

STAR DRIVE™

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ALIEN COMPENDIUM™

ACCESSORY

Creatures of the Verge


Science Fiction
Roleplaying Game



by Richard Baker and Bill Slavicsek

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ALIEN Creatures of the Verge COMPENDIUM™ ACCESSORY



Science Fiction
Roleplaying Game

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Roleplaying Game

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the STAR^{DRIVE}™ universe, humankind has encountered thousands of worlds inhabited by alien creatures. This book details a mere handful of these species in one isolated corner of the galaxy, the Verge. Unlike the monsters in a fantasy game, aliens in a science fiction setting don't appear at random to obstruct the heroes' progress. With few exceptions, aliens are bound to the planets on which they evolved, unless they come into contact with starfaring civilizations and hitch rides to new worlds. Therefore, this compendium organizes the various aliens by homeworld, the most crucial distinction to you and the players in your game.

Although we've tried to avoid contradicting known scientific fact while instilling a sense of wonder and mystery into the worlds and aliens described in this book, it's important to remember that the ALTERNITY® game and the STAR^{DRIVE}™ setting are centered in science fiction. Don't be afraid to extrapolate about what might be possible, especially if you assume that insights or advances may occur in our future that change the way we look at the universe.

*From the journal of Dr. Aliisz Veras,
University of Ceres:*

In our exploration of the galaxy, we've found that worlds with the potential for life are rare indeed. We've visited almost two million stars, and found planets around two-thirds of those, but the conditions in which life can develop and flourish are so stringent that less than 20 percent of these planet-bearing star systems produce even the simplest organisms. The great majority of our galaxy is a magnificent wasteland.

So, if our experience in our own small corner of the galaxy approximates the conditions in the rest of the galactic disk, we can expect to find life around one in ten stars. Within the bounds of the Stellar Ring and the Verge, that means that there are 50,000 living worlds within our reach. And our survey vessels have logged 44,972 at the latest count, although our recent experience with Series VI and VII lifeforms indicates that we have probably missed hundreds or thousands of likely candidates in our initial surveys. Even though we try to be objective and open-minded in our scientific definition of what constitutes "life," it's difficult for our judgment not to be tainted by our ingrained frames of reference where such determinations are concerned. For every creature we have identified that does not fit our preconceptions, we have probably overlooked a score of others.

While primitive life is not extremely rare, we have found that the conditions for organized, multicellular life are extremely demanding. Only one in ten life-bearing worlds can support anything except the crudest prokaryotes. Time is our enemy; simple lifeforms can emerge on very young planets, but the establishment of critical chemical cycles that can support organized life requires billions of years. If a world lags only 10 minutes behind Earth on the evolutionary clock, intelligent life won't appear for another 40 million years . . . and that will be an event that we won't be around to document.

Of the 44,000-plus life-bearing worlds we've charted, only 5,232 appear to support multicellular life. This is actually a little higher percentage than we originally expected—perhaps we were lucky. So far as we can determine, the rest of these worlds aren't old enough to have developed life, or have aged to the point where multicellular life has become impossible again. Overall, the number of stars orbited by worlds with multicellular life is roughly one in a hundred—but in the enormous extent of the galaxy, we might expect to eventually find millions of worlds with highly organized lifeforms. As our technology and our techniques become more sophisticated and more versatile, our ongoing search for life will be ever more fruitful.

What You Need to Play

While you might enjoy reading through this book and adapting the creatures to any science fiction game system you like, the game statistics given here are usable only with the ALTERNITY science fiction game. You'll need the ALTERNITY *Player's Handbook* and *Gamemaster Guide* in order to make use of the entries as they're written. In addition, the *Alien Compendium* is grounded in the Verge, which is part of the STAR^{DRIVE} campaign setting. The worlds, nations, species, and themes of this setting form a background for all the creatures described in this work.



Presentation

As noted before, this book is organized by worlds. Within each world entry, from two to five of the most dangerous, interesting, or intelligent of the world's denizens are described. The order in which the worlds are presented traces the course of the Concord Survey Vessel *Kepler* during its biological survey cruise of 2499–2500, the first venture of its kind following the reestablishment of contact with the Verge. Under the guidance of Concord Administrator Ruden Grant, the *Kepler* visited eighteen worlds in thirteen star systems.

The entries in this document have been compiled from information acquired by members of the survey team as they went from place to place. Adding to the presentation are excerpts from the personal logs of Administrator Grant and his science team leader, Dr.

Aliiez Veras of the University of Ceres. (A few entries include information that isn't known by any character in the STAR*DRIVE setting, but which a Gamemaster will need in order to properly represent the creature in question. Such information may become known to characters as the result of events that occur during an adventure.)

More extensive information on migration patterns, population density and distribution, detailed reductions of physiological systems, and other matters of interest to exobiologists are available in the University of Ceres database (Grid/ceres.survey.verge) and the Concord Survey Service Grid access site. At this time, the University plans to assemble cataloging expeditions for several planets visited by Administrator Grant and Dr. Veras.

The Worlds

Only a handful of the thousands of planets in the Verge are covered in this biological survey. The laws of astrophysics and chemistry dictate that the great majority of worlds are lifeless, and many that do boast life of some kind support only the most rudimentary algae and microorganisms. Lifeless worlds and those containing nothing more interesting than organic soup have been omitted from this book.

We've provided brief descriptions of each world mentioned in this compendium, including basic astronomical and geophysical data. Each of the data categories is defined below.

Parent: Usually, the name and spectral class of the parent star of the planet. If the world being described is a satellite of a planet, then the planet is identified as its parent, and the star and spectral class are given thereafter in parentheses.

Spectral class is a measure of the star's size and temperature; refer to the discussion in Chapter 14 of the *ALTERNITY Gamemaster Guide* (or any book on astronomy) if you're not familiar with this term.

Orbital Radius: The distance at which the world orbits its parent, given in astronomical units (AU) for a planet and kilometers (km) for a satellite of a planet. One AU equals 150 million kilometers, which is the distance at which the Earth orbits the Sun. (If the parent is a planet, then the distance of that planet from its parent star is also given.)

Orbital Period: The length of the world's year; how long it takes for the planet (or satellite) to complete one revolution around its parent. (If the parent is a planet, then the time it takes for the planet to make one revolution around its parent star is also given.)

Rotation Period: The length of the world's day; how long it takes the planet (or satellite) to complete a full rotation around its axis.

Axial Tilt: The degree of the world's inclination to the plane of

its orbit about the sun. This affects the severity of the planet's seasons, the latitude at which the arctic and antarctic circles appear, and the latitude band of the tropics. Axial tilt is generalized as minimal (0° to 10°), moderate (11° to 25°), severe (26° to 45°), or extreme (46° or more). A world with an axial tilt of more than 90° is one that is rotating in a retrograde (backward) motion relative to the rest of the worlds in the system.

Diameter: The diameter of the world in kilometers. For comparison, Earth's diameter is roughly 12,700 kilometers.

Density: The density of the world, given as a ratio where the density of Earth = 1.

Surface Gravity: The world's surface gravity expressed in g, where 1.0 g is the average surface gravity of Earth. On a 2.0 g world, objects are twice as heavy as they are on Earth's surface.

Atmosphere: The primary constituents of the world's atmosphere. For comparison, Earth's atmosphere is primarily a mix of molecular nitrogen and oxygen (N_2 and O_2), with a few less common gases mixed in.

Pressure: The average atmospheric pressure observed at the world's surface in atmospheres (atm). One atm equals the pressure of Earth's atmosphere at sea level, so a world with a pressure of 2.0 atm has an atmosphere twice as dense as Earth's.

Median Temperature: The midpoint between the hottest and coldest temperatures found on the planet's surface, expressed in degrees Celsius. For comparison, Earth's median temperature is 15.8°C , or about 60°F .

Satellites: If the world has any significant satellites, the number of those bodies is noted here.

GRAPH: This line describes the five principal attributes of a planetary environment in the GRAPH system. (Details of the GRAPH system can be found on page 52 in the *Player's Handbook* and pages 62–65 in the *Gamemaster Guide*.)

The Creatures

Even the most barren worlds described in this book have hundreds if not thousands of different species of life. Most are innocuous and not of any real interest to the typical hero, so only the most dangerous or exotic denizens of each world are presented here. Each world entry is subdivided into entries for species native to that planet.

Consider that Earth, with its amazing diversity of species, is merely one of five thousand planets bearing complex lifeforms, each with its own evolutionary course and history. On the homeworld of humankind are millions of species of animals, plants, fungi, and microbes. A person could spend a lifetime doing nothing more than cataloging a few small branches of Earth's astonishing tree of life.

As it turns out, Earth's diversity of species is unusually high; conditions on Earth were ideal for the growth and development of life—an accident of astrophysics, geology, and evolution that has not been shown to be universal. But even the simplest ecosystems we know of contain hundreds of distinct species . . . and the overall number of species known, both Terran and extraterrestrial, is approaching the total of one billion or more. The search continues every day.

— Dr. Aliisz Veras, University of Ceres

Ecological Data

This window gives some of the basic facts about a creature and its place in its world. The categories covered in this section of text are defined below.

Biochemistry: To date, six basic biochemistry models or series have been found to exist in the galaxy. Most lifeforms require a liquid medium to carry out life-sustaining chemical reactions and some kind of reagent for cellular respiration. In addition, their bodies require compounds or elements that can create very complex organic molecules. The basic series are summarized and defined below.

Series	Medium	Reagent	Structure	Environment
I	Water	Oxygen	Carbon	Class 1, 2
II	Ammonia	Hydrogen	Hydrocarbons	Class 3
III	Water	Chlorine	Carbon	Class 2, 3
IV	SO ₂	SO ₃	Carbon	Class 3
V	H ₂ SO ₄	Oxygen	Silicones	Class 3
VI	Sulfur	SO ₂	Fluorosilicone	Class 3, 5
VII	???	???	???	???

Series I: This is life as we know it: carbon-based oxygen breathers. It is the most common life series, due to its efficiency. Series I lifeforms inhabit Earthlike environments. A subcategory, Series Ia, describes lifeforms that originate on worlds that are essentially Earthlike but have one or more relatively mild differences from Earth normal. The mechalus (see page 12) is one such example; its homeworld is hotter and has a thinner atmosphere than Earth, but a mechalus can survive in an Earth-normal environment without life support. Another subcategory, Ic, describes lifeforms that originate on worlds with one or more significant differences from Earth nor-

mal. Despite those differences, these lifeforms can survive easily in an Earth-normal environment, and may actually prefer such a world.

Series II: Series II life develops on cold worlds (anywhere from -50° to -150° C) in diluted ammonia oceans. Technological civilizations are nearly impossible on planets conducive to Series II life, due to the lack of fire. Worlds that can support Series II life are usually Class 3 environments.

Series III: Similar in many respects to Series I life, Series III lifeforms appear on worlds where chlorine (or more rarely, fluorine) are dominant in the atmosphere. Chlorine is not nearly as efficient a reagent as oxygen, so most Series III lifeforms develop mechanisms for gathering additional organic fuels. Technological civilizations are scarce on Series III worlds, due to the flame-retardant air. Depending on the concentration of chlorine, worlds with these ecosystems are Class 2 or 3 environments.

Series IV: Series IV life is based on sulfur dioxide and sulfur trioxide. These worlds tend to be cool (-50° C or colder) with lots of surface sulfur. Again, the lack of free oxygen in the atmosphere eliminates fire and makes many types of technology inaccessible. Since there is no free oxygen, these are Class 3 worlds.

Series V: This is an unusual but highly efficient biochemistry that uses sulfuric acid as a medium. Since carbon compounds don't do well in this environment, lifeforms use silicones (silicon-oxygen chains) as organic molecules. These worlds tend to be warmer than Earth (50° to 200° C), and may be considered Class 3 or Class 5 environments depending on the atmospheric density. Metal-using civilizations are possible in the right conditions.

Series VI: The most heat-tolerant life series, creatures of this sort thrive in molten sulfur. Cell-like structures in their bodies are based on fluorosilicones, which can form stable compounds at high temperatures. These worlds are very hot (300° C or more), and are considered Class 3 or Class 5 environments. Fire and metallurgy may be irrelevant to these lifeforms.

Series VII: Anything that doesn't fit into the biochemistries described above is referred to as Series VII life. To date, very few Series VII organisms have been discovered.

Environment: The creature's native environment class with special conditions noted. Most life support gear is rated by the maximum environment class it can protect its wearer against.

Class	Description
1 Terran	Habitable
2 Minimal	Minor life support required due to climatic extremes, atmospheric conditions, etc.
3 Extreme	Major life support required due to intolerable climate or atmosphere
4 Space	Including asteroids, rings, etc.
5 Jovian	Extreme life support required

Each of these five basic environment classes can be further described by adding GRAPH codes for special conditions that vary significantly from the norms observed on the Earth's surface. (Details of



the GRAPH system can be found on page 52 in the *Player's Handbook* and pages 62–65 in the *Gamemaster Guide*.)

Gravity	Radiation	Atmosphere Composition
Zero (G0)	Zero (R0)	Vacuum (A0)
Low (G1)	Low (R1)	Inert (A1)
Moderate (G2)	Moderate (R2)	Moderate (A2)
High (G3)	High (R3)	Toxic (A3)
Very High (G4)	Extreme (R4)	Corrosive (A4)
Super High (G5)	Lethal (R5)	Super Corrosive (A5)

Pressure	Heat and Cold
Vacuum (P0)	Absolute Zero (H0)
Very Thin (P1)	Frigid (H1)
Thin (P2)	Temperate (H2)
Moderate (P3)	Torrid (H3)
Dense (P4)	Super Torrid (H4)
Crushing (P5)	Inferno (H5)

For example, Mars in the Sol system was a Class 2 world with a GRAPH rating of G1/R2/A3/P2/H1 before its terraforming. It was colder than Earth, but not frozen, with a thin and toxic atmosphere. A human used to require modest life support to survive the surface conditions of Mars. Venus, on the other hand, is a Class 5 G4/R3/A4/P4/H5. Its crushing atmosphere and intense heat pose a nearly insurmountable challenge to designers of life support systems. It has resisted all terraforming attempts to date.

Biome: While a world may be described by only a single environmental class, most planets possess multiple biomes. Therefore, an Earthlike planet (Class 1 environment) may have arctic, desert, jungle, plains, and steppe biomes. Typically, a species can be found in the biome that best suits it. While lions, polar bears, and tube worms all belong to Earth's biosphere, you'll never see all three of them in the same place.

Encounter Chance: This entry is a rough guideline of how likely it is that the creature will be encountered on its homeworld and in its biome:

Category	Likelihood	d20 roll
Probable	75%	1–15
Possible	50%	1–10
Unlikely	25%	1–5
Slim	10%	1–2

On the table above, *Likelihood* is an estimate, in percentage terms, of the chance for heroes (or other characters) to come across the creature by happenstance; *d20 roll* gives a range of numbers that can be used for random determination—any result within the given range indicates that an encounter occurs. If heroes are actively searching for a certain type of creature, the chance of an encounter could be adjusted upward somewhat; conversely, if heroes are actively seeking to avoid contact with other lifeforms, the encounter chance might be smaller than the entry here would suggest.

How often the encounter chance for a creature comes into play is up to you—and, to some extent, up to your players. For a strictly random determination, just pick a time unit (most likely hours or days, but any unit can be used) and roll d20 whenever that much

time passes in the game. It's often better just to let the situation dictate what happens; for instance, if the heroes are determined not to stop looking until they find the creature they're after, there's no point in waiting for the "right" result to come up on a die roll.

Group Size: The number range given here indicates how many creatures are liable to be met in one encounter (with an optional die roll in parentheses if you prefer random generation).

Organization: The social structure displayed by the creature in its native environment. Examples include packs, flocks, schools, herds, and so on for nonsentient creatures. For intelligent creatures this characteristic reflects the basic level of civilization or organization: tribal, rural, urbanized, city-states, national, and so forth.

Niche: The creature's role in the regional ecosystem, such as herbivore, carnivore, etc. The basic subsistence system of intelligent creatures is noted in this heading.

Intelligence: A crucial characteristic in dealing with an alien species, intelligence is categorized as none, low-order animal, high-order animal, subsentient, or sentient. Following are rough guidelines for how a creature of a certain intelligence will act.

None: The creature is incapable of reasoning or communication, at least in terms that humans can perceive or relate to.

Low-order animal: The creature has an Intelligence score of 1 or 2. It is incapable of communicating with creatures of other species, but can interact on a primitive level with other creatures of its own species. It may be able to perform the most fundamental decision-making, but its actions when doing so will appear random and mindless to an outside observer.

High-order animal: The creature has an Intelligence score of 3 or 4. It is able to realize when a creature of another species is trying to communicate with it, but may not possess the means (either physical or mental) to respond to that communication. If the creature has appendages or muscles it can manipulate, it may be able to convey information by gesturing or flexing the manipulable part. Individually and when acting in a group, these creatures employ rudimentary tactics against prey or opponents.

Subsentient: The typical creature has an Intelligence score of 5 or 6. Its communication skills may be developed well enough that it can be said to have a language, but the nuances of that language are perceptible only to others of the same species. The creature can convey broad concepts, using gestures, vocal emissions, or a combination of the two, that can be understood by sentients. A subsentient creature is intelligent enough to use simple tools and weapons, but may lack the physical means to manipulate such objects. Many subsentients possess one or more Intelligence-based skills, and may even have a low rank in a specialty skill. The Intelligence skills they are capable of knowing include Knowledge—*deduce*, Knowledge—*first aid*, Tactics—*infantry tactics*, and Technical Science—*repair*.

Sentient: The typical creature has an Intelligence score of 7 or higher. This category includes all species capable of independent thought, sophisticated reasoning, and detailed cognitive processes. A sentient creature is mindful of its own identity and its own existence, and behaves accordingly—although it may still fight to the death, just as an animal or a subsentient might, the sentient creature knows that's what it's doing. Sentient creatures may learn and improve any Intelligence-based skill, although some skills may not be available in certain situations; for instance, it's impossible for a sentient species on a primitive planet to be skilled in Computer Science.



Game Data

The key entries for using an alien in play are its game statistics. The game statistics provided in this book are considered to represent an average specimen of the species—unusual individuals may be larger, faster, stronger, or smarter than the norm.

Ability Scores: All creatures are given a rough rating in the six Ability Scores (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Will, Personality) to approximate their capabilities on a human scale. You may roll the scores randomly using the die range provided in parentheses, or you can use the typical (default) values that are included.

For creatures belonging to the intelligence categories of low-order animal and high-order animal, the parenthetical Ability Score values and ranges for Intelligence and Personality are preceded by the word “Animal.” In such cases, the given numbers represent how the creature’s abilities compare to those of other creatures in those intelligence categories. For instance, the world of Grith is home to a pair of species that belong to the high-order animal intelligence category. Both the terador and the veractor have actual Intelligence scores of 4; in comparison to humans and other sentients, they’re pretty dim. But a typical terador has an “Animal” Intelligence score of 9, and the veractor’s score is 7, meaning that in a situation where the two species are competing, the terador should be able to out-smart or outthink the veractor most of the time.

Durability: The amount of punishment a member of this species can withstand—numbers for fatigue, stun, wound, and mortal points separated by slashes. A creature’s durability rating is usually tied to its Constitution, although exceptionally bulky or tough creatures may have better ratings than their Constitution scores suggest.

Move: The alien’s combat movement rates (with other modes of movement, when applicable, given in parentheses). Sometimes these rates are different from what is indicated by a creature’s Strength and Dexterity, due to its body structure, metabolism, or other factors.

Reaction score: If you want to dispense with die rolls for determining a creature’s action check result and the number of actions it can perform in one round, use its reaction score instead of rolling the dice. The degree of success (Marginal, Ordinary, or Good) indicates the first phase in which the creature can act, and the number following the slash is how many actions it receives in each round.

Psionic energy points: If the creature has psionic abilities, its maximum number of psionic energy points is given here.

Action check: The creature’s action check score. These numbers are not always based on its Dexterity and Intelligence, as is the case for heroes—some mindless creatures may be very swift.

#Actions: The number of actions the creature receives per round. Again, this figure isn’t always derived from the alien’s Will and Constitution scores. It’s more a measure of fighting instinct.

Last resorts: The number of last resort points a creature is entitled to have, usually based on its Personality score. This category applies only to sentient creatures.

Attacks: The alien’s natural attacks are listed here, using the following format:

Mode	Skill score	Damage (O/G/A)	Type
Claw	16/8/4	2d4s/2d6w/d4m	LI/O

Defenses: The alien’s resistance modifiers versus melee attacks (Strength-based) and ranged attacks (Dexterity-based) appear here,

as well as statistics for its natural armor (if any). For sentient and subsentient creatures, this section also includes Intelligence and Will resistance modifiers that may come into play if encounter skills are employed against the creature.

Skills: Any skills an alien possesses are noted here. Even though their Intelligence scores might not “legally” permit them to have the number of skills attributed to them, many creatures of animal-level intelligence have innate physical attributes that correspond to particular skills. The numbers in brackets following each skill are the skill scores for a typical creature of the species in question; if a particular creature has any Ability Scores different from the ones given for a typical specimen, any skill scores associated with those Ability Scores will have to be adjusted accordingly.

Aliens in Your Campaign

Aliens are not “monsters.” In the literature (and roleplaying games) of heroic fantasy, it’s reasonable to imagine creatures that are irredeemably evil, who exist for no other purpose than to foil the heroes’ plans—but most modern science fiction takes a much murkier, and more realistic, view on morality. It’s possible for any sentient creature, human or otherwise, to behave monstrously—but it’s a rare creature that can be portrayed as completely inimical to all other life.

To an injured man drifting in shark-infested waters, a shark may appear monstrous—but it’s just an animal hunting for its food. It isn’t evil or amoral, it’s simply a force of nature (although the swimmer may beg to differ!). When you present a scene featuring a creature that might view the heroes as enemies, remember that even the most ill-tempered creatures are driven by instinct, not malice.

While alien creatures are rarely evil from a human point of view, they can be mysterious or horrifying. Many terrestrial animals provoke extreme reactions in humans—spiders, snakes, and rats, just to name a few. Most people get a good jolt of fear out of something as mundane as a hostile dog, so just think how they might react to something completely alien. Here are some hints for getting the best effects from the presence of an alien creature in an adventure:

- ◆ Build anticipation by providing clues before the heroes actually meet the creature. For example, they may find the remains of its prey, abandoned structures or ruins, and so forth.
- ◆ Don’t come right out and say, “You see a xorntha,” especially the first time the players encounter the creature. Describe it in detail. What does it look like? Is it man-sized, elephantine, or tiny? What’s it doing? An initial encounter in conditions where the heroes never get a good look at the creature is a great tension-builder.
- ◆ Don’t make it easy to figure out where a creature fits into its world. It may be quite difficult to determine whether an aboriginal alien is actually sentient. Give the players every chance to draw the wrong conclusions, and then jerk the rug out from under them!

Concord Representatives

On the facing page are descriptions of the two representatives of the Galactic Concord who are in the forefront of the *Kepler’s* mission of discovery and information-gathering. Either or both of them could be encountered by the heroes, should you choose to arrange for such a meeting to take place. Brief advice for how such a scenario could come about is included in the descriptive text for each character.



Ruden Grant, Concord Administrator

Level 5 human Diplomat (Combat Spec)

STR 10 (0) INT 11 (+1)
DEX 9 (0) WIL 10 (0)
CON 9 PER 11

Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action check: 12+/11/5/2
Move: run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/1 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Tri-staff 12/6/3 d8+2w/3d4+1w/d6m En/0
15mm sabot
pistol 12/6/3 2d4w/2d4+1w/d4+3m HI/0
Unarmed 5/2/1 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/0

Defenses

CF softsuit: d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

Skills

Athletics [10], Melee [10]—*powered* [12], Modern [9]—*pistol* [12], Vehicle Operation [9], Stamina [9]—*endurance* [10], Knowledge [11]—*sociology* [13], Life [11]—*biology* [12], *xenology* [12], *zoology* [12], Administration [10], Awareness [10], Culture [11]—*diplomacy* [12], *etiquette* [Concord] [12], *first encounter* [14], Interaction [11]—*bar-gain* [13], Leadership [11]—*inspire* [12].

Leader of the *Kepler* survey, Grant chose to specialize in the Science branch of the Administrator Corps during his training, studying alien cultures and societies. This education made him a good choice to lead the *Kepler* mission despite his lack of field experience. He was given only the broadest orders: Go to the Verge and see what's there.

Grant is a short, wiry man in his mid-thirties. His face is square and strong, and he demonstrates a very direct and uncompromising manner. He is a straight arrow in every sense of the word, a young Administrator who sees things in black and white terms and brooks no vacillation in his subordinates. More than anything, Grant is serious. He believes that his status as an Administrator is a sacred trust.

Ruden Grant can be the focus of a number of adventure hooks in a STAR*DRIVE campaign. When the *Kepler* finishes its initial survey, he may remain in the Verge to examine several of the planets he visited in much greater detail. He'll need guides, agents, field technicians, and security personnel to attend to the dozens of tasks still ahead of him. He's particularly interested in learning more about the Glassmakers and Stoneburners, and several of the intelligent species he met during his voyage—the ke'kekt, the riglia, and the bhruu, among others. Grant currently employs several teams of field agents to keep an eye on these areas and might approach the heroes about capturing specimens, tracking down poachers or looters, or studying a species or site in detail.

Aliisz Veras, Concord Survey Service

Level 6 fraal Tech Op

STR 6 (-1) INT 15 (+3)
DEX 9 (0) WIL 12 (+1)
CON 6 PER 12

Durability: 6/6/3/3 Action check: 15+/14/7/3
Move: run 10, walk 4 #Actions: 2
Psionic energy points: 12 Last resorts: 2

Attacks

Stutter pistol 10/5/2 d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s LI/0
Unarmed 3/1/0 d4-1s/d4+1s/d6+1s LI/0

Defenses

CF softsuit: d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

Skills

Modern [9]—*pistol* [10], Vehicle [9]—*land* [10], Knowledge [15]—*computer* [17], Life [15]—*biology* [19], *botany* [18], *zoology* [18], *xenology* [19], Medical [15]—*treatment* [16], Awareness [12]—*perception* [13], Investigate [12], Resolve [12], Culture [12], Interaction [12], Telepathy [12]—*contact* [13].

Dr. Veras served as the Biological Survey Team Leader for the *Kepler* expedition. She is an accomplished academic, with a Ph.D. in xenobiology and outstanding credentials from several major universities. Before entering the world of academia, Dr. Veras served in the Concord Survey Service. When the *Kepler* mission was in its planning stages, she took a leave of absence from her position at the University of Ceres and reactivated her commission, joining Grant's survey team.

Dr. Veras is quite attractive by fraal standards, a young and brilliant scientist with a great passion for her work. She can be a real firebrand at times, and often surprises those who expect one of her station and species to be introspective or detached. Her tour of duty with the Concord Survey Service has toughened her to situations that some of her academic peers would find utterly intolerable or frightening.

At the conclusion of the *Kepler's* voyage, Dr. Veras's commission lapsed again. She decided to remain in the Verge, and convinced the University of Ceres to provide her with the funds necessary to establish a field command post in order to coordinate several secondary surveys on the more interesting worlds.

Naturally, the University has been unable to produce enough funds or personnel to enable Dr. Veras to do everything she wants to do, so she spends a great deal of time courting corporate and local backers for financial support for her work.

She could easily hire the heroes to help her by undertaking a mission—and it might not take much persuading to get her to accompany them on the mission herself.



OLD SPACE

Entry Date: 3 May 2499

From time to time I wonder if it is foolish optimism or empty bravado to call our scattered handful of worlds a *Galactic Concord*. After all, we have visited less than one-tenth of one percent of the stars that comprise this vast Milky Way galaxy. It would be as if the Pilgrims of ancient Earth, in their Massachusetts Bay Colony, had declared themselves the masters of North America. As it turned out, they did conquer a continent, with an endless flood of new colonists, troops, and commercial interests—but could they have done it if not a single ship had ever followed them from the old powers of Europe? I doubt it.

Our Galactic Concord is a human institution, conceived by humans for the purpose of enforcing peace among human-dominated stellar nations. Like the early European settlers, we have met several other peoples who live near our home—the fraal, the weren, the mechalus, the sesheyans, and the t'sa. They share in our Concord, and with us they have joined the great exodus into the unknown.

My orders are to explore the Verge, gathering information about lifeforms native to various planets that are known to be life-bearing, and searching for signs of other lifeforms as yet unknown to the Concord. In order to prepare myself to the greatest extent possible for the mission, I have spent several weeks in transit reviewing xenobiology, xenosociology, anthropology, and an entire host of related subjects. I have concentrated on studying the aliens that are known to us already, hoping to learn from the familiar what I might expect from the unfamiliar or the unknown.

Dr. Veras has provided me with this database from her own personal library. She has also observed that, with a century of separation, some of the aliens who have settled the Verge may have drifted from the familiar types we know today. Since we have four days before we make starfall at Kendai, reviewing this information seems like a good place to start. — **RG, CLA**

Fraal

Even the oldest among the long-lived fraal are too young to shed light on the secrets of their past. Almost everything before the Wandering's End has been forgotten, lost to the ravages of time and to half-remembered disasters from the most ancient of days. Even so, the fraal shouldn't be considered a sad people. Noble, serene, and highly spiritual, the fraal have become humankind's primary partner in the exploration and colonization of space. They participate for the challenge, for their genuine appreciation of humans, and for the ever-burning hope that a clue to their origin may be discovered somewhere in the galaxy.

The fraal arrived in Earth's star system more than 10,000 years ago. Wandering's End occurred when three slow-moving generation ships, all that remained of what fraal legends refer to as an armada, went into high orbit around Sol's primary planet (at least as far as that planet's inhabitants have always been concerned). Except for limited interaction that helped spawn some of humanity's oldest myths and legends, the fraal didn't make contact with humans until 2124. That was the year that the galaxy changed—forever.

Description: A fraal stands about 1.5 meters tall and has a thin, graceful humanoid form. Large eyes look out from a round head accented by wisps of silver, white, or pale yellow hair. A fraal has pale, almost luminous skin, and the appearance of ancient wisdom etched into his features. Some fraal adopt the wardrobes of the stellar nations they have attached themselves to, but most wear traditional fraal garb—regal, stylistic, and alien all at the same time.

Fraal naturally communicate among themselves via psionic links and other mental disciplines. They have also mastered the languages of most of the primary species, including the many tongues of humans, mechalus, and t'sa.

Encounter: Fraal can be found throughout Old Space and the frontier regions, as members of nearly every significant society. Some have integrated completely into galactic society, living and working side by side with humans and other species. A few, however, remain aloof, joining society as the need arises and then returning to an isolated existence among others of their kind.

Two main factions exist among the fraal population, the Wanderers and the Builders. The Wanderers consider themselves the keepers of fraal tradition, even if that tradition only stretches back to Wandering's End. They lead a nomadic lifestyle, wandering the stars in great city-ships that are only tied to particular stellar nations through registry and infrequent diplomatic exchanges. Most of the time, the Wanderers avoid contact with other species and are afforded the same courtesy. To most of the rest of galactic society, the Wanderers are enigmatic and mysterious. Some observers place religious significance on the Wanderers and their nomadic ways, but no one knows exactly why they refuse to fully join galactic society. It goes back to some great division among the fraal, a division that dates back to well before the revelations of 2124.

The Builders were the driving force behind the eventual partnership with humanity that exists to the current era. It is believed that the Builders have wanted to extend the hand of friendship to humans for many millennia and that the Wanderers have opposed such a course for just as long. Both sides, however, seem embarrassed when questions pertaining to the schism are broached, and all fraal steadfastly refuse to discuss it with non-fraal. Whatever the case, the Builders have left the city-ships behind and have taken up residence alongside humans throughout the galaxy. They are active members

Fraal Game Data

NOTE: These statistics reflect a nonprofessional fraal, perhaps employed as a low-level functionary in a branch of one of the social sciences or a laborer aboard a fraal city-ship. Just as with humans, most fraal are not hero-class characters.

STR 7	(d8+3)	INT 11	(d8+7)
DEX 7	(d8+3)	WIL 12	(d8+8)
CON 6	(d8+2)	PER 9	(d12+3)
Durability: 6/6/3/3		Action check: 11+/10/5/2	
Move: run 10, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/1		Last resorts: 1	
Psionic energy points: 12			

Attacks

Ranged weapon	7/3/1	varies	varies
Unarmed	3/1/0	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 +1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 +1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Modern Ranged Weapons [7], Vehicle [7]—*space* [10], Computer [11]—*hacking* [13], Knowledge [11]—*deduce* [14], System [11]—*communications* [12], Awareness [12]—*intuition* [16], Resolve [12]—*mental* [16], Interaction [9]—*interview* [11], Telepathy [9]—*contact* [12], *suggest* [10].



Fraal Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I
Environment: Class 1
GRAPH: G1/R1/A2/P3/H2
Biome: Any temperate land
Encounter Chance: Possible
Group Size: 1–6 (d6)
Organization: Family
Niche: Advanced technological civilization
Intelligence: Telepathic sentient

of the stellar nations, working and living as equal partners in human society.

Fraal of both factions excel at mental activity of all sorts. Very few have any interest or proficiency at physical activities. They demonstrate extreme patience, sometimes to the point of generating anger in other species. They believe that violence should never be the first course of an intelligent species, but they will use whatever force is necessary to defend themselves, right wrongs, or support causes that inspire them.

Most humans who casually encounter fraal consider them to be emotionless, aloof beings. While it is true that the fraal have a more limited range of emotional responses than humans, those who get to know them soon realize they can be a sensitive, expressive people. They have a passion for art, science, scholarly research, exploration, and diplomacy. If a human wins the friendship of a fraal, that friendship lasts for a long, long time.

Habitat/Society: Wanderers live on the city-ships, following the most ancient traditions still remembered by the fraal. They have a

matriarchal society, in which fraal females lead family units and hold the highest positions on the mysterious Council of Thought. For the most part, however, the ways of the Wanderers are secret, and few humans ever get to interact with them in any meaningful way.

Builders, on the other hand, have abandoned many of the more inflexible fraal traditions. They have adopted the belief of equality of sexes held by most human stellar nations, for example, and have even molded other national traditions into personal beliefs they can follow. While they are not as mysterious as the Wanderers, there are still times when the fraal Builders can be unfathomable to humans.

Builders can be found throughout the Verge, both as Arrivers and as Vergers who have lived in the area since before the Second Galactic War. Recently, a Wanderers' city-ship entered the region. It roams the star lanes, keeping to its own secret agenda and rarely interacting with any settlements or Concord authorities.

Despite the extent to which humanity has explored and settled its portion of the galaxy, no evidence has been found of the existence of other members of the fraal species. Every fraal living today in the Stellar Ring or the Verge is descended from the group that revealed its existence to the residents of Earth in 2124. Some of the oldest fraal were actually members of that group, and may be inclined to share their memories of those bygone days. But, to the disappointment of historians and scientists everywhere, no one among the fraal has any recollection of where the species originated or how much time the generation ships took to make their interstellar journey from the fraal homeworld to the Sol system.

Even though they are spiritual and contemplative in nature, the fraal have no formal religion. Indeed, they refuse to participate in any discussions regarding faith or systems of belief. Their philosophies and practices concerning mindwalking, however, border on religious ecstasy—though no fraal will admit to practicing or advocating such nonsense.

Mechalus

The aleerin were the second intelligent species encountered by mankind in the initial explorations after the perfection of the stardrive. We have always used technology to adapt ourselves to our environment and to increase our ability to do work, but our association with the aleerin—more commonly known as the mechalus—has shown us the difference between using technology and living tech-

nology. They made a conscious decision in their ancient past to become techno-organic lifeforms, reinforcing their bodies with mechanical structures and enhancing their minds with cybernetic circuitry. They're not cyborgs, living creatures who graft mechanical appendages and improvements to their bodies; a typical mechalus would no sooner part with his arm or leg than a fraal or a human would part with his. Instead, the mechalus are born as an amalgam of the biological and the mechanical.

For more than two centuries, Aleer has been closely allied with the Rigunmor stellar nation. Most mechalus hold Rigunmor citizenship, and are employed by the various Rigunmor Consortium concerns. Substantial numbers of mechalus have chosen to emigrate to other stellar nations and frontier regions, seeking greater autonomy or a chance to return to pre-Contact mechalus culture.

Description: In most anatomical details, mechalus strongly resemble humans. Records of their original biological forms are one of the best examples of convergent evolution known among sentient species, although the resemblance is one of body form and basic

Mechalus Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series Ia
Environment: Class 1
GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P2/H3
Biome: Any
Encounter Chance: Possible
Group Size: 1–10 (d10)
Organization: Communal hierarchy
Niche: Advanced technological civilization
Intelligence: Human-equivalent sentient

chemistry as opposed to actual organ arrangement and genetic structure.

Mechalus tend to be marginally larger and heavier than the average human, but fall well within the expected human ranges. The mechalus skeletal arrangement is much simpler than a human's, with sturdier (but more rigid) joints that are less susceptible to sprains and injuries; this gives the mechalus a slightly angular, symmetrical frame.

The most distinctive feature of the mechalus is their techno-organic components. All mechalus possess mechanical skeletal, muscular, and nervous systems that parallel their organic systems. These weaves strengthen and reinforce their biological counterparts. The muscular-skeletal enhancements are fairly straightforward, but the parallel nervous system actually includes cytronic circuitry that makes each mechalus a living computer. A mechalus is marked with bands or veins of circuitry and metallic flesh blended perfectly with his living tissue.

Encounter: Mechalus have had a long time to get to know humans (if not quite so much time as the fraal). As individuals, they can function quite well in human society, and throughout Rigunmor territory they draw no more attention than any other traveler or businessman

Mechalus Game Data

NOTE: These statistics reflect a nonprofessional mechalus technician working in the cutting edge of a corporate or scientific enterprise. Just as with humans, most mechalus are not hero-class characters.

STR 10	(d6+7)	INT 11	(d8+7)
DEX 9	(2d6+2)	WIL 9	(d6+5)
CON 8	(2d4+5)	PER 8	(2d4+2)

Durability: 8/8/4/4 Action check: 11+/10/5/2
 Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Marginal/1 Last resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed	10/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Heavy weapon	5/2/1	varies	varies
Melee weapon	5/2/1	varies	varies
Ranged weapon	4/2/1	varies	varies

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 +1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [10], Unarmed Attack [10], Vehicle [9]—*land* [10], Stamina [8], Computer [11]—*hacking* [12], *hardware* [12], *programming* [13], Knowledge [11]—*computer* [13], System Operation [11], Technical [11]—*juryrig* [12], *repair* [12], Awareness [9], Culture [8]—*etiquette (Rigunmor)* [9], Interaction [8].



would. Mechalus can be found among the ranks of virtually all professions and careers.

Mechalus strike humans as cold, unemotional, and logical. Some of this perception is undoubtedly stereotyping based on the species' semimechanical appearance, but there's a grain of truth to it too. Mechalus lack the drive, the vision, and the creativity of the best and brightest among humankind. They may be capable of incredible intelligence and feats of pure logic and engineering, but they're also methodical, dogmatic, and predictable.

Mechalus gain a -1 bonus to any Computer Science or Knowledge—*computer operation* skill checks. They also possess two neural data slots that allow them to use computer programs. For example, a mechalus Combat Spec might carry an archive program holding detailed information about drive mechanics and an assist program for the Technical Science skill. Even though he doesn't possess any normal repair skills, he can use the computer programs to give himself these abilities (and might receive a special bonus on attempts to repair a stardrive because of his special knowledge).

Habitat/Society: Aleer is a close analogue of Earth, although it is smaller and warmer with an ozone-rich atmosphere that strikes humans as thin and acrid. Aleer's surface gravity is about 1 g, since its small size is set off by the density of the heavy metals in its crust. The seas are small and shallow, and the world's tropics comprise a wide arid belt that was the cradle of Aleerin civilization more than fifty thousand years ago. When the mechalus unified their world and transformed themselves into man-machine hybrids, they also performed extensive modifications to the other species on their homeworld, eliminating any that were perceived as dangerous or inefficient.

Aleerin lifeforms are unusually old and few in number by Terran standards. The planet has never endured the mass extinctions that

periodically changed the course of Earthly evolution. Very few species diverged into multiple forms. On Earth, *Homo sapiens* is only one species among dozens of primates all descended from a common ancestor; on Aleer, the mechalus are the only species in their genus. Aleerin creatures tend to be supremely well adapted for their niche and lack the versatility or competitiveness of Terran lifeforms.

Mechalus society is much more strongly bound to the community than to the family. Mechalus aren't emotionless machines, but they don't marry and don't raise their own children. Instead, mechalus parents view all the children of their particular community or cell as their own offspring. Emotional attachment of the sort that a human would feel for his spouse and family is, among mechalus, instead directed toward the whole mechalus species. Mechalus don't attach much emotional significance to sexuality, and they view reproduction as a duty to the race, not an expression of love.

The society as a whole is organized into something of a communal technocracy. Experts in each field of study or enterprise call the shots and coordinate efforts. It's assumed that each and every mechalus concerned will do his part, and if other mechalus spot problems or raise questions, the project in question halts until everyone reaches a consensus on the direction to take. Ambitious or self-serving humans can stall mechalus decisions indefinitely by pointing out faults, real or imaginary, in the plan.

