qualities

[illegible]

AUGMENTATIONS

[illegible]

Drawbacks

[illegible]