Organizationally, the Rignumors consider the Aleerin system and all its inhabitants as one division or consortium within their empire. The mechalus leaders—the acknowledged heads of the most important professional fields—are accorded the same rank, privileges, and levels of access that a human in charge of a planetary enterprise would be granted. Beyond that, the Rignumors try not to concern themselves with how the mechalus manage their own affairs or administer their home system, as long as mechalus goods, starships, and expertise are still at their disposal.

Sesheyans

First encountered by a VoidCorp exploration venture more than two hundred years ago, the sesheyans are a primitive race barely out of their own Stone Age. Of all the alien species with whom contact has been made, the sesheyans received the poorest reception from humankind. With no regard for their culture, for their innocence, VoidCorp colonized their planet and dragged them from the formative years of their own civilization into humanity's sphere of interest. We'll never know how the sesheyans would have grown and evolved on their own, what kind of culture and civilization they would have made for themselves in the twilight deeps of their forest-world. It seems nothing short of miraculous that the sesheyans have survived this calamitous collision with the spirit of their species—their ways, their lifestyle—still intact.

The sesheyans are virtually indentured to VoidCorp, held in the heartless fist of that gigantic power. Visits to Sheya are strictly controlled by VoidCorp, and all other humans who have been allowed to meet the sesheyans on their homeworld have done so under heavy VoidCorp escort. Rumors abound of countless ses-

sheyans conscripted into VoidCorp's armies or deported to the most remote and undesirable enterprises to be found within the megacorp's sprawling territory. Alien-rights activists throughout the Concord have vigorously protested VoidCorp's policies toward the sesheyans, with little effect.

Description: In appearance, sesheyans are one of the most alien of the sentient species encountered by humanity to date. They are hexapedal flying creatures, with a pair of small forelimbs, powerful sweeping wings, and complex, double-jointed legs that end in clawed feet. In addition, sesheyans possess long, finned tails that flare open and act as stabilizers when the creatures are in flight. A typical sesheyans is about the same height as an average human, but weighs in at only 40 kilograms—a sesheyans's skeleton is mostly composed of light, strong cartilage.

The sesheyans's head is wide and round, ringed by eight small eyes and crowned by two pointed ears. The blunt snout covers a hinged jaw full of sharp, bony ridges instead of teeth. Their hearing

is as keen as a cat's, and their night vision is superior—but bright daylight virtually blinds them.

Sesheyans are capable fliers, able to launch themselves into the air and easily stay aloft in any environment with a reasonably thick atmosphere (0.5 atm or greater) and relatively light gravity (1 g or lower). Having the ability to fly means that sesheyans never suffer damage from falling, as long as they are conscious and able to control their descent. They are adept at functioning in zero-gravity conditions, receiving the benefit of the *Athletics-zero-g training* skill at rank 1 without having to actually possess the skill.

Encounter: Most sesheyans are indentured Employees of VoidCorp. They're quite rare outside of VoidCorp territory, and even within space controlled by the megacorporation, sesheyans are mostly found in special supervised colonies. The "typical" sesheyman is a laborer, assigned to a camp or station far from his beloved forests and given drudge-work of the worst sort. VoidCorp also enlists sesheyans in its military forces and counterintelligence services; they're not spies by nature, but sesheyans have the mentality of a hunter and learn very fast.

The sesheyman personality is much more regimented than the human personality. While a human shifts from curiosity to fear to wrath in the space of minutes with no mental effort, a sesheyman views the changing of his emotional state or outlook as an undertaking with great spiritual consequences. When a sesheyman decides

Sesheyman Game Data

NOTE: These statistics represent a nonprofessional sesheyman laborer or guard in VoidCorp's employ.

STR 9	(2d4+4)	INT 8	(2d4+2)
DEX 11	(3d4+3)	WIL 11	(2d4+7)
CON 7	(2d4+2)	PER 8	(d8+3)

Durability: 7/7/4/4 Action check: 11+/10/5/2
 Move: run 12, walk 4, fly 40 #Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Marginal/1 Last resorts: 1

Attacks

Wing strike	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Heavy weapon	4/2/1	varies	varies
Melee weapon	9/4/2	varies	varies
blade	10/5/2	varies	LI/0
Ranged weapon	5/2/1	varies	varies

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 no INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 +1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [9]—*climb* [10], *throw* [10], Melee [9]—*blade* [10],
 Acrobatics [11]—*daredevil* [12], *fall* [12], *flight* [14],
 Stealth [11], Stamina [7], Knowledge [8], Awareness
 [11]—*intuition* [12], Interaction [8].



that it is time to hunt, he deliberately calls up the Hunter in his heart and mind. To the Hunter, there is nothing to be gained by wasting time in debate with his fellows—there is only the chase. When the hunt is over, the sesheyan may shift his mind to the Dreamer, the Traveler, the Maker of Weapons, and so on. (It's worth noting that the most important archetypes have dozens of associated outlooks, such as the Waiting Hunter, the Feral Hunter, the Hunter Who Talks with Spirits, and so on.)

There are hundreds of these acquired personalities in the sesheyan worldview, each deeply rooted in ceremony and mythology. Many are spirits of nature or animal totems, while others are legendary heroes or wise men. By emulating these personalities and embracing the particular virtues or strengths each symbolizes, a sesheyan keeps in touch with his culture and adapts to the strange new universe around him. This unusual outlook also helps the indentured sesheyans under VoidCorp's control to accept their condition for the time being.

As a people of hunters, sesheyans are not afraid of physical confrontation. If violence is necessary, a sesheyan prefers to strike first and strike hard. All but the frailest or most pacifistic nonprofessionals have some kind of weapon skill. In addition to their flight ability, the keen senses of sesheyans negate darkness- or obscurément-

based combat penalties by two steps. However, their eyes are quite sensitive to bright light, and a sesheyan suffers a +1, +2, or +3 penalty to all actions undertaken in Ordinary, Good, or Amazing illumination. Dark goggles or visors can negate these penalties, and most sesheyans traveling offworld make use of such devices.

Habitat/Society: Sheya is the largest moon of Gamma Leonis III, a superjovian gas giant that glows just under the threshold of ignition. Although GL III is more than ten times farther from its sun than Earth is from Sol, its radiated heat makes Sheya perfectly habitable. Sheya itself is about the size of Mars, an impact-scarred world marked by vast craters, sheer mountains, and extensive rift valleys.

The dichotomous environments on Sheya—arctic uplands and lush lowlands—gave rise to two completely different evolutionary tracks. In the upper world, nothing more sophisticated than hardy insects and wiry scrub developed. The sesheyans, on the other hand, evolved in the ecosystem of the great equatorial rifts, canyons averaging 7 to 10 kilometers in depth. While Sheya's uplands are virtually Himalayan, its sheltered lowlands support great deep lakes and emerald forests. The atmosphere is significantly denser in the canyons; combined with Sheya's low gravity, it's easy to see how a sentient creature capable of flight evolved here. Sheya endures month-long eclipses behind GL III, and its valleys are shadowed by the great walls of rock, which means that very little sunlight reaches the forest floor.

Sesheyan social organization is fairly simple. Until VoidCorp landed on their homeworld, the sesheyans were an aboriginal race of hunters, moving from place to place as they saw fit. Family ties are quite strong, even to very distant relations, and the family leaders serve as a council to the tribe's chieftain. When two sesheyan tribes meet, it's not unusual for them to exchange entire families of twenty or thirty individuals and then continue on. This practice unifies the sesheyan tribes and promotes the spread of news and preservation of oral epics.

Sesheyan Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G1/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Rift valley forest belts

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1–6 (d6)

Organization: Tribal

Niche: Hunter-gatherer

Intelligence: Aboriginal sentient

T'sa

Of all the intelligent aliens encountered so far, the t'sa are the most like humans psychologically. They are driven by insatiable curiosity and determined to find a better way to do things. Their childlike exuberance and optimism, so deceptive to humans who don't know them well, are tempered by a keen analytical intelligence capable of astounding feats of innovation and ingenuity. Alone among humankind's interstellar neighbors, only the t'sa had overcome the immense engineering challenge of sublight interstellar travel and set out from their own home system to explore the cosmos prior to meeting the human species.

The t'sa were the unwitting instigators of nearly two centuries of fierce warfare among humankind. Orion League survey vessels discovered the T'sa Cluster on the eve of the First Galactic War, and the jealous jockeying for proprietary contact with this fascinating new civilization was one of the key flashpoints of the storm. And, since the Second Galactic War had its roots in the strife of the First, you

might say that the t'sa were responsible for both. Throughout both conflicts the t'sa maintained their independence, avoiding the imperial aspirations of their human neighbors.

Today the T'sa Cluster is a Concord Neutrality, a separate stellar nation in all but name. While several human powers still desire to lay claim to the system with the hope of incorporating these rich worlds into their empire, the t'sa themselves have held on to their autonomy.

Description: T'sa are smaller than humans, averaging 1.1 to 1.4 meters in height and weighing in at 30 to 50 kilograms. They are reptilian in general appearance, covered in colorful scales and having a snout full of tiny, sharp teeth. They are astonishingly fluid and quick in their movements, with wiry, flexible bodies and short limbs. T'sa scales are extremely hard and dense, capable of stopping a knife-thrust or even a low-caliber bullet.



Encounter: T'sa merchants, scientists, and explorers are a common sight throughout Concord space and the Verge. T'sa systemships are becoming an increasingly common sight in human space, and millions of t'sa have found employment as technicians and engineers outside their home cluster.

T'sa are skittish creatures by nature, much more likely to flee a confrontational situation than to meet force with force or even to attempt to defuse an adversary through diplomacy. Coupled with their small size and jittery body language, this has given them an unearned reputation as cowardly. T'sa try to avoid meaningless conflict, true—but if his work is endangered or his friends are threatened, a t'sa can turn all of his formidable intelligence and inventiveness to the discouragement of his tormentors.

T'sa Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series Ic

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A3/P3/H2

Biome: Any

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 2–24 (2d12)

Organization: Balkanized subracial states

Niche: Advanced terraformer/manufacturer

Intelligence: Starfaring sentient

T'sa are known far and wide for their maddening inquisitiveness and their friendly natures. They're quick to make friends, and unlike many humans with the same knack, a friendship formed in five minutes will last a lifetime.

T'sa are naturally quicker than humans (or just about any other creature, for that matter) and gain a –1 bonus to their action checks. Regardless of their actual profession or skill selection, they have a knack for working with technology and gain a –1 bonus to *juryrig* skill checks. (If a t'sa does not have the Technical Science skill, his untrained check is made against half his Intelligence score with a +d0 base situation die instead of half his score with a +d4.) Finally, t'sa have natural body armor (see "Game Data").

Habitat/Society: Taasa, the t'sa homeworld, is a large, metal-poor planet marked by countless lakes, swamps, and marshlands instead of seas. Its atmosphere is tainted by a moderate concentration of chlorine—not nearly enough to cause the planet to be classified as a Series III world, but sufficient to force the indigenous carbon-based lifeforms, such as the t'sa, to develop a tolerance to this toxic gas. Taasan evolution proceeded much like Earth's, although no arthropod-analogues (insects) ever emerged, nor did any mammals. Curiously enough, strong evidence exists to indicate that the forebears of the t'sa shifted from aquatic to terrestrial forms and back again several times over the course of millions of years before the evolutionary track settled down.

T'sa Game Data

NOTE: This is a nonprofessional t'sa technician, a capable engineer who is not a heroic character.

STR 7 (d8+3) INT 11 (2d4+6)
 DEX 12 (2d4+7) WIL 8 (d8+3)
 CON 7 (2d4+2) PER 9 (d8+3)
 Durability: 7/7/4/4 Action check: 12+/11/5/2
 Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Ordinary/1 Last resorts: 1

Attacks

Ranged weapon	6/3/1	varies	varies
Unarmed	3/1/0	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Heavy weapon	3/1/0	varies	varies
Melee weapon	3/1/0	varies	varies

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 +1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: d4+1 (LI), d4 (HI), d4-1 (En)

Skills

Athletics [7]; Manipulation [12]—*lockpick* [13]; Vehicle [12]—*land* [13]; Stamina [7]; Knowledge [11]—*deduce* [13]; System [11]—*engineering* [12]; Technical [11]—*juryrig* [12], *repair* [12]; Awareness [8]; Investigate [8]; Culture [9]; Interaction [9].

The t'sa are oviparous, or egg-laying, creatures. Their familial attachments are virtually nonexistent; due to their high metabolisms and small size, it only takes about three months for hatchlings to grow to adult size, so the t'sa never developed anything like the long-lasting parental bonds that tie human families together. The t'sa instead form lifelong bonds with their siblings, the dozen or so individuals who hatched from the same clutch of eggs. The female who laid the eggs cares for the hatchlings for the first couple of months of life and plays no further part in the young t'sa's lives. Naturally, t'sa don't fall in love or marry—adult t'sa have a mating cycle of one week every three to five years, and give no thought to the topic of reproduction at any other time.

T'sa society is utter chaos by human standards, which says a lot. At best it might be described as feudal in nature, a tangled system of patrons and clients without any clear division of position or nobility, but the allegiance is shared by an entire clutch of siblings toward another clutch of higher standing. In short, the peasant and all his brothers owe fealty to the lord and all of his brothers, who owe allegiance to the king and all of his kin . . . although it's not as clean-cut as that! This web of loyalties is known as a *xakksha*, which humans refer to as a kingdom for lack of a better word. These *xakksha*, in turn, deal among themselves in much the same way, a nebulous arrangement of loyalty and tangled alliances from weak nation to strong. There are hundreds of *xakksha* spread throughout the T'sa Cluster, each marked by minor variations in the scale pattern and other minor genetic traits.

The initial station of a t'sa brood is determined by the status of their mother's brood, but after that it's the accomplishments and abilities of the members of the young clutch that dictate the entire group's standing in society. It's not uncommon for one brilliant scientist or charismatic leader to carry his entire brood to greatness on his coattails.

Weren

The first preindustrial species of sentients to be encountered by humanity was the weren, a fierce species of warriors born and bred for battle. Until we met the weren, we thought that we were the most warlike species in this small corner of the galaxy, but the weren battle-lust dwarfs the human proclivity for violence, just as their hulking frames dwarf even the most powerful human bodybuilders. When Orlamu missionaries first visited Kurg, the weren homeland, two and a half centuries ago they found a species faced by its greatest challenge yet—although the weren were on the threshold of a renaissance of literature, learning, and science, their ceaseless warfare threatened to wreck everything they'd built and drag the entire world back into squalid savagery.

The Orlamu managed to pacify the weren through diplomacy and the introduction of their religious beliefs. Although the weren still feel the call to arms after all the years of contact with the Orlamu, these conflicts are now limited campaigns, fought under a Code of War to match the individual warrior's own Code of Honor. While the Orlamu deplore this behavior, there are limits to the amount of influence they

can wield over weren society. Some observers have even remarked that fighting of this sort is entertainment for the weren, a healthy release of the rage and aggression within.

Weren who find the ritualized battle of their homeworld too constricting often set forth into the stars, becoming mercenaries or soldiers for any of a hundred human nations or worlds. Others are

Weren Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H1

Biome: Temperate and equatorial zones

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1–6 (d6)

Organization: Feudal

Niche: Pre-industrial agrarian

Intelligence: Low-tech sentient

driven to explore the wonder and the mystery opened up to them by the arrival of the Orlamu, and take passage with Orlamu vessels just to see what's out there.

Description: Few humans possess the formidable physique of a weren. Armed with rock-hard claws and enormous strength, weren are 200 kilograms of muscle, fur, fangs, and rage. Instead of humanlike hands and feet, weren retain the distinct second joint of their quadrupedal ancestors; they walk on their toes, and their hands are very long and pawlike. The weren's dense fur is colored in soft striations of white, gray, and black.

Encounter: While most weren are extraordinarily intimidating, humans have little to fear from the typical weren warrior unless they pick a fight. The weren don't believe that it is honorable to do battle with those weaker than themselves, and don't go out of their way to threaten humans. Of course, different weren have different tolerance levels, and there are a few who won't hesitate to answer even imaginary slights with lethal force.

Regardless of their vocation or calling in life, weren throw themselves into any endeavor with gusto. They are surprisingly flexible

Weren Game Data

NOTE: While many weren are combat specialists, the typical weren is a nonprofessional character who simply happens to know some combat skills. Even weren have more farmers, craftsmen, and shepherds than dedicated warriors in their numbers.

STR 13 (d8+8) INT 8 (d8+3)
DEX 7 (2d4+2) WIL 7 (d8+3)
CON 12 (2d4+6) PER 7 (2d4+2)
Durability: 18/18/9/9 Action check: 8+/7/3/1
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Marginal/1 Last resorts: 0

Attacks

Claws	14/7/3	d4w/d4+2w/d4m	LI/0
Melee weapon	13/6/3	varies	varies
bludgeon	14/7/3	varies	LI/0
Heavy weapon	6/3/1	varies	varies
Ranged weapon	3/1/0	varies	varies

Defenses

Camouflage (see text)
+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
no INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [13], Melee [13]—*bludgeon* [14], Unarmed [13]—*brawl* [14], Stamina [12]—*endurance* [13], Knowledge [8], Animal Handling [7], Creativity [7], Awareness [7], Culture [7]—*etiquette* (Orlamu) [9], Interaction [7].



thinkers, although they're much more intuitive and emotional than deductive in their reasoning. This trait means that weren are very open to new philosophies, and, once exposed to an interesting idea, the weren are likely to embrace it with great passion . . . until another idea comes along to catch their fancy. Weren delight in debate and persuasion, viewing a war of words as an event nearly as exciting and important as physical combat.

A weren's claws are deadly weapons, especially when backed by the creature's great strength (note the damage listed in "Game Data"). The creature's innate toughness provides him with a durability rating equal to his Constitution score $\times 1.5$ (instead of $\text{CON} \times 1$, as with most other creatures). Finally, weren have a natural talent for camouflage. They can change the pigmentation of their fur at will to match their surroundings. Enemies trying to spot the weren or target him with ranged weapons suffer a +1 penalty to their skill checks.

All weren are considered to suffer from the effects of the Primitive flaw. This means that weren suffer a +2 penalty when making use of any technological device or weapon from Progress Level 4 or higher. To a weren's alien intelligence, principles considered elementary by humans seem to be nothing short of magic. Determined to preserve the forms of their warriors' codes, many weren have consciously rejected any new technology that might change the face of warfare on Kurg. It's a heinous crime to slay another weren with an Outsider weapon.

Habitat/Society: Kurg is a large, cold world by Earth's standards, orbiting its sun at about the same distance that Mars orbits Sol. Its equatorial regions are equivalent to the temperate areas of Earth, and Kurg's "temperate" zone consists of subarctic steppe, taiga, and mountains. Since large animals are more efficient at retaining heat in cold weather, Kurg's evolutionary track favored bulk. As impressive as weren are, there are plenty of creatures on their homeworld that can make a meal out of a weren.

Weren possess a family structure fairly similar to humans, although a weren clan is much larger and more contentious than even the most dysfunctional human families. Since weren females give birth to half a dozen young at a time, the first warfare a weren experiences is the struggle against his own siblings. Throughout life, a weren's family includes both his staunchest allies and his worst en-

Weren Flintlocks

Weren firearms tend to be much larger and more robust than the ancient human models depicted in the *Player's Handbook*, inflicting greater damage. A weren flintlock musket inflicts damage of $d8+1w/d8+3w/d6+2m$, and a weren flintlock pistol does $d6+2w/d8+2w/d4+2m$. All other game statistics (range, accuracy, etc.) remain the same. A human-sized hero who tries to fire one of these weapons suffers a +2 penalty above and beyond any other modifiers that apply, due to the weapon's mass and the strength of the recoil.

emies. This trend accelerates as a weren grows into maturity, and he begins to compete against his siblings for the right to claim leadership of the family. Many weren who prefer not to become entangled in these domestic disputes (or who do so and lose) choose exile, leaving their homeland behind and striking out on their own.

Two distinctive culture-groups have evolved among the weren: the nomadic herdsman of the subarctic steppes, and the agricultural settlers of the temperate zone. The scientific and philosophical renaissance of the weren is centered in the more populous kingdoms around the equator, and the Orlamu are well established in this area. These townlands are generally enlightened feudal states, ruled by noble clans who swear allegiance to higher nobles. Warfare between these states is ritualized with iron codes of conduct, as described above.

The nomads of the extreme north and south are far more ferocious, true martial cultures that have attacked the settled lands over and over again throughout weren history. Like the ancient khanates of Central Asia, they spend decades fighting among themselves in fierce clan-feuds until a great leader emerges to lead them in wars of conquest and pillage against the townlands. The nomadic weren subsist entirely on their prized herds of *marrizhe*, a large grazing animal analogous to the caribou or reindeer of Earth's northern lands. These cultures are far more resentful of the Orlamu presence on their world, and many have chosen to retreat entirely from contact with offworlders. Visitors to Kurg are warned to exercise caution in dealing with these native cultures.

Warbeast

Many horrors can be attributed to the Second Galactic War. Some of these were social and political in nature, but some were true nightmares that science unwittingly released upon the galaxy. One such horror is the genetically engineered warbeast. Developed by the Thuldans Empire, the warbeast was designed to be inserted into enemy strongholds or onto enemy worlds where its fierce nature and programmed instincts could then be turned loose in a frenzy of wanton destruction. Though the Treaty of Concord outlawed warbeasts and called for all records, research, and specimens of the creature to be destroyed, warbeasts continue to stalk worlds and outposts far from the Stellar Ring. In fact, recent evidence suggests

that the Thuldans still use warbeasts and that they have even sold both living specimens and invaluable genetic techniques to an underworld organization.

Description: A four-legged monster, the warbeast revels in hunting, fighting, and killing whatever it deems inferior to itself—and the creature has been genetically designed to consider itself superior to all other living things. Each of the creature's powerful legs ends in terrible claws, and its foreclaws have enough dexterity and range of motion to function as clumsy hands. Its exceptionally strong jaws contain rows of razor-sharp teeth that can slice through most types



of carbonate fiber. A whiplike tail extends from its hindquarters, providing an additional weapon for the beast to employ. Finally, armored plates and flexible armorlike skin covers the warbeast's body, giving it much the same protection as attack armor affords a human soldier.

Encounter: Two types of warbeasts might be encountered in the Verge. The first is the warbeast still active since the Second Galactic War. This creature continues to fight a battle that, at least officially, has been over for more than 30 years. Such creatures have honed their skills to a razor's edge, improving their abilities through constant practice and frequent battle. The second type of warbeast is younger, less refined, but no less dangerous. These creatures have

emerged from the gene-labs more recently and either serve a clandestine faction of the Thuldan Empire or the crime lord who acquired the technology by adding to the coffers of the Thuldan war chest.

The older warbeasts stalk remote portions of the Verge, though they are sometimes encountered in more populated areas. Only the most powerful and canniest warbeasts survive hunting forays that take them into Verge metropolises, because such locations throw every resource they have into locating and destroying the terrible creatures before they can cause too much harm. It is more likely that such a warbeast will be encountered traveling from one hunting ground to another (usually as a stowaway aboard a trader or other space vessel) than on an actual war prowl.

The younger warbeasts can be encountered anywhere, since those who still employ these illegal creatures are almost as remorseless as the monsters they command. Refined genetic engineering techniques allow the newer warbeasts to be instinctually programmed to hunt a specific target. Assassination is often the goal of those who send out warbeasts, but they are sometimes set loose to cause havoc and incite fear and panic. Even so, their craving for blood and destruction makes any living thing that gets in their way potential prey. And if a living thing becomes prey for a warbeast, it often winds up dead.

In either case, a living creature selected by a warbeast doesn't have long to live. The warbeast stalks its prey for as long as it takes

Warbeast Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Any

Encounter Chance: Slim

Group Size: 1 or 2

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Genetically engineered predator

Intelligence: Nontechnological sentient

to get the measure of its inferior enemy. Then, when conditions are right (the warbeast prefers to make its kill in isolated locations), it moves in for the kill. The warbeast feels nothing but contempt and hatred for all other creatures. Because of this attitude, it strikes quickly and without warning. It doesn't seek a fair fight or a long battle; it prefers to remove the inferior life from its presence by expending as little effort as possible. When prey proves tougher than the warbeast anticipates, the creature might withdraw to rethink its strategy. But even in such a case, its rage and battle-lust sometimes get the better of it, and it fights on even in the face of superior force. (A flaw in the warbeast's genetic makeup makes it unable to recognize an enemy as superior; it simply can't believe such a thing is possible.)

Though they seem to detest such items, warbeasts have been seen employing weapons and tools that can be used with a single hand, such as pistols and knives. Though not very dexterous, the clawed fingers of their forelimbs can manipulate tools and devices that aren't too small or delicate.

Warbeast Game Data

STR 11 (d6+6) INT 10 (d6+6)
DEX 12 (d6+8) WIL 12 (d6+8)
CON 8 (d4+6) PER 8 (d4+6)
Durability: 8/8/4/4 Action check: 16+/15/7/3
Move: run 14, walk 4, (jump 10) #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Good/2 Last resorts: 0

Attacks

Claws	13/6/3	d4+1w/d4+2w/d6+3w	LI/O
Tail	12/6/3	d4w/d4+1w/d4+2w	LI/O
Teeth	14/7/3	d6w/d6+2w/d4+1m	HI/O

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
no INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
+1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: d4+2 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6-1 (En)

Molecular Reconstruction: When all mortal points are used up (unless all are expended in a single attack), the warbeast's molecular structure breaks down and forms a puddle of protoflesh. After d20+4 hours, the warbeast reforms with improved attributes. This improvement takes the form of a 1-point increase in a defense related to the way it "died": If it was killed by a high impact attack, improve its HI armor rating by +1; if it was killed because of an environmental condition, it reconstitutes with the ability to survive in such an environment.

Skills

Athletics [11]—*jump* [13]; Melee [11]—*blade* [14], *bludgeon* [12]; Unarmed [11]—*brawl* [13]; Acrobatics [12]—*dodge* [14], *fall* [13]; Stealth [12]—*hide* [14], *shadow* [15], *sneak* [14]; Movement [8]; Stamina [8]—*endurance* [12], *resist pain* [10]; Awareness [12]—*perception* [14]; Investigate [12]—*search* [13], *track* [14].

The most terrible aspect of the warbeast is its ability to survive. This isn't just instinct, it's genetic. If a warbeast is killed either in battle or by a hostile environment, its DNA is designed to reconstruct the creature. When reconstructed, the warbeast adapts to the environment or weapon that killed it. Destroyed by radiation? The reconstructed warbeast returns with a higher tolerance for radiation. Killed by a laser beam? The reconstructed warbeast develops armor that's slightly more resistant to energy weapons. When a warbeast dies (all its mortal points are used up), it melts into a shapeless puddle of protoflesh that reforms in d20+4 hours. Only a massive amount of damage that wipes out its full complement of mortal points in a single attack can actually kill a warbeast.

Habitat/Society: The warbeast is a fast, powerful killing machine. It isn't just trained for war—its very nature impels it to track enemy targets and kill them. The creature's genetic code has been specifically designed to inspire this behavior. Every instinct the warbeast possesses directs it to kill quickly and efficiently. It acts without remorse, pity, or mercy, for these traits belong to lesser creatures. A warbeast is programmed to enjoy the hunt, to find great pleasure in destroying its enemies. The problem, as some Thuldan forces discovered firsthand during the Second Galactic War, is that the warbeast recognizes all other living things—including any other warbeasts—as its enemy.

The warbeasts still active since GW2 constantly seek new ways to sate their never-ending bloodlust. They hunt with purpose and uncanny intelligence, selecting targets and destroying them systematically and with great enthusiasm. When an opportunity to move on presents itself, a warbeast takes it, sneaking onto space transports or hiding in cargo containers in order to put some distance between its previous hunting grounds and its next killing field. Their hunter's intelligence has developed over the years into true intelligence—look into the eyes of such a warbeast and you can see pure hatred and an uncanny spark of self-awareness and reasoning ability that makes the creature even more frightening.

The older warbeasts are solitary creatures. Because they can't abide even others of their own kind, they never work together or travel in packs. The newer breed can be programmed to accept a war-mate, but will never tolerate any other warbeast in its presence. A genetically bonded pair can also be bound to a handler, who cares for them and conveys them from mission to mission. Most warbeast handlers are almost as dangerous and mean-spirited as their charges, though more than a few have been ripped apart by the warbeasts they care for over the years.

A typical handler is trained alongside a young warbeast or a bonded pair, giving both the opportunity to become familiar with each other and to develop into a team. A handler ferries his warbeasts to their target area, then releases them and waits for their return. In some instances, a handler takes part in the hunt. Freelance handlers take jobs throughout the galaxy, but most are employed by stellar governments, criminal organizations, or private corporations.

A handler wears thick gloves, padded armor, and heavy boots when working with his warbeasts. He carries a stun baton and an 11mm charge pistol, but if his beasts turn on him, there's little he can do.

Warbeasts are incapable of reproducing; the only way to create the creatures is in the laboratory.



Cykotek

Advances in cybertechnology have led to many benefits for humanity and its alien partners. Limb and organ replacement, enhanced body performance, and direct mental access to the Grid are just a few of the ways cybertechnology has improved the human condition. Not every society approves of cybertech excesses, however, and some have no tolerance of cybernetics whatsoever. Some of this relates to religious or societal beliefs, but some cybertech rejection can be traced to the cyber-abusers who have made life difficult for people throughout the galaxy: the humans and aliens who have embraced the cult of the cykoteks.

Cykoteks aren't numerous, though the stories concerning them have spread throughout human space. While a rogue cykoteke can appear anywhere, true cykoteke enclaves can only be found in about a half dozen secret locations. Those areas suspected of harboring cykoteks include star systems in Insight and Orion League space, an area of Open Space on the border of Rignunmor territory, and the remote regions of the Verge.

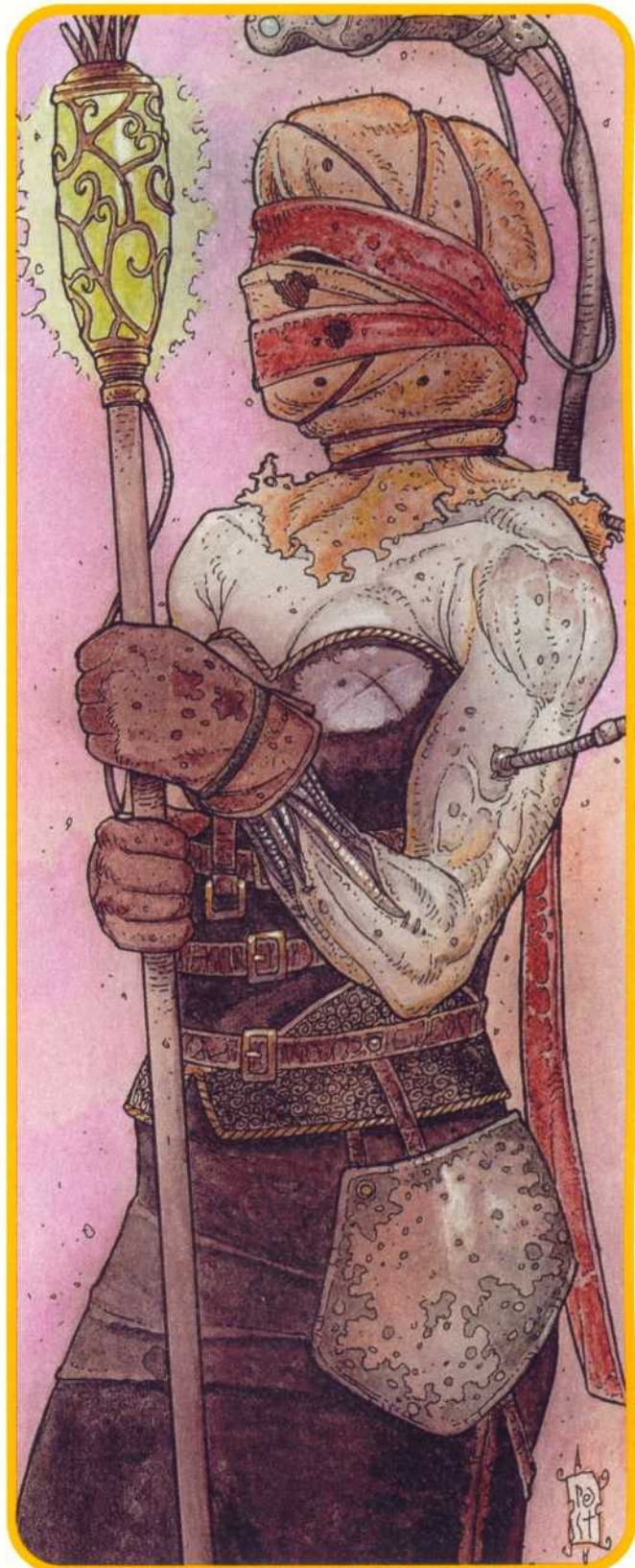
Description: The members of the death-dealing, flesh-hating cult known as the cykoteks can be of any major species. Humans make up the largest portion of cykoteke membership, while weren, se-sheyans, and fraal are almost unknown within the group. The t'sa are represented, and a few mechalus can also be found among their numbers.

A cykoteke is an individual who has taken the concept of better living through cybernetics to a new height. With more and more cybernetic components edging out living tissue, a cykoteke believes that metal is the state of the future and meat is the way of the past. Unfortunately, this compulsion to replace flesh with wires, metal, and plastic has a tendency to drive cykoteks insane.

In addition to a variety of cybernetic equipment displayed openly and proudly, a typical cykoteke wears the colors of his or her clan—garish face paint and body tattoos, relics of clan significance (hair, feathers, jewelry, bones), and tribal clothing signifying obedience to a particular cult leader. Every cykoteke also carries a relic that has personal and profound religious significance to each particular member: a skull of the cykoteke's species. The skull signifies that the cykoteke has triumphed over his or her flesh-self and is progressing toward perfect purity. In all cases, the skull comes from the cykoteke's first victim—the first murder committed after he or she has pledged to follow a particular cult leader.

Encounter: While cykoteks consider themselves to be members of a new religious movement, most of the rest of the galaxy sees them as members of a sadistic, dangerous cult. Cykoteks do little to alleviate these fears. Instead, they roam the galaxy as pirates, marauders, and ritualistic killers. They are an extremely violent group, taking their crusade to destroy all flesh from world to world—and stealing whatever tech and resources they need from their victims.

Two types of cykoteks might be encountered—cultists and rogues. Both types have two traits in common, though they aren't really part



of an all-encompassing religion. They believe that metal is superior to meat, and they have an insane hatred of those who haven't embraced the cyber madness.

The cultist travels with others of his kind. He finds a charismatic leader and follows that leader's branch of the cult. Like most violent cults or underworld gangs, cykoteck clans usually extend their hatred to other cykotecks who don't wear their colors or follow their leader.

Cultists travel in stolen vessels, behaving as raiders and pirates throughout the less protected portions of space. Though their insane bloodlust sometimes gets the better of them, cykoteck cultists usually operate at a level that doesn't attract the attention of any powers that can cause them serious harm. Once in a while, a Concord or stellar nation patrol will chase them out of a sector, but the cultists usually don't engage in activities that force the full might of a security detail to hunt them down. However, there have been incidences of cykoteck killing sprees both in Old Space and among the frontier regions.

Rogue cykotecks are individuals who either can't or don't want to locate a clan. In many ways, a rogue is more dangerous than a clan member. The rogue isn't just insane, he's also gripped by a religious fervor that drives him to commit greater and greater atrocities in the name of his cyber-induced visions. Some rogues become leaders of new clans; others challenge existing leaders for command of their

clans. Most rogues, however, are lone prophets who travel from system to system spreading their gospel of death and blood.

The cykoteck's weakness is his unwavering belief in the superiority of cyber technology. He refuses to fear opponents of mere flesh and blood. Most aren't so blinded by their madness that they continue to fight against superior firepower or forces, however. For technology to win the year, it sometimes has to lose the day.

The typical cykoteck is arrogant, violent, and thoroughly insane. He loves to inflict pain on those who refuse to give up their flesh and embrace the form of the future—a body that's cybered to the hilt. He is obsessed with acquiring the latest, most up-to-date cyber gear available. And he can't just possess it; he must have the gear installed, even if it means losing more of his fragile humanity.

Habitat/Society: Cykotecks aren't born; they're made. By accepting every bit of cyber gear he can, the cykoteck expresses his faith in machine over mind and body. But even an extensive amount of cyber gear isn't enough to drive a normal human insane. That requires a bit of illegal technology called the fast chip. A fast chip, when combined with a nanocomputer and reflex, allows a cybered person to operate on a level that's a step above normal people—it provides faster reflexes and reaction time, and greater mental acuity. Unfortunately, the fast chip has a terrible side effect. It can lead to the condition known as cykosis—a mental illness that plagues most of those who call themselves cykotecks. (There are cykotecks who don't suffer from cykosis; instead, they embrace the lifestyle and philosophy of the cykotecks of their own free will. This makes them even more fearsome monsters than those who suffer from cykosis.)

Cykoteck clans operate in a tribal society based on rule by might. Anywhere from a half dozen to as many as four hundred individuals follow a clan leader. They lead nomadic lifestyles, constantly moving to avoid capture and to find new targets to raid and new victims to kill. A religious fervor hangs over the clans. This is a side effect of the fast chip, which stimulates the portion of the brain most associated with belief, visions, and ego. Rogues demonstrate the same tendencies; they just carry out their practices on their own.

At least three cykoteck clans are supposed to be operating in the Verge. The smallest group, the Bone Hunters, is believed to consist of less than ten individuals. They travel in a souped-up cutter, sticking to remote trade lanes and sparsely populated outposts and space stations. It is rumored that a sesheyan cyber warrior leads this group. Known as Silver Ghost, this mysterious cult figure has been building a terrible reputation throughout the Verge. One story relates how Silver Ghost and his band took control of a research outpost and terrorized the scientists for nearly a week, killing eight of them, before they grew bored and left.

The Death Wires, whose membership numbers nearly fifty, travel the Verge in a ragtag collection of merchant vessels. They often pretend to be simple traders, coming aboard larger ships or space stations to satisfy their insane desires.

The largest clan in the Verge follows Jaklaw Three. He went on a murder spree throughout the Stellar Ring a decade ago, killing more than a hundred people and gathering a small army of cykotecks to his side. His clan disappeared seven years ago but was recently identified as one of the pirate bands prowling the Hammer's Star system. Jaklaw Three has an estimated three hundred pirates and a small fleet of traders and converted warships.

Cykoteck Game Data

STR 9	(d4+7)	INT 8	(d4+6)
DEX 10	(d4+8)	WIL 8	(d4+6)
CON 10	(d4+8)	PER 8	(d4+6)
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 10+/9/4/2	
Move: run 10, walk 4		# Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/1		Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

BattleKlaw	10/5/2	d4w+1/d4+2w/d4+3w	LI/O
11mm ch pistol	11/5/2	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m	HI/O
(subdermal mount)			

Defenses

Fast chip: -2 step action check bonus
 no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 no INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor (body plating): d6 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4+1 (En)

Cyber Gear

Ordinary BattleKlaw (left arm), various types of BioArt, Good body plating, Ordinary cyberlimb (left arm), fast chip, Ordinary MusclePlus (left arm), Ordinary nanocomputer, NIJack, Good subdermal weapon mount, reflex.

Skills

Athletics [9]-climb [10]; Unarmed [9]-brawl [10]; Manipulation [10]-pickpocket [11]; Modern [10]-pistol [11]; Stealth [10]-hide [13]; Stamina [10]-endurance [12]; Computer [8]-hardware [11]; Technical [8]-juryrig [12]; repair [10]; Interaction [8]-intimidate [12].

ALAUNDRIL



ur first port of call in the Verge, Alaundril is the oldest colony world in this region of space. First visited nearly two hundred years ago by a StarMech colony ship, Alaundril represents a tenuous link between the powers of Old Space and the frontier of the Verge. During the years of isolation imposed by the Second Galactic War, the citizens of Alaundril gradually absorbed StarMech assets and created their own nation-state, independent of any Old Space powers. Alaundril today maintains a fragile independence.

Recent diplomatic accords between the Concord and the leading mercantile empires of Alaundril ensured that the Kepler received any assistance we requested. Of course, Alaundril was initially surveyed more than 150 years ago, but Verge politics and the interruption of the war has blocked the return of all but a handful of biological assays. A great portion of StarMech's existing records on Alaundril's biosphere was lost during the war, but we were pleasantly surprised to find that Alaundrin universities (in particular, the biologists of the research station Providence) had extensively observed the fauna of their own planet.

Alaundril is the jewel of the Tendril system. No other planet in this system is close to being habitable. A hot, arid, desert moon suffering from intense UV irradiation, Alaundril is still well within Class 1 specifications. Its stark salt flats, golden sands, and rugged mountains are quite striking. — **RG, CLA**

Alaundril

Parent: Sperous (Tendril, F1)	Density (Earth = 1): 1.88
Orbital Radius: 362,014 km (3.67 AU from Tendril)	Surface Gravity: 1.14 g
Orbital Period: 30.84 days	Atmosphere: N ₂ , O ₂
Rotation Period: 77 hours	Pressure: 1.24 atm
Axial Tilt: Moderate (11.3°)	Median Temperature: 28° C
Diameter: 7,726 km	Satellites: None
	GRAPH: G2/R2-R3/A2/P3/H2

Alaundril is the largest moon of Sperous, the second planet in the Tendril system. Sperous is only about three times the size of Alaundril, and it has not yet tidally locked its smaller companion; the moon still rotates slowly as it circles its parent.

Over the course of geologic time, Alaundril has lost much of its water to UV photodissociation caused by its bright parent star. Its magnetic field is also weakening with time, and Tendril's intense radioactivity is scouring the surface more every year. Despite this, Alaundril is a viable world for human habitation; its warmth, amount of water, and scorching sunshine are still within human limits.

Life on Alaundril includes species closely analogous to those of Earth in many regards. The Tendril system is younger than Sol, so Alaundril's biosphere is characterized by a small number of recently evolved, relatively unspecialized species.

Egistron

The undisputed master of Alaundril's long, cold nights, the egistron (pronounced EE-jis-tron) is a large, aerial carnivore with a voracious appetite.

Native to the rugged, broken terrain of Alaundril's southern highlands and mountains, the egistron often covers dozens of kilometers of territory over the course of Alaundril's 38-hour night, slowly cir-

cling on the warm thermals that spiral from the cooling sand and rock of the deep desert.

Alaundril's dense atmosphere supports avian creatures much larger than those found on Earth; a full-grown egistron weighs in at 40 to 60 kilograms. It's easily capable of killing an adult human, and many people who disappear in Alaundril's deserts probably fall prey

TENDRIL : SPEROUS : ALAUNDRI : EGISTRON



25



to an egistron's attentions. Fortunately, the creatures have a strong dislike for light, and they avoid brightly lit places.

Description: The largest and most dangerous member of a family of aerial mammals, the egistron is deceptively slender and agile. Its wingspan often reaches 4 or 5 meters, and its wings are unusually short and broad in proportion to its body—like a falcon or a hawk, it's built for speed and maneuverability in a dive, not long-endurance soaring. Fliers of the egistron family have a body arrangement unknown in any other quadrupeds; the broad wings evolved from the creature's anterior limbs, while its striking talons evolved from its forelegs. The creature's small head features six small eyes spaced evenly around the forward hemisphere of the skull, and its mouth is lined with three rows of small, razor-sharp teeth.

Encounter: The egistron sleeps through Alaundril's long, hot day, lairing in a cave or crevice on a mountainside, boulder field, or escarpment. It avoids the open sand wastes and salt flats that characterize much of the moon's surface, since it cannot survive a full day of Tendril's sunshine in the ovenlike anvil regions. If disturbed during daytime, the egistron defends its lair with blind fury, trying to drive the intruders away.

Egistron Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R2/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Desert mountains and highlands

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1–6 (d6)

Organization: Family group

Niche: Medium carnivore (nocturnal)

Intelligence: High-order animal

At sunset, the egistron emerges from its den to hunt. Taking to the skies, it begins a series of short sweeps from its lair, using rocky elevations and crags as perches from which to strike. The egistron is most active and dangerous early in the evening, when it's hungry from its long nap and the daytime creatures haven't been driven to their dens by the cold of the night.

Travelers in well-lighted areas don't need to worry about egistrons; the creatures avoid bright light. Out in the blackness of the desert night, however, anything that moves is prey for the wolfbat. The egistron possesses extremely keen eyesight in the infrared

Egistron Game Data

STR 11	(d6+7)	INT 4	(Animal 11 or d6+8)
DEX 12	(2d4+7)	WIL 11	(d6+7)
CON 8	(2d4+3)	PER 2	(Animal 7 or 2d4+2)
Durability: 8/8/4/4		Action check: 15+/14/7/3	
Move: walk 6, fly 50		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			

Attacks

Bite	14/7/3	d4w/d4+2w/d4+4w	LI/O
Talons	16/8/4	d6s/d4+1w/d4+3w	LI/O

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d4–1 (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [11]—climb [14]; Acrobatics [12]—flight [16];
 Stealth [12]—shadow [14]; sneak [16]; Stamina [8]—en-
 durance [12]; Awareness [11]—intuition [14]; perception [16].

wavelengths, and it can typically spot man-sized prey from hundreds of meters away simply by its body heat. A cunning hunter, the egistrion observes its victim for a short time, planning its attack, then circles around to strike silently from above and behind the victim. (Check for surprise at a +3 penalty, or a +1 penalty if the intended victim is familiar with the egistrion's habits and keeping an eye out for the predator.)

The egistrion strikes first with its formidable talons as it swoops down on its victim. The impact of its strike is powerful enough to knock most people to the ground; if the egistrion attacks by surprise from behind, the victim must succeed at a Strength feat check to remain standing after the creature's strike. Once on the ground, the egistrion fixes its talons in the victim's back and clamps its small but strong jaws on the back of the victim's neck. Against a downed victim it automatically strikes twice per action, once with a bite and once with its talons. An egistrion abandons its chosen victim only if it suffers mortal damage or is confronted by bright light.

Habitat/Society: Egistrions live in mated pairs with two to five immature young. They have a strong familial bond, and young

egistrions remain with their parents until they're fully grown. As soon as the young can fly, the family hunts together; the parents make the kill while the young egistrions circle at a safe distance. As the younger egistrions grow into physical maturity, they practice their hunting skills under their parents' watchful eyes. Young egistrions leave the family of their own accord at about three to four years of age, searching for a mate. Despite their fierce nature, egistrions never engage in dominance battles or mating duels—the creatures shy strongly from any confrontation with others of their kind.

For decades, some of the more adventurous and wealthy Alaundrins have made a sport of hunting egistrions. It's a dangerous pastime, to say the least—according to local records, at least 100 Alaundrins have lost their lives this way in the last 10 years. A local merchant by the name of Aidole Bushur is now engaged in an effort to capture and breed wild egistrions, then export these dangerous predators to neighboring systems as game animals. Alaundril has no laws to prevent this kind of activity, and Bushur is paying a handsome price for each live egistrion brought to his desert estate. I have lodged an official protest with the Alaundrin government. — AV, CSS



Driven by the fearsome irradiation of Alaundril's sun and the harsh conditions of the Alaundrin desert, evolution has proceeded at a rapid rate on this world. A vicious struggle for the survival of the fittest has bred a variety of creatures dangerous to man. To be successful, an Alaundrin predator has to be smart, tough, and aggressive, ready to capitalize on any opportunity that comes its way. The gevin, like a number of other Alaundrin creatures, is all too ready to make a meal out of a human traveler. Unlike the egistrion or the sandgrotha, the gevin has no fear of humankind and is actually drawn to human settlements and outposts for the wealth of food concentrated there.

Description: The gevin is a six-legged arachnid with six strong legs and a covering of stiff, wirelike hair. It belongs to a family of megarthropoda with powerful bands of external connective muscle supplementing the musculature within its exoskeleton. This adaptation allows the gevin, and other creatures in its class, to reach sizes

impossible for terrestrial arthropods—in the gevin's case, almost 50 kilograms. The creature's head is a rigid section of its body, a convoluted mass of interlocking ridges surrounding a complex central mouth with two venom-dripping fangs. The gevin is eyeless and earless, but it compensates with an acute sensitivity to vibration and movement; it can sense the air displacement of a flying bird 20 to 30 meters distant.

Gevin are adapted for concealment and ambush. The creature's brown and yellow mottled hide blends perfectly with most colors and textures of sand.

Encounter: The gevin is an ambush hunter. It burrows into the sand, leaving nothing but its brown thorax-ridges exposed in the air. After waiting for hours in perfect stillness, the gevin bursts from its sandy cover with one powerful spring, covering up to 40 meters horizontally (or 20 meters straight up) in a single leap. Heroes are allowed an Awareness skill check to avoid being surprised by the gevin's sudden attack.

Slamming into the victim with bone-jarring force, the gevin stabs the hapless creature with its daggerlike fangs and then scuttles back, waiting for its potent venom to do its work. If the victim survives the first bite, the gevin gathers itself up and leaps again, seeking to inject more poison. Gevin are very persistent and not at all bright, and soldiers in powered armor have reported instances in which they were struck at dozens of times before the gevin finally gave up in exhaustion.

If the gevin's bite inflicts primary damage to the victim (in other words, if the victim's armor fails to stop all of the gevin's bite damage from getting through), the creature injects its poison into the wound. The victim must make a Constitution feat check at a +2

Gevin Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R2/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Sandy deserts and badlands

Encounter Chance: Possible

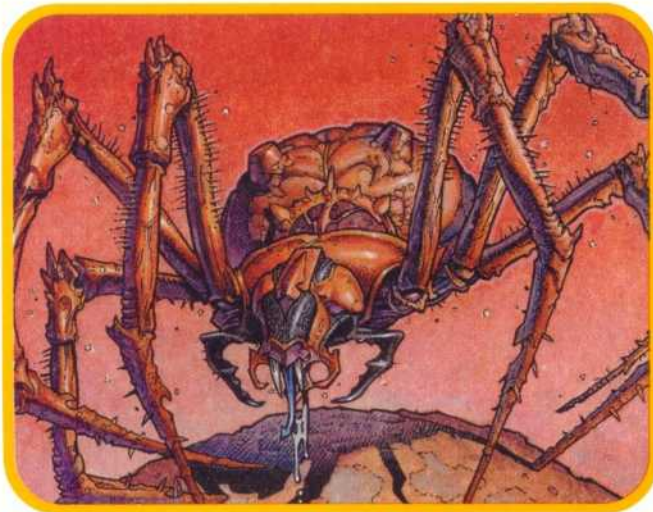
Group Size: 1–6 (d6)

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Medium carnivore

Intelligence: Low-order animal





penalty to determine the effects of the venom. The gevlin's poison is an alkaline neurotoxin with an onset time of 2d8 rounds and an attack duration of 2d4+2 hours.

Con Feat

Check Result Effect

Amazing	Nausea (+2 penalty to all actions for duration of attack)
Good	d6s, nausea as above
Ordinary	d6w, nausea plus partial blindness (+3 penalty for duration of attack)
Marginal	d6m, nausea plus partial blindness
Critical Failure	Death

After the victim is overcome by its venom (or at least badly weakened), the gevlin moves in and attacks with its bite. It automatically inflicts Amazing bite damage on each attack against an unconscious or helpless victim.

The gevlin is most active during the early morning and early evening of the Alaundril day. In the heat of the day and the chill of the night, the creature burrows deep into the soft sand dunes to escape the worst of the desert's temperature ranges.

Habitat/Society: Dependent on the vast dune seas of Alaundril's equatorial regions for shelter and cover, gevlin frequent the perimeter of these lifeless wastes. Adapted for burrowing under the sands,

Gevlin Game Data

STR 8	(d4+5)	INT 2	(Animal 5 or d4+3)
DEX 11	(2d4+6)	WIL 9	(d6+5)
CON 9	(2d6+2)	PER 1	(Animal 4 or d6+1)
Durability:	9/9/5/5	Action check:	13+/12/6/3
Move:	walk 8, run 30, (jump 40)	#Actions:	2
Reaction score:	Ordinary/1		

Attacks

Bite	11/5/2	d4w/d4+1w/d6+1w	LI/0
Poison	see text		

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d4 (LI), d4-2 (HI), d6-4 (EN)

Skills

Athletics [8]-jump [16]; Stealth [11]-hide [14]; Stamina [9]-endurance [12]; Awareness [9]-intuition [14], perception [16]; Resolve [9].

a gevlin makes no permanent lair but instead shifts its hunting ground once every few days, digging in and waiting for something to cross its path. Gevlin dislike bare rock and avoid regions in which they can't quickly swim into the sand to set their deadly traps.

Gevlin are not social creatures and show no signs of communication or cooperation between each other. However, local conditions that attract one gevlin are likely to attract several more, so it's not uncommon to run across a dune or basin infested with a number of the creatures. Gevlin mate once per year and lay a clutch of 15-20 eggs, burying them beneath the sand. Neither parent remains to tend the nest, so most young gevlin are quickly devoured by other desert predators.

Carry a few doses of gevlin antivenom when you travel in Alaundril's sandy regions. The medical community of this world developed an efficacious antidote more than sixty years ago. Also, be sure your gun is fully loaded or charged; gevlin fangs can prove just as lethal as gevlin poison. — RG, CLA

Sandgrotha

The largest and most dangerous of Alaundril's desert carnivores, the sandgrotha is an excellent illustration of evolutionary convergence. In appearance, temperament, structure, and behavior, it's a near-perfect replica of Earth's great cats. One of the most successful carnivore "blueprints" in the explored galaxy, large felines are found on almost a dozen different worlds. Alaundril is home to only seven distinct species of great cat; of these, the sandgrotha is the largest and most dangerous to human wayfarers.

Description: Nearly 3 meters in length, the sandgrotha is a muscular, tigerlike creature with rough, golden-brown skin and large eyes shaded by translucent membranes. Its retractable claws are black and brown, and its prominent white teeth remind many observers of Earth's extinct smilodon—the saber-toothed cat. Somewhat leaner and more sinuous than a tiger or a lion, the sandgrotha does not have ears; instead, it hears through elongated grooves on each side of the head, more sensitive to faint sounds than an external ear

but not as good at determining direction.

The sandgrotha is built for speed, not endurance. Its limbs are short and powerful, and its golden-brown hide enables it to conceal itself in desert surroundings with ease. The creature is noted for its high, hissing screech, an unnerving sound that can carry for kilometers through the rock-walled canyons and badlands it calls home.

Encounter: Sandgrothas always hunt in packs of three. One animal flushes out the prey with a slow, deliberate stalk, driving the victim or victims into its two hidden packmates.

These ambushers burst from cover and strike with blinding swiftness (an Awareness skill check to determine surprise definitely applies for heroes who aren't familiar with this tactic). In general, a sandgrotha trio gives human settlements and vehicles a wide berth, and rarely stalks humans—but in lean times, sandgrothas overcome their natural suspicion of the human scent and attack individuals or small groups that are traveling on foot. Weak or injured travelers in the deep desert are at greater risk than fast-moving, alert travelers who stay near the fringes of civilization.

In the pounce, a sandgrotha strikes with its two forepaws (two claw attacks) and a powerful, ripping bite. If the sandgrotha hits with its bite attack, it knocks the victim flat unless the victim succeeds on a Strength feat check. Once the victim is on the ground, the sandgrotha gains a -2 bonus to its attacks against the unfortunate individual. As an instinctive hunter, a sandgrotha is first inclined to kill its chosen prey, then drive off any threats in the vicinity (for example, other humans) before settling in to enjoy its meal.

Strictly a diurnal creature, a sandgrotha goes to ground at sunset and stays out of sight until dawn. Its eyes are adapted for visual acuity in Alaundril's blinding daylight, and it is virtually blind in darkness (double any darkness-based penalties that may apply).

Habitat/Society: Sandgrothas prefer the same kind of rugged lands favored by the egistron—rough hills, badlands, and boulder fells along the desert fringe. They're most active in the early morning and late afternoon, resting during the hottest portion of the day. Most Alaundrin creatures avoid being out and about for the period



from 30–60 hours after sunrise, anyway, so there isn't much for the sandgrotha to hunt at this time.

Sandgrothas form trios of one adult male and two adult females by nature. This trio remains extremely close for a few months, hunting, sleeping, and mating, then breaks up with the arrival of any new cubs. The male seeks out two new partners, while the mothers isolate themselves to raise the cubs. Young sandgrothas leave their mother at about two years of age, going off to find a trio to join, while the mother returns to the search for a trio of her own.

The sandgrotha trio is one of the more unusual social groupings I've come across in my survey. The degree of communication and cooperation in a trio is remarkable. One might almost expect that these great cats possess a latent psi ability of some kind, but I've found no evidence of any unusual psionic awareness. — AV, CSS

Sandgrotha Game Data

STR 13	(2d4+8)	INT 3	(Animal 10 or d6+7)
DEX 11	(2d4+6)	WIL 11	(d6+8)
CON 11	(2d4+6)	PER 3	(Animal 11 or d8+7)
Durability: 11/11/6/6		Action check: 15+/14/7/3	
Move: run 50, walk 10, (jump 10)		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			

Attacks

Bite	14/7/3	d6+1w/d8+1w/d4m	LI/0
Claws (×2)	16/8/4	d4+1w/d6+1w/d6+2w	LI/0

Defenses

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

Skills

Athletics [13]—climb [14], jump [16]; Stealth [11]—hide [12], shadow [16], sneak [14]; Stamina [11]—endurance [16]; Awareness [11]—intuition [14], perception [12]; Resolve [11].

Sandgrotha Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R2/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Arid foothills and badlands

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 3–6 (d4+2)

Organization: Pride

Niche: Large carnivore

Intelligence: High-order animal



DELPHIN

Delphin should be nothing more than a mining property to be bought, sold, and stripped as its owners decide. It's covered in poisonous smog, it's completely desiccated, and its parent star is a seething blue hell of radioactivity—but somehow life has evolved here. Despite the claims of the so-called Delphin Development Division of StarMech ("Triple-D," as the locals of the Tendril system like to call it), this is not a lifeless wasteland ... which means that their operations fall under a much closer scrutiny than some of the StarMech executives might like.

After obtaining suitable shielding and surface gear on nearby Alaundril, we spent five weeks sampling the planet surface, selecting random landing sites spaced around the globe. At first we saw no reason to give credence to the local rumors of hostile sentients; conditions were abominable, with temperatures averaging 70° to 90° Celsius and brutal windstorms that reduced visibility to 10 meters or less. Eventually, we learned that the great sand seas of Delphin are mostly lifeless, and that the planet's lifeforms prefer the conditions near the volcanic rift valleys and the iron carbonyl seas.

At this time, I've placed an injunction against StarMech to suspend its terraforming operations until a Concord-certified survey team can determine the exact habitats and intelligence levels of the creatures native to this world. — **RG, CLA**

The first planet in the Tendril system, Delphin was probably an Earth-sized mass during the system's early formation. When Tendril ignited, most of Delphin's volatiles were blown away, leaving nothing but an iron core surrounded by a thin, charred mantle of carbon, silicon and oxygen—rock and sand.

Delphin might have developed as a Mercury- or Venuslike world, but it is extremely volcanic. Outgassing of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, combined with vast metal-rich lava flows, have created a nightmarish landscape of barren sand marked by ephemeral lakes of iron carbonyl.

Delphin

Parent: Tendril, F1

Orbital Radius: 2.74 AU

Orbital Period: 3.38 years

Rotation Period: 16.01 hours

Axial Tilt: Minimal (2°)

Diameter: 8,406 km

Density (Earth = 1): 2.78

Surface Gravity: 1.83 g

Atmosphere: CO, CO₂, Fe(CO)₅

Pressure: 1.60 atm

Median Temperature: 80° C

Satellites: Two

GRAPH:

G3/R4-R5/A3/P3/H3-H4

Calliope

The calliope appears to be one of the most advanced of Delphin's unusual but efficient lifeforms. It is a dangerous cooperative hunter, armed with a battery of rigid, dart-throwing tubes in the center of its body. The creature is, quite literally, a living minigun.

*There is strong evidence to suggest that this is not an unintelligent species. Given its formidable natural armament, the calliope may be a sentient that, because of its dominance in its ecosphere, has never needed to develop tool use. — **AV, CSS***

Description: The calliope's body is a soft globe about a meter in diameter, with seven long tentacles or pseudopods trailing its body. Its mouth is located in the middle of its underside, between the tentacles. In the center of its forward or upper surface, seven bony tubes are situated in a ringlike structure; these are the creature's dart-throwers. Seven stalked eyes are located around its equator. Overall, it bears a passing resemblance to a terrestrial octopus, but the calliope is far stronger and more agile—beneath its tough, rubbery

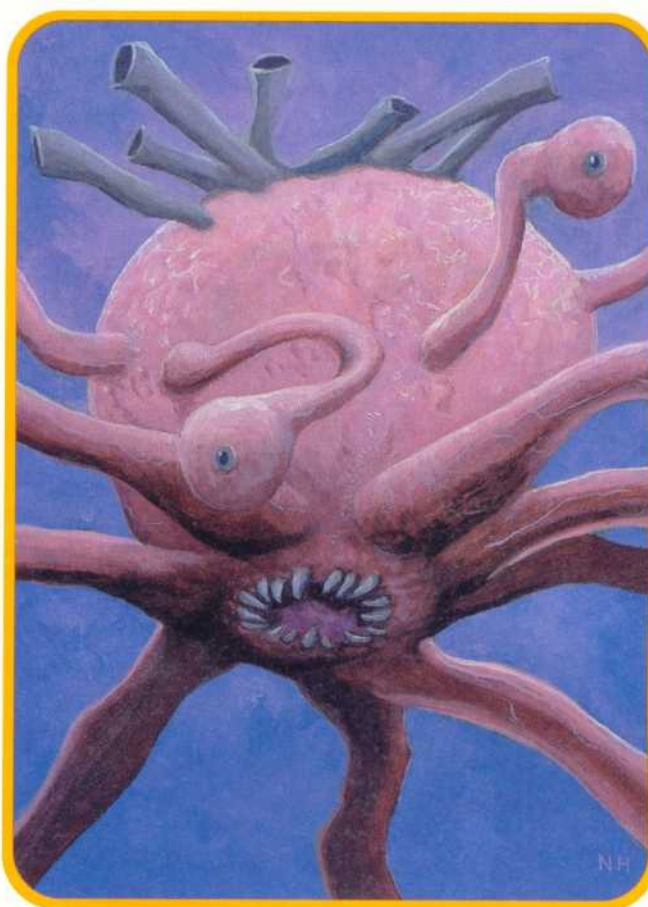
hide are extremely dense, semirigid cordlike tissues of tightly wound organic metals. This serves as both the creature's muscle and its skeletal structure at the same time.

Encounter: In the first years of humanity's presence on Delphin, calliopes gave human facilities and vehicles a wide berth, avoiding contact as much as possible. In recent months, this behavior has begun to change, with some calliopes refusing to retreat from human incursions or actually approaching individual humans or small groups. Perhaps familiarity breeds contempt, or perhaps the calliopes have simply lost their fear of these newcomers to their world.

To date, no attempts to initiate communication with these creatures have succeeded. At first, they were shot as dangerous animals when they wandered too close to human installations. The calliopes soon learned to burrow out of sight when confronted with too many humans at one time . . . but isolated posts and lone wayfarers started disappearing, provoking speculation that the calliopes were striking back.

Recently, the calliopes have grown more aggressive, deliberately attacking humans wherever they encounter them. News of this unpleasant development has been suppressed by StarMech and is not widely known offworld.

Calliopes are skilled at setting ambushes. In Delphin's sandy wastes, a calliope can submerge itself until only its eyestalks show. It takes a mere flick of its tentacles to bring its dart tubes into firing position. A calliope fires all seven darts at one time, always at a single target, but after this formidable volley it requires 3 to 8 hours (d6+2) to grow new darts and amass the carbon monoxide it needs to fire its weapons. The darts have a short range of 20 meters, a medium range of 80 meters, and a long range of 160 meters; the seven-dart volley is treated like an autofire attack against a lone target. For example, if a calliope has a base situation die modifier of +1



when it shoots at a hero, roll the control die plus a d4, a d6, and a d8 to see if the calliope scores 0, 1, 2, or 3 hits.

If the calliope's prey is disabled by its dart attack, it closes in to finish off its foe by tearing it to pieces with its powerful tentacles. Two tentacles can attack simultaneously in any phase in which the calliope has an action.

Habitat/Society: Calliopes cannot tolerate the heat of Delphin's equatorial zone, and live in the higher latitudes. The primary type is found in the northern hemisphere, from latitude 40° N on up to the polar region, but a second population inhabits the south polar region as well. This second group shows different coloration and body characteristics, which is evidence of a fairly long separation from the main group.

As nomadic hunters, calliopes appear to make no permanent structures or lairs. They simply burrow into the sand at dusk and

Calliope Game Data

STR 12	(d8+8)	INT 6	(d6+3)
DEX 9	(d6+6)	WIL 11	(d6+8)
CON 9	(2d4+4)	PER 9	(d6+6)
Durability:	9/9/5/5	Action check:	13+/12/6/3
Move:	run 30, walk 6, (burrow 4)	#Actions:	2
Reaction score:	Ordinary/2	Last resorts:	1

Attacks

Darts	13/6/3	d4-1w/d6-1w/d8w	HI/O
Tentacles (×2)	14/7/3	d4+1s/d6+1s/d4w	LI/O

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
-1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
+1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: d8+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d4+1 (En)

Skills

Stealth [9]-hide [12]; Movement [9]; Stamina [9]-endurance [12]; Awareness [11]-intuition [13]; perception [15]; Resolve [11]; Interaction [9].

Calliope Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VII (iron carbonyl)

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G3/R4/A3/P3/H3

Biome: High-latitude sandy wastes

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 7-12 (d6+6)

Organization: Family group

Niche: Hunter-gatherer

Intelligence: Subsentient



wait out the night. Calliopes travel in small family groups of seven to twelve individuals. When one group encounters a second group, they usually halt their wandering for a period of three to five days, exchange one or two members, and spend a lot of time in close con-

tact. Dr. Veras of the Concord Survey has suggested that this is a conscious social behavior, not an instinctual one—a sort of town meeting between neighbors in which news is exchanged, mates chosen, and ceremonies or observances performed.

Centurion

While the intelligence of the calliopes is still in doubt, it seems clear that the centurions are sentient. These creatures are small omnivores that live in large warrenlike communities near the carbonyl lakes of the planet's torrid zone. They cultivate shallow ponds of Delphin's scum- and seaweedlike plant life, use simple tools, and demonstrate advanced social behavior. Since they inhabit some of Delphin's least desirable terrain from a human point of view, the centurions have been left alone to date. — RG, CLA

Administrator Grant may be mistaken in his assessment. Earth's communal insects—ants and termites—also build cities, cultivate food, and fight wars. It might be useful for the Concord to spite StarMech by declaring these creatures to be sentients, but I believe there is insufficient data for this conclusion. — AV, CSS

Description: The centurion, like all Delphinite animals, is radially symmetrical with seven limbs. Four limbs serve as articulated legs, and three interspersed limbs are positioned to serve as arms. Its head consists of a small beaked mouth ringed by eyes on a long, prehensile neck. At rest, this member is retracted face-up into the centurion's thick torso, but it can extend its mouth and eyes almost a meter from the body. Overall, the creature is about a meter and a half in height, and its spindly legs span a distance of about two meters. In profile the centurion looks a little like a squatting humanoid with a long, thin neck and a tiny head.

The centurion belongs to a different order from the calliope, having a true exoskeleton of metallic compounds. Its limbs are jointed, with broad claws for "feet" and "hands." It shares the extremely tough cordlike musculature of the calliope within its exoskeletal frame, and is surprisingly resilient and powerful for its size.

Encounter: Centurions are relatively nonaggressive in their own lairs, but very dangerous when away from their cities. Within the



ponds and fields tended by the members of a city, and even within the warren itself, centurions are inclined to ignore small numbers of intruders. Bold humans have wandered throughout centurion warrens without provoking any response except a passing inspection. However, this can change in a split second. Humans who molest centurions in their nest, damage the city or any of the outlying structures, or approach in great numbers instantaneously trigger a "defense mode" in the nest. All the centurions present drop whatever they're doing and muster to drive out the offenders.

Curiously enough, showing bright lights near the warren also provokes this response; the centurions are accustomed to Delphin's endless murk and react negatively to artificial lighting of any kind, scurrying back into shadows as quickly as their legs will carry them.

Centurion foraging parties are also dangerous. The entire band seems to be set on "attack mode" and relentlessly pursues any prey it encounters. Foragers may march for hundreds of kilometers from their home, traveling for weeks along the lakeshores and lava flows. Several human campsites or outposts on Delphin that have disappeared without a trace were probably wiped out by centurions on the march.

Communication with centurions hasn't gotten very far yet. Foragers don't talk, and centurions in the nest either disregard or attack any intruders. Individually, they seem nearly mindless, but it might be possible to communicate with the nest as a whole.

In combat, a centurion can attack with weapons of cold-worked iron. Its favored weapon is a short stabbing spear, although bladed maces and long daggers are also employed. Due to its extra arm, a centurion can fight with two one-handed weapons simultaneously at no penalty. The centurion can also bite an opponent with its retractable mouth.

Centurion Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VII (iron carbonyl)

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G3/R4/A3/P3/H3-H4

Biome: Low-latitude volcanic wastes

Encounter Chance: Possible

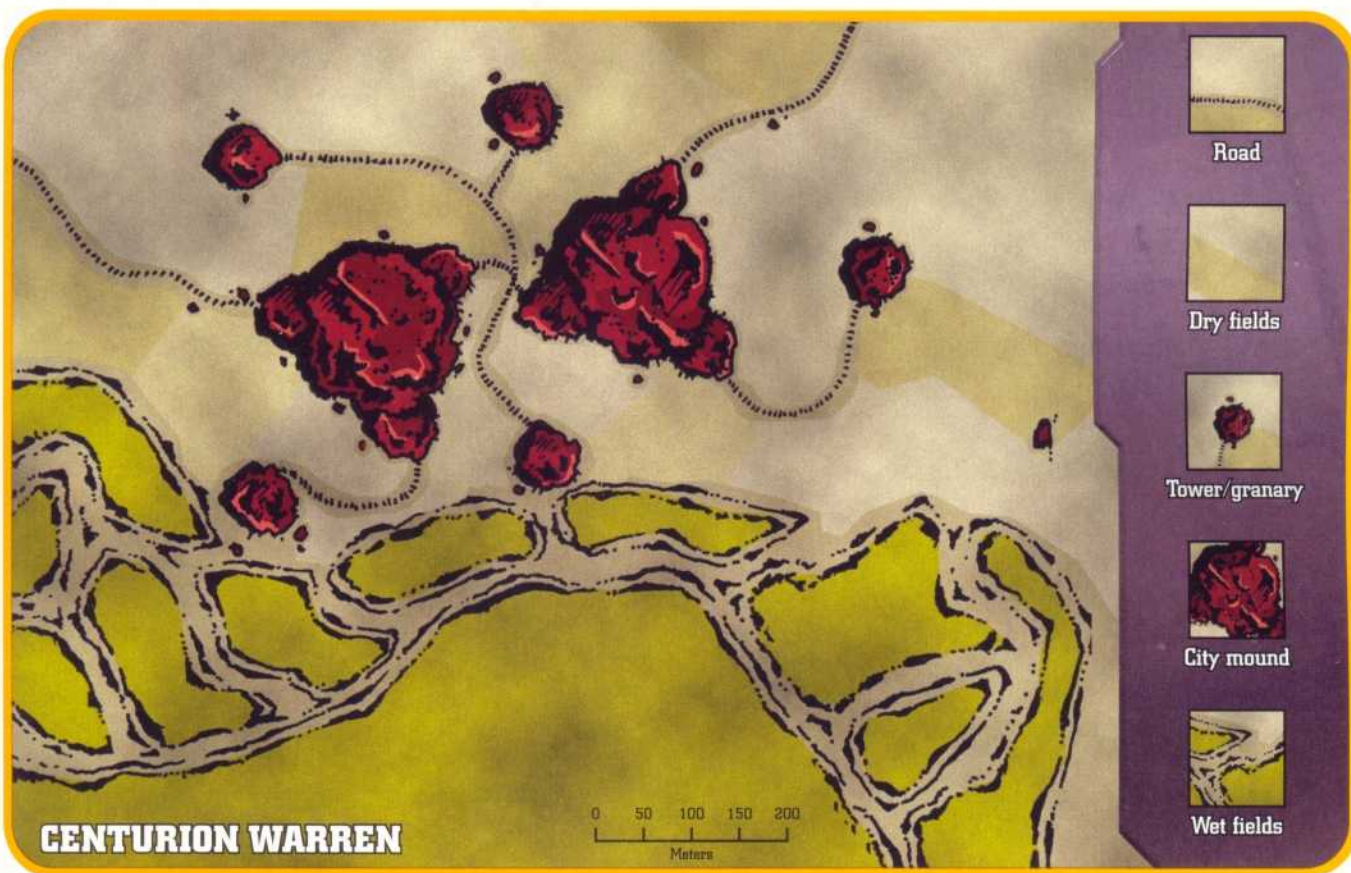
Group Size: 10–60 (10d6)

Organization: Nest

Niche: Simple cultivator/forager

Intelligence: Subsentient





Centurion Game Data

STR 10 (d6+6) INT 6, 9 (f, m) (d6+2, 2d4+5)
 DEX 11 (d6+8) WIL 9 (d6+6)
 CON 7 (d4+5) PER 7, 11 (f, m) (d6+3, d6+7)
 Durability: 7/7/4/4 Action check: 11+/10/5/2
 Move: run 20, walk 10 #Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Ordinary/1 Last resorts: 1 or 2
 Psionic energy points (males only): 9

Attacks

Weapon (×2) 12/6/3 d4w/d6w/d6+2w LI/O
 Bite 10/5/2 d4-1w/d4w/d4+1w LI/O

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 no INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills and
 psionic attacks
 Armor: d4+3 (LI), d4+2 (HI), d4+2 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [10]; Melee Weapons [10]; Stamina
 [7]-endurance [10]; Knowledge [6 or 9]; Awareness
 [9]-intuition [14]; perception [14]; Resolve [9]-mental
 [14]; Interaction [7 or 11].

Males (1 centurion in 500) also possess Telepathy,
 with a -5 bonus vs. other centurions.

Habitat/Society: Centurions are resistant to the climatic extremes of Delphin's surface, but they require large amounts of what passes for water on their planet in order to maintain their warrenlike cities. In order to meet this need, the centurions typically locate their cities close by Delphin's shallow lakes of iron carbonyl. Since these lakes are only found in regions of ongoing volcanic activity, and are ephemeral phenomena at best, a centurion city rarely stands for more than a dozen or so years before it must be abandoned and a new one built.

A typical city may include up to ten thousand individuals, although cities of two to five thousand are more common. The city's area of cultivation may sprawl for two or three hundred square miles. Delphin's vegetation consists mostly of black algae and scum, although a few simple grass-mats and seaweeds can be found near the more fertile areas. The centurions work tirelessly to buffer the carbonyl lakes against their natural tendency to evaporate or fill in with windblown sand.

Centurions have two genders, but males are extremely scarce. They act as community leaders, controlling and directing the affairs of the city, while the females serve as workers and warriors. Males do not venture outside the city, and do not make themselves readily available to visitors of other species or even to other centurions.

Although we did not encounter any male centurions, I strongly suspect that they may be telepathic, serving as the mediums or directors of the nest. Perhaps this is the secret of their group mind—each male maintains a rapport with hundreds of females in its sector, and with each of the other males in the city, submerging its individual consciousness into the communal whole. — AV, CSS

Shuriken

Delphin's atmosphere is a turbulent, murky maelstrom of unpredictable winds, volcanic gases, and cyclones of sand and grit. It is also home to an ecology of windborne plants and animals. None of Delphin's creatures are true fliers; the high gravity and fierce winds make directed flight nearly impossible for anything smaller than an airplane. However, a few animals are gliders or drifters that ride the wind, going wherever the currents take them. The shuriken is one of these, a small predator that ranges hundreds of kilometers each day.

Description: The shuriken is a seven-limbed, radially symmetrical creature. Four arms are spaced at even intervals around the edge of its disk-shaped body, connected to it by tough membranes that act as wings. The other three limbs are clawed, whiplike tentacles spaced evenly about its lower body. The creature measures 2 meters from wingtip to wingtip, and its whips are about 1 meter long. Its body is 10 centimeters thick and 50 to 80 centimeters across.

The shuriken has no skeleton, but it does possess a shell of hardened silica that protects the creature's upper surface. Extending from this carapace are long, sharp blades that overhang its arms. These weapons give the shuriken its name; it attacks by gliding out of Delphin's winds to impale its prey on these bladelike projections.

Encounter: Shurikens are not intelligent, and aren't very good hunters. They rely completely on chance to bring prey their way (or, more precisely, to bring them to where there's something they can eat). They're dangerous when Delphin's fierce winds are blowing; during calm periods, the shuriken is nearly helpless, and it burrows into the sand wherever it falls to wait for the wind to pick up again.

Shurikens use an acute echolocation sense to detect prey. This innate sonar has a range of hundreds of meters even in the worst of Delphin's sandstorms, and will steer a shuriken toward any object that appears not to be a part of the natural terrain. If a shuriken misses on its first pass at a target, it requires a successful *Acrobatics-daredevil* skill check to angle back for another pass—otherwise the wind just keeps carrying it past its prey.

When a shuriken strikes an opponent, it lands immediately and scuttles toward its prey, using its whiplike tentacles to finish off a wounded target. If the foe shows too much resistance, the shuriken spreads its wing-membranes and takes flight, leaving the scene.



Habitat/Society: Shurikens are not often seen by humans; during periods of calm they're under the sand, and during windstorms they enjoy excellent mobility and cover, making them difficult to spot. The only place shurikens aren't found is in Delphin's volcanic regions, since there's little sand cover for them to hide in.

Shurikens appear to take little or no notice of each other and have minimal social behavior. While resting, shurikens often burrow into cover near each other, but when the winds rise again they go their separate ways. Shurikens mate in the air about once per year; the female strews thousands of microscopic eggs on the winds, only a tiny fraction of which survive to become adult shurikens.

Shuriken Game Data

STR 7	(d4+5)	INT 2	(Animal 7 or d6+4)
DEX 12	(d4+10)	WIL 7	(d4+5)
CON 6	(d4+4)	PER 2	(Animal 6 or d4+4)
Durability: 6/6/3/3		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: walk 6, glide 60		#Actions: 1	
Reaction score: Ordinary/1			

Attacks

Impale	13/6/3	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	LI/O
Whip	8/4/2	d4s/d4+2s/d4-1w	LI/O

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d8-1 (LI), d8-2 (HI), d8-3 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [7], Acrobatics [12]-*daredevil* [13], Stamina [6], Awareness [7]-*intuition* [8], *perception* [10], *Resolve* [7].

Shuriken Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VII (iron carbonyl)

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G3/R4/A3/P3/H3-H4

Biome: Open desert, aerial ecosystem

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1-4 (d4)

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Medium carnivore and scavenger

Intelligence: Low-order animal

ANTIGUA

Matching Earth almost exactly in composition, temperature, and general characteristics, Antigua has only three flaws from a human point of view. First, it exerts an uncomfortable 2 g at its equator, with a correspondingly thick atmosphere at sea level; second, it is a metal-poor planet with few mineral resources worth exploiting; and third, it is inhabited by a thriving race of primitive sentients who are thoroughly xenophobic.

Personally, I find all three factors to be fortunate accidents, in that Antigua's diverse and exotic biosphere is likely to remain unspoiled. Antigua is a pristine world, virtually untouched by human mining outposts, colonies, manufacturing facilities, or terraforming equipment.

I believe that Antigua represents an unparalleled opportunity for the Concord to exercise its moral authority to prevent the exploitation of a developing civilization. We should do so before one of the old stellar nations takes a serious interest in this planet and its native sentients. — *AV, CSS*

At first glance, the world of Antigua shares many of Earth's characteristics and features. Skies, seas, mountains, and weather are all remarkably Earthlike. The sole exception is Antigua's size. It is considerably larger than Earth, with a correspondingly greater surface gravity.

Antigua is slightly warmer than Earth, and its open oceans, minimal seasons, and warm climate lead many humans to compare the planet to Earth's tropics. Evolution on this world followed a different path than it did on Earth; mosses, ferns, and armored conifers are the most advanced plants on Antigua, while nothing resembling the vertebrates ever appeared. Antiguan animals include a great number of sponges, jellyfish, worms, and an odd phylum of exoskeletal fish. Echinodermlike creatures (starfish, urchins, and their kin) developed an amazing diversity of species, including the ke'kekt.

Antigua

Parent: Ignatius, G0	Surface Gravity: 2.03 g
Orbital Radius: 1.3 AU	Atmosphere: N ₂ , O ₂
Orbital Period: 516.1 days	Pressure: 1.8 atm
Rotation Period: 29.9 hours	Median Temperature: 18.7° C
Axial Tilt: Minimal (4.8°)	Satellites: One
Diameter: 18,990 km	GRAPH: G3/R1/A2/P3/H2
Density (Earth = 1): 1.36	

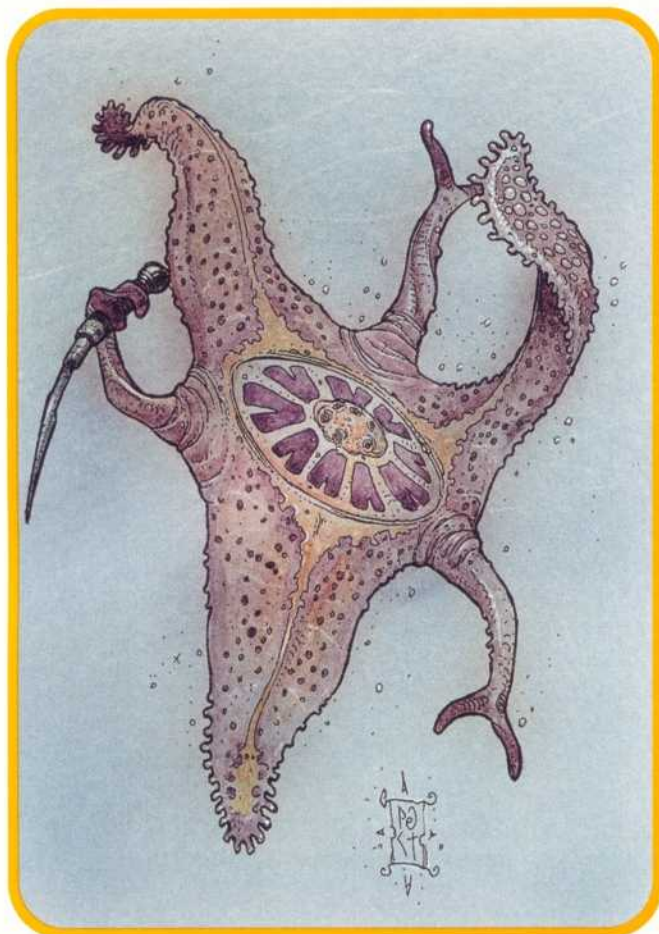
Ke'kekt

First encountered by Thuldan exploration teams over 130 years ago, the ke'kekt (pronounced Kay-KEKT) are a primitive race balkanized into thousands of mutually hostile communities. Neighboring villages frequently raid each other to the point of mutual annihilation, and the few offworlder outposts maintained by the Alaundrins must be guarded continuously against the threat of ke'kekt attack. While communities are likely to be warlike and hostile, individual ke'kekt are neither stupid nor murderous, and are capable of forming alliances, partnerships, or friendships with offworld visitors.

Description: A ke'kekt is a six-armed creature that bears a passing resemblance to a starfish. Three opposing limbs are thick and strong, acting as legs. The three intermediate limbs are thinner and longer, forking at the end for use as manipulative digits. Its beaked mouth is located on the underside of its body, but its six eyes are arranged in a ring around the center of its upper surface. Its brain, stomach, and all other vital organs are located in the thick disk of its central body.

Most ke'kekt are very slow and deliberate on land. They can't re-





ally run or swim, although they can scuttle across the ground or sea bottom at something like a fast walk for a human. The creature's knobby hide tends toward mottled yellow, blue, or green coloration, although the more brilliant coloration fades as it ages. A typical ke'kekt is 2 meters in diameter, stands about 1 meter above the ground, and weighs about 150 to 250 kilograms.

Ke'kekt are fully amphibious and manage equally well in or out of the water. They can withstand enormous depths and pressures, but prefer warm, shallow waters or terrestrial dwellings. Ke'kekt communicate by a language of rasps, clicks, and shrill whistles. While they are not very advanced technologically, they are intelligent tool-users, and farm both the coastlands and the wide shallows of the tropical seas. They are extremely warlike, and visitors to Antigua are advised to approach strange ke'kekt with extreme caution.

Ke'kekt Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G3/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Any nonarctic coastlands and seas

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 2–24 (2d12)

Organization: Feudal agricultural states

Niche: Omnivore, with low-level cultivation

Intelligence: Sentient

Encounter: Ke'kekt communities regard intruders of any kind as a threat to be countered forcefully. Individuals or small groups away from the precious home community are more reasonable, giving in to their curiosity when confronted with the new and the unknown (rival ke'kekt would simply be attacked or avoided). The reason behind this dichotomy of behavior is simple—ke'kekt elders remain close to home, supervising their villages, and they tend to be even more xenophobic than the average worker or warrior out in the field.

Ke'kekt are almost fearless by human standards, throwing themselves into battle with reckless abandon. In order to establish a friendly discourse with these creatures, it may be necessary to fight them first to win their respect. On rare occasions ke'kekt "adopt" the bravest warriors of a rival clan, and this is a socially acceptable way for an outsider to win the friendship of a ke'kekt community.

A ke'kekt may be slow-moving, but it is extremely strong; it can crush objects between its three heavy motive limbs, and wield weapons with its manipulative limbs. Unarmed, they are still quite dangerous to humans—the ke'kekt overpowers its enemy with its manipulative limbs, and if it succeeds in grabbing its foe, it brings its powerful walking arms into play in the following action and crushes its enemy.

Habitat/Society: The structure of a ke'kekt community is strongly influenced by the nature of the creatures' reproductive process. Most individuals live out their lives as nonreproductive adults, fighting for the right to mature and mate. A ke'kekt brood may number in the multiple hundreds.

This basic fact of ke'kekt life governs their entire society. Each

Ke'kekt Game Data

STR 14	(d6+11)	INT 7	(d8+3)
DEX 6	(d4+3)	WIL 9	(3d4+1)
CON 12	(d8+6)	PER 6	(2d4+1)
Durability: 12/12/6/6		Action check: 8+/7/3/1	
Move: run 10, walk 4, swim 6		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Marginal/1		Last resorts: 0	

Attacks

Melee weapon ¹	14/7/3	by weapon +2	LI/0
Grab	16/8/4	d4s/d6s/d3w	LI/0
Crush ²	14/7/3	d8+2s/d6+1w/d8+2w	LI/0

¹ Progress Level 1–3 melee weapons only.

² Can only be used vs. overpowered opponent.

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
no INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: d6+1 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [14]; Melee Weapons [14]; Movement [12]—swim [13]; Stamina [12]; Awareness [9]; Resolve [9]; Interaction [6].

community or village consists of one bloodline, one genetic heritage. The two community parents produce all the young for the village, but every adult—both parent and nonreproductive—share in the duties of raising the young brood. Each set of parents produces one brood only, and then retires to become community elders. The broods are staggered at about 10-year intervals, and there are always six generations or broods at different stages of life in a single village.

This arrangement also inspires the ke'kekt impulse to warfare. The right to become a parent is the source of intense competition among the siblings of a young brood, and prowess in battle is one of the key determinants of which ke'kekt becomes a parent to the

next generation. Ke'kekt nations are built from the practice of exchanging parents between rival communities—once two villages have become linked in this way, they end their hostilities and become allies. The ke'kekt nations are growing larger and more well organized with each generation.

The ke'kekt are not a technologically advanced race. They build simple adobe or coral homes and concentrate on raising food. There is a growing tension between the landbound communities, which are capable of manufacturing many more tools and weapons, and the aquatic communities. This is being exacerbated by the easier access of land communities to offworld traders.



One of the more dangerous creatures native to Antigua, the sandray is a powerful aquatic carnivore. It is an ambusher, camouflaging itself on the bottom and waiting for its prey to come within reach.

Description: The sandray has a large, diamond-shaped body not dissimilar to the body form of a manta ray. However, the sandray's body is protected by a chitinous exoskeleton, with tunnels or passages on either side. Powerful muscles inside these passages act as impellers, forcing water through much like a jet engine. A long, bladed tail assists in directional control. The creature's gaping mouth is armed with circular ridges of thousands of sharp, tough teeth.

An adult sandray is about 4 meters in diameter and weighs more than 1,000 kilograms.

Encounter: Typically, a sandray begins a scene concealed on the bottom; a *Stealth-hide* skill check may be appropriate to see how well it is hidden. With a sudden burst of its impellers, it tries to batter its prey with ramming attacks. When its prey appears stunned, the sandray seizes it in its jaws and tears it to pieces. It is an instinctive hunter, not much brighter than a shark or a barracuda.

Habitat/Society: Sandrays inhabit the richest aquatic habitats, temperate shallows where dense vegetation can support a number of aquatic animals. They are solitary creatures that stake out their territory and defend it viciously against others of their kind. Sandrays belong to a phylum consisting of cartilaginous mollusks, unique to Antigua. Many of Antigua's "fish" are members of this phylum.

Sandray Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G3/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Tropical seas

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1–2 (d4÷2)

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Top carnivore

Intelligence: High-order animal



Sandray Game Data

STR 17	(d6+14)	INT 3	(Animal 9 or 2d4+4)
DEX 7	(d4+4)	WIL 11	(d4+9)
CON 14	(d6+11)	PER 1	(Animal 5 or d6+2)
Durability: 14/14/7/7		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: swim 18 (36 for short bursts)		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			

Attacks

Ram ¹	17/8/4	2d6s/3d6s/d8w	LI/0
Bite	18/9/4	d4+1w/d6+2w/d4+1m	LI/0

¹ May be used only once per 2 rounds.

Defenses

+3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d10–1 (LI), d6–1 (HI), d6–2 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [17], Stealth [7]–*hide* [12], Movement [14]–*swim* [18], Stamina [14]–*endurance* [16], Awareness [11]–*intuition* [12], Investigate [11]–*track* [12].



Giant Urchin

The giant urchin is a hazard to swimmers or travelers in coastal regions. Like other Antiguan echinoderms, the giant urchin is amphibious, hunting and scavenging both in the oceans and on nearby land.

Description: The urchin's spherical body is covered by thousands of spines. Six stubby legs ring its lower surface, hidden by the forest of spines, and six whiplike arms are retracted around its mid-section. A large mouth is located in the center of its undersurface, and six stalked eyes crown its body. The urchin is fully amphibious, but on land it is too slow to catch any but the most careless (or immobile) prey.

A giant urchin is 1 to 2 meters in diameter and weighs anywhere from 100 to 500 kilograms.

Encounter: Giant urchins are lethargic scavengers, unlikely to pursue any but the easiest of prey. As a rule, they don't hunt anything as large or strong as a full-grown human or ke'kekt. However, they have been known to attack helpless or careless travelers.

Urchins attack by lashing out with their small whip-arms. They can attack with as many as three whips in a single action. If the urchin scores a Good or Amazing hit with at least two of its arms, it may try to drag a human-sized foe within range of its spines for a jab attack. The urchin's spines protect it against the unarmed or

Giant Urchin Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G3/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Temperate shallows and intertidal regions

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 1-4 (d4)

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Omnivore and scavenger

Intelligence: Low-order animal

melee attacks of its enemies, giving the creature a free defensive jab each time the urchin is attacked.

Habitat/Society: The giant urchin inhabits warm coastal waters and nearby land regions. In the absence of other more substantial prey, it feeds on immobile plants, worms, and mollusks. Urchins are solitary creatures, but not territorial; in an area that provides plentiful food, as many as four of the creatures may be found scavenging separately. An urchin will not attack one of its own kind.

Giant Urchin Game Data

STR 11	(d6+7)	INT 1	(Animal 4 or d4+2)
DEX 9	(d6+6)	WIL 7	(d4+5)
CON 11	(d8+6)	PER 1	(Animal 4 or d4+2)
Durability: 11/11/6/6		Action check: 11+/10/5/2	
Move: walk 2, swim 12		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/1			

Attacks

Whip ¹	12/6/3	d4s/d6s/d4-1w	LI/O
Jab ²	11/5/3	d4w/d4+2w/d4-1m	LI/O

¹ Up to three whip attacks may be used in one action, range 3 meters each.

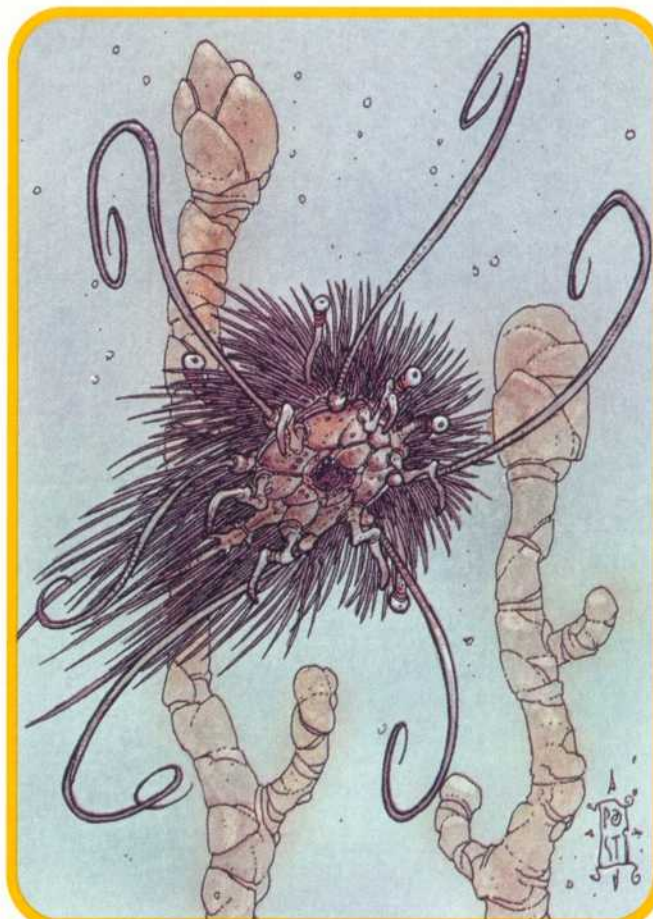
² Only useful if urchin gains two Good strikes with its whips, or is attacked hand to hand.

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: 2d4 (LI), d6-1 (HI), d6-2 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [11], Stamina [11]-endurance [12], Awareness [7], Investigate [7]-track [9].



GRITH



Grith, a satellite of the planet Hydrocus in the Corrivale system, has been an independent outpost of the sesheyans for as long as their oral histories remember. VoidCorp contests this claim, maintaining that all the sesheyans on Grith are employees of VoidCorp, just as sesheyans elsewhere are. But in the words of Twice-Scarred Sellas, the greatest shaman of the Grith sesheyans, "We have been here since the beginning," and the existence of ruined city-sites whose carbon-dating marks them as more than 1,800 years old seems to lend credence to the claim. In any event, Concord Administrator Ari Mahdra has issued a ruling that these sesheyans, not being residents of Sheya, are not bound by the terms of the agreement with VoidCorp—and, naturally, VoidCorp has appealed that ruling to the Concord's Galactic Consulate.

Grith's north pole was first settled in a fit of optimism by the Hatire Community in the year 2324. This colony, called Diamond Point, spawned a southern polar research outpost called Atlantis about twelve years later. Contact with both groups was lost during the Long Silence, when the Verge was cut off from Old Space and the stellar nations that had settled it. Sometime during the Second Galactic War, the Hatire colonies met with misfortune, and almost every trace of them was removed from the planet's surface.

The Hatire Community, once again exercising its legal right to colonize Grith, has begun to repopulate Diamond Point—this time sharing the place with the resident sesheyans. In response to the renewed human immigration to this world, a few sesheyans have bought passage on vessels to other worlds, but most have remained exactly where they are. In total, more than 100,000 sesheyans live in the city of Diamond Point and the settlement of Redknife in the northern latitudes, and the jungle cities of Uyellin and Angoweru in the south. A minority—but still a large number—of Grith sesheyans live in the wilds of the jungle itself, pursuing the hunter's life that their ancestors enjoyed.

While Grith is a world not entirely hospitable to human settlement, the sesheyans seem to find it perfectly habitable. — **RG, CLA**

Grith

Parent: Hydrocus (Corrivale, F2)	Density (Earth = 1): 0.91
Orbital Radius: 322,000 km (2.05 AU from Corrivale)	Surface Gravity: 0.62 g
Orbital Period: 14 days (Hydrocus 836.9 days)	Atmosphere: N ₂ , O ₂
Rotation Period: 37.05 hours	Pressure: 0.83 atm
Axial Tilt: Minimal (8.5°)	Median Temperature: 40° C
Diameter: 8,696 km	Satellites: None
	GRAPH: G1/R2/A2/P3/H2

Grith is smaller and warmer than Earth, tropical and subtropical everywhere but in its polar regions, and barely habitable by humans at its equator, where temperatures routinely reach 50° C (122° F) with 100% humidity. The satellite's large land masses and modest axial tilt combine to produce only minimal seasonal variations—Grith is a world of endless, almost seasonless summer.

In both hemispheres, the planet is primarily covered with jungle and dense woodlands, extending north and south from the equator to within 10 degrees of the pole. The planet's weather is usually mild, but its tides are violent, because Grith's parent body, Hydrocus, exerts a profound gravitational pull on Grith's small oceans. The tropics of Grith vary in richness and composition on each continent. The Grith "arctic" zone has the planet's largest temperature swings, ranging from 40° C in the summertime to 15° C in winter.

Much of Grith's vegetation is tall, thin, and layered, providing as many as four or five distinct biozones in the richest jungle canopies. Close to the jungle floor, beneath several layers of vegetation, the environment is cloaked in a perpetual twilight (not unlike the conditions on the sesheyian homeworld of Sheya), making it difficult for predators and prey to see and be seen. The plants are primarily fernlike, although many species of vines and primitive flowering plants also exist. Animals fall into four phyla, including worms, arthropods, mollusks, and a wide variety of vertebrates. Terrestrial and marine branches of all four groups can be found.





The veractor (sesheyan name *yendor*) is a species of large, social carnivore that inhabits Grith's coastlines. They do not interact well with the sesheyan—the two species have been competing for some of the same resources for as long as the shamans can remember. However, veractors are primarily coastal, swamp, and river dwellers, with a preference for open woodlands rather than dense forest. Thus, veractors and sesheyan rarely come in direct contact.

Well adapted to the muddy waterways and rain forest estuaries of Grith, veractors are predators on both land and sea, dominating the planet's large tidal zones. Few natural predators can take on a full-grown veractor, and members of the species generally make only ceremonial displays of violence toward one another. Human xenobiologists suggest that the veractors evolved social behavior in response to the need to defend the rich coastal territories from incursion by competitors from both the oceans and the land.

Description: A veractor is a biped slightly smaller than a typical wren: a 2-meter-tall, four-fingered, clawed killer. All veractors are colored in green striations; brighter colors in the pattern typically indicate higher rank in the pack. Their large, thick tails are strong and dexterous enough to lift their bodies off the ground if properly supported, and they generally sleep suspended above the jungle floor, suspended by their tails. They are covered with thick, scaly hide, and their hands and feet are clawed. A veractor's head is a wedgelike point, streamlined for swimming or for pushing through dense jungle undergrowth. A typical veractor weighs 200 to 400 kilograms.

Encounter: Veractors are largely concerned with issues of survival, tribal status, and mating, in that order. By veractor standards, sesheyan are sneaky, cowardly scavengers, little more than forest ghosts that will as soon steal a veractor's rightful kill as run in fear. Veractors have poor social skills other than establishing social dominance and status; they view other large carnivores or omnivores primarily as competitors. They guard their coastal territories jealously, but ignore strangers who seem uninterested in poaching.

While veractors are easily riled by a perceived challenge, they are capable of considerable curiosity as well, and sometimes seem positively playful with their prey. In combat, a veractor can bite

weakly when swimming or can attack with its potent claws, teeth, and tail on land. Unlike those of a Terran cat, a veractor's claws are fixed, and cannot be sheathed. When hunting, the veractor prefers to work cooperatively with others of its kind, encircling an enemy and then attacking in a rush from all directions.

Habitat/Society: As noted above, veractors live in small groups, which the sesheyan call *yenden* (literally, "rivermeets"). The Hatire described these groups as packs, but the social structure of the *yenden* is more fluid than most pack hierarchies found among Old Earth species. The basic family unit consists of a dominant female, her consort, three to six juvenile or submissive females, and the dominant female's young. Very young offspring of both sexes remain with the pack until the age of six or seven. After that, young males are driven out of the pack by the dominant female. The young males live on their own until they form their own pack by capturing a female from an established pack, or by defeating one of the dominant males and assuming his place. Young females remain with the pack, caring for the dominant female's young, until they are stolen away by

Veractor Game Data

STR 14	(3d4+7)	INT 4	(Animal 7 or d8+3)
DEX 11	(2d4+6)	WIL 11	(3d6)
CON 10	(d6+6)	PER 4	(Animal 9 or 2d6+2)
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 9+/8/4/2	
Move: sprint 24, run 16, walk 6, swim 12 #Actions: 2			
Reaction score: Marginal/1			

Attacks

Bite ¹	15/7/3	d4-2s/d4s/d4-1w	LI/0
Claws	15/7/3	2d4s/2d6s/d6w	LI/0
Rake ²	12/6/3	d4+2s/d4+1w/d6+2w	LI/0
Tail ³	10/5/2	d4s/d4w/d6w	LI/0

¹ When the veractor is swimming, attack scores are 10/5/2 and damage decreases by 1 point.

² On an Amazing claw hit, the veractor can also rake with its hind claws in the same phase.

³ Tail can only hit enemy behind veractor, and only when creature is retreating.

Defenses

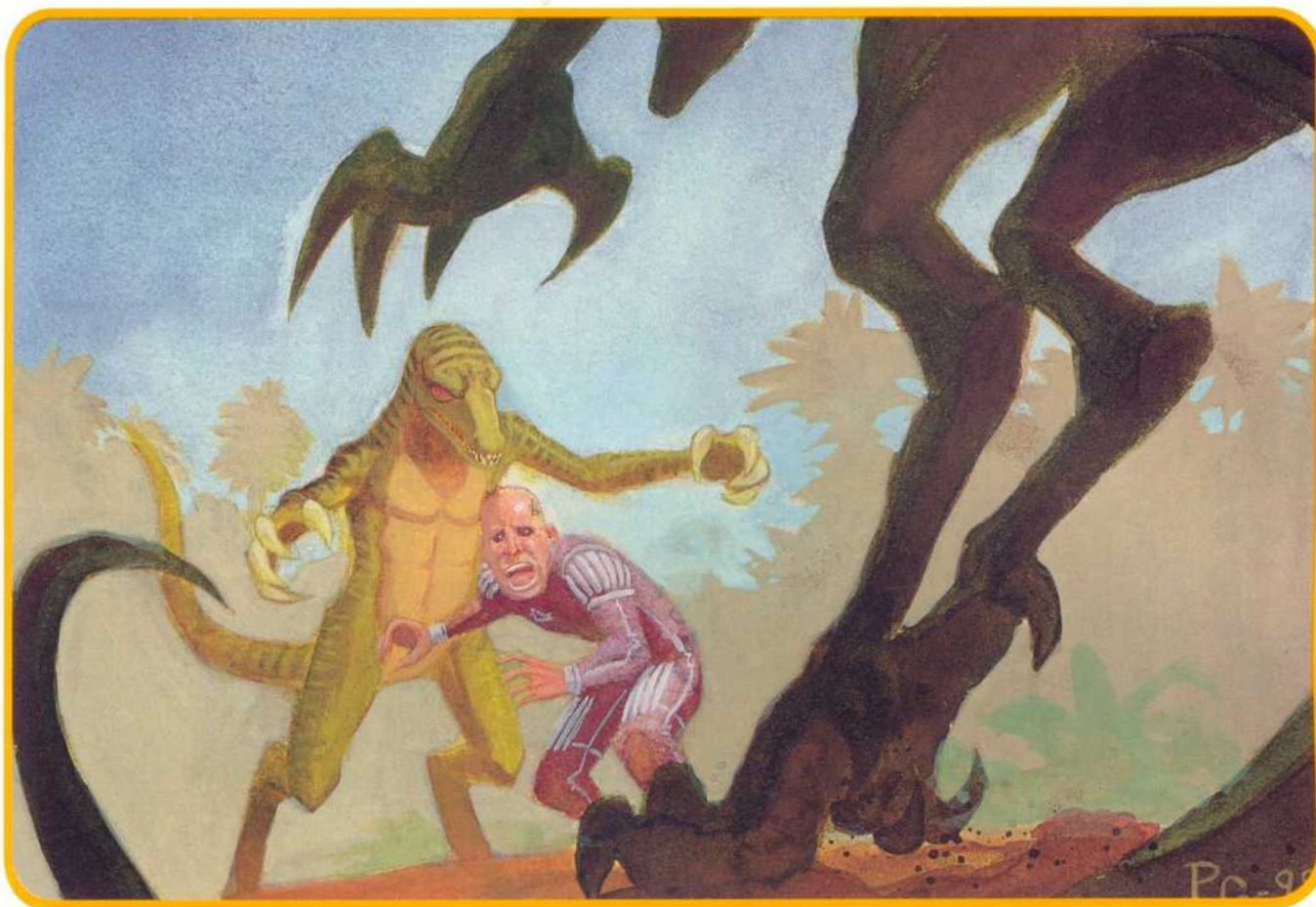
+3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d4-1 (LI), d4-2 (HI), d4 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [14]-brawl [15]; Movement [10]-swim [11]; Stamina [10]-endurance [11]; Investigate [11]-track [12]; Interaction [7]-intimidate [8].

Veractor Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I
Environment: Class 1
GRAPH: G1/R2/A2/P3/H2
Biome: Any riparian, coastal, or marshland
Encounter Chance: Probable
Group Size: 4-24 (4d6)
Organization: Competing packs
Niche: Large semiaquatic carnivore
Intelligence: High-order animal



the consort of a competing *yenden* or until they run away with one of the juvenile males to start their own pack.

Young males without a *yenden* of their own are the most expendable members of the species, and are often destroyed by their own kind as they approach a strange *yenden*. Surviving older males become either consorts or *ille noor* (literally, “forest hunters”), rogue veractors who seize a river or jungle territory and kill any wandering veractor who cross their stretch of ground. According to the Grith sesheyans, these rogue veractors also engage in cannibalism. Older

ille noor are often expert at tracking prey and are experienced combatants, with hides scarred by dozens of past combats.

Veractors are best avoided—and they probably would be left alone by the humans and sesheyans on Grith, except for the fact that they consider themselves the owners of all the beachfront property on the world. Their control of water sources and many of the best natural port locations makes them likely targets for extermination as the colonization of Grith expands into unsettled areas. — AV, CSS



The terador (sesheyan name *gelanan*) is a species of colorful, agile flyer that inhabits the lushest forests of Grith. Teradors are considered a delicacy among the Grith sesheyans—perhaps because the teradors live in the sunlight of the upper canopy, and the sesheyans rule the darker, lower canopies. Since the sesheyans hunt in darkness and the teradors need moderate light to spot predators, the two species rarely share the same section of forest.

The terador is an herbivore, but it is found only in forests with a wide variety of different plant life, where its myriad of colorful feathers allows it to blend in. For this reason, the sesheyans also refer to the terador as the “flower bird.” However, this name is deceptive, for

although the terador is an herbivore, it is very territorial and attacks any threatening creatures it finds in its territory.

Terador flocks occasionally lose members to preying gandercats, brambersnakes, or the eaglelike *wyrna* bird during their forays down to the forest floor, but their quick reproductive cycle ensures that a few members of each generation survive to populate the next flock.

Description: A terador is a winged, colorful, avian creature, with a thick beak for breaking open honey ferns and shattering (though not eating) the occasional brambersnake egg. Their blue, red, green, and





Terador Game Data

STR 6	(d4+4)	INT 4	(Animal 9 or d8+5)
DEX 9	(2d4+4)	WIL 6	(d4+4)
CON 7	(d4+5)	PER 4	(Animal 7 or 2d6)
Durability: 7/7/4/4		Action check: 8+/7/3/1	
Move: run 10, walk 4, glide 14, fly 28		#Actions: 1	
Reaction score: Marginal/1			

Attacks

Beak	7/3/1	d4-2s/d6s/d6w	LI/0
Claw ¹	9/4/2	d4-2s/d6-3s/d6-2w	LI/0
Wing ²	9/4/2	d4+2s/d4+1w/d6+2w	LI/0

¹ Terador claws can only strike when the creature is airborne.

² A wing buffet employs the terador's wing spike, a bony projection that males have at the leading edge of the wing joint. Females do not strike with wings.

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Unarmed [6]-brawl [7]; Acrobatics [9]-dodge [10]; Acrobatics [9]-flight [11]; Awareness [6]-perception [7].

golden feathers are highly prized as decorative materials. A typical female weighs 8 to 12 kilograms (males are slightly larger) and stands 50 centimeters high with a wingspan of 2 meters.

Encounter: Teradors are loud, chattering birds, constantly speaking to one another in cries associated with food, danger, and territory. Teradors are capable of cracking open nuts and even tree trunks to reach the food within; their territories are distinct from unoccupied terrain because of the destructive effect they have on local plant life.

While teradors respond aggressively to other flying creatures entering "their" space, they ignore most nonflying creatures (predators such as gandercats and sablesnakes are notable exceptions). In combat, a terador attacks with its sharp beak and—in the case of adult males—its wing spikes. In nesting season, teradors fight as a group, with an entire flock sometimes turning on much larger creatures, such as gandercats attacking terador nests. These swarms drive away all but the most determined predators, at the cost of losing a few members of the flock. Xenobiologists have compared their behavior to that of schools of fish, and in flight, they certainly seem as dazzling and colorful as any marine school.

Habitat/Society: The basic terador family consists of a mated male and female and two to four young during the nesting season. Isolated cases of female siblings "sharing" the same male have been reported, but these are rare. Most terador nestlings remain with their parents for about six months; thereafter, they fly off to seek mates of their own. A terador can live as long as 15 or 20 years.

Terador life centers around the nesting season, which begins each year after the young from last year's nesting season have left the nest. At this time, the teradors gather together in large flocks that exhibit an unusual group behavior. Humans call these flocks terador parliaments; sesheyans call them gelanan councils, but the social organization and purpose is disputed among these species. When the terador gather, they speak to one another, using the distinctive pure, whistling tones that also characterize their mating behavior. The flocks continue this "discussion" among their members until they reach a size of at least seventy members. Then the flocks fly off, en masse, to the forest floor. Traveling from forest floor to the top canopy as many as thirty or forty times, these flocks then build nests of large, communal nests of fern leaves glued together with mud taken from the jungle floor.

Teradors are beautiful but dangerous birds; some observers suggest they are sentient, but their group behavior seems to result from an adaptive evolutionary quirk rather than true intelligence. — AV, CSS

Terador Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G1/R2/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Any flowering forest

Encounter Chance: Probable

Group Size: 1-6 (d6) or 12-120 (10d12)

Organization: Nesting pairs and flocks

Niche: Forest fructivore

Intelligence: High-order animal

Gandercat

The gandercat lives in the lowest layers of Grith's jungle canopy, in permanent semidarkness. It is a rarely seen species of enormous arboreal omnivore (sesheyan name *illubit*, sometimes also referred to the Grith sloth). Large, silent, and nondiscriminating in where and when they eat, gandercats often clash with sesheyans over the richest hunting and gathering territories. Unlike sesheyans, however, the gandercat is a solitary species.

Well adapted to the arboreal terrain of vines, trees, and fern paths, the gandercat hunts by scent and by sound, because the darkness of the deep canopy makes hunting by sight difficult at best. Gandercats can move entirely silently, and their ability to keep their bulk hidden is remarkable.

The gandercats' only competitors at the top of the food chain are veractors and sesheyans, and neither of those other species consider hunting gandercats except in times of desperation. Human xenobiologists suggest that the gandercat fulfills the same role in Grith's ecology that bears fulfill in terrestrial ecology.

With little fear of being attacked, a gandercat can roam pretty much as it pleases, covering up to 20 kilometers a day in search of food. In addition to predatory activity and scavenging, a gandercat depends on honey ferns, makao root, and redleaf berries to supplement its diet. In unusual cases, gandercats have proven capable of assuming the role of chief of a veractor tribe, somehow commanding the veractors to provide food as a form of tribute. These tribute relationships seldom last long; their existence has led some human geneticists to suggest that the veractors are or were a client species of the gandercats.

Description: A gandercat is an omnivorous quadruped slightly smaller than an Earth rhinoceros, with enormous eyes and nostrils. It is covered with thick, matted fur. Most of this fur is dark brown or black, but its head is surrounded by a greenish mane. Over time, the cat's coat becomes more and more tangled with vines, saprophytic plants, and bits of leaf and bark, until the creature resembles a moving shrub. The cat's entire coat of tangles and fur falls out once a year, exposing its sleek, almost rubbery skin, then immediately begins to grow out again.

The gandercat's feet are tipped with four claws that are so curved

they are almost ingrown; these are used both to kill prey and to extract roots and fruits from their hiding places. The gandercat moves either by swinging along vines, by crawling up and down trunks, or by hanging upside down, just like the earth sloth. When motionless, it often lies on a branch with its legs dangling down somewhat like a panther's.

A typical gandercat is thin for its apparent size, weighing in at 150 to 220 kilograms. The creature stands 1.5 meters tall at the shoulder and is almost 4 meters long.

Gandercats have been known to build shelters, dig burrows, and even construct simple traps. However, their intelligence seems specialized, and is generally focused on obtaining food. They understand the use of tools, but seem to employ them only when building their dens or when fighting off a veractor or sesheyan assault.

Encounter: Gandercats are unconcerned with any other species; they have no interest in first contact and no skill at communication. Early researchers believed that their language was entirely based on scent; in fact, they speak with powerful vocal cords, but their words and songs are entirely ultrasonic, in the same range as some terrestrial bats' echolocating chirps. No hard evidence exists to prove

Gandercat Game Data

STR 14	(2d6+7)	INT 9	(2d6+2)
DEX 10	(2d4+5)	WIL 10	(2d6+3)
CON 14	(4d4+4)	PER 8	(3d4)
Durability: 14/14/7/7		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 24, run 16, walk 6		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Bite	14/7/3	d8+1s/2d6w/d4-1m	LI/0
Claw ¹	15/7/3	2d4s/2d6+2s/1d8+2w	LI/0

¹ A charging or pouncing gandercat adds 2 points to its claw damage, but cannot bite in the same phase.

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
no INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: d4-1 (LI), d4-2 (HI), d4 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [14]-brawl [15]; Acrobatics [10]-fall [11]; Stealth [10]-hide [11], sneak [11]; Investigate [10]-search [11]; Resolve [10]-physical [11]; Stamina [10]-endurance [11]; Awareness [10]-perception [11]; Entertainment [8]-sing [9].

Gandercat Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G1/R2/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Any jungle

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1, rarely 2 or 4

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Large arboreal omnivore

Intelligence: Sentient





that gandercats possess an echolocation sense of their own, but their ability to sense prey, tainted bait, and the locations of researchers' traps is legendary.

In combat, a gandercat prefers to strike from ambush or to overwhelm its prey with a sudden charge—and often those charges are made vertically, straight down a tree trunk into a terador nest or an armored clutch of brambersnake eggs.

Although gandercats are sometimes encountered while they are out hunting, more often a hunter finds their dens. A single gandercat may have as many as four or five dens, some as far as 40 or 50 kilometers from each other. Thus the cat can hide its kills in one of several sites, and can always find relatively close shelter from human or sesheyan hunters.

Habitat/Society: Archeological evidence indicates that the gandercats once had a sophisticated and technological society, perhaps equivalent to Progress Level 4 or 5, but this civilization was abandoned or destroyed more than 1,800 years ago. Gandercats generally avoid the ruins of their forebears except when they are seeking out veractors—many veractor settlements seem to be built on the ruins of gandercat cities—or when a gandercat parent is engaging in communal activity with its offspring (see below).

Though they once must have been social creatures, now gandercats live alone and rarely communicate with others of their kind except through song and scent. Both male and female gandercats stake out and defend their own territory from all challengers—including other gandercats. The sole exception to this behavior occurs during the cats' one-month mating season every year.

Gandercat offspring (always born singly) are fed and cared for by the father for up to two months, then abandoned. Very young offspring then live on their own for up to three years before seeking out one of their parents. This return to the parents seems to be instinctive. While the now-mature offspring remains with its parent, the two of them travel to the nearest gandercat ruins (often located in veractor territory) and remain there together for up to three months. During this time, they hunt only occasionally; most of the time seems to be spent in communication between the pair. In rare instances, more than one pair of gandercats commune together in the same place.

The main purpose of these gatherings seems to be for the adults to teach their young the songs of the species. These songs have been recorded, and it is clear that they do not vary from one generation or even from one cat to another. Sesheyan shamans claim that the songs tell the story of the cats' rejection of technology and their return to the forest. However, the songs have not yet been successfully translated by any reputable researcher.

The gandercats have intrigued every settler Grith has ever had, but the answers to the questions they pose remain elusive. It is in the Concord's best interest to protect the species from the depredations of big game hunters, so that the cats might grow less wary of being observed by other sentient species. Being able to view the creatures in their natural habitat is crucial to our understanding of the gandercats—because, clearly, if we hope to solve the mysteries of the species, we must do it without the benefit of direct communication or other assistance from the creatures themselves. — AV, CSS

HYDROCUS

The second world in the Grith-Hydrocus double planet system, Hydrocus is considered to be the primary; it's more than seven times as voluminous as its companion. Swathed in great bands of yellow, ochre, and red beneath a murky atmosphere, Hydrocus is a poignant reminder of how finely balanced the Earthlike planets of the galaxy truly are. Although the planet is nearly identical to Grith in composition, Hydrocus's chemistry was just different enough to turn it into a desiccated wasteland of acidic mud flats.

Hydrocus was first surveyed almost a century ago, and was quickly passed over as a potential location for new settlements in favor of its more hospitable companion. While it's unlikely that the planet will ever accommodate any permanent nonnative residents, the distinctiveness of its environment from a planetological perspective will make Hydrocus a popular place among xenobiologists and other researchers long after the rest of the Corrivale system has been exhaustively explored and cataloged.

The most ironic part of Hydrocus's tale, from a Series I lifeform's point of view, is that this world was once quite Earthlike. Series I life evolved and flourished on this world, just as it did on Grith, but Hydrocus harbored a tragic flaw. Many millions of years ago, its oceans died, to be replaced by seas of sulfuric acid. Without exception, all Series I lifeforms died out between 50 million and 100 million years ago. But a new evolutionary track emerged, one capable of thriving in Hydrocus's hostile environment. An energetic young biosphere of Series V life—silicone creatures with sulfuric acid for blood—has emerged, replacing the biosphere that was lost.

While there are other worlds in the galaxy on which life has gained a foothold, vanished, and resurfaced again, Hydrocus is seemingly unique. We have observed no other environment in which life has changed its structure so radically, completely discarding one biochemistry for another.

More important, we have discovered signs of a bygone civilization from the earlier epoch, when Hydrocus was a Terran world. I look forward to an opportunity to return here to study this fascinating world and its native lifeforms in greater detail. — *AV, CSS*

Hydrocus

Parent: Corrivale, F2	Surface Gravity: 1.29 g
Orbital Radius: 2.05 AU	Atmosphere: N ₂ , CO ₂ , SO ₂ , SO ₃
Orbital Period: 836.9 days	Pressure: 5.0 atm
Rotation Period: 58.3 hours	Median Temperature: 70° C
Axial Tilt: Moderate (11.5°)	Satellites: One (Grith)
Diameter: 17,060 km	GRAPH: G3/R2/A4/P3/H3
Density (Earth = 1): 0.96	

Two accidents of composition and formation caused Hydrocus to become the planet it is today. The first of these was Hydrocus's parent, Corrivale is an energetic F2 star, and its fierce ultraviolet output drastically increased the rate of photodissociation (the destruction of water molecules) in its atmosphere. The second factor is Hydrocus's high tectonic activity, the result of the gravitational influence of its lesser companion Grith. Active volcanism brought heavy concentrations of sulfur close to the planet's surface, leading to increasing levels of sulfur dioxide and sulfur trioxide in the planet's atmosphere.

One hundred million years ago, Hydrocus was an Earthlike world with a well-established Series I biosphere beginning to suffer from a naturally caused onslaught of acid rain. Within 50 million years, a mere eyeblink in geological time, Hydrocus's oceans of water were gone, replaced by shallow seas of sulfuric acid. With all of its carbonaceous rocks weathered away by its seas and its precipitation, Hydrocus's atmosphere has become a thick blanket of greenhouse gases that stopped just short of running away into a Venuslike hothouse. Its surface is an endless plain of caked mud flats, clays, and salts dissolved by the world's acidic seas and atmosphere.

Hydrocus is smothered by an atmosphere five times as dense as Earth's. Just as Earth's oceans act as a heat sink, controlling seasonal warming and cooling, Hydrocus's blanket of dense gases serves the same purpose with greater effect. There's a difference of only 10° C between the average temperatures at the poles and the equator.



Bunyip

In the two centuries of human exploration in the Verge, dozens of expeditions have traveled to the surface of Hydrocus, most of them mounted by the Hatire colonists of nearby Grith. We studied the records of these expeditions quite carefully before choosing a landing site in the southern edge of the Goldpan, a region of rich clay flats, thickets of blue-leaf scrub, and muddy streams. From this vantage we hoped to conduct a detailed sampling of one of Hydrocus's most diverse biomes. We encountered bunyips—so named by a crewman of Australian descent—within a few hours of establishing our survey perimeter. — RG, CLA

Bunyips are small, cooperative foragers, with a vaguely kangaroo-like build and a hide of banded, armorlike segments. They are among Hydrocus's most intelligent animals, clever creatures with an advanced social structure. They can be quite dangerous when hunting, using sophisticated tactics to trap and wound prey while driving off marauding mudfiends and other large carnivores.

Description: A bunyip is a medium-sized quadruped with an upright stance. Its hind legs are much larger and more powerful than its small forelimbs, and a broad, paddlelike tail balances its long neck and tapered head. Like most Hydrocan animals, the bunyip's hide consists of semirigid articulated bands, colored a dull ochre or yellow to blend in with its surroundings. An adult bunyip stands about 1 meter in height, although it's close to 2 meters from the tip of its snout to the end of its tail, and weighs about 40 kilograms.

Each of the bunyip's feet is armed with four small, sharp claws and a large sickle-claw, its primary weapon. Its jaws are vertically hinged, and are filled with tough crushing ridges of bone. The bunyip has four eyes—two set well off to either side of its skull for good peripheral vision, and two facing forward to aid in judging distance.

Encounter: A troop of bunyips are the lords of all they survey. While a mudfiend can catch and kill one or two bunyips that have become isolated from their group, a pack of these creatures is more than a match for any other animal on Hydrocus. Objects or creatures that clearly aren't of their environment, such as humans in e-suits or spaceships, unsettle bunyips tremendously. At the same time, bun-

yips are also extraordinarily curious creatures, and are often drawn to unusual events or objects.

Bunyips have been known to fight fiercely in self-defense. In fact, a troop once inflicted serious injury to an expedition that had tranquilized and carried off two individuals for study. A nearby bunyip that witnessed the event returned to the main body of the troop, brought its fellows to the site of the shooting, and then led them along the surveyors' tracks. When the troop arrived at the human camp, they attacked the residents with reckless ferocity. Clearly, the bunyips had identified the explorers as enemies and had decided to deal with them accordingly.

A bunyip troop is an extremely well-organized formation. They forage every day, ranging over dozens of kilometers of land and stopping every night. (Hydrocus's day is almost 60 hours in length; Hydrocan animals are adapted to this diurnal cycle, taking a long sleep break around "noon" and waking to forage for a while at "midnight.") Bunyips on the march set out scouts and use a sophisticated system of vocal calls to identify food and danger.

When bunyips attack, they surround their foes and strike from all directions, using feints and misdirection with the skill of born ambushers. When closing on an enemy, the bunyip's first strike may be a leaping kick that is strong enough to break bones and cause mortal injury. At close range, the creature rakes with its vicious sickle-claws, striking twice per action (once with its foreclaws, once with its rear claws). Bunyips often concentrate on a single foe, tearing it to pieces before moving on to the next. Sometimes a number of bunyip troops band together into a small horde of 100 to 150 creatures.

Bunyip Game Data

STR 9	(d6+6)	INT 4	(Animal 3d4+4)
DEX 12	(2d4+7)	WIL 11	(3d4+3)
CON 7	(d4+4)	PER 5	(Animal 3d4+4)
Durability: 7/7/4/4		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 50, walk 16, (jump 20)		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/1			

Attacks

Kick	10/5/2	d4w/d6+1w/d4m	LI/O
Claw (×2)	10/5/2	d6s/d4w/d6w	LI/O

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d6 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d4+1 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [9]—*brawl* [10], Athletics [12]—*jump* [19], Movement [7]—*race* [12], Stamina [7]—*endurance* [10], Awareness [11]—*intuition* [14], Interaction [5].

Bunyip Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series V

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G3/R2/A4/P3/H3

Biome: Mid-latitude mudflats

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 3–36 (3d12), sometimes larger

Organization: Troop

Niche: Omnivore

Intelligence: High-order animal



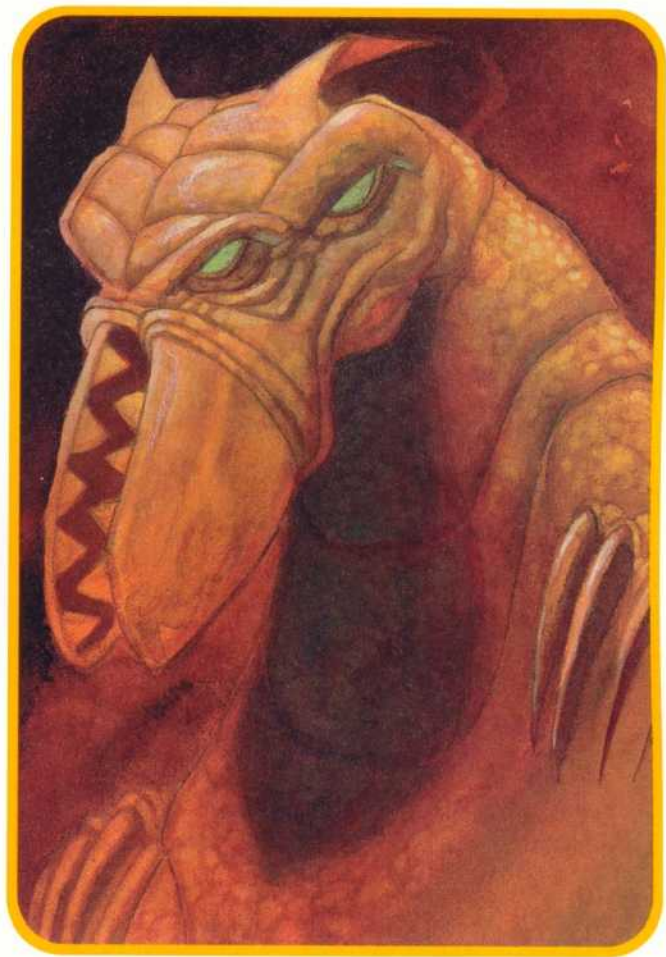
Habitat/Society: Bunyips can be found almost anywhere on the planet's surface, although they're most common in the mid-latitude mud flats bordering the planet's acidic seas.

The mud and clay flats of Hydrocus are a rich and deadly environment, heavily overgrown with hardy vegetation. Thickets of dense vegetation alternate with salted-out clearings and meandering streams. Bunyips are most comfortable in this terrain; their paddle-like tails and broad feet make them excellent swimmers and help them in softer portions of the mire. Smaller populations have been documented in a number of other biomes, though—this is a successful species that has flourished throughout the world.

An average-sized troop of bunyips consists of about 20 to 30 members, tied together by a complex chain of matriarchal relationships. The oldest females are the leaders, sharing the top of the dominance ladder with occasional feuding. The other bunyips have a status determined by the standing of their mother among the troop's leaders. When a female has her first litter, she no longer enjoys the prestige or safety of her mother's status, and must make her own way in the troop. In some cases, the younger female must abandon the troop and find another in order to have any chance to rise to leadership.

The bunyip presents a number of mystifying questions. First of all, it has no relations. The species appears to have developed in complete isolation, with no other species in its order. This is the equivalent of a situation in which chimpanzees were the only mammals to evolve on Earth; it just doesn't fit with the model of evolution as we understand it.

Second, bunyips are amazingly well-adapted creatures. There are no vestigial organs, no redundant structures, no inherited defects. We've found fossil records that clearly indicate that bunyips have been this way for almost 80 million years, without the slightest evolutionary change or drift. I can only conclude that these creatures



were engineered at some point in the distant past, which raises two obvious but critically important questions: Who did this engineering, and for what purpose? — **AV, CSS**



Just as some of Hydrocus's animal life evolved to cope with the desiccation of the planet into a hot, arid wasteland of acidic seas and mineral-caked mud flats, so did some of Hydrocus's species of plants. The Hydrocan version of photosynthesis is quite similar in effect to the processes of Earthly plants: Solar energy is used to build organic molecules from inorganic materials, which may then be oxidized to release the energy again. This is the first step in the food chain. All a Hydrocan plant needs is sunshine, minerals, carbon dioxide, and a fair amount of sulfuric acid (which is quite common on the planet's surface) to make its food.

Hydrocan plants belong to one of four phyla: mosslike scums; spore-bearing spiky grasses; armored fungi; and fruiting stemmed plants. The firethorn belongs to this last group, the only Hydrocan plants that seem to have evolved from Series V origins (the others had Series I forebears in the distant past). Firethorns are a considerable hazard in many parts of Hydrocus's temperate mud flats.

Description: The firethorn is a tough bramble consisting of a num-

ber of linked root-nodules and a web of blue-black stems studded with long, bulbous thorns. A large firethorn may be as much as 10 meters in diameter and stand nearly 2 meters tall in the center. The plant doesn't bear any leaves; photosynthesis is carried out in a number of buoyant matlike pods that rest on the ground or mud, or float on the acidic waters. The firethorn's barbed stems serve to guard these relatively fragile structures from the attention of Hydrocan animals.

Encounter: Firethorns are immobile plants and can easily be avoided by anyone who exercises any kind of care in his movement. They're only dangerous if a hero doesn't notice a patch before he blunders into it, or if the hero finds himself with no alternative but to bodily enter the patch. A typical firethorn patch is 10 to 20 meters in diameter, and its tough stems and fat thorns make it very difficult to move through (or out of!). A hero must succeed on a Strength feat check or a Movement-trailblazing skill check each round in order to force his way through at a walking pace.



The firethorn gets its name from its unusual defense mechanism. Its odd thorns are made of a pyrotechnic mixture covered in natural wax. Inside the thorn is a reservoir of highly concentrated sulfuric acid. When something brushes against the pod, the plant releases

the acid, which strips the thorn's waxy covering and allows the long thorn to ignite. The thorn burns with an intense heat and unbearable light (it's an organic magnesium candle), searing or scorching anything unfortunate enough to be nearby.

The chance of a firethorn to ignite when disturbed is based on a Stealth-sneak skill check by the character moving into or through the patch. If the check result is a Failure, the thorns ignite and start to burn. At this point, the character must make a Constitution feat check to see how much damage he sustains in the current round. At the beginning of each subsequent round, further Constitution feat checks are required until he or she is clear of the patch or until the fire goes out. The thorns of a plant burn for 2d6 rounds before exhausting their fuel, and it takes d4+2 days for the plant to replenish its thorns.

If a character caught in a firethorn patch gets a Critical Failure

Firethorn Game Data

STR 0
DEX 0
CON 14 (3d4+6)
Durability: 14/14/7/7
Move: none
Reaction score: n/a

INT 0
WIL 0
PER 0

Action check: n/a
#Actions: n/a

Attacks

Thorn CON feat¹ d8w/d6w/d4w/d4s LI/O

¹ Victim must make Constitution feat check to resist effects; damage listed is inflicted on a Marginal/Ordinary/Good/Amazing success.

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+3 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d4+3 (LI), d6+10 (HI), d6+1 (En)

Skills

none

Firethorn Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series V

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G3/R2/A4/P3/H3

Biome: Tropical and subtropical mudflats

Encounter Chance: Probable

Group Size: 1

Organization: None (immobile patch)

Niche: Open flatland/marsh plant

Intelligence: None

result on his or her Constitution feat check, his or her vision is temporarily damaged by the brightness of the flares. The victim suffers a +2 penalty to all actions that might be affected by the acuity of his or her vision for the next d8 days, or until successfully tended to by a character with a Medical Science-*treatment* skill rank of 5 or higher.

Note that a firethorn is almost immune to high-impact damage due to its tough stems and lack of vital areas.

Habitat/Society: Firethorns are found in the warmer equatorial and low-latitude regions of Hydrocus. At first glance, they're not much different in appearance from a host of other Hydrocan plants, so it may be quite difficult for a character to recognize the potential danger before he blunders into the patch. A character who knows (perhaps from bitter experience) what a firethorn patch looks like may be allowed to make a Life Science or Awareness skill check in order to spot the threat of a firethorn before the plant is disturbed.

Mudfiend

Creatures inimical to humankind (or humanoid aliens) aren't all that common in the galaxy. Since humans are not a part of the natural ecology of their homeworld, most predators are inclined to give humans and their allies a wide berth in the wild. The mudfiends of Hydrocus are an exception to this rule. They're ferocious and aggressive in the extreme, attacking large parties without hesitation. We lost a member of our survey team to a mudfiend near the end of our last week on Hydrocus. — AV, CSS

Description: The mudfiend is a 500-kilogram amphibian with a long, salamanderlike body and a bladed tail for swimming. It is 5 to 8 meters in length, but less than 1 meter high at the shoulder. Its blunt snout is split by a gaping vertical jaw that can bite a man in two with ease. The creature's limbs are stubby and powerful, with broad, paddlelike feet that enable it to negotiate mud, silt, or water with ease. Its hide is covered with thick, leathery plates of mottled yellow and brown.

Encounter: A mudfiend attacks anything that crosses its path. It's especially skilled at striking from ambush, flattening its body out to lie motionless in mud or clay. A character who knows what to look for can spot a mudfiend up to 60 meters away by making an Awareness-*perception* skill check with a +1 penalty per 20 meters of range. If the hero isn't looking out for the concealed mudfiend, the creature inflicts a +3 penalty to the hero's Awareness skill check to avoid surprise.

The mudfiend has an unusual attack designed to stun and immobilize its prey. It takes a large mouthful of heavy clay into its mouth and works it into a dense, goopy mass. As its first attack in a subsequent encounter, it uses a bellowslike action in its throat to launch

this mass at its chosen prey. The range of this attack is 6/12/20 meters, with a -1 bonus for short range and a +1 penalty for long range. The impact of this mudball can knock down an adult human; any character struck by this attack must succeed on a Strength feat check or an Acrobatics-*fall* skill check (with a -2 bonus in either case) in order to remain standing. A knocked-down character suffers the usual penalties for being prone until he uses an action to stand up again. If the mudfiend scores an Amazing success on its attack, the mudball strikes the victim's head, covering his faceplate with impenetrable goo—he's effectively blinded until he uses an action to clear away the mess.

After the creature fires its mudball, it charges its prey with surprising speed. The mudfiend attacks at close quarters with its horrifying jaws, preferring to seize one unfortunate hero and retreat into the muddy bogs in order to devour its meal in a leisurely fashion. This is an overpowering attack that, if successful, pins the victim in the mudfiend's mouth instead of inflicting damage. The creature must succeed at an Unarmed Attack-*brawl* skill check with a +1 penalty

Mudfiend Game Data

STR 17	(2d4+12)	INT 2	(Animal 8 or d4+6)
DEX 10	(2d4+5)	WIL 9	(2d4+2)
CON 14	(2d4+9)	PER 1	(Animal 4 or d4+2)
Durability: 14/14/7/7		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 30, walk 8, swim 24		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			

Attacks

Mudball	10/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Bite	18/9/4	d8w/2d6w/d6m	LI/G

Defenses

Good toughness
 +2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d4+4 (LI), d4+2 (HI), d4 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [17]-*brawl* [18]; Stealth [10]-*hide* [14]; Movement [14]-*swim* [18]; Stamina [14]-*endurance* [16]; Awareness [9]-*intuition* [12]; Resolve [9]-*physical* [12].

Mudfiend Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series V

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G3/R2/A4/P3/H3

Biome: Mid-latitude mudflats

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1-4 (d4)

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Large carnivore

Intelligence: Low-order animal





in order to trap a victim between its jaws. Few victims carried off by a mudfiend are ever found again.

Habitat/Society: Mudfiends prefer the vast coastal swamps where Hydrocus's shrinking acidic seas meet the land. These mud flats and mires are 50 to 200 kilometers in width, forming a nearly impassable barrier between the planet's terrestrial regions and its oceans. Mudfiends occasionally head for the open sea to hunt swimming creatures, but they're much more adept at catching unwary prey on the mud flats.

Mudfiends are not sociable, but several may share a rich hunting ground without territorial strife. A small group of the creatures may have a common lair to which they return at nightfall. The lair is always a dank, cramped burrow with submerged entrances, excavated in the banks of a stream or a pond. Mudfiends mate and lay eggs about once per Hydrocan year; the nests are buried in mud and abandoned, so that the young mudfiends must fend for themselves from the moment they hatch.

These things are some of the most vicious creatures I've ever encountered. The one that got Veracruz shrugged off everything we threw at it, until I ran some heavy-duty conduit from the power leads on our camp's generator and made a perimeter around our area. When the creature came back to find itself another meal, it got a taste of 25,000 volts instead!

If you're going to be spending time in mudfiend country, make sure you arm at least two members of your party with arc guns, and keep everyone in the group widely separated. — RG, CLA

The Horseshoe Site

Four months after Administrator Grant and Doctor Veras completed their survey of Hydrocus, a strange artifact was discovered deep in Hydrocus's arctic regions—a colossal mound in the shape of a horseshoe, more than 30 kilometers in length and 100 to 250 meters in height. For decades the Horseshoe Site (as it came to be called) had eluded attention because it appeared to be nothing more than a natural topographic feature, albeit an unusual one. However, an exploration team discovered that, when calculations were adjusted to account for millions of years of seismic activity and the fierce weathering of Hydrocus's acidic atmosphere, the Horseshoe's shape was symmetrical to within .03 percent, a clear indication that it was not natural.

Further investigation revealed that the exact center of the Horseshoe Site had marked the location of Hydrocus's north magnetic pole roughly 80 million years ago—about the time that the mass extinction of Series I life was in its early stages. Seismic surveys of the Horseshoe have revealed the existence of a massive complex of dense structures under a hundred meters of mud and clay. Someone apparently built the Horseshoe and then buried it with fanatical precision, at a time when dinosaurs still ruled Earth.

Three theories have been advanced concerning the Horseshoe Site, with no concrete evidence to support any of them. The first supposition is quite exotic: Before Hydrocus became desiccated, an intelligent Series I lifeform arose on the planet. Understanding that their civilization was doomed, they undertook this last feat of engineering to preserve something of their achievements or to memorialize the world they knew. Some scientists have even suggested that the bunyips, considering their anomalous evolutionary history, may have been the handiwork of this vanished people. But a question begs to be answered: Why didn't this intelligent species simply leave the planet? Grith is so close and so obvious as an alternative home, it seems incomprehensible that a species capable of engineering something like the Horseshoe—and perhaps the bunyips—could not have crossed so small a distance to save themselves.

The other theories are even more far-fetched. Some people suggest that the Horseshoe Site was a planetary base for a starfaring species that colonized Hydrocus for some time before deciding to leave—and before they departed, they covered up the evidence of their presence as their final act on the planet. Others hypothesize that the Horseshoe Site is the remnant of a terraforming device, a monstrous machine that brought about the desiccation and acidification of Hydrocus tens of millions of years ago. Only one thing is certain about this artifact: Until the mysterious structures under the mound are breached and explored, no one can possibly know the real story behind the Horseshoe Site.

BHRUUSIL

Bhruusil has been a trading post, fueling stop, and research station for well over a century. The planet was first charted by a VoidCorp system exploitation survey nearly 200 years ago and subsequently colonized by VoidCorp citizens. The planet's location was lost in the chaos of the Second Galactic War, and VoidCorp representatives did not revisit the system for decades.

Near the end of the war, key personnel in the planetary administration secretly worked out a reorganization that turned over the VoidCorp facilities on Bhruusil to the newly independent Insight government—more as a means of thwarting VoidCorp's expansionism than for any strategic or technological benefits the planet offered. After the Verge was reopened, VoidCorp returned only to find that Bhruusil wasn't its property anymore. Rather than engage in a direct confrontation with Insight—which certainly would not be condoned by the Concord—VoidCorp has contented itself with establishing mining operations and military outposts on Bhruusil's sister worlds in the Karnath system.

Whether or not Bhruusil itself is considered to be a world worth fighting over, its most important asset may turn out to be the bhruu—an industrialized species of sentients that have resisted incorporation with either VoidCorp or Insight to date. Currently, Insight controls all planetary offworlder facilities and commerce, maintaining friendly diplomatic relations with the bhruu. Many bhruu have taken employment with Insight or bought passage on Insight vessels to other worlds. Not surprisingly, VoidCorp contests this development, maintaining that Bhruusil and all its inhabitants are VoidCorp property. — *RG, CLA*

Bhruusil is larger and colder than Earth, with vast arctic and subarctic regions. Its large land masses and axial tilt lead to drastic seasonal variations. In both hemispheres, the planet is girdled by a vast steppe extending from about 20° north or south of the equator to within 20° of the poles. The weather is violent, with extreme warming and cooling in the polar regions over the course of a year. The tropical areas of Bhruusil are climatically equivalent to Earth's middle latitudes, and the temperature in the polar regions ranges from 50° C in the summertime to -100° C in the winter.

Much of Bhruusil's vegetation is low, scrublike, and tough. Animals belong to one of four phyla: worms, arthropods, mollusks, and vertebrates. Terrestrial and marine branches of all four groups can be found.

Bhruusil

Parent: Karnath, F5	Surface Gravity: 1.21 g
Orbital Radius: 1.85 AU	Atmosphere: N ₂ , O ₂
Orbital Period: 776.6 days	Pressure: 1.06 atm
Rotation Period: 24.4 hours	Median Temperature: 11.4° C
Axial Tilt: Severe (33.6°)	Satellites: None
Diameter: 17,160 km	GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H1-H2
Density (Earth = 1): 0.90	

Bhruu

The bhruu are a species of hulking, sentient grazing animals with a rich and complex culture. In general, they welcome contact with off-world visitors and enthusiastically pursue any new knowledge. Well adapted to the vast mid-latitude steppes of Bhruusil, the bhruu have heavy, insulated bodies and thick coats—which enables them to survive the Bhruusil winters, when bitterly cold temperatures invade the

immense plains. Being built relatively low to the ground makes it possible for the bhruu to stand up against windstorms strong enough to cause large buildings to sway. Few natural predators can take on a full-grown bhruu, but individuals of the species are generally non-violent and cooperative toward each other.

Having adequate natural weaponry, no need to create permanent

KARNATH : BHRUUSIL : BHRUU



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shelters, and little need for tools, the bhruu were a nontechnological civilization for millennia until the appearance of human traders. Now, as a consequence of decades of contact with humans, the bhruu have begun developing primitive forms of agriculture and light industry. During the recent years of direct association with Insight personnel, the bhruu have taken major steps toward becoming more thoroughly integrated with humans. Most significantly, the programming geniuses of Insight have developed software that enables bhruu and humans to communicate with much greater accuracy and efficiency than was the case during the time when VoidCorp held sway over the planet. Also, Insight technicians are responsible for the development of special harnesses and mechanical interfaces that allow the bhruu to make use of a wide range of simple tools, devices, and weapons—tools for cultivating the land, devices for constructing and repairing simple machines, and weapons for defending themselves from the planet's predators.

Description: A bhruu is a quadruped roughly the size of a large buffalo. It is covered with thick, rank hair. Its feet are padded, not hooved, and it possesses a long and agile tail. The creature's lips, tongues, and teeth are extremely dexterous—a trait that Insight technicians took advantage of in their designs for the aforementioned harnesses and interfaces. A bhruu's head and tail are crowned with long, bony spikes for defense against the various predators that might molest the herd. A typical bhruu weighs in at 700 to 1,000 kilograms and stands a little less than 2 meters high at the shoulder.

Encounter: Bhruu tend to be contemplative, long-winded conversationalists. They developed an amazingly complex system of mythology and parables over thousands of years of peaceful, nontechnological civilization. By bhruu standards, humans are violent savages, and therefore to be regarded with suspicion and condescension. Bhruu tend to have a low mechanical aptitude (although these abilities are quickly becoming more refined), but make up for it with highly developed intuitive reasoning and observational skills.

While bhruu are slow to anger, they are not necessarily pacifists. Although one bhruu almost never harms another, they are quick to defend themselves and their camps against threats such as razorcats or blackworms (see the following pages)—or aggressive humans. If forced into combat, a bhruu can make use of modified modern ranged weapons (held, aimed, and operated by means of the Insight-manufactured interfaces) or attack with its paws, horns, and tail. In unarmed combat, the bhruu opens with a fearsome charge, head lowered, and then tramples its enemy while lashing with its armored tail.

Bhruu Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H1-H2

Biome: Any land

Encounter Chance: Probable

Group Size: 12–100 (8d12+4)

Organization: Seminomadic clan groups

Niche: Large herbivore, with cultivation

Intelligence: Sentient

Habitat/Society: A bhruu community, or *abhaal* (plural *abhaala*), consists of several thousand individuals who migrate from one campsite to another, as the seasons dictate. A single *abhaal* may have six to ten campsites, some of them separated by several hundred kilometers; by maintaining several homesteads and moving from one site to another, the *abhaal* avoids the worst of Bhruusil's harsh climate (and the threat of winter starvation). Humans think of these groups as herds, but that is a very crude term to describe the rich weave of interaction, relationships, and roles that characterizes an *abhaal*. The basic family unit, or *marhu'u*, consists of a male, three to six females, and their young. Very young offspring of both sexes remain with the *marhu'u* for about ten years.

The young males that have not yet begun their own *marhu'u* are considered the most expendable members of the community, and serve in the most dangerous or isolated roles. Every year, the young males compete in a series of arduous challenges for the right to begin their own *marhu'u*; only a handful are chosen each year. Most bhruu heroes come from this age group.

The bhruu are a sophisticated society deserving of full representation on the Concord Council. While Insight is a much better patron than VoidCorp, I do not believe that the bhruu have any need of our cultural and technological colonialism. Let them choose their own path. — **AV, CSS**

Bhruu Game Data

STR 14	(2d4+9)	INT 8	(2d6+1)
DEX 7	(d6+3)	WIL 9	(2d6+2)
CON 12	(d6+8)	PER 9	(2d6+2)
Durability: 12/12/6/6		Action check: 9+/8/4/2	
Move: sprint 60, run 40, walk 6		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Marginal/1			

Attacks

Weapon ¹	7/3/1	varies	varies
Charge ²	15/7/3	2d4s/2d6s/d6w	LI/0
Trample ³	15/7/3	d4+2s/d4+1w/d6+2w	LI/0
Tail ³	14/7/3	d4s/d4w/d6+1w	LI/0

¹ Progress Level 5–7 ranged weapons.

² Must run at least 10 meters to charge.

³ May make one trample and one tail attack per action; tail can only hit target behind bhruu and within a 2-meter radius.

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
no INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: d6–1 (LI), d4–2 (HI), d4 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [14]–brawl [15]; Modern Ranged Weapons [7]; Movement [12]; Stamina [12]–endurance [13]; Knowledge [8]; Life Science [8]; Administration [9]; Awareness [9]–intuition [10]; Culture [9]; Interaction [9].





Bhruu as Heroes

The bhruu may be considered for use as player characters, if you so choose. A fair number have applied for passage on Insight ships to go explore the galaxy. Away from his or her *abhaal*, a bhruu becomes more impulsive and aggressive, although still quite placid and deliberate by human standards. Bhruu heroes must observe the following Ability Score minimums and maximums:

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIL	PER
12/16	4/9	10/16	4/14	6/14	4/14

Bhruu receive the broad skills Unarmed Attack, Movement, Stamina, Knowledge, Awareness, and Interaction for free. The natural armor and attacks described in the Game Data box are special abilities common to all bhruu—don't forget to add the bhruu's Strength adjustment to damage inflicted in hand-to-hand combat.

Bhruu must have e-suits, armor, and other such equipment custom-built, tripling the cost of any such item. They also suffer a +3 penalty to any Athletics or Acrobatics skill checks, since they're terrible at climbing, throwing, jumping, and feats of agility or balance. At your discretion, certain skills may be off limits to a bhruu—Vehicle Operation and Manipulation, for instance—unless you decide that the hero possesses a harness or interface that makes the use of the skill possible.

Blackworm

Highly evolved, venomous worms that fill an ecological niche similar to that of Terran snakes, blackworms are a common hazard on Bhruusil's grass-covered plains. They are aggressive hunters that use their lethal poison stings to bring down prey.

Description: As its name suggests, the blackworm is dull black in color, with glossy blue dots on its upper surface and a fringe of tiny leglike cilia on both sides. Its hide is composed of tough, leathery ring-segments, and it possesses no visible sense organs. The blackworm's mouth is a circular ring of teeth covered by a blunt cowl that retracts when it strikes. The creature's sting is a long, sharp barb located at the end of a muscular tongue; the venom is a powerful neurotoxin dangerous to any Series I or III lifeforms.

Blackworms range from 1.5 to 2.5 meters in length and 5 to 20 kilograms in weight.

Encounter: Blackworms are sightless and hunt by night, relying on an uncanny ability to detect the slightest vibrations with their cilia. They can track a human's footfalls at a range of more than 1,000 meters. Blackworms are nonintelligent and simply swarm toward anything that passes near their nest. They move very quietly and are hard to see by night—at the beginning of a scene, if conditions are

Blackworm Game Data

STR 5	(d4+3)	INT 1	(Animal 4 or d4+2)
DEX 11	(d4+8)	WIL 7	(d6+3)
CON 7	(d4+4)	PER 2	(Animal 6 or d4+4)
Durability: 7/7/4/4		Action check: 17+/16/8/4	
Move: run 24, walk 6, (burrow 2)		#Actions: 1	
Reaction score: Good/1			

Attacks

Bite	10/5/2	1w/d4w/d4+2w	LI/0
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Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Unarmed [5]—*brawl* [10]; Stealth [11]—*sneak* [16]; Stamina [7]—*endurance* [8]; Awareness [7]—*intuition* [10], *perception* [14]; Investigate [7]—*track* [12].





appropriate, a blackworm nest can achieve surprise against its prey by making a successful Stealth skill check.

When a blackworm strikes a character, it injects the victim with a deadly neurotoxin if at least 1 point of wound damage penetrates the victim's armor. The onset time of the venom is d6 rounds. At the end of this time, the victim must make a Constitution feat check to see how well he resists the neurotoxin:

Result	Damage
Critical Failure	Death
Marginal	2d4m, paralyzed d4 days
Ordinary	2d6w, paralyzed d6 hours
Good	d6+1w
Amazing	d4w

Blackworm Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I
Environment: Class 1
GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2
Biome: Northern hemisphere steppes
Encounter Chance: Unlikely
Group Size: 3–12 (3d4)
Organization: Nest
Niche: Small carnivore
Intelligence: Low-order animal

The sting of a blackworm is extremely painful; during the onset time and for the next d4 hours, a victim suffers a +2 penalty to all actions. Once blackworms bring down a victim by paralyzing it or rendering it unconscious, they ignore other potential victims in the vicinity and feed; each creature in the group automatically inflicts 1 point of wound damage to the victim per round.

Blackworms can be repelled by fire. They run from a flame even if they are in the middle of an attack.

Habitat/Society: Blackworms live in communal nests. They are strong burrowers and may riddle an area hundreds of meters across with small tunnels, making it easier for them to surprise their prey (apply a –1 bonus to the blackworms' Stealth skill check if their targets are located directly above one of their nests). Blackworms hibernate through winter and are never encountered in Bhrusil's cold seasons.

These things are worse than cobras. They like open country, and their burrows are almost impossible to spot. Carry flamethrowers when you're on the move, and have some torches lit at night around the perimeter of your campsite to keep them away. — RG, CLA



Native to the cool rain forests and scrublands of Bhrusil's narrow temperate belt, razorcats are aggressive and cunning pack hunters. Not only are they extremely fast and agile, they're also intelligent; their behavior shows evidence of sophisticated social arrangements, crude tool use, and shelter-building. The bhruu give razorcats a wide berth, and warned us against any close surveillance of these creatures. We mounted several expeditions into razorcat territory to observe them, but they were adept at avoiding us. — AV, CSS

Description: The razorcat is a quadruped about the size of a large dog, with a long, semiprehensile tail used in navigating the upper branches of the trees. Each of its feet is armed with a formidable array of sharp claws that can be partially extended (for climbing) or fully extended (for killing). Razorcats have a mottled brown and tan coat and a flat, intelligent face with large eyes. They average 1 meter in length, not counting the tail, and weigh 20 to 30 kilograms.

Encounter: Razorcats seek out large, slow-moving game and arrange skillful ambushes, driving prey under trees where a killing team of three or four hunters can spring down on the victim. The ambushers gain a –1 bonus to their attack rolls by using this spectacular attack tactic. A small party of travelers may be attacked in this fashion, but razorcats usually leave large groups (or parties in vehicles) alone.

It's possible to approach razorcats with care, especially if the pack is sated from a recent kill. Individuals exhibit more curiosity and less aggressiveness than the pack together. Some people have succeeded in domesticating razorcats, which is possible if an animal is removed from its pack while it is very young. However, razorcats are high-strung and dangerous pets in the best of circumstances.

A razorcat can attack twice in one action with its claws, or once with its bite; generally it alternates between these attack forms. If a razorcat gets two Good or better claw hits against the same oppo-



nent in one action, it immediately tries to rake its enemy with its rear claws. This third claw attack does an extra 2 points of damage if it hits.

Habitat/Society: A razorcat pack establishes a common shelter or home by weaving crude platforms in the high branches of the forest canopy. The creatures spend about two-thirds of their time near this shelter, guarding their territory from other predators. Once or twice a week, they leave their shelter to hunt. The young and infirm are left behind, guarded by a selected handful of stronger adults.

Razorcats have a complex language of yowls, hisses, and yips that can convey a substantial amount of information. This vocalization takes place at frequencies well above the normal human hearing range—two razorcats can have a screaming contest within 10 meters of a party of humans, and the humans won't hear a thing. Using this ability, razorcat scouts can shadow potential enemies or prey, while constantly updating the rest of the pack on the location and condition of the threat.

Razorcats can use simple tools, such as a heavy rock to bash in

the shell of a turtlelike creature, or heavy vines to weave aerial shelters. Nonetheless, they don't seem to be true sentients. Recently, razorcats have begun to appear on other worlds in the Verge, trained to act as guard animals or captured to serve as exotic pets.

Razorcat Game Data

STR 10	(d4+7)	INT 6	(2d4+1)
DEX 15	(d6+11)	WIL 13	(2d4+8)
CON 9	(d4+7)	PER 6	(d8+3)
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 18+/17/8/4	
Move: sprint 80, run 50, (climb 10)		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Good/2			

Attacks

Claws (×2)	14/7/3	2d4s/d4+1w/d6+1w	LI/0
Bite	14/7/3	d6s/d4w/d4+1w	LI/0

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +3 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 -1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 +2 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [10]—climb [16]; Unarmed [10]—brawl [14]; Acrobatics [15]—fall [16]; Stealth [15]—shadow [18]; sneak [18]; Movement [9]; Awareness [13]—intuition [16]; perception [18]; Investigate [13]—track [14].

Razorcat Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H1-H2

Biome: Temperate and subarctic forest

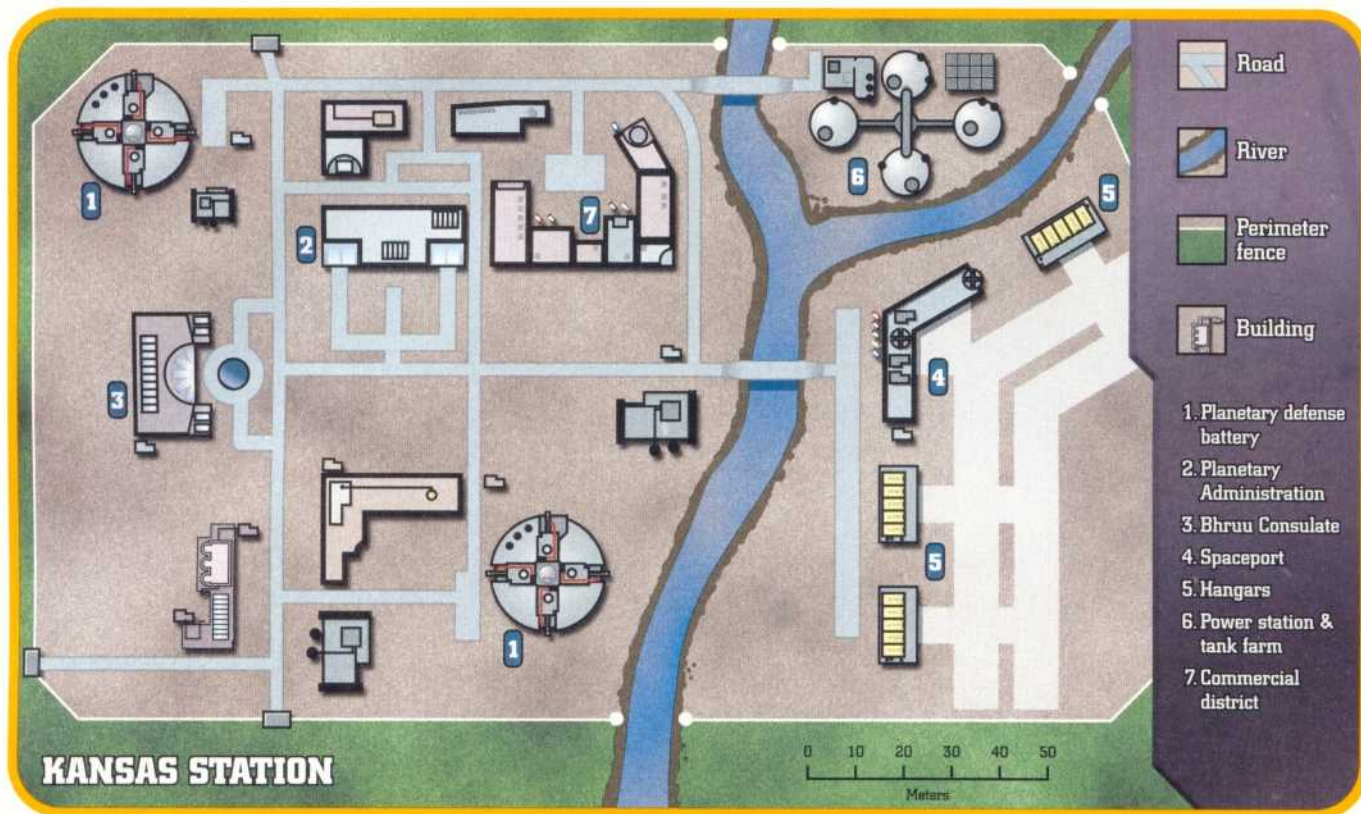
Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 3-24 (3d8)

Organization: Pack

Niche: Carnivore

Intelligence: Subsentient



Kansas Station

Insight's chief installation on Bhruusil is the outpost of Kansas Station, located in the central portion of the continent of Fhir-gaal. The station is manned by more than 2,500 Insight officers and civil servants. Roughly half of the personnel assigned here are scientists and survey teams, studying bhruu culture and Bhruusil's climatology and geology, and charting the location of mineral or natural resources for exploitation at a later date.

The station is situated in the foothills of the Kaarmaagh Mountains, in the broad fork of the Amughu River. The site was chosen for its proximity to the major campsites of three important *abhaala*; the nearest is only about 15 kilometers away.

Kansas Station is the planetary capital, for all intents and purposes. Insight's Planetary Manager, his administrative staff, and all other corporate assets are located here. Dozens of major exchange programs with the local bhruu *abhaala* are headquartered here as well; at any given time, several hundred bhruu from around the planet are visiting or working here.

The Planetary Manager

Currently, the leader of Bhruusil's Insight installations is Executive Heoren DeValk. He exemplifies the kind of no-nonsense executive who makes the trains run on time in a society devoted to individuality and freedom of expression. The Planetary Manager is hard-nosed and possessed of a singleminded drive to extend Insight's interests to every corner of Bhruusil.

Executive DeValk aims to drastically extend Insight's mining, forestry, and industrial production by establishing corporate enclaves or reserves in bhruu territory. It's rumored that DeValk also intends to incorporate the bhruu into Insight, similar to the relationship between the mechalus and the Rignumors or the weren and the Orlamus. Given the free-thinking nature of Insight citizens, he has encountered formidable resistance to this plan from his own staff.

The Council of Ubhruusa

The leaders of Bhruusil's *abhaala* are known as *ubhruusa*, or chieftains. Early in its colonization, VoidCorp attempted to divide and conquer the bhruu by exploiting differences between rival *abhaala*. However, the bhruu don't compete with each other in the same ways that humans do, and VoidCorp's divisive tactics backfired—the bhruu banded together to form the Council of Ubhruusa, a vehicle through which the bhruu present a united front on any issue of planetwide significance.

Currently, the council is engaged in opposing the Planetary Manager's plans to bring more of Bhruusil under development. This resistance has become a roadblock to DeValk's schemes, and he is considering drastic, possibly illegal, action to get the chieftains out of his way. A prominent sore spot is the Heerhil, a rich pan of heavy metals in the southern transpolar mountain range. Devalk wants to begin mining here, but the land is under the control of the Luunh *abhaal*. The area is located in the migratory path of the Luunh's livestock, and the bhruu are unwilling to allow incursions that could injure the herd.

RIVENDALE

Consisting of a complex trinary, the Terivine system didn't seem to hold much promise for life-bearing worlds or valuable resources. Terivine A and B are a tight pair of G-class stars that swept out every bit of material in their accretion disks, leaving nothing but the most insignificant debris. From this part of the system, Terivine's third sun—Terivine C—is nothing more than a bright star, a dim and distant K7 dwarf.

While the bright double-star pair in the center of the Terivine system is a common emergence point and navigational aid for ships making starfall, Terivine C has been subjected to only the most cursory of surveys. It was less than ten years ago that an Alaundrin merchant vessel missed its starfall badly enough to wind up close to the orange dwarf. The Alaundrins were quite surprised to discover a Class 1 planet orbiting Terivine C at a distance of only 45 million kilometers. Because of its extreme mountainous features and steep-sided crevasses, the Alaundrins named this world Rivendale, a constructed word loosely interpreted as "fractured valley." — *AV, CSS*

Rivendale is a metal-poor planet that orbits quite close to a relatively small, cool sun. Given its light gravity and the significant tidal effects of the nearby sun, Rivendale developed as a world of extreme mountains and valleys. Rivendale's highest peaks tower almost 40 kilometers above the deepest rifts in its tortured crust. The planet's early years were marked by violent volcanic activity, but over the course of time its core has cooled in spite of the tidal effects, and most of Rivendale's volcanoes are long extinct.

Rivendale possessed a highly elliptical orbit and rapid rotation in its distant past, but the effects of time and tide have normalized its orbital path while slowing its rotation. The Rivendalian day is almost as long as an Earth week, leading to intolerably hot and cold temperatures by late afternoon and in the long hours before dawn. At the equator, the temperature ranges from 60° C at noon to -20° C at midnight. Rivendalian lifeforms are either cold-adapted or heat-adapted, and take shelter during the day or night as appropriate.

Rivendale

Parent: Terivine C, K7	Surface Gravity: 0.80 g
Orbital Radius: 0.31 AU	Atmosphere: N ₂ , O ₂
Orbital Period: 89.1 days	Pressure: 0.60 atm
Rotation Period: 162.3 hours	Median Temperature: 27.9° C
Axial Tilt: Moderate (18.4°)	Satellites: None
Diameter: 8,446 km	GRAPH: G1/R1/A2/P2/H2
Density (Earth = 1): 1.20	

TERIVINE C : RIVENDALE : RIGLIA

Riglia

Dwelling in the wide altitude band between the cold, thin air of the highest peaks and the impenetrable murk of the valley floors, the riglia are a race of sentient avians. They are completely nontechnological, eschewing material possessions and achievements in favor of the study of the mind. At first they were mistaken for simple, if graceful, animals—after all, the riglia don't speak, wear clothing, build structures, or organize themselves beyond intimate circles of a few dozen individuals. Because they avoided contact with human scien-

tists and miners, they appeared to be nothing more than part of the scenery.

About five years ago, a fraal Mindwalker working for a Bluefall research outpost succeeded in making tentative contact with the riglia. They are a xenophobic species with little desire for extensive contact or trade with other species, and only tolerate human settlements and outposts in the most inhospitable sites of their world. Rumors of a riglian attack or strike to cleanse their world of foreign





influences abound, inflamed by riglian demonstrations of reticent and hostile behavior.

Description: A riglia is a true avian, a creature adapted to spending its entire life from birth to death in the skies of Rivendale. Its body is a long, gossamer ribbon with a cilia-like fringe, reaching 10 to 12 meters in length as an adult. Most of its body is only a few centimeters thick, and a typical riglia weighs 15 to 25 kilograms. The creature's face is a dense mat of longer feeding cilia, with three spherical eyes mounted on short stalks. It flies with a twisting, corkscrew motion, literally swimming through the air.

A riglia's flesh is translucent but surprisingly tough; the creatures are much stronger and more resilient than their diaphanous appearance suggests. A riglia doesn't have any true limbs, but it's capable of fine manipulation with its cilia and pliable body. A number of Rivendalian lifeforms share the riglia's body form, but most are much smaller than their intelligent cousin. The riglia is a nocturnal creature and retreats to the cool shadows of the deeper atmosphere during the long, hot Rivendalian day.

Encounter: To date, riglia have gone out of their way to avoid parties of offworlders, simply flying off when intruders get too close. But more alarming stories exist about the riglia—stories of missing travelers in the mountains, and of homesteads or lonely outposts that have been found mysteriously abandoned. No direct evidence of riglian involvement has yet been found, but offworlders are advised to proceed with caution outside the strictly proscribed boundaries of human settlements and stations.

While riglia want nothing to do with physical interaction, they are

much more amenable to mental contact. Riglia are cold and unemotional creatures by human standards, with a ruthless set of values that places the welfare of the riglia species above all other considerations. They have no tolerance for time-wasting formalities or appeals to their better natures; any distraction from their meditations and cogitations is greatly resented.

Riglia have been known to attack humans in isolated instances, usually when the humans were engaged in activity that was disturbing the environment in some way. The creatures prefer to fight with the power of their minds, using their psionic skills of *psychokinetics* and *electrokinetics* to drive away intruders. If its psionic en-

Riglia Game Data

STR 6	(d4+3)	INT 10	(2d4+5)
DEX 11	(2d4+6)	WIL 12	(d8+8)
CON 6	(d4+3)	PER 8	(d8+3)
Durability: 6/6/3/3		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: fly 40		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	
Psionic energy points: 12			

Attacks

Flail	10/5/2	d4s/d4+2s/d4w	LI/0
Electrokinetics	18/9/4	d6+2s/d4S/d4+2w	En/0

Defenses

kinetic shield (when activated)
 no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 no INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 +1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Unarmed [6]—*brawl* [10]; Acrobatics [11]—*flight* [16]; Stamina [6]—*endurance* [10]; Knowledge [10]; Life Science [10]; Awareness [12]—*intuition* [14], *perception* [14]; ESP [10]—*empathy* [14], *mind reading* [12]; Telekinesis [12]—*electrokinetics* [18], *kinetic shield* [16], *psychokinetics* [16]; Telepathy [8]—*contact* [16], *illusion* [12].

Riglia Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I
Environment: Class 1 (nocturnal)
GRAPH: G1/R1/A2/P2/H2
Biome: Aerial; tropical and temperate regions
Encounter Chance: Possible
Group Size: 2–12 (2d6)
Organization: Small communities
Niche: Aerial filter-feeders
Intelligence: Telepathic, nontechnological sentient

ergy is temporarily depleted, a riglia can strike a powerful blow with its long, whiplike body.

Habitat/Society: Rivendale's biosphere is distinguished by altitude—in the great rift valleys, the atmospheric pressure is several times Earth normal, while the heights of Rivendale's mountains are far beyond Himalayan in scope. The riglia favor a band that begins 10 kilometers above the canyon floors and continues to within 5 kilometers of the peaks. Their world is a misty realm of clouds and gentle rains, bounded by endless cliffs. This aerial world supports an amazing ecology of creatures who swim and drift on the air currents, rarely coming in contact with the hanging mountain walls. The riglia are filter-feeders, dining on aerial plankton and algae colonies.

Riglia have no family structure or relationships. Adults mate once per year, releasing a cloud of microscopic eggs to drift on the wind. Most of these are devoured by other Rivendalian lifeforms, but a few survive long enough to awake to sentience and telepathic ability. These young adults simply fall in with any group of riglia in the vicinity, becoming members of the band.

There is no true social structure to a riglian community. For the most part, each individual does as he or she pleases, pursuing the mental endeavors or studies that hold the most promise. At infrequent intervals, all riglia in the vicinity may enter into a communal telepathic rapport in order to make important decisions. Once a communal rapport has spoken, all riglia everywhere acknowledge its decision and abide by it.

Riglia as Heroes

You may allow players to create riglia heroes at your discretion. All riglia heroes are Mindwalkers; their free broad skills include Acrobatics, Stamina, Awareness, ESP, Telekinesis, and Telepathy. They are natural fliers. Riglia inflict $d4s/d4+2s/d4w$ (LI/O) in unarmed combat, although that's not their preferred mode of attack.

Riglia heroes must meet the following Ability Score requirements:

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIL	PER
4/7	8/14	4/7	7/13	9/16	4/11

Riglia have no hands and can't make use of weapons or armor designed for humanoids. They suffer a +4 penalty to use any kind of tool, weapon, or device even if they can manipulate it with their body or telekinetic power. Riglia heroes can only speak telepathically, although you can allow the player of such a hero to converse normally with the other players in noncrucial situations. Riglia are difficult and reticent at times, and are very rigid thinkers—they gain 1 less skill point per achievement level than normal due to their inflexibility.

Spidermist

Arable land is a scarce commodity on Rivendale. Great portions of the planet's landscape are sheer mountain slopes, and the flattest regions—the canyon floors—are immersed in a thick, unending fog. The richest biomes of the planet are the montane rain forests, vertical jungles that cling to the vast cliffs above the impenetrable murk of the lower reaches. The spidermist is one of the more dangerous predators of this region, a monstrosity that even the riglia fear.

Millions of tiny organisms make up a spidermist. The entire swarm maintains its form and integrity through the manipulation of bioelectric fields; each individual contributes a tiny amount of bioelectricity to the whole, and since the individuals are virtually weightless, even a weak attraction is sufficient to keep the individual in its place. Thus, the bioelectric field serves as the definition of the aggregate's body and, in some fashion unfathomable to humans, its consciousness as well.

Description: Each individual organism in a spidermist is a tiny, disc-shaped creature similar to the rotifers of terrestrial ponds and streams. A belt of whirling cilia serves as the animal's wings, acting like the lift fan of a hovercraft. The largest individuals are no bigger than the head of a pin, a glittering spark of sunshine in bright light. The entire colony is visible as a faint smudge about 2 to 4 meters in diameter, rippling with rainbowlike colors as ambient sunlight shines through the individual creatures' transparent bodies.

Encounter: A spidermist can be considered a single being composed of millions of cells. Its bioelectric fields give it a semblance of cohesion and shape, allowing it to manipulate very light objects or move to attack prey. The aggregate can sense the bioelectric fields of other living beings within 500 meters and pursues them with mindless ferocity. A spidermist prefers to lurk in the shadows and cover of the forest wall, darting out to attack prey that wanders nearby.

When a spidermist attacks, it lashes out with dangerous shocks of bioelectricity. Because of its flawless control over this energy, the creature never fails with this attack—the result of a Will feat check made by the attacking spidermist determines how much damage it inflicts with the discharge. The range of this attack is 20 meters, but for every 4 meters the shock travels, the spidermist must add a +1 penalty to its Will feat check, making it less likely to achieve a high grade of success. Each shock the spidermist attempts adds a cumulative +1 penalty to any subsequent feat check during the same scene as it exhausts its store of energy.

When the swarm's target is immobilized, or if the swarm closes to within 4 meters of its prey, it surges forward to feed, surrounding the victim in a cloud of gleaming lights. The individual wounds are insignificant, but millions together can flay the skin from a human in a matter of minutes, desiccating the victim. Again, a Will feat check determines how much damage the swarm inflicts. If a target is not dressed in an e-suit or a body tank, his or her armor is worthless—





the rotifers can infiltrate any body covering that isn't completely sealed against the environment.

A Spidermist has rudimentary, instinctive telepathic abilities. It rarely initiates psionic contact or combat, but strikes with great power if pushed by Mindwalker contact. Energy weapons are the only weapons that can damage a Spidermist; blades and bullets pass through its form harmlessly.

Habitat/Society: The sum of a Spidermist's parts is greater than the whole. Although it is composed of millions of disparate beings, it

shares one common consciousness, will, and intelligence. The incredibly complex web of interlocking bioelectric fields serves as a neural net, supporting an animal-level intelligence.

Although a Spidermist aggregate is cohesive and behaves like a single being, it's not. Each of its millions of cells is self-sufficient, drawing its own nutrients from the surroundings. The Spidermist's structure has no specialized organs or cells; when the creature feeds, all of its cells must absorb food at the same time.

A Spidermist is a voracious creature, needing to consume several kilograms of animal and plant matter every day to stay alive. This voracity can be a telltale sign of Spidermist activity—the landscape may be stripped bare for hundreds of meters around the vicinity of a Spidermist's lair or haunt. On the periphery of such an area, where a Spidermist is most likely to be located, the chance of encountering one of these creatures rises to Possible (50%).

A Spidermist's individual cells are constantly replenishing themselves. The creature reproduces simply by dividing into two entities when it reaches a certain size—usually about 4 meters in diameter, sometimes sooner if the creature is in an area where food is relatively scarce. Different aggregates do not interact with one another, and give each other a wide berth; the two smaller Spidermists that result from a reproductive split move away from each other rapidly as soon as the reproduction process is over.

Spidermist Game Data

STR 2 (d4) INT 1 (Animal 5 or d4+3)
DEX 6 (2d4+1) WIL 8 (d8+4)
CON 6 (2d4+1) PER 2 (Animal 8 or d4+6)
Durability: 6/6/3/3 Action check: 17+/16/8/4
Move: fly 20 #Actions: 4
Reaction score: Good/3
Psionic energy points: 8

Attacks

Shock 9+/8/4/2¹ d4s/d8s/d12s/d8w En/0
Swarm 9+/8/4/2¹ d4-2w/d4w/d4+2w/d6+2w En/0

¹ Critical Failure result counts as Marginal success.

Defenses

immune to damage from LI or HI weapons
+3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+5 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Stealth [6]-hide [16], sneak [12]; Stamina [6]; Awareness [8]-intuition [12], perception [12]; Telepathy [2]-contact [6], mind blast [8], mind shield [12].

Spidermist Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1 (diurnal)

GRAPH: G1/R1/A2/P2/H2

Biome: Aerial, montane rain forests

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Omnivore

Intelligence: Low-order animal

POLYPHEMUS

The Lucullus system is another trinary, even less hospitable than the Terivine system. Lucullus A and Lucullus B are both young blue-white stars, blazing away with a fierce intensity. The orbital mechanics of the system are quite complex; Lucullus A is orbited by Polyphemus and an array of mineral-rich asteroids, and this subsystem forms a close binary pair with Lucullus B. Caught between two blue giants, Polyphemus is a molten hell, and even the most persistent asteroid miners dare not follow their claims into Lucullus's Arch, the region of space between the two stars.

We began our survey of this system in the most unlikely of places, the irradiated wasteland known as Polyphemus. This is one of the few places where Series VI life has developed. Its lifeforms are based on long chains of fluorosilicones, extremely heat-resistant organic compounds, and they feed on the rich metallic ores of the planet's surface. They "breathe" sulfur in gaseous form and various sulfur oxides, absorbing these substances through bodily contact. — **AV, CSS**

Obviously, Polyphemus is not a world for human settlement. However, its great mineral wealth has made it attractive to various mining interests. A handful of shielded stations are scattered around its surface, and turn a handy profit despite the high level of upkeep and personnel turnover. Polyphemus's extreme volcanism continuously refreshes the surface deposits of heavy minerals, but places the mining posts at grave risk. — **RG, CLA**

While it's often grossly inaccurate to describe any planet by a single phrase, such is not the case here: Polyphemus is, plain and simple, a molten hell. Not only is the surface scorched by vicious heat and radiation, the planet is wracked by intense seismic activity, and vast regions are composed of impassable terrain. Polyphemus's seasons are negligible; the world's passage through Lucullus's Arch has a far greater effect on the planet's climate than do any characteristics of the planet itself.

Polyphemus is a cornucopia of heavy metals. Many valuable ores that are locked in the cores of cooler worlds are easily accessible beneath Polyphemus's thin crust. Unfortunately for those who would strip the planet of whatever they can take from it, these metals happen to be the basic foodstuffs of the planet's native creatures.

Polyphemus

Parent: Lucullus A, A4	Surface Gravity: 1.35 g
Orbital Radius: 0.39 AU	Atmosphere: S, SO ₂ , SO ₃ , CO ₂
Orbital Period: 57.4 days	Pressure: 0.28 atm
Rotation Period: 19.8 hours	Median Temperature: 650° C
Axial Tilt: Minimal (4.8°)	Satellites: None
Diameter: 9,044 km	GRAPH: G3/R5/A3/P1/H5
Density (Earth = 1): 1.90	

Brimstone

One of the more common denizens of Polyphemus, the brimstone is a good example of a typical Series VI creature. It resembles an oversized amoeba made of cooling lava, with a charred crust of scorched dirt and regolith. It feeds voraciously on various stones and metallic ores, and has been known to attack humans because of the interesting taste of their suits or vehicles. While they're not very intelligent,

brimstones seem to have some basic ability to communicate with each other and tend to travel in small groups for mutual protection and socialization.

Description: The brimstone is a large, amorphous scavenger covered in a thick, cracked crust that constantly oozes red-hot proto-

LUCULLUS A : POLYPHEMUS : BRIMSTONE





plasm. The creature has no discernible external features except for several stalklike crystal-eyes and tough, serrated stone pads at the ends of the creature's pseudopods. Brimstones are slow-moving creatures, but they possess considerable strength and hardness. A full-grown brimstone averages 2 to 2.5 meters in diameter, and weighs 600 to 1,200 kilograms.

Encounter: Characters aren't likely to spend much time wandering around in places where they might encounter brimstones; the surface of Polyphemus presents a survival challenge that only the most advanced technology can overcome. However, brimstones may approach the outskirts of human installations and become troublesome when they start to consume equipment and structures. If a maintenance party sets out to repair this damage, those characters run the risk of being attacked by the brimstones.

Characters who are unfamiliar with Series VI lifeforms may not recognize a brimstone as a potential threat, especially in the heat of day or the relative coolness of nighttime on Polyphemus. At these times, brimstones lie dormant, their stony hides settling into boulderlike shapes. Someone who gets too close to a dormant brimstone

(within 2 to 6 meters) triggers the creature's defensive response, provoking an attack. If the intruders didn't notice the creature, they suffer a +2 penalty to their Awareness skill check to avoid surprise. A successful Awareness or Life Science skill check may spot a dormant brimstone before it's too late.

When a brimstone attacks, it seeks to surround and crush its foe, using its mass and body heat to extinguish any opposition. A human can observe a brimstone from a short distance (20 meters or so) in safety; the creature can't overtake him, and is likely to ignore him or her unless it's unusually hungry.

Habitat/Society: Brimstones can tolerate the entire range of temperatures found on the surface of Polyphemus, but their heavy, awkward bodies are best suited to flat terrain. Thus, they favor the baked salt flats, boulder fields, and basalt plains of the planet, instead of the difficult mountainous regions. They graze the surface, seeking nutritional deposits, and never stake out territory or remain in one place for long. Brimstones usually travel in small groups for mutual protection against Polyphemus's predators.

The intelligence of brimstones is difficult to gauge. Clearly they are not sentient, but beyond that it is hard to say if their intelligence is equivalent to that of monkeys, lizards, sponges, or bacteria. They are mobile, and they use that motive ability to move toward food sources and move away from recognized threats. They band together, but it's not known if they interact or communicate with each other in any way.

A brimstone reproduces by a parthenogenetic process, forming a miniature copy of itself within a sac on its underside and then expelling the offspring when it has reached sufficient size (1 meter diameter, 200 kg) to function on its own. The frequency with which new individuals are created is tied to the size and quality of the local food supply.

Brimstone Game Data

STR 15	(d4+12)	INT 1	(Animal 4 or d4+2)
DEX 6	(d4+3)	WIL 9	(2d4+4)
CON 18	(d6+14)	PER 2	(Animal 6 or d4+4)
Durability: 18/18/9/9		Action check: 7+/6/3/1	
Move: run 6, walk 2		#Actions: 1	
Reaction score: Marginal/1			

Attacks

Crush 15/7/3 2d6s/2d4w/d4+1m LI/0

On a successful hit, humanoid targets suffer an additional d4 points of wound damage (En/0) due to the brimstone's temperature.

Defenses

Good toughness

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

-1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

Armor: 2d4+1 (LI), 2d4 (HI), d4+2 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [15]; Stamina [18]-endurance [20]; Awareness [9]-perception [10]; Resolve [9].

Brimstone Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VI

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G3/R5/A3/P1/H5

Biome: Polar salt flats

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 3-12 (3d4)

Organization: Herd

Niche: Lithovore, scavenger

Intelligence: Low-order animal

Crystallis

The lifeforms of Polyphemus are divided into three kingdoms: stone-like lithovores, soft-bodied gaseous creatures, and immobile crystalline creatures. The crystallis is an example of this third type, worth mentioning here because it poses a considerable danger to anyone moving about on the surface of Polyphemus. The crystalline creatures of Polyphemus are a little like the plants of Earth, in that they use the energy of sunlight to change inorganic compounds into food (by Series VI standards).

Description: One of the most beautiful creatures known to humankind, the crystallis is (as its name suggests) a crystalline lifeform. Its short, barrel-shaped body is ringed with glittering, razor-sharp crystal protrusions, and brilliant light scintillates in its many facets. On its uppermost surface, a tassellike structure of thin, silvered antennae drifts with the slightest atmospheric disturbances. The crystallis averages 1 meter in height, about 30 centimeters in diameter, and weighs about 20 kilograms.

Encounter: One might think there isn't much to expect in an encounter with a plantlike creature, but the crystallis has killed a number of human miners and surveyors over the years. It has a unique defense mechanism—a natural laser attack focused through its crystal fronds. The silver antennae of its tassel are delicate pressure and vibration sensors that warn the creature if any large intruders are approaching. If a character gets within 5 to 20 meters (the range varies with the size and speed of the intruder), the crystallis uses chemical compounds in its body to produce a burst of light that is funneled through living crystal conduits in its fronds and fired at the



intruder. It has enough energy for 2d4 shots before it exhausts its defenses. It can replenish its supply of chemicals in d6+2 minutes.

The crystallis ignores the effects of stun damage, since it can't be knocked out, but once its stun points have been up, additional stun damage is marked off as wound damage just as with other creatures. Laser weapons are ineffective against it, and actually serve to boost the creature's own attack capability, giving the crystallis d4 extra attacks with its own laser every time it is hit with such a weapon.

Habitat/Society: The crystallis grows only in places where conditions are favorable to it, so it's not unusual to find a number in the same area. The creatures favor mountainous regions where the threat of plains-bound lithovores such as brimstones is reduced, and prefer cool climes (by Polyphemus's standards). Like most other natives of the planet, they reproduce asexually by budding, creating a handful of delicate, seedlike sprouts that can be carried hundreds of kilometers on the furnace breezes of the Polypheman atmosphere. These sprouts can show up anywhere, taking root and growing to maturity in a matter of days. A number of miners have been injured by crystallis patches that have suddenly grown up near their camps and bases.

Crystallis Game Data

STR 1		INT 0	
DEX 9	(d6+6)	WIL 5	(d4+3)
CON 9	(d6+6)	PER 0	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 17+/16/8/4	
Move: none		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Good/2			

Attacks

Laser 18/9/4 d4+2w/d6+2w/d4m En/0

Defenses

Immune to laser weapons (see text)
 -3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d4 (LI), d6-2 (HI), d6-2 (En)

Skills

Modern [9]-rifle [18]; Awareness [5]-intuition [14], perception [12].

Crystallis Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VI
Environment: Class 3
GRAPH: G3/R5/A3/P1/H4
Biome: Polar foothills and mountains
Encounter Chance: Unlikely
Group Size: 3-8 (d6+2)
Organization: Patch
Niche: Immobile producer
Intelligence: None



Flamering

Polyphemus's most formidable predator is the flamering, an example of the planet's gaseous creatures, which attacks the slow-moving brimstone and immobile crystallis wherever it finds them. A flamering is a balloonlike creature having only a fraction of the strength of the rocky creatures it feeds upon. It drifts from place to place in the thin, acrid winds of the Polypheman atmosphere.

Description: The flamering's body resembles a tall, elongated balloon, with a mass of tentacles and organs suspended at the bottom end. The balloon-body is translucent and divided into compartments, each of which holds a supply of oxygen-rich gas. The expulsion of gas from these chambers often creates jets of bright flame—the property from which the creature's name is derived.

A flamering's balloon-body is about 15 meters in height and 5 meters in diameter. The solid body containing its vital organs is only about 1 meter in diameter, but its reddish tentacles can reach 3 meters or more in length.

Encounter: Despite the great size of its gaseous envelopes, a flamering is quite stealthy. The balloonlike portion of its body is nearly transparent, and the creature drifts in complete silence. It can easily surprise a suited human at work. Fortunately, flamering's don't have much of an appetite for human suits and ignore potential meals at least 75% of the time.

Flamering Game Data

STR 5	(d4+3)	INT 3	(Animal 11 or 2d4+6)
DEX 9	(d4+7)	WIL 9	(d4+7)
CON 8	(3d4)	PER 1	(Animal 5 or d6+2)
Durability: 8/8/4/4		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: fly 10, (crawl 1)		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			

Attacks

Flame ¹	16/8/4	2d4w/2d4w/2d4w	En/0
Slap	7/3/1	d4s/d6s/d4w	LI/0

¹ Can affect multiple targets; see text.

Defenses

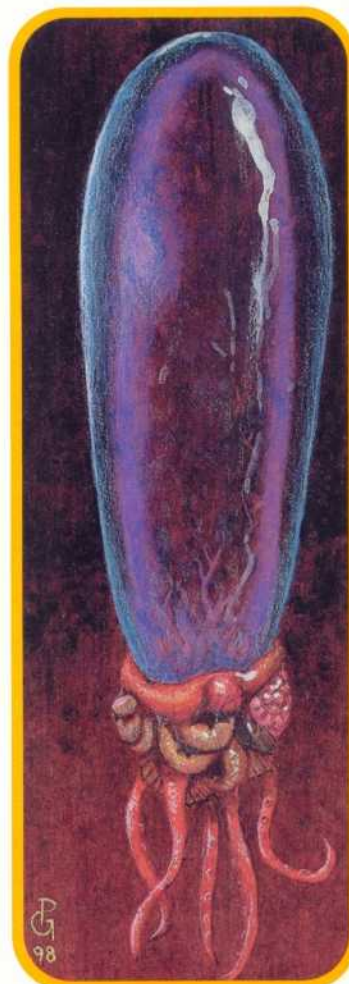
+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks (solid body)
 -1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks (membrane)
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks (solid body)
 -2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks (membrane)
 Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Unarmed [5]-brawl [7]; Modern [9]-SMG [16]; Stealth [9]-sneak [12]; Stamina [8]-endurance [10]; Awareness [9]-intuition [12]; perception [14]; Resolve [9].

The creature attacks by combining oxygen-rich gas from one of its membranous sacs with liquid magnesium that it stores inside its solid body. When the two substances are expelled in the same direction at the same time, the gas immediately oxidizes the atomized magnesium, which then bursts into flame. The heat from the burning magnesium is in the neighborhood of 3,000° C—and even heat-resistant Polypheman lifeforms can't stand up to this kind of treatment. This flame spray does 2d4 points of wound damage to any single character in the immediate vicinity of the creature. If the flamering gets a Good success on its attack roll, the flame shoots out far or wide enough to hit a second character located within 2 meters of the creature. On an Amazing success, as many as three targets can be hit if they're reasonably close together and all within 4 meters of the flamering.

When its victim is dead or immobilized, the flamering uses its weak tentacles to strip the body bare. The creature is especially attracted to silicon-based materials from which it can extract oxygen, as well as any compounds containing magnesium. Attacks against its balloon-body don't count against the flamering's durability score; this membrane can withstand 6d4 points of wound or mortal damage.



Flamering Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VI

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G3/R5/A3/P1/H5

Biome: Any terrain

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 1-2 (d4÷2)

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Carnivore

Intelligence: High-order animal

age before the creature is forced to land. On the ground, the creature is practically immobile and essentially defenseless—it can't use its flame attack, and must resort to slapping weakly at foes with its tentacles.

Habitat/Society: Flamerings can be found almost anywhere on Polyphemus, although they're not very common. They are extremely complex biological beings, possessing the ability to process any substance they ingest and extract oxygen and magnesium from those foodstuffs with 100% efficiency. A number of other gaseous crea-

tures exist in the Polypheman atmosphere, including balloonlike plants and grazers. None of the others is nearly as sophisticated or as dangerous as the flamerings.

Flamerings sometimes travel in pairs, although individuals are not very good at cooperative tactics. About once every three years, the creature must land and anchor itself to one point for several months while it sheds its old membrane, produces a new set of gas sacs, and fills them with metabolized gases. During this time, a flamerings is very vulnerable, and many don't survive this molting process more than once or twice.



The discovery of intelligent Series VI life was a complete shock to the early human explorers of Polyphemus. The prevalence of dim-witted living rocks such as the brimstones lulled xenobiologists into classifying Polyphemus as a virgin world, free to whomever wanted to exploit its resources. Several major mining corps established outposts on its hellish surface to take advantage of the abundant mineral resources, but their activities over the last 10 years have provoked the silicates. These rock creatures—far from dim-witted—wreck human facilities and installations at every opportunity, apparently as part of an effort to drive the mining stations from their world.

To date, humans have had little success in establishing communication with silicates. The creatures use complicated chemical signals and sign language to talk to each other, and appear to be deaf. Some mindwalkers have managed to tap into the silicates' consciousness, and they report that silicates have excellent reasoning powers but only the dimmest sense of self-awareness. In the absence of other silicates, an individual descends to an instinctive, non-conscious awareness, acting as nothing more than an animal of low-order intelligence. Dealing with an individual is pointless and fruitless; in order to communicate, a contact specialist has to speak with an entire band of silicates at one time.

Description: Although silicates belong to the same kingdom as the rocklike brimstones, they are far more sophisticated beings, in the same way that a human being is more highly developed than a tube worm. Despite this great evolutionary gap, a silicate doesn't look all that different from a brimstone. It's roughly cylindrical with no true permanent limbs, wider at the base than at the top, standing about

as tall as a human. The silicate actually has an internal "skeleton" of dense, hot fluids that can be shaped and stiffened to provide leverage and support as necessary. With this it creates temporary pseudopods, tentacles, or small manipulative appendages at whatever point on its body is convenient. Typically, a creature has 3–5 motive limbs radiating from its base, plus 3–5 additional manipulative limbs on its upper surface.

Encounter: Silicates regard human outposts—and, by extension, individual humans—as enemies. At best, the creatures are elusive and hard to find, retreating from any human approach. At worst, they can be downright murderous, using every bit of their collective knowledge and wile to destroy human installations. Any peaceful contact will have to be made in remote regions where the presence of

Silicate Game Data

STR 15	(d6+11)	INT 6	(2d4+1)
DEX 7	(2d4+2)	WIL 12	(3d4+5)
CON 16	(d6+12)	PER 7	(2d4+2)
Durability: 16/16/8/8		Action check: 11+/10/5/2	
Move: run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Marginal/1		Last resorts: 0	

Attacks

Pseudopod	16/8/4	d8s/d8+2s/d4+2w	LI/O
Stone control	12/6/3	varies (see text)	LI/O

Defenses

+3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 –1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 +1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d4+2 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [15]–brawl [16]; Stamina [16]–endurance [18]; Knowledge [7]; Awareness [12]–intuition [14], perception [14]; Resolve [12]–mental [18]; Interaction [7].

Silicate Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VI
Environment: Class 3
GRAPH: G3/R5/A3/P1/H5
Biome: Any terrain
Encounter Chance: Unlikely
Group Size: 6–24 (6d4)
Organization: Tribal bands
Niche: Lithovore
Intelligence: Subsentient





human installations neither threatens nor frightens the silicates. And, if no Mindwalker is along to speak to the silicates, contact will be limited to a few days of wary watchfulness.

A silicate tribe is extremely conscious of anything that might affect its environment, but uncaring of most other matters. Asking tribe members which way a human fugitive fled is pointless—but ask them where a lone human has interfered with their territory, and they'll gladly answer. Silicates can be bribed with gifts of refined ores, a promise to remove some installation that despoils their territory, or the threat of environmental mayhem in their home.

In combat, silicates possess great physical strength and incredible resilience. They can meld with and shape the very ground and rock, creating eruptions, landslides, or crevasses to threaten their enemies. To exercise this power, the silicate must remain motionless and concentrate completely on its task. The result of a Will feat check determines how well the attack succeeds:

Eruption (+2 penalty on feat check, range 50 meters): A buried vein of volatile compounds explodes, inflicting $d8s/d6w/2d6w$ of damage (En/O) to nearby targets. The eruption has an area effect of $2/4/6$ meters for Amazing, Good, and Ordinary damage.

Landslide (+1 penalty on feat check, range 100 meters): By shifting the subterranean rock, the silicate causes a mass of regolith or rock to fall. Obviously, the targets must be located downslope of a suitable site. The landslide inflicts $d8s/2d6s/d4+1w$ in a path $4/6/8$ meters wide and 50–100 meters long.

Crevasse (+2 penalty on feat check, range 50 meters): The silicate causes subterranean structures to subside, creating a pit beneath its foe. This pit is 2 meters square and 2 meters deep for an Ordinary success, 4 meters square and 4 meters deep for a Good success, and 6 meters square by 4 meters deep with an Amazing success. The target is entitled to a Dexterity feat check (or Acrobat-

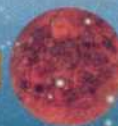
ics skill check) to avoid being caught. Small pits are a nuisance, but may trap a victim for $d4$ rounds; a 4-meter deep pit confines a human character until someone can help him.

Habitat/Society: The collective nature of silicate intelligence dictates the organization of individuals into small bands or tribes. These groups wander the surface, remaining within strictly defined areas—to all outward appearances, silicate tribes define their borders with perfect agreement. At various times of the year—typically the solstices and the equinoxes—neighboring bands meet and congregate for days on end in a communion of experiences, insights, and decision-making.

While silicates are gifted with the physical capabilities necessary to thrive in their environment, they have begun to display an ability to mimic human tool-making. They are shapers of their environment, and use their control over stone and rock to shape shelters and defeat enemies—but recently they have begun to demonstrate the ability to fashion weapons and tools after the human model. For example, some north polar bands have developed a handheld laser based on custom-grown crystals. These weapons are made from large, partially hollowed geodes. Other silicates have been seen making use of magnetic manipulation and levitation.

Some scientists have speculated that the silicates are growing more intelligent, somehow responding to the challenge that humankind poses to their species. Others hypothesize that the creatures have stumbled upon, or have been presented with, strange technology currently outside the realm of human or fraal experience. If either or both of these speculations are accurate, continued enterprise on the surface of Polyphemos by any nonnative species could be in serious jeopardy. — AV, CSS

DIONE



ne of the saving graces of Lucullus C is that it's nowhere near as navigationally challenging as its parent stars. Dione's orbit is quite stable, a world away from the challenges of the Möbius Belt and its criss-crossing figure-8 orbits. The pale blue, steam-covered waters of Dione were a welcome sight after our extended stay in the inner system.

The hot-water world of Dione more resembles a solar teacup than a world that would be enticing to colonization. Its surface is totally devoid of any land mass whatsoever, and the environment is composed entirely of superheated water and currents of deadly hot vapors. It's not a place where I would have expected to find native life forms, but this was yet another surprise that Lucullus held.

My navigator informed me that there is a narrow temperature band (102–106° C) at the higher latitudes that seems to provide the smoothest flight into Dione's atmosphere. Negotiating the myriad of currents present in the atmosphere does take some additional time, but I considered it well spent. The few times we hit major turbulence occurred when we had to go through a particularly hot area, and it's not an experience I would have willingly subjected myself to. — **AV, CSS**

Dione

Primary: Lucullus C, MO	Surface Gravity: 1.29 g
Orbital Radius: 0.19 AU	Atmosphere: N ₂ , O ₂
Orbital Period: 21.6 days	Pressure: 5 atm
Rotation Period: 14.35 hours	Median Temperature: 120° C
Axial Tilt: Minimal (4.5°)	Satellites: None
Diameter: 49,780 km	GRAPH: G3/R0/A2/P4/H4
Density (Earth=1): 0.33	

Despite the difficulties associated with colonizing a water world, numerous small settlements exist upon the surface of Dione. Some are composed of individuals who seek to escape the madness of the inner-system political morass, while other encampments are made up of those who desire humanity to stay away from them. It's not always possible to distinguish these two groups until the opening round of weapons fire crosses the bow; keep a close eye on sensors until permission to dock has been granted.

Our search of the planet's surface took us toward the equator, where reports of the corstars were most numerous. I suspect that the "traders" we found willing to talk with us were probably escapees from Penates, but I chose not to bring up the topic with them. Our primary concern was discovering a good vantage point to view the native lifeforms safely. — **RG, CLA**

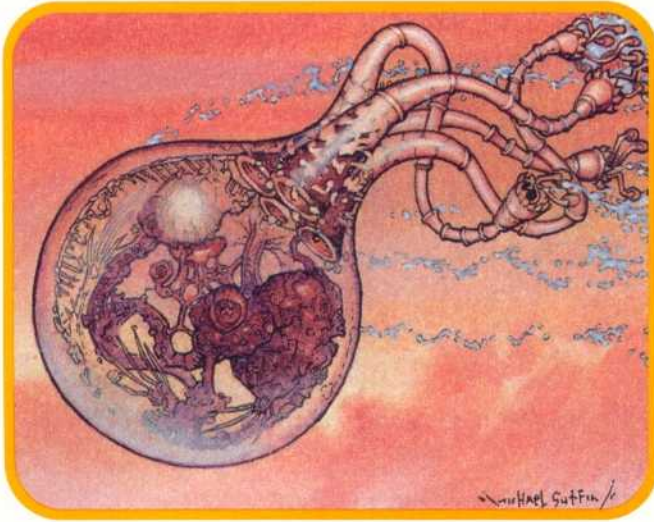
Corstar

One of the most delicate lifeforms on the planet, the corstar is difficult to classify. The creatures are composed of highly pressurized and extremely hot water, with silicon and a scattering of other elements thrown in for good measure. They're particularly sensitive to compounds in their environment, and some corstars that have been examined contain trace elements of interstellar dust and other non-native particles. Apparently, this residue has come from spacecraft that have traversed the atmosphere of Dione.

Simple observation of the creatures revealed that they were indeed a lifeform. They traveled in groups, paired off with others of their kind, and tried to avoid contact with spacecraft. Until a few years ago, it wasn't believed that corstars were particularly intelligent, but that myth was shattered when Karyn Corthguard, a human Mindwalker, received telepathic communication that she claimed to be coming from a nearby corstar community.

Psi-detectors were used to verify the presence of psychic energy,





but couldn't track the source. Corthguard described the contact with the corstar community to be more on the empathic level rather than through verbal dialogue. Her notes were used to help arrive at the conclusions detailed below.

Initial communication with a corstar typically begins empathetically. To date, the only contact made with humanity has been via Mindwalkers; a talent has never been contacted, nor has a non-psionic individual ever communicated with a corstar. Only true Mindwalkers seem to possess the ability to get the mental attention of these creatures.

It's still unclear whether an individual corstar possesses the ability to communicate telepathically, or whether such contact requires a community to begin empathic conversation. Few Mindwalkers have been willing to expend much time and energy pursuing the matter.

Recent contact with corstars has indicated a change in their behavior. More and more ships traveling to Dione have apparently attracted the attention of the community, and a few Mindwalkers have reported that corstars are puzzled by the influx of traffic. During a landing about six months ago, a Mindwalker on board the *Hangman's Temptation*, a trading vessel, was struck unconscious by what he described as a "psychic scream." The scream happened to coincide with an unfortunate impact with a corstar by the freighter.

Description: Corstars are teardrop-shaped creatures around 2 meters wide and 4 meters long. They possess wispy "tails" of water that trail out behind them as they traverse the winds of Dione. They do not possess any humanoid features (eyes, mouth, ears, and other characteristics). Each corstar weighs approximately 200 kilograms.

Corstar Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series V

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G3/R0/A2/P4/H4

Biome: Aerial

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 12-144 (12d12)

Organization: Small communities

Niche: Photoelectric

Intelligence: Telepathic, nontechnological sentient

While most of the creature's body is translucent, its tail is an opaque white. Internal organs can be seen pulsating amoebalike through their watery bodies, and these organs take on a variety of different colors, typically reds and violets. The outer layer of a corstar's body is composed of a thin layer of clear silicon.

Encounter: Corstars inhabit a narrow band of Dione's atmosphere where the temperature remains approximately 100° and the pressure maintains 3 atmospheres. That's approximately 4 kilometers above the surface of the planet in most cases, but fierce windstorms can cause the creatures' "temperate zone" to vary in altitude by as much as a kilometer. When possible, corstars try to stay out of the way of humanity's intrusions to their world.

Research vessels have discovered that the corstar's activity cycle is primarily centered around times of daylight. No psionic contacts have been made during darkness, and the creatures seem to possess a complex internal clock that regulates the speed at which they traverse the skies.

For instance, during the first hours of daylight, corstars are normally hovering in the air, apparently basking in the warmth of Dione's sun. By midday, they are typically traveling around 200 kph, and by late in the day they're moving at a speed of 500 kph or more. During darkness, their speed slowly drops until dawn once again reinvigorates them.

Corstars are most likely to investigate items of interest, such as hovering spacecraft, during the early morning hours. It is during this time of day that most of the Mindwalker contacts have occurred. By mid-afternoon, corstars seem to have little interest in exercising their curiosity.

Corstar Game Data

STR 5 (d4+2) **INT** 11 (2d6+5)

DEX 7 (d6+4) **WIL** 10 (2d4+5)

CON 13 (d6+10) **PER** 6 (d4+3)

Durability: 13/13/6/6 **Action check:** 11+/10/5/2

Move: fly 48 **#Actions:** 2

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 **Last resorts:** 1

Psionic energy points: 10

Attacks

Suicide drop 14/7/3 d4w/d4+2w/d4m HI/G

Pyrokinesis 16/8/4 d6+2w/d8+2w/d4m En/O

Mind blast 12/6/3 d4+2s/d6+2s/d8+2s En/O

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

+1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Armor (silicon shell): d6 (LI), d4-1 (HI), none (En)

Skills

Acrobatics [7]—**flight** [18]; **Awareness** [10]—**intuition** [12], **perception** [12], **Telekinesis** [10]—**photokinetics** [12], **pyrokinesis** [14], **Telepathy** [6]—**contact** [10], **mind blast** [12].

Unfortunately, most encounters with corstars take place when a ship approaching one of Dione's settlements strikes one during its landing approach. Such a collision is almost always fatal to the corstar and poses the threat of damaging external components of a spacecraft (such as laser antennae and other delicate protrusions).

It's rare that a corstar attacks a human, but two such incidents have been recorded. In both cases, an entire corstar community attacked the crew of a vessel that had used them for weapons practice. In the first attack, more than a dozen people were killed when several corstar "flung" themselves on crew members wearing e-suits as they departed the ship. The attacks cost the corstars and most of the crew their lives, but the creatures demonstrated a much higher degree of intelligence and bonding than was first imagined.

The second attack came against the docking mechanism of a ship that had attacked them. While crew members were departing via an airlock, the corstars once again sacrificed themselves, cracking the docking ring and exposing the unshielded crew to the extreme planetary temperatures.

Habitat/Society: Little is known of corstar society, but by all indications this appears to be a peaceful species that doesn't wish to

harm anyone. Empathic contact with the aliens has discerned their curious nature, but little is known about their social structure.

Biologists researching corstar communities have conjectured that they are indeed made up of family units. This is based on observations of "smaller" corstars traveling with larger companions. In an eight-month time frame, the "sibling" reached its full-grown status and appeared to take a mate (meaning it traveled around with the same corstar until death). The corstar in the study, who was tagged with a transponder while hovering in the darkness so that his movements could be tracked, was nicknamed Hera by the biologists.

Other studies have concluded that it's safe to approach a corstar just before dawn. While scientists have no evidence by which to verify that this is the slumbering time of the corstars, none of the research biologists or their ships have been attacked when they have tagged the creatures (and they've kept a careful eye skyward when disembarking just in case).

Extended observation of several different groups has led to the conclusion that a corstar typically remains with its original community for its entire life. (Most corstar live around two years.) A lone corstar will be accepted into a new community if some catastrophe has caused it to be abandoned by its original community.



These creatures are reminiscent of the great Terran whales, though they are more reptilian than mammalian. They swim around in the great boiling oceans of Dione as the absolute masters of their environment. While a variety of smaller creatures dwell in Dione's ocean, none of them prey on the levian. They are at the top of the world's food chain (though it's unsure if a greater menace dwells deeper in the oceans).

The levians don't appear to possess anything more than animal intelligence, operating on a biological cycle that's fairly predictable and preordained. They swim the great oceans of Dione, gobbling up smaller creatures and seldom coming to the surface unless lured there with sonar- or laser-based scanning equipment. As a water-breather, a levian doesn't have a biological need to surface.

Attempts to communicate with levians haven't yielded any success. All planetary biologists have been able to discover is that scanning equipment can be used to attract the creatures to a particular

area. Eventually, a levian will attack the source of such emanations with enough brute force to sink or capsize a medium-sized observation platform.

Mental contact with these great beasts has proven totally ineffective. It's not that their thoughts are alien, it's just as if there's nothing there. One Mindwalker described the experience as "trying to communicate with a rock."

Among themselves, levians communicate using a low-pitched drone that travels for hundreds of kilometers across the ocean floor (almost in mimicry of whales). Communication of this sort is rare, except during mating season or when a levian is close to death.

Description: Levians are 20-meter-long eellike creatures with sharp gray-blue bones that protrude from their bodies. These bone structures form long ridges along the body, shielding the creature from the attack of any other animal foolish enough to attempt such a thing. Levians' bodies are roughly 5 meters or so in diameter, with a huge mouth on one end and a wide tail at the other that propels them through the water.

They have large, white eyes covered with a thick, clear membrane. This coating insulates the creature's eyes from the blistering heat of the water, and also serves to protect the eye from attack, since the levian doesn't have eyelids. Its skin is gray, with light black mottling peppered across its surface.

Encounter: A chance run-in with a levian is rare, but has the potential to be fatal. Since the levian is typically only looking for food, it's more than likely that it would see any nearby humanoid (whether encased in an e-suit or not) to be its next meal. Scientists within an

Levian Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series V

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G3/RO/A2/P4/H4

Biome: Hot oceans

Encounter Chance: Slim

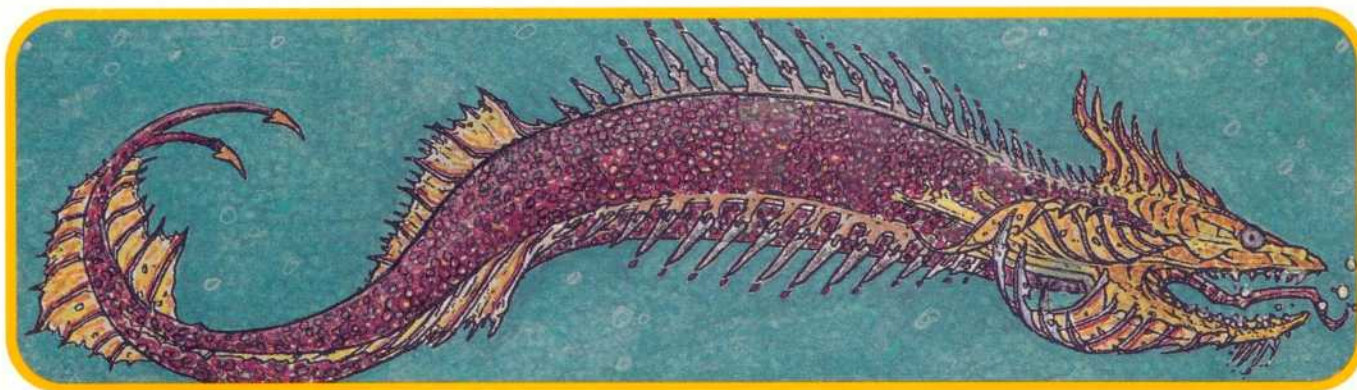
Group Size: 1, rarely 2–5 (d4+1)

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Carnivore

Intelligence: High-order animal





observation platform can be difficult for a leviathan to get at, but the creature is persistent.

It's very rare for a leviathan to simply wander away after it has sighted a meal. Their presence in the oceans of Dione has eliminated any possibility of small ships traversing the superheated oceans, because a leviathan will continue to attack a ship until it destroys the vessel. Once a leviathan attacks, the only way to escape its grasp is to kill it or leave the planet.

As long as it doesn't see anything that it considers food, a leviathan will swim away. Landing platforms, observation decks, and other constructions aren't interesting enough to one of these creatures to cause it to hang around. But if it sees creatures in the observation deck or on the landing platform, it becomes a persistent and dangerous hunter. A leviathan has even been known to attack such structures if it sees a household pet within.

When attacking, a leviathan normally uses its head to bash against large objects or tries to swallow anything else. It also uses its bony protrusions to go after power cables, support lines, or any other susceptible item. While it's not known to have any other attack forms,

the leviathan is large enough to swallow a man whole (even one encased in a lot of protective armor).

The first attack by a leviathan against a manmade structure was reported by the Union of Sol, which lost a twelve-man team to the creature. A record of the incident was captured via satellite, but proof of the attack didn't allay fears. While those who have lived on Dione knew that you didn't drop small structures into the hot oceans, no one informed the incoming governments of that fact.

Another attack occurred against a unit of marines who had stopped off to resupply a Galactic Concord research facility. Although equipped with battle armor and heavy weapons, the marines lost six men to one of these beasts before they finally killed it with an assortment of plasma guns and quantum rifles.

Habitat/Society: Leviathans are solitary creatures, coming together only through chance or during their yearly mating cycle. A hatchling is born in deeper water than a leviathan normally prowls, most likely as some kind of protection mechanism (so that the eggs are not eaten by other predators). Typically, a leviathan female produces 7–12 eggs (d6+6). From this batch, two leviathans will probably make it into adulthood; the remainder are eaten by predators or other leviathans.

Once mating has concluded, the female chases off the male. After mating, the male typically becomes docile for a period of 1–4 weeks, living off whatever creatures swim too close to his gaping maw. After this "cooling off" period, the male resumes his normal pattern of attacking anything that looks edible.

The impending death of a leviathan is the only other event known to bring these creatures together without a battle ensuing. When a creature is about to succumb to old age, disease, or some other natural cause, other leviathans gather to surround their brother or sister. Then, as if on cue, they batter the dying creature to death in a ferocious series of orchestrated attacks.

A leviathan in the midst of fighting creatures that are killing it will emit a death drone. This low-pitched call for help can attract from 1–4 other leviathans to the battle, though it can take up to an hour for them to arrive. If the original combatant is mortally wounded when help reaches the scene, the other leviathans don't immediately put it out of its misery. Instead, they start roaming the area looking for the cause of its death before returning to finish it off. This is one of the few instances where it's possible to face multiple leviathans at once.

A lot of research is still being done in the area of leviathan habitats and social structures. Scientists intent on investigating the matter are highly respected by other marine biologists because of the danger they expose themselves to while conducting their work.

Leviathan Game Data

STR 16	(d4+2)	INT 4	(2d6+5)
DEX 10	(d6+4)	WIL 10	(2d4+5)
CON 18	(d6+10)	PER 3	(d4+3)
Durability: 18/18/9/9		Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: swim 9		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Good/2		Last resorts: 0	

Attacks

Bite	16/8/4	d6+1w/d4m/d4+2m	LI/G
Bone Rake	12/6/3	d6s/d4w/d6w	LI/O

Defenses

+3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d6+2 (LI), d4+2 (HI), d4–1 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [16]; Stealth [10]—hide [14], shadow [14], sneak [14]; Movement [18]—race [22], swim [24]; Stamina [18]—endurance [20], resist pain [20]; Awareness [10]—perception [13].

HIGH MOJAVE



Mantebron is one of the oldest class G stars yet charted, a dull orange orb approaching its expansion into a red giant. Within 20,000 to 50,000 years, Mantebron will exhaust its hydrogen fuel and begin to fuse helium, swelling into a titan that will engulf High Mojave along with the rest of its inner system.

This system is a classic example of the immense effects of time on our exploration of the galaxy; a billion years ago, while Earth was still covered with nothing more complex than bacteria, High Mojave was a thriving, Earthlike world. By the time we evolved into beings with the intelligence, curiosity, and technology to explore this portion of the galaxy, High Mojave had been a desiccated and dying world for millions of years.

While High Mojave is more like Mars than Earth today, it is not devoid of life. Orion settlers founded a small colony here more than 150 years ago, scattering their domed farmsteads across the dusty plains. To their surprise, a number of Mojavian creatures still exist, having adapted to the changing conditions of their planet over time. Tough weeds, cacti, and grasses grow sparsely over much of the planet, and a number of small animals resistant to High Mojave's extremes thrive in the marginal biosphere that remains. — *AV, CSS*

High Mojave is a world almost eight billion years old, almost twice the age of Earth. In its youth it was probably very Earthlike, but with the passage of eons it is losing its ability to support terrestrial life. Seismic activity has virtually ceased, and its rotation has slowed to the point where it takes more than 10 Earth-days for one Mojavian day.

High Mojave's seas are now but a memory, and most of the oxygen in its thinning atmosphere is now in the form of nitric oxide and nitrogen dioxide. With no oceans and little air to act as heat sinks, High Mojave has cooled off drastically; its daytime temperatures are tolerable, but during the long, cold nights the temperature plummets to nearly -100°C .

High Mojave

Parent: Mantebron, G9 (unstable)	Density (Earth = 1): 1.02
Orbital Radius: 0.85 AU	Surface Gravity: 1.05 g
Orbital Period: 316 days	Atmosphere: NO, NO ₂
Rotation Period: 255.8 hours	Pressure: 0.4 atm
Axial Tilt: Moderate (16.9°)	Median Temperature: -23.8°C
Diameter: 13,057 km	Satellites: Two
	GRAPH: G2/R2/A3/P1/H0-H1

The Glassmakers

The most intriguing mystery of High Mojave involves the Glassmakers, a Precursor species that is thought to have inhabited this world in its youth. The Glassmakers seem to be long gone, but a few of their works have survived the crushing march of years. Glassmaker artifacts have been found in a number of systems throughout the outward borders of the Verge, although most are isolated sites that probably served as outposts and small colonies. However, High Mojave contains dozens of major sites, leading some people to speculate that this planet was the Glassmaker homeworld. Some Mojavian colonists even claim that the Glassmakers aren't really gone, and make a point of avoiding the ruins that draw so much attention from offworlders.

Recent planetary surveys have revealed evidence that High Mojave was subjected to an intense and violent climatic shift near the end of the Glassmakers' time of supremacy, a catastrophe that might have led to the destruction of the world's oceans and the loss of half its atmosphere. While the evidence of this climatic change can be found in ancient rock strata and fossils, no clues have been uncovered concerning exactly what took place.

It's conceivable—if only because it hasn't been disproven—that the Glassmakers brought about the catastrophe themselves, either knowingly or unknowingly. If that is the case, then it remains to be determined whether the Glassmakers' creations, notably the arachnon and the orbweaver, were engineered before the climatic change or whether they were specially created to serve as caretakers of what the Glassmakers left behind when they departed from High Mojave.

Arachnon

While engaged in cataloging populations in the region of the Glassmaker ruin located at 55° 37.94' N, 116° 12.34' E, we inadvertently opened some kind of stasis pod, releasing an alien being of a sort we had never seen before. This crystalline creature attacked immediately, killing crewman Drecir and wounding three others before we managed to stop it through repeated charge-rifle fire. After that incident, we encountered a number of similar pods—some open and empty, others still sealed. At this time, it is prudent to deem High Mojave an unsecured alien contact area; the Glassmakers apparently left more than buildings behind. — **RG, CLA**

Blurring the line between lifeform and automaton, arachnons are occasionally found in the vicinity of Glassmaker ruins and sites. The Glassmakers had a silicon-based technology that was equal or superior to the metal-based technology of humankind, and the arachnons seem to be made of living glass. They do not appear to be sentient, but they are capable of sophisticated behavior, in much the same way as a computer is programmed to perform a complex task.

Description: An arachnon is a vaguely insectile creature about the size of a large man. Its diademlike body is divided into thirteen segments, six of which bear a single limb each. These claw-tipped limbs are offset by 120 degrees from the adjacent limbs, so that an arachnon typically walks on four staggered legs while two more jut up from the middle of its "back." The arachnon has no actual rear, front, side, or underbody—it can walk on any two pairs of its six limbs with ease. The foremost segment is a large, bulbous head equipped with a powerful pair of mandibles and a ring of six eyes. The arachnon's entire body is covered in a transparent, crystalline exoskeleton, and the details of its interior arrangement appear as no more than sharp-edged facets of different colors inside its body.

Encounter: Arachnons are encountered in one of two states: controlled or free-willed. Controlled arachnons have been programmed with an order or an assignment. An arachnon tasked with guarding a facility or a site is a remorseless killer, using every means at its disposal to eliminate intruders. An arachnon instructed to maintain the same facility may ignore intruders until they damage the loca-



Arachnon Game Data

STR 13	(2d4+8)	INT 4	(Animal 13 or d6+10)
DEX 11	(2d4+6)	WIL 6	(d4+4)
CON 9	(d6+6)	PER 4	(Animal 13 or d6+10)
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: run 40, walk 12		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			

Attacks

Claws	14/7/3	d4w/d4+2w/2d4+1w	LI/O
Acid ¹	11/5/2	3d4w/2d4w/d4w/d6s	LI/G

¹ Damage tied to victim's CON feat check, see text.

Defenses

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

Skills

Unarmed [13]—brawl [14], Manipulation [11], Stamina [9]—endurance [12], Awareness [6]—intuition [8], Investigate [6]—track [10], Interaction [4].

Arachnon Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Any (Class 2)

GRAPH: G2/R2/A3/P1/H0-H1

Biome: Any

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 2–8 (2d4)

Organization: Hive

Niche: Scavenger/lithovore

Intelligence: Automaton or high-order animal

tion—at which point it might retreat to seek further instructions, attack the intruders to prevent more serious damage, or immediately set about repairing whatever was broken.

Of course, that behavior gives rise to the question of who or what tells an arachnon what to do. In some Glassmaker sites, orbweavers (see below) serve this function. In others, arachnons seem to be continuing under directions issued ages ago by their vanished masters.

Some arachnons have been encountered in an uncontrolled state; in the absence of any directions, the creatures default to a simple behavior similar to that of communal insects (Earth's ants and termites), scavenging for food and defending themselves if attacked.

Arachnons attack by using their powerful claws to slash and crush their enemies. They are also capable of spitting a stream of nitric acid through their mandibles. This acid stream has a range of 6 meters, and the arachnon must succeed on a Dexterity feat check in order to strike its target. If it hits, the damage inflicted depends on the result of a Constitution feat check by the victim; the damage listed is for Marginal, Ordinary, Good, and Amazing results in order. On a Critical Failure, the victim suffers damage as for a Marginal result, and suffers a +2 penalty to any actions he or she attempts for d4 rounds thereafter. The degree of success the arachnon achieves on its attack may provide a penalty to the victim's Constitution feat check: +1 for a Good success and +2 for an Amazing success.

Armor can protect a victim from this acid damage, at least during the initial phases of a combat scene, but after it absorbs damage from several hits, a character might discover that his or her armor has become corroded and no longer offers the same amount of protection it once did. An arachnon can expel acid as many as six times in a scene, after which it must spend d8 hours finding and consuming raw material that it can use to manufacture more acid.

Habitat/Society: As biological robots, arachnons live wherever their ancient masters saw fit to place them, and they have an extremely rigid social order. Uncontrolled arachnons favor dry, relatively warm places such as a desert or savanna, building large termite-mounds for shelter. These labyrinthine cities may sprawl for dozens of meters, with passages large enough for a human to wriggle through on hands and knees. Despite their engineered construction, arachnons are still living creatures, and reproduce slowly when left to their own devices.

Whether controlled or free-willed, arachnons have the ability to communicate with each other and are able to cooperate in the performance of tasks. This makes them formidable opponents, since they can use tactics involving attacks from several directions at the same time, and helps them to accomplish various feats of engineering in building their nests.



Another of the Glassmakers' constructs, the orbweaver serves as a living computer network for Glassmaker sites. Equipped with a keen and perceptive intelligence, these rarely seen creatures display practically all the qualities humans associate with sentience—curiosity, creativity, abstract reasoning, and deductive logic. Yet, strangely, they have no sense of self. Orbweavers have been encountered in only a handful of Glassmaker sites; they have shown themselves to be merciless enemies at times, while others have attached their allegiance to their discoverers and rendered great aid in deciphering the mysterious ruins in which they were found.

Description: Like the arachnon, the orbweaver is a creature of living crystal and glass. Its body, about 1 meter in diameter and weighing 100 to 150 kilograms, consists of two hemispherical segments separated by a narrow waist. Each hemisphere has three long, slender legs spaced evenly around its surface; the legs end in claws that are only slightly less dangerous than the claws of an arachnon. The creature's waist is ringed with six large eyes that can retract into the safety of the hemispherical shell-segments; a beaked mouth with abrasive teeth is located on its topmost surface, while its posterior surface is fitted with a spinnaretlike structure that can extrude hundreds of meters of glass filament. An orbweaver is often found in the center of an immense net of glass fibers.

Encounter: Orbweavers were created by the Glassmakers to serve as living computers, servants, and guardians to care for their masters. Any important Glassmaker site or ruin was administered by an

orbweaver at one point, but with the passage of the ages many orbweavers have been destroyed or lost along with their stations. However, a few exist in and around a handful of Glassmaker sites, protected by stasis pods or rebuilt over and over through self-replicating programming.

Orbweavers generally avoid contact with intruders, using a building's or structure's automated systems to divert and contain any significant threats. Unlike its arachnon cohorts, an orbweaver is fully intelligent and free-willed despite its lack of self-awareness; it's basically a sophisticated, semiorganic artificial intelligence. Orbweavers are not bound by their ancient commands. Instead, they are free to follow any course of action consistent with some goal such as the protection of a site, the maintenance or reconstruction of a facility, or even the monitoring or measurement of some phenomenon.

Orbweavers are capable of commandeering or controlling any

Orbweaver Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 2

GRAPH: G2/R2/A3/P1/H0-H1

Biome: Any

Encounter Chance: Slim

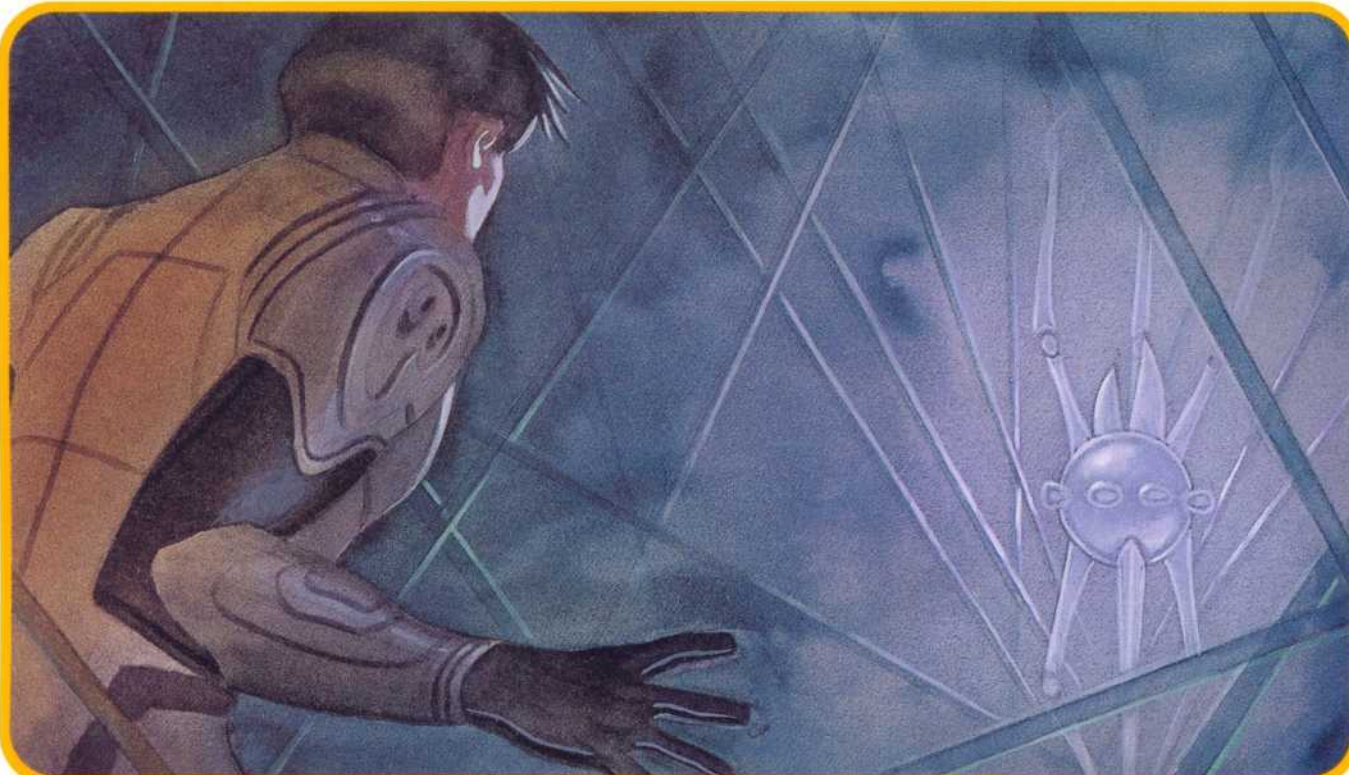
Group Size: 1–4 (d4)

Organization: Special

Niche: Lithovore

Intelligence: Telepathic sentient





Orbweaver Game Data

STR 11	(2d4+6)	INT 15	(2d4+10)
DEX 15	(d6+12)	WIL 13	(2d4+8)
CON 11	(d6+8)	PER 9	(d6+6)
Durability: 11/11/6/6		Action check: 18+/17/8/4	
Move: run 30, walk 10		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Good/2		Last resorts: 1	
Psionic energy points: 13			

Attacks

Claws (×2)	16/8/4	d4w/d4+1w/2d4w	LI/O
Ranged weapon	18/9/4	varies	varies
Glass filaments	15/7/3	see text	LI/O

Defenses

Good toughness

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

Skills

Unarmed [11]—brawl [16]; Manipulation [15]; Modern [15]—pistol [18], SMG [18], rifle [18]; Stamina [11]—endurance [18]; Computer [15]—programming [16]; Knowledge [15]; Technical [15]—repair [20]; System Operation [15]; Awareness [13]—intuition [16], perception [20]; Investigate [13]—track [16]; Interaction [9]; Telepathy [9]—contact [14].

arachnons in the area at will, even seeing through the arachnon's eyes or taking over its body through a special telepathic ability. This allows the orbweaver to use arachnons for extremely advanced tasks or jobs; arachnons under orbweaver control have been mistaken for intelligent creatures more than once.

An orbweaver is extremely dangerous in combat. First of all, it uses its glass filaments to create numerous traps in the area where it wants to stage the fight. The orbweaver can produce enough to cover 16 cubic meters (two 2m × 2m × 2m cubes, or a 1m-thick barrier 4m wide and 4m tall) in a single day. It can use three different types of filament:

Strong filament: Thick, flexible strands can support a weight of up to 500 kilograms per cubic meter, or seal something with an effective Strength of 19. It's impossible to move through a barrier constructed of strong filament; the barrier must be destroyed.

Sticky filament: Microscopic hooks and glue-like secretions enable sticky filament to catch anything that moves into it. A hero who tries to move into or through an area of sticky filament must succeed in a Strength feat at a +1 penalty or become stuck. Even if he's not stuck, the hero is still slowed to half his normal walking pace.

Razor filament: Spun incredibly fine, razor filament can slice a human to ribbons. A hero moving through razor filament suffers d8w (LI/O) per meter of thickness or depth he moves into. A fast-moving character might plunge d4 meters into the filament before he's able to stop.

Orbweaver filament has a toughness of Good and ignores damage from high-impact weapons. A web or patch has 1 mortal point and 2 wound points per cubic meter. Orbweavers can't attack with their filaments, but they can move through their own webs with ease.

In combat, orbweavers attack with their claws, striking twice per action for the damage shown. This is not their preferred means of attack; they are quite capable of employing a variety of weapons,

and most make use of ancient Glassmaker weapons. Some weapons that orbweavers have been seen to use include: a powerful laser rifle (treat as a laser SMG, except it has a firepower of Good); a spiraling-tube device that hurls glass flechettes (use the statistics for the autoflechette shotgun: range 10/20/40, damage d4w/d6w/d4m, but with a firepower of Good); and a spherical shell that duplicates the effect of a mass pistol, except that it has triple the range and can fire up to twelve shots before reloading. Again, orbweavers do not expose themselves in combat lightly and prefer to neutralize attackers through deceit and misdirection.

It is possible for a character with telepathic ability to open a dialogue with an orbweaver. As long as an orbweaver does not consider itself or its post to be at risk, it is willing to negotiate or interact

with any intelligent creatures it encounters. The danger, of course, is that the orbweaver might decide to redefine its concept of "risk."

Habitat/Society: The orbweavers are a servitor race engineered hundreds of millions of years ago by the Glassmakers. As such, they do not define themselves in any other context. Unlike the arachnons, who can exist in a more or less independent state, an orbweaver can't forget its duty or join any kind of natural ecology.

The creatures are sexless and do not reproduce—but they also do not die from natural causes or from the depredations of native predators. As a result, the population of orbweavers on High Mojave has remained virtually constant ever since the creatures were brought into existence.

Werewisp

While Glassmaker artifacts, arachnons, and orbweavers have been found in a number of systems outside of Mantebron, the werewisp is a creature that appears to be unique to High Mojave. No direct evidence links the werewisp to the Glassmakers, but it seems likely that the creature is not entirely natural. Nothing else on High Mojave is remotely like it, suggesting that the werewisp was created by the Glassmakers or imported to this world through some agency of the Precursor species.

The werewisp is one of the most unusual lifeforms yet encountered in the Verge, a bizarre energy being that stretches humankind's definition of life to the limits. It's a deadly predator that haunts the cold, open spaces of High Mojave's endless plains and weathered hills. The human colonists of High Mojave tell many stories of the werewisp, claiming that the creature is responsible for almost any unexplained death or disappearance that occurs.

Perhaps the most striking of these tales is the claim that only one werewisp exists on the entire planet, a lonely wanderer that streaks over the plains, trapped on this ancient ruin of a world. — **AV, CSS**

Werewisp Game Data

STR 2	(d4)	INT 13	(2d4+8)
DEX 18	(2d6+11)	WIL 15	(2d4+10)
CON 8	(3d4)	PER 7	(d6+4)
Durability: 8/8/4/4		Action check: 17+/16/8/4	
Move: fly 200		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Good/3		Last resorts: 0	
Psionic energy points: 15			

Attacks

Magnetic blast	22/11/5	d8s/d12s/d8w	En/G
Energy bolt	20/10/5	d6+1w/2d4+1w/d6m	En/G
Energy drain	15/7/3	d4w/d4+2w/d4m	En/G

Defenses

+4 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +6 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 +2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 +3 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: d4 (LI), d4+2 (HI), 3d4+3 (En)

Skills

Acrobatics [18]—flight [26], Modern [18]—pistol [22], rifle [20], Stealth [18]—sneak [22], Stamina [8]—endurance [16], Awareness [15]—perception [24], Resolve [15]—mental [20], physical [18], Deception [7]—bluff [8], Telekinesis [15]—psychokinetics [18], Telepathy [7].

Description: Contrary to popular belief, the werewisp possesses a corporeal body, a delicate meter-wide globe of transparent material hidden by its shimmering halo of greenish energy. No structural details are visible in its core, simply a symmetrical emerald striation that marks the surface of its translucent body. The creature's luminescence ranges from a dim phosphorescent glow to a brilliant radiance too bright to look at.

A werewisp may drift serenely at a snail's pace for hours, and then suddenly dart away at a speed of several hundred kilometers per hour, streaming a long tail of light. Devices sensitive to electromagnetic energy "spike out" in the presence of a werewisp, sometimes even shorting out as if they'd been exposed to the electromagnetic pulse of a nuclear explosion.

Werewisp Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VII

Environment: Class 2

GRAPH: G2/R2/A3/P1/H0

Biome: Open plains and hills

Encounter Chance: Slim

Group Size: 1

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Energy-feeder

Intelligence: Sentient, uncommunicative





Encounter: Werewisps are only encountered during High Mojave's long, cold night. They require temperatures to drop to about -50°C before their fragile physical bodies begin to superconduct, generating the intense electromagnetic fields that give them mobility and protection. Within a few hours after sunrise, the werewisp is forced to seek shelter and hide itself for the duration of the 128-hour Mojavian day. Usually, the werewisp conceals itself in an inaccessible cave or crevice. During daylight hours, the werewisp cannot move or generate any of its attacks, and its resistance modifiers are negated.

As the day comes to an end and darkness descends over High Mojave, temperatures plummet with shocking speed. The werewisp leaves its lair in search of energy to feed upon. A werewisp can sense a vehicle-sized source of power from up to 500 kilometers away, and can even discern the bioelectric signature of a human-sized creature at a range of 10 kilometers. The werewisp is most dangerous early in the evening, when its hunger is acute; from 20 to 50 hours after sunset, it usually has consumed enough energy from High Mojave's sparse flora and fauna to sate itself until the next night. In its sated state, the werewisp tends to be curious and mischievous, harassing travelers and wreaking all kinds of havoc with colony power grids or outlying homesteads.

The werewisp's first attack mode is a magnetic pulse capable of scrambling any electronic system it hits; regardless whether the attack penetrates the target's armor, the pulse adds a +1, +2, or +3 penalty (depending on the grade of success of the werewisp's attack roll) to all actions attempted with that system or vehicle for d12 rounds. During that time, other pulses directed at the same item have no additional effect. This pulse can affect handheld computers, vehicular control systems, energy weapons, and powered armor or defensive devices. The magnetic pulse has a range of 40 meters.

The second weapon employed by the werewisp is a deadly energy bolt, similar to the discharge of a maser weapon. The energy bolt has a range of 100 meters.

The werewisp's third means of attack, and its method of feeding, is an energy drain. The creature must be in contact with its prey and

succeed on a Will feat check to use this power. If successful, it forces a humanoid target to immediately attempt a Stamina–endurance skill check. If the victim succeeds, he suffers no damage, but if he fails he takes damage and slips into a coma. Then he must make additional Stamina–endurance checks to avoid taking more damage each time the werewisp uses an action to drain more energy. If the physical contact between the werewisp and its victim is broken, the victim regains consciousness by making a successful Resolve–physical resolve check. This energy-feeding exhausts or drains a handheld device on an Ordinary success, large equipment on a Good, or vehicle-sized gear on an Amazing success.

Werewisps are intelligent, but they are so incredibly alien to a human or humanoid mindwalker that their thoughts are incomprehensible. They're only willing to communicate when they're caught in their vulnerable daylight form, or when they're sated and not interested in a potential meal.

Habitat/Society: Werewisps wander vast stretches of High Mojave's frigid deserts and hills, covering thousands of kilometers in a single Mojavian night. They have been spotted in all corners of the globe, though no one has ever seen more than one at a time.

In fact, High Mojave is home to thirteen of these creatures. They were (as Dr. Veras speculates) created by the Glassmakers as an experiment in the engineering of a sentient energy-based lifeform. The experiment was a success in the broad sense, but the creatures were found to be lacking any sense of community or cooperation. A werewisp has no regard even for others of its own kind, and stays at least 100 kilometers away from any other werewisp it detects.

The lifespan of a werewisp is theoretically limitless, since their food supply never runs out and they are not preyed upon by any other creatures native to High Mojave. These creatures do not reproduce in the customary sense, but if a werewisp suffers 2 points of mortal damage it can split off a miniature version of itself (durability 2/2/1/1, no energy drain attack, damage from other attack forms halved) that grows to full size and strength in the space of a single night's feeding.

BLUEFALL

Despite the fact that Bluefall is the most Earthlike world in the Verge, the current dominant colony—the Regency of Bluefall—has been in place for less than 40 years. Prior to this time, Bluefall was a ghost world, left empty by the disappearance of every human colonist from the planet's first settlement. The reason behind this mass disappearance remains unknown—but the threat of another similar tragedy is apparently of no concern to the busy new residents of the planet. A mere 12 years after all nonindigenous life was erased from Bluefall, a massive fleet of ships carrying more than five million people arrived to claim the place once more. Now, settlers from every nation in Old Space are streaming in to take advantage of Bluefall's outstanding climate.

Bluefall, as its name suggests, is an ocean world; 98 percent of its surface is covered by water. This leaves precious little room, in relative terms, for land-based settlements—but, fortunately for the millions of spacefarers who have come to live here, most of the larger islands have enough area to support sizable populations. — **RG, CLA**

Considered one of the gateways to the Verge, Bluefall is covered by a vast world-ocean; the only points of land are chains of volcanic islands along key rift points in the planet's crust. Its terrestrial ecology is sparse and simple, but marine life is present in great abundance. Bluefall was first surveyed in the period between the First and Second Galactic Wars by an Orion exploration team.

All the occupants of the initial human settlement on the planet vanished without a trace in 2452. Several theories have been advanced to explain this catastrophic turn of events, but none of those theories has anything to do with climatic changes. Bluefall is now, as it was before the colonists' disappearance, the most human-friendly world known to exist in the Verge. Its atmospheric composition is so close to Earth's as to be identical; its median temperature is a perpetually comfortable 20° C (67° F), and its slightly weaker surface gravity makes humans feel more buoyant than they would on Earth or any other 1 g world.

Bluefall

Parent: Aegis, G2
Orbital Radius: 0.97 AU
Orbital Period: 348.8 days
Rotation Period: 28 hours
Axial Tilt: Minimal (8.1°)
Diameter: 11,452 km
Density (Earth = 1): 0.99

Surface Gravity: 0.89 g
Atmosphere: N₂, O₂
Pressure: 0.89 atm
Median Temperature: 20° C
Satellites: Two
GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2

Deepfallen

In one of the more unusual developments we encountered in our survey of the Verge, we learned that the Regency colony on Bluefall has recently been contacted by a new alien species. Throughout Concord space, humankind and its nonhuman companions have been cast in the role of the strangers from the sky—but on Bluefall, the deepfallen came to us. Although the current human colony has thrived on Bluefall's surface for a few decades, the deepfallen chose to make their presence known only a year ago.

The deepfallen are an aquatic species, at home in the vast, dark depths of Bluefall's oceans. The uppermost of their communities are more than three kilometers beneath the surface, and rumors persist concerning trench-cities 30 kilometers deep.

The deepfallen appear to possess a highly advanced civilization with impressive mastery of biological science and powerful innate psionic talents. In many ways, the situation we have encountered with the deepfallen is similar to what transpired during the initial



fraal contact with humanity in the early 22nd century: The starfaring cultures and the deepfallen both have assets from which the other party could benefit. However, the deepfallen seem much more reluctant to part with their secrets than either the humans or the fraal were when those two species first met. — **AV, CSS**

The deepfallen are an advanced marine species inhabiting the depths of Bluefall's world-spanning ocean. They have only recently established contact with the humans who have colonized Bluefall's archipelagoes. Normally reluctant to leave their hidden cities, in the months since First Contact, a few small parties have journeyed to the shallows and even ventured onto land. These travelers have expressed intense interest in a variety of human technologies, institutions, and cultures. Most of Bluefall's human residents feel that the deepfallen are observing and evaluating their newfound neighbors, trying to determine what (if anything) they should do about the visitors to their planet's distant surface.

To date, the deepfallen have strongly discouraged active exploration of their own communities, and some speculate that the creatures may have secret sites or facilities that they would kill to keep hidden. No submarine accidents or disappearances can be directly associated with the deepfallen, of course.

Despite their delicate appearance, deepfallen are amazingly tough and resilient creatures, with an innate ability to adapt their bodies to a wide range of pressures and temperatures. Their tissues are exceptionally dense, and their bodies include a complex system of internal passages and chambers that can regulate their response to depth changes.

A deepfallen can survive unharmed on land, exposed to air, for a day. After this time, the creature must make a Stamina-endurance skill check to determine whether he or she suffers stun damage (see "Exposure Challenge" on page 61 of the *ALTERNITY Gamemaster Guide*). Subsequent checks are required once every 6 hours thereafter. This damage can't be recovered until the deepfallen is once again immersed in water and remains underwater for at least an hour. For extended visits on land, deepfallen make use of transparent, cloaklike membranes that appear to be living spacesuits.

Description: A deepfallen is an elongated, sinuous humanoid with translucent skin. Its legs and arms are very long, ending in broad, webbed hands and feet. Deepfallen use their entire bodies as they swim, twisting through the water eel-fashion. Thin, tough winglike membranes join the arms to the body, giving the creature speed and maneuverability when swimming. A deepfallen's neck is long and flexible, enabling the creature to see ahead of itself when it's swim-

ming in a prone position or to bend its head down toward its feet in a more humanlike pose. The creature's face is dominated by wide, dark eyes; the mouth is tiny and seems almost vestigial.

Deepfallen are generally restricted to life within Bluefall's oceans, but are remarkably adaptive. They can use any human-made tool. They rely on their Telepathy skill to communicate, since their bodies are not capable of audible speech. If a deepfallen uses Telepathy to communicate with a Mindwalker (or any other deepfallen), he or she doesn't spend any psionic energy points on a successful use of the skill.

Encounter: Heroes are likely to encounter deepfallen in one of two situations: meeting travelers exploring the human holdings of Bluefall, or in the deepfallen communities beneath the ocean. Deepfallen travelers in the surface world tend to be polite and passive, avoiding conflict or confrontation. However, the deepfallen have been known to take strong stands against human encroachment in their homes. Heroes are well advised to seek an invitation to visit instead of approaching unannounced.

So far, no one has recorded a truly hostile encounter with one of the deepfallen. It's not known if this implies that the deepfallen are pacifists, too advanced to resort to violence, adept at concealing in-

Deepfallen Game Data

STR 8 (d6+4) INT 11 (2d4+6)
DEX 11 (2d4+6) WIL 12 (2d4+7)
CON 12 (d6+8) PER 8 (2d6+1)

Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action check: 12+/11/5/2
Move: walk 6, swim 40 #Actions: 3
Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 0
Psionic energy points: 12

Attacks

Mind blast¹ 12/6/3 d4+1s/d4+2s/d6+2s n/a
Sonic pulse 14/7/3 2d4s/d6+1w/d4m En/0
Needle² 14/7/3 1w/d4-1w/d4w HI/6
Martial arts 12/6/3 d4s/d4+1s/d6+2s LI/0

¹ Armor is ineffective against this attack.

² Plus poison, see text.

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
+1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
+2 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills or psionic attack
Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Acrobatics [11]-defensive [12], Movement [12]-swim [20], Stamina [12]-endurance [17], Knowledge [11], Life Science [11], Awareness [12]-intuition [14], perception [14], Interaction [8], Biokinesis [9]-morph [12], rejuvenate [13], ESP [11]-mind reading [13], precognition [12], Telepathy [8]-contact [12], mind blast [12], mind shield [10], suggest [9].

Deepfallen Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Abyssal plain, marine trenches

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 4-48 (4d12)

Organization: Advanced urbanized society

Niche: Omnivore, with active cultivation

Intelligence: Sentient, telepathic



criminating evidence, or simply demonstrating a healthy respect for humankind until they learn more. Individual deepfallen tend to be aloof and dispassionately direct—deepfallen take no account of human motives, likes, or dislikes, stating their wishes or relaying information with no emotional overtones.

In the rare instances when a deepfallen is forced to defend itself, it prefers to fight with its psionic abilities and manufactured devices. (Note that a deepfallen receives a +1 increase to its Will resistance modifier, which makes these creatures particularly adept at turning back mental attacks directed toward them.) The standard weapons of the species include a device that delivers disruptive sonic pulses, which is only usable underwater, and a taserlike weapon that fires poisoned needles (usable in water or on land). The needles deliver a powerful neurotoxin with an onset time of d4 rounds and a duration of 2 hours. If a needle causes at least 1 point of wound damage (after any damage absorbed by armor is accounted for), the victim must make a Constitution feat check with a +2 penalty to determine how much damage he or she suffers (see “Poison” on page 59 of the *ALTERNITY Gamemaster Guide*).

Habitat/Society: Only the most general information about the deepfallen has been revealed to the human community on Bluefall. Scientists theorize that the creatures evolved as part of the geothermal ecosystem fed by Bluefall’s unusually active volcanic rifts. This source of energy and food is supplemented by the detritus (plankton, algae, and dead creatures) that sinks from the upper ecosystem. This food chain is not as efficient as a photosynthesis-based system, so deepfallen communities “harvest” vast tracts of the ocean floor to support themselves.

Technologically, the deepfallen seem to have achieved a mastery of biological engineering to replace their inability to develop metallurgy. A select few humans have been allowed to view (but not examine) buildings, vehicles, weapons, tools, and even clothing that seems to have been bred from some of the countless varieties of marine life that inhabit Bluefall’s oceans.

The organization of deepfallen communities is unclear. It’s theorized that their psionic talents allow them to exist almost as a group mind, making decisions by telepathic consensus. Deepfallen hate to be alone, and isolated individuals return to the company of their kind at the earliest opportunity. Human scientists interpret this behavior as evidence that the “group mind” theory has some credence.

Unbeknownst to the surface-dwelling population of Bluefall, a small number of human scientists and an even smaller number of deepfallen are sequestered in the undersea complex known as Depth Epsilon, where both species are involved in an ongoing mission of discovery and disclosure. This effort is sanctioned by the highest officials in the Regency of Bluefall, and the existence of the project is known only to them. The deepfallen who have agreed to participate in the project are just as reclusive and cautious as the other members of their species where humans are concerned, and would no doubt abandon Depth Epsilon immediately if the security around the complex was somehow breached.

Deepfallen as Heroes

You may allow players to create deepfallen heroes at your discretion. Deepfallen can choose from any profession; if the hero is not a Mindwalker or a Diplomat with Mindwalker as the secondary profession, he or she is a psionic talent possessing the Telepathy broad skill. Free broad skills for deepfallen heroes are Movement, Stamina, Knowledge, Awareness, Interaction, and Telepathy. They also receive the Movement—*swim* specialty skill at rank 3 at no cost. Deepfallen inflict d4s/d4+1s/d6+2s (LI/0) in unarmed attack, although they prefer to use psionic attack whenever possible.

Deepfallen heroes must meet the following Ability Score requirements:

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIL	PER
5/10	7/14	9/14	8/14	9/15	3/13

Deepfallen heroes would form a unique and unforeseen element in their society. Individualism is not something that the deepfallen are familiar with, but through exposure to humanity at Depth Epsilon and beyond, it’s possible that a few of the deepfallen have developed sufficient curiosity and wanderlust to inspire them to leave behind Bluefall’s oceans. Nevertheless, such travelers must endure the loneliness of life without the presence of other deepfallen minds.



Moore's Shark

Named after the noted marine biologist who first cataloged the species, the Moore's shark is one of the most dangerous creatures in Bluefall's seas. Although these creatures are not sentient, they rely on innate psionic powers to locate and subdue prey. Moore's sharks are rarely a threat to surface craft or marine colonies, but they have been known to attack diving humans working the kelp beds or seafloor industries of Bluefall.

Description: This aquatic animal bears a strong resemblance to the sharks of Earth's seas, although this resemblance might be expected, given the sheer mechanical advantages of a streamlined shape, fins for maneuvering, and a powerful jaw for biting. However, the Moore's shark is a true bony fish with advanced gill structures and sophisticated depth regulation organs. Its head is wider and blunter than a true shark's, and its eyes are situated for forward (not side-ways) vision.

A typical Moore's shark is 2 to 3 meters long from snout to tail and weighs 100 to 150 kilograms.

Encounter: Moore's sharks are not intelligent, hunting as dictated by hunger and instinct. They ignore large craft, but small and mobile objects (such as swimmers) attract their attention. A school attacks by surrounding its prey and using the Telepathy skills of *mind blast* and *tire* to stun and immobilize the target. All the sharks in a group contribute to a single telepathic attack—the more sharks present, the deadlier the attack. Each individual beyond the first raises the school's effective rank in both of the specialty skills by 1 (up to the limit of rank 12), so a group of eight Moore's sharks attacks as a single creature with rank 8 (skill score 13) in both Telepathy—*mind blast* and Telepathy—*tire*. When their victim has been rendered helpless, the sharks rush in to finish it off with their tooth-filled maws.

Habitat/Society: Moore's sharks prefer the cold, game-rich waters of Bluefall's southernmost oceans. They band together in schools, forming a collective entity in which each individual plays an equal part. The sharks often cooperate to attack much larger prey, using their mental powers to immobilize creatures that would otherwise be too much for the school to handle.



Moore's Shark Game Data

STR 11	(d4+8)	INT 3	(Animal 7 or 3d4)
DEX 11	(d4+8)	WIL 11	(d4+8)
CON 13	(d6+10)	PER 5	(Animal 10 or 4d4)
Durability: 13/13/7/7		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: swim 50		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			
Psionic energy points: 11			

Attacks

Bite	14/7/3	d4+1w/d8+1w/d12+1w	LI/O
Mind blast ¹	see text	varies	n/a

¹ Armor is ineffective against this attack.

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d4+1 (LI), d6-2 (HI), d6-3 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [11]—*brawl* [14], Movement [13]—*swim* [19],
 Stamina [13]—*endurance* [16], Awareness [11]—*intuition* [12],
perception [14], Telepathy [5]—*mind blast* [6], *tire* [6].

Moore's Shark Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Polar seas

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 4-16 (4d4)

Organization: School

Niche: Medium carnivore

Intelligence: High-order animal, telepathic

Sunsoarer

The sunsoarer is one of the top predators in Bluefall's island ecosystem. It is native to the tropical islands of the planet's equatorial region, but is capable of ranging far and wide and establishing a nest on any island outside the polar regions. These creatures are extremely territorial and aggressive; every year, several humans are killed by wandering into sunsoarer territory and unwittingly provoking one or more of them into an attack.

Description: The sunsoarer is a large, winged reptile, covered in a dazzling array of brilliant scales. Like most creatures in Bluefall's terrestrial ecology, the sunsoarer is hexapedal, with two pairs of taloned claws and a broad, powerful pair of leathery wings. Its mouth is toothed, not beaked, and its neck is long and snakelike. Finally, the creature's tail includes a broad aerodynamic spade as a rudder. The body of a sunsoarer is about 1.5 meters long, with an additional 2-meter tail; its wingspan can be up to 10 meters. Most weigh between 30 and 50 kilograms.

Encounter: Sunsoarers spend most of their time gliding over the shallows and lagoons of Bluefall's island coastlines. Sunsoarers may attack small children (or 'sa!) but won't approach large groups or adult humans. However, this behavior changes when the sunsoarer nears its nest. It considers all the space within hundreds of meters of its nest to be its territory, and tries to drive off any creature that gets too close.

Sunsoarer Game Data

STR 9 (d6+5) INT 2 (Animal 7 or 2d4+2)
DEX 16 (d4+13) WIL 8 (d6+5)
CON 7 (d4+4) PER 1 (Animal 7 or 2d4+2)
Durability: 7/7/4/4 Action check: 16+/15/7/3
Move: walk 8, swim 12, fly 80 #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2

Attacks

Claws¹ 13/7/3 d6s/d4w/d6+1w LI/O
Bite 11/5/2 d4s/d6s/d4w LI/O

¹ Either 2 or 4 attacks per action; see text.

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+3 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d4-2 (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [9], Unarmed Attack [9], Acrobatics [16]-flight [18], Stealth [16]-sneak [18], Movement [7]-swim [10], Stamina [7]-endurance [10], Awareness [8]-intuition [10], perception [16].



A sunsoarer attacks by diving silently out of the sun, offering no warning until it strikes. Its chance of surprising an intended victim depends on the result of a Stealth-sneak skill check, which is then applied as a modifier to the intended victim's Awareness-intuition or Awareness-perception skill check: Amazing, +3 penalty; Good, +2 penalty; Ordinary, +1 penalty; Failure, -1 bonus; Critical Failure, -3 bonus.

On its first strike, the sunsoarer attacks with all four claws; after that, it swings into the air and swoops back down on the invader once every two rounds, striking only with its two rearmost claws. The creature can be brought to ground by inflicting at least 1 point of mortal damage upon it. After it has been brought down, it can attack only with its bite.

Habitat/Society: Sunsoarers are strong climbers as well as fliers, and choose high crags and cliffs overlooking the sea for their nests. They live together in small packs or flocks that share the tasks of hunting, defending the nest, and raising the young. Sunsoarers are hunted for their valuable skins, which are made into bright clothing.

Sunsoarer Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I
Environment: Class 1
GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2
Biome: Coastal lagoons and cliffs
Encounter Chance: Probable
Group Size: 2-8 (2d4)
Organization: Nest
Niche: Small piscivore
Intelligence: Low-order animal



HUDSON

Located between the metropolitan systems of Aegis, Algemron, and Oberon, Rinstoke is little more than a way point for vessels passing through part of the Verge. Rinstoke is a small orange dwarf, surrounded by six uninhabitable planets. One of them, a gas giant called Caina, supports a huge satellite system, including the ice moon of Hudson. Hovering on the very edge of the parameters for Series I life, Hudson supports a cold-adapted biosphere at temperatures that would quickly destroy Earthly creatures.

Scientists and surveyors from the neighboring systems have visited Hudson numerous times, studying its creatures and evaluating the moon for potential colonization. While Hudson might one day be made tolerable for humans, the planet is very poor in heavy metals; its only true resources are water, oxygen, and its natives. If the Second Galactic War had not interfered with the development of the Verge, it's almost certain that one stellar nation or another would have claimed this icy wasteland and initiated terraforming activities by now.

Hudson is home to the independent station of Baffin Island, a lonely outpost founded by the Regency of Bluefall in 2415. Created as a scientific observatory, trading post, and emergency repair station, Baffin Island's domed habitats and windswept landing fields sprawl over dozens of square kilometers on a rocky island in Hudson's equatorial sea. — *RG, CLA*

Hudson is the fifth of an estimated thirty moons orbiting the gas giant Caina. The planet's magnetic fields and electromagnetic emissions make its inner moon system a dangerously radioactive region. Hudson's small metallic core and slow rotation generate only the faintest magnetic fields to deflect this particle storm, and when the moon is directly between Rinstoke and Caina, the auro-ras flicker brightly enough to be seen in full daylight. Most Hudsonite creatures instinctively seek cover during these episodes.

Its core long since frozen, Hudson owes its continuing tectonic activity (and therefore, its biosphere) to the tremendous tidal forces exerted by Caina and the orbital perturbations caused by its neighboring moons. This flexing duplicates to some extent the volcanic activity of Io in the Sol system, except that Hudson mostly outgasses steam and molten rock—there's very little sulfur or carbon dioxide in its makeup. Hudson's volcanic areas support the richest ecologies of the entire moon.

Hudson

Parent: Caina (Rinstoke, Class K5)	Diameter: 8,970 km
Orbital Radius: 1,850,000 km (3.1 AU from Rinstoke)	Density (Earth = 1): 1.22
Orbital Period: 18.24 days (Caina 6.5 years)	Surface Gravity: 0.86 g
Rotation Period: 394 hours	Atmosphere: N ₂ , O ₂
Axial Tilt: Moderate (11.5°)	Pressure: 0.74 atm
	Median Temperature: -82° C
	Satellites: None
	GRAPH: G2/R3/A2/P2/H1

Bedestrin

The most dangerous creature native to Hudson, the bedestrin is a sentient forager that haunts the open waters and ice-free shorelines of the moon's equatorial region. No place on Hudson is ever truly warm, but a number of volcanoes keep these waters from freezing and comprise Hudson's richest ecosphere. Since geothermal heating is unpredictable and often short-lived, the bedestrin is frequently compelled to shift its hunting grounds by hundreds or thousands of

kilometers in search of unfrozen territory and the prey these comparatively warm regions attract.

Bedestrins are aboriginal, making no permanent home and using only the most basic Stone Age technology—fire, stone weapons, and domestication of a handful of animals. They speak a simple language of hoots and howls. To date, first-contact expeditions have had little success in dealing with the bedestrins; the creatures are extremely



shy, and they flee from human explorers. If cornered, bedestrins turn on their harassers with extreme violence. Several Regency scientists have met their demise in this fashion.

Description: Standing nearly three meters in height, the bedestrin is an imposing physical specimen. The creatures are covered in soft, white fur that blends perfectly against a snowy background. Their long arms end in wide four-fingered hands, and their jaws are filled with sharp teeth. A bedestrin has no nose or snout, but its dark eyes are large and expressive. Despite their great height, bedestrins are surprisingly thin and agile; they're powerful swimmers more akin to a sea otter than a polar bear.

Encounter: Bedestrins normally retreat from encounters with humans, with two notable exceptions. First, humans who interfere in a bedestrin's hunt or take any action that might be interpreted as an attempt to steal the creature's prey may provoke an attack. Second, humans who get too close to a bedestrin's lair are usually attacked. Unfortunately for such interlopers, bedestrins don't believe in threatening displays—a human who gets too close is simply attacked by a stealthy spear-cast or a sudden, silent rush from concealment. (If the bedestrin succeeds on a Stealth skill check, its victims must make successful Awareness checks to avoid surprise.) Due to its white coat and its familiarity with its surroundings, a bedestrin gains a -2 bonus to any Stealth checks it makes in its native environment.

In combat, bedestrins favor simple ranged weapons such as spears, slings, and thrown stones. When these are exhausted, they close in with a fierce rush, grappling their foes and attacking with



their formidable fangs. This is an overpowering attack; the bedestrin first uses its Unarmed Attack skill to capture its prey in an Ordinary, Good, or Amazing hold. In subsequent actions, the bedestrin bites and rends its foe at a -2 bonus until the victim frees himself by getting a degree of success on an Unarmed Attack skill check or Dexterity feat check that matches or exceeds the quality of the bedestrin's hold.

Habitat/Society: Few of Hudson's creatures can survive on the open ice that covers most of the moon; almost every species lives within a few dozen kilometers of a seacoast. The bedestrin always stays within sight of open water and spends much of its time in the sea. Its white fur is extraordinarily fine and dense, serving as excellent insulation. Sea caves and ice caves are its preferred residences,

but the creature can build crude shelters of snow or rock in the absence of any naturally occurring shelter.

Bedestrins are normally found in extended families or small tribes of 4-24 adults, and about half that number of juveniles. About half of the adults are away from the lair at any given time, fishing and hunting for food. (The d4+1 in the Group Size entry describes the typical bedestrin hunting party.) The males frequently battle for dominance, instinctively refraining from the use of deadly force or holds unless the rivalry is extremely intense.

Bedestrin Game Data

STR 13	(2d4+8)	INT 7	(d8+3)
DEX 10	(d8+5)	WIL 9	(d8+4)
CON 12	(2d4+7)	PER 6	(2d4+1)
Durability: 12/12/6/6		Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: walk 6, run 24, swim 10		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	

Attacks

Grapple	16/8/4	d6+2s/d6+4s/d4+2w	LI/0
Bite	14/7/3	d4w/d4+2w/2d4+1w	LI/0
Thrown spear	15/7/3	d4+2w/d4+4w/d4+2m	LI/0
Thrown rock	15/7/3	d4+2s/d6+2s/d4+2w	LI/0

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 -1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: d4+1 (LI), d4 (HI), d4-1 (En)

Skills

Athletics [13]-climb [14], jump [14], throw [15]; Unarmed [13]-brawl [16]; Movement [12]-swim [14]; Stamina [12]-endurance [14]; Stealth [10]-hide [12], sneak [12]; Animal Handling [9]; Awareness [9]-intuition [12], perception [10]; Resolve [9]-physical [10].

Bedestrin Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I
Environment: Class 2
GRAPH: G2/R3/A2/P2/H1
Biome: Equatorial seas and plains
Encounter Chance: Possible
Group Size: 2-5 (d4+1)
Organization: Tribe
Niche: Aboriginal hunter
Intelligence: Nontechnological sentient





The bedestrin have an unusual evolutionary development that limits fighting between adult males and immature males. Young males are actually neuter in gender until an unclaimed female of the tribe becomes available. At that time, any immature males in the tribe mature and fight with any other just-matured males for the right to start a harem. The winner joins the dominant males who lead the clan; the loser is exiled from the tribe and almost always perishes alone in the inhospitable wilderness.

Some bedestrin clans have successfully domesticated animals in their immediate vicinity. One of these is a small goatlike creature that provides meat, milk, bone, and sinew for bedestrin communities. Another, the gherek, is a sleek pack predator used by the bedestrin for hunting and defense of the lair. A typical bedestrin community has a 50% chance of sharing its home with 2d6 of these creatures. The gherek stands about 1 meter tall and weighs in at 60 to 90 kilograms; they are quite mercurial in temperament and frequently turn on their supposed masters.

Typically, a bedestrin hunting party uses a team of ghereks to flush out prey and run down fleeing animals wounded by bedestrin stones or spears. The gherek typically attacks with a ferocious low rush that forces the victim to succeed on a Strength or Dexterity feat check to remain standing if the gherek hits on its first attack of the encounter. Victims knocked flat must spend an action to climb to their feet again or fight prone. The gherek gains a -2 bonus to its attacks against victims on the ground.

The bedestrins are in the midst of a long evolutionary struggle from intelligent animal status to true sentience. They still possess far more instinctive responses than a true sentient, but they're showing signs of sophisticated reasoning in their tool-making, domestication of an-

Gherek Game Data

STR 11 (d6+7) INT 3 (Animal d6+6)
DEX 11 (d6+7) WIL 9 (2d4+4)
CON 9 (2d4+4) PER 4 (Animal d6+8)
Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action check: 15+/14/7/3
Move: walk 6, run 40, swim 8 #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2

Attacks

Bite 15/7/3 d4+1w/d6+1w/d6+3w LI/0

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

Armor: d4 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d4-2 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [11]-brawl [15]; Movement [9]-swim [10]; Stamina [9]-endurance [12]; Stealth [11]-shadow [14]; Awareness [9]-intuition [14], perception [12]; Investigate [9]-track [12]; Resolve [9]-physical [10].

imals, and language. In my estimation, the bedestrins need another 10,000 to 30,000 years before technological sentients can safely interact with them. For now, most of Hudson should be declared a special preserve in order to give them the time and room they need to finish the climb to sentience. Regrettably, the Regency of Bluefall is dragging its feet in establishing this sanctuary. — AV, CSS

Disruptor

Hudson's Series I lifeforms may be fascinating examples of adaptation to extreme cold, but they aren't the ice moon's only natives. Hudson also supports a Series VII ecosphere of crystalline creatures on the open ice fields and glaciers of its deep interior. The disruptor is the most spectacular and dangerous example of these weird lifeforms, a mindless predator that absorbs energy from other creatures of its type. Human power cells attract disruptors as a flame draws moths. Driven by blind instinct to feed on power, disruptors can inflict grievous damage to suits and vehicles, often destroying themselves in the process.

Disruptors, like most of the other crystalline lifeforms of Hudson's coldest regions, possess mineral-based (as opposed to water-based) cell structures and a viscid mineral oil for a circulatory fluid. Extreme temperatures don't bother disruptors because they literally cannot freeze, and need not breathe in any conventional sense of the word. Disruptors, like other animals of this kingdom, rely on advanced electrolysis processes to metabolize food and provide energy. Hudson's bitterly cold temperatures allow flashes of superconductivity in the disruptor's body, making it into a living battery. At temperatures above -60° Celsius, disruptors begin to lose the ability to metabolize food and power neural activity, dying within a matter of hours.

Description: The disruptor is a radially symmetrical creature of crystalline structure, roughly 1 meter in diameter. It appears to have gemlike formations of blue and purple scattered through the delicate latticework of its body. Hidden within the bases of its five arms are fine crystalline fans set horizontally in hollow wells like the lift chambers of a hovercraft. Using magnetic impulsion to spin these fans, the disruptor can gracefully fly, hover, and dart about.

Encounter: A disruptor has no sense of sight, smell, or touch—but it can detect vibration, heat, and electromagnetic activity with uncanny precision. Driven by instinct, it moves toward EM sources such as other species of crystalline creatures at its best speed, seeking to attach itself to its victim and drain its bioelectrical potential. A disruptor can sense the EM signature of a small power cell such as that in a radio or weapon at a range of about 500 meters, a medium power cell (a suit or piece of machinery) from 1,000 meters away, and a large power cell at up to 5,000 meters. Its other senses are effective out to 100 or 200 meters, depending on conditions.

The disruptor typically lies motionless and perfectly concealed in snow and ice, waiting for prey to approach. When something comes close enough to attract its attention, it rises in a puff of ice particles



and flies toward the target with a soft humming or whirring sound. As it nears, it picks up speed, until it strikes like a flying blade, lodging in its target. If the disruptor misses with this attack, it circles back around for another pass $d4$ phases later.

Once the disruptor has embedded one of its arms in its target, it begins to drain stored power at a voracious rate. Biological energy, such as the bioelectric fields surrounding Series I lifeforms (including humans) is immune to the disruptor's touch. Power cells in suits, weapons, vehicles, or machinery are not. The disruptor drains a small or handheld device in $d4-1$ phases (minimum of 1), a medium or worn device in $d4+1$ phases, a large or stationary device in $2d4$ phases, and a very large power source such as that of a vehicle or an installation in $3d4$ phases. (At the Gamemaster's discretion, partially drained devices may operate at a +1 to +3 penalty.) If a disruptor completely drains an object, it detaches and flies away to seek a new hiding spot.

Disruptor Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VII

Environment: Class 2

GRAPH: G2/R3/A2/P2/H1

Biome: High-latitude polar plains

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1–4 ($d4$)

Organization: Solitary hunter

Niche: Medium electrovore

Intelligence: Low-order animal

Disruptors that attack large power cells almost always drain more power than they can hold. Once a disruptor has spent $d6+1$ phases draining such an object (roll separately for each power-draining incident), it reaches its capacity and explodes. This inflicts damage of $d8+1w$ (HI/O) in a 2-meter radius, $d6w$ from 2 to 4 meters, and $d8s$ to creatures 4 to 6 meters distant. Modern power storage cells contain so much energy that a disruptor usually destroys itself with its own hunger.

Habitat/Society: Disruptors are found in the most inhospitable regions of Hudson. They need the extreme cold of the open plains and polar wastes to avoid death and dissolution. Away from the unpleasant warmth of the seas and volcanic areas, Hudson supports a thriving ecology of Series VII crystalline creatures. The disruptor is one of the top predators in this strange food chain.

Disruptors are incapable of communication or cooperation, but they're often found clustered in small groups. The best locations naturally attract a number of individuals. Somehow, they are capable of recognizing each other's EM signatures and refrain from cannibalism, avoiding their neighbors. Since several disruptors may hunt in the same general area, it's not unusual for several to respond to the same power signature that stimulates any one of them to attack.

A disruptor reproduces by seeking another of its kind just before its own death. The younger, healthier disruptor implants $3d6$ spores in the body of the older, which then perishes. Two to three months later, $d4$ new disruptors rise from the remains of their parent and depart to lead their own lives. Few creatures prey on the disruptor, so most of these individuals survive to adulthood—if they don't overdose on a power source and explode.

The crystalline creatures of Hudson display a kind of biological organization and metabolism unknown to science until the survey of this world. Series VII lifeforms are the rarest and most precious treasures of the galaxy. — AV, CSS

Disruptor Game Data

STR 4	(d4+1)	INT 1	(Animal d4+1)
DEX 12	(3d4+4)	WIL 7	(d6+3)
CON 6	(d6+2)	PER 1	(Animal d4+1)
Durability: 6/6/3/3		Action check: 11+/10/5/2	
Move: fly 30		#Actions: 1	
Reaction score: Ordinary/1			

Attacks

Ram	8/4/2	$d4w/d6w/d8w$	LI/O
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Defenses

–2 resistance modifier vs melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: $d6+1$ (LI), $d6$ (HI), $d6+2$ (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [4]—brawl [8]; Acrobatics [12]—flight [14]; Stealth [12]—hide [14], sneak [13]; Stamina [6]—endurance [7], resist pain [12]; Awareness [7]—intuition [14], perception [12].



ALITAR

The next stop in our survey of the Verge was the war-torn system of Algemron. This remarkable star system boasts no less than four life-bearing worlds. We conducted detailed surveys on Alitar, Reliance, and Wreathe, but we were unable to visit Galvin. The Galvinites took great exception to our cordial reception from Alitar, and opened fire on the *Kepler* when we tried to approach the world under a neutral flag. Despite our efforts to convince them of our nonbelligerence, the Defense Directorate of Galvin refused to allow us access to their world.

Of the three worlds we did visit, Alitar is the sparkling gem of the system. Like Bluefall, it is remarkably Earthlike, with a complex Series I biosphere and an indigenous species of sentient aliens—in this case, the xe'reen. The rest of this entry is devoted to an examination of some of the more interesting species native to this planet. Reliance is an extreme Class 3 world of ice and ammonia, inhabited by creatures of life Series II. Finally, Wreathe is a massive asteroid large enough to cling to a thin atmosphere of sulfur dioxide, supporting Series IV lifeforms. Galvin, Alitar's sister-world, is closer to the star Algemron and correspondingly warmer, a large world of steaming swamps and shallow seas. We took the liberty of downloading the University of Alitar's old survey records on their neighbor; this second-hand information is included in the mass of supporting documentation attached to this report. — *AV, CSS*

Alitar

Parent: Algemron, G5	Surface Gravity: 1.04 g
Orbital Radius: 1.31 AU	Atmosphere: N ₂ , O ₂
Orbital Period: 577 days	Pressure: 1.33 atm
Rotation Period: 22.8 hours	Median Temperature: 12° C
Axial Tilt: Minimal (1°)	Satellites: None
Diameter: 14,302 km	GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2
Density (Earth = 1): 1.02	

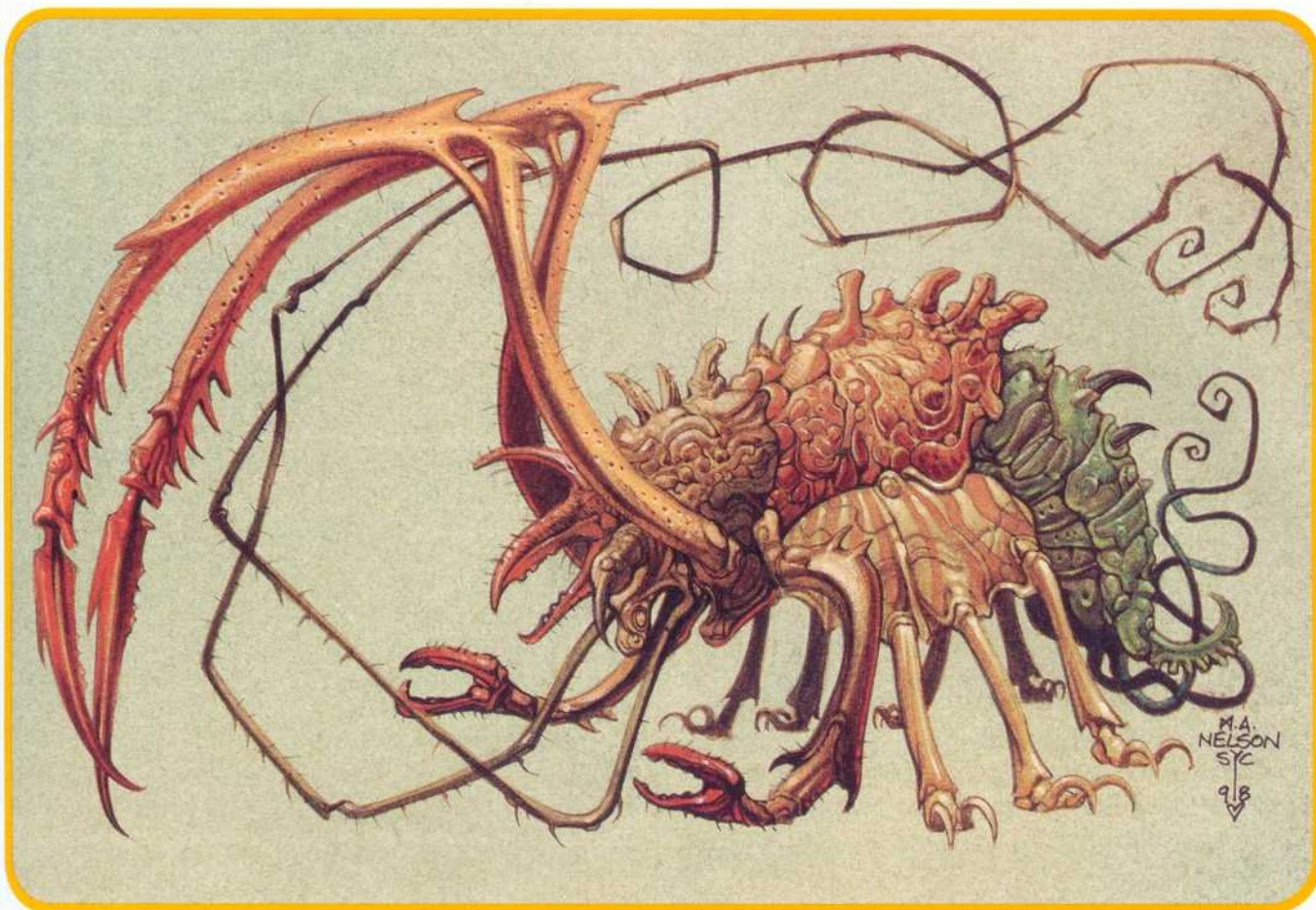
Alitar is an Earthlike world with one key difference: Its axial tilt is nearly nonexistent. Naturally, this means that seasons are virtually nonexistent; the mean temperature simply decreases as one travels toward the poles, with only minor fluctuations over the course of the year. On Earth, this would mean that someone living in the middle regions of North America (for instance) would experience year-round temperatures of about 5° to 15° C (40° F to 60° F), with no marked winter or summer. Alitar is also somewhat cooler than Earth, being farther from its sun, so its polar ice caps cover a correspondingly greater portion of the globe.

Drexen

Alitar is an excellent example of convergent evolution. Its rich biosphere includes close analogues of almost every order of terrestrial life. There are a great number of differences, of course—birds never developed on Alitar, and the planet's flying creatures consist of small mammals and reptiles or large insects. Another difference of note are the Alitaran superarthropods. Unlike Earth's insects, the megarthropods of Alitar have true lungs and complex circulatory systems, along with interior skeletons. The chitinous exoskeleton is

simply a skin covering, and does not support the creature's weight or anchor its muscles. The drexen is a fine example of Alitar's megarthropoda, a dangerous predator that prefers the perpetual warmth of Alitar's equatorial deserts.

Description: A drexen bears a passing resemblance to the whip scorpions of Earth. Ten of its limbs are long, spindly legs equipped with sturdy clawed feet; its two forwardmost limbs are powerful



arms equipped with spearlike barbs for impaling its prey. The drexen's body is about a meter long, and the side-to-side span of the creature's legs is almost 3 meters. Two long feelers extend more than 4 meters from the body. A drexen weighs about 30 kilograms.

Encounter: Drexens are a significant danger in the outback of Alitar's torrid zone. They are fearless hunters, primitive and ferocious creatures that frequently attack humans. Loud noise only attracts them, but large numbers often discourage the drexens; they're much more likely to attack one or two hikers or scouts than a dozen people clustered together. Drexens prefer to set ambushes by trails or waterholes, concealing themselves in dense brush and laying their whip-feelers out to cover the path and detect prey. They attack with a lightning-quick rush from cover.

The drexen kills by means of its spearlike front claws, striking

twice (once per claw) in each action. Each claw is equipped with a venom sac that is quite lethal to other Alitaran lifeforms (and t'sa, for some reason), but acts as a painful irritant to most creatures not native to the planet. This poison inflicts a +2 penalty on a hero's Con-

Drexen Game Data

STR 9	(d6+6)	INT 1	(Animal 6 or d4+4)
DEX 12	(2d4+7)	WIL 9	(d6+6)
CON 7	(d6+4)	PER 1	(Animal 6 or d4+4)
Durability: 7/7/4/4		Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: sprint 60, run 40, walk 12		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			

Attacks

Claws (×2) 14/7/3 d6w/2d4w/d4m LI/0
Plus poison, see text.

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d6 (LI), d6-3 (HI), d6-2 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [9]; Stealth [12]-hide [14], sneak [14], Stamina [7]-endurance [12]; Awareness [9]-intuition [14], perception [16]; Resolve [9]-physical [12].

Drexen Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Arid steppe and scrublands

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 1-6 (d6)

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Small carnivore and scavenger

Intelligence: Low-order animal

stitution feat check to resist its effect, and has an onset time of 1 round. Treat it as an irritant for all heroes except t'sa, for whom the venom acts as a necrotoxin. (For statistics, see "Poison" on pages 59–60 of the *ALTERNITY Gamemaster Guide*.)

Habitat/Society: Creatures native to Alitar have the advantage of specializing in the climate they prefer. Unlike terrestrial creatures

that have to adapt to changing seasons, an Alitarin lifeform never needs to hibernate, change its coat, or risk starvation in wintertime. The drexen is quite comfortable in the arid grassland and brush of Alitar's lower latitudes, ranging from about 10° N to 10° S over much of the planet's surface. Drexens are diurnal hunters, and retreat to their burrows at night. They have little social organization, and can be quite territorial toward each other.

Kettledrake

The kettledrake is a large lizardlike reptile native to Alitar's middle latitudes. Somewhat clumsy, it makes up for its lack of agility with a very unusual natural attack—the ability to generate scorching bursts of flame from its gullet, burning its prey alive. A special adaptation of the kettledrake's digestive system produces methane gas and stores it in a bellowslike organ behind the creature's lungs; when exhaled, the methane is ignited by a bioelectric shock, generated by a gland on the upper surface of the kettledrake's tongue.

Description: Armored in thick scales and equipped with a blunt, tooth-filled maw, the kettledrake looks something like a monitor lizard at first glance. Alitaran reptiles evolved with their limbs beneath them, not beside them; the kettledrake can trot or run like a short-legged dog, instead of thrashing side to side in its gait. A kettledrake ranges from 3 to 5 meters in length, and weighs 100 to

Kettledrake Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Temperate forests

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1–4 (d4)

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Large carnivore

Intelligence: Low-order animal

250 kilograms. The creature's distinctive hissing shriek gives it its name—early settlers thought it sounded like a boiling kettle.



Encounter: Kettledrakes are notoriously stupid and persistent. They've been known to starve to death waiting outside a fenced-in livestock enclosure. They're not inclined to attack humans in most situations—kettledrakes don't usually think of a human as a potential meal. But on occasion a human who blunders onto a kettledrake, or who just happens to encounter a very hungry one, may be attacked.

The kettledrake's most dangerous weapon is its flame-jet. This has a range of 6 meters, and affects a path 2 meters wide. The first time a kettledrake uses this attack in an encounter, its attack roll is a Constitution feat check with a -3 bonus, but for subsequent attacks this becomes more difficult: No bonus for the second, a +3 penalty for the third, and so on. After the prey has been incapacitated by burns, the kettledrake finishes it off with its jaws.

Kettledrakes are not immune to flame; they avoid burning themselves while breathing fire by maintaining a constant bellowslike exhalation that projects the heat away from themselves.

Habitat/Society: Kettledrakes favor the dense forest belt of Alitar's northern hemisphere. (This is a humid climate, so they don't start too many forest fires.) A kettledrake's hunting ground is easy to identify—scorched patches on the ground and burned trees mark the vicinity of its lair.

Although kettledrakes are basically solitary animals, they congregate in groups of three or four about once every 65 days. At this time they mate and establish territorial claims over their neighbors. The creatures are susceptible to surprise during this time (+2

Kettledrake Game Data

STR 12 (2d4+7) INT 1 (Animal 5 or d4+3)
DEX 5 (2d4) WIL 8 (d6+5)
CON 11 (d6+8) PER 1 (Animal 6 or d4+4)
Durability: 11/11/6/6 Action check: 9+/8/4/2
Move: run 30, walk 6 #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Marginal/1

Attacks

Bite 13/7/3 2d4s/d4+1w/d6+2w LI/0
Flame 11/5/2 d4+2w/d6+2w/d8+2w En/0

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d6+1 (LI), d4 (HI), d4+1 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [12]; Stamina [11]—endurance [14];
Awareness [8]—intuition [10]; Resolve [8]—physical [12].

penalty to their Awareness checks), but attack with extra ferocity (-1 bonus) if they are disturbed. This period lasts for three days, after which time the individuals return to their own hunting grounds.



One of the most terrifying carnivores to be found anywhere, the thraat is a powerful engine of destruction. It is a polar carnivore that hunts the cold, rocky shores of Alitar's north polar sea and icecap, taking a terrible toll of the northern x'eeren populations. Without exception, the thraat is an ill-tempered and voracious creature.

Description: The thraat's body is generally apelike, but its hind feet are oversized paddles that can propel it through the water with surprising speed. The beast is covered in a double layer of long, white fur over insulating blubber, and it hunts on both land and sea, easily tolerating the persistent chill of Alitar's polar regions. The thraat's powerful arms end in stubby, clawed hands, and its gaping jaws reveal hundreds of sharp teeth. An adult thraat stands about 2.5 meters tall, despite its hunched posture, and weighs about 600 to 700 kilograms.

Encounter: Thraats hunt the coastlines or ice floes, stalking prey both in and out of the water. They are very strong swimmers, capable of catching some slow-moving marine mammals or mollusks, and can hold their breath for up to 30 minutes before surfacing for air. Despite their clumsy appearance, thraats are quite agile on land and can outrun any human.

Thraats use ice floes to cover their approach, swimming beneath the ice to get close to landbound or icebound prey, or crossing over

the ice to sneak up on marine prey from above. A number of x'eeren are killed each year in this fashion. Thraats attack with their powerful forelimbs and a dangerous bite. They are immensely strong, and have been known to kill adult humans with a single blow of their mighty forepaws.

Habitat/Society: Alitar's poles are more extensive than Earth's ice caps; without a summer melt-off, glaciation begins at around 60° north or south latitude, about 3,500 kilometers from the planet's actual north and south poles. This seems like a tremendous waste of land, but Alitar's polar ice fields are not like the frigid wastelands of

Thraat Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I
Environment: Class 1
GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H1
Biome: Polar ice floes and coastal regions
Encounter Chance: Slim
Group Size: 1-2 (d4÷2)
Organization: Solitary
Niche: Large carnivore
Intelligence: High-order animal





Greenland or Antarctica; these regions never endure the sunless winters of Earth's poles, so temperatures on the icecap stay within 10° C (20° F) of the freezing point. Alitar's poles are cold, but they're far more diverse and populous biospheres than Earth's arctic regions.

Alitar's largest sea, the Misten, girdles the planet near the northern frost line and pole. Like the northern waters of Earth's oceans, it is rich with cold-water krill, plankton, and shellfish. Its eastern shores are the primary habitat of the thraat. These great carnivores are not commonplace even in this area, but more can be found here than anywhere else. Unfortunately, this region is also coming under intense commercial development as Alitaran fishermen and aquaculture firms are bringing these waters into production. Currently, an illegal bounty of \$5,000 per thraat is the going rate in some of these rough-and-tumble settlements.

Late in Alitar's year, the richer fishing grounds shift several hundred kilometers to the south and remain there for about three months. During this time, thraats hibernate in snow caves. In spring, they emerge with a voracious appetite and begin scouring vast areas for any prey. For a week after they awaken from hibernation, thraats are so crazed with hunger that they receive an extra action in every round of a combat scene, but their resistance modifier against ranged attacks is negated.

Following this period of replenishing their bodies, thraats engage in a month-long mating season. Each creature seeks out a member of the opposite gender, and the two of them go through an elaborate courtship ritual for several days. The two thraats are inseparable during the courtship, and each individual will defend the other to the death. After the mating ritual is complete, the creatures go their sep-

Thraat Game Data

STR 18	(d4+16)	INT 3	(Animal 9 or 2d4+4)
DEX 9	(d6+6)	WIL 10	(d4+8)
CON 15	(d8+10)	PER 1	(Animal 4 or 2d4)
Durability: 15/15/8/8		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: run 24, walk 4, swim 30		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			

Attacks

Paw	20/10/5	2d4s/2d4w/2d6+2w	LI/0
Bite	19/9/4	d4w/d6+2w/d4m	LI/0

Defenses

+3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d6+1 (LI), d6 (HI), d8-3 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [18]-*brawl* [20]; Stealth [9]; Movement [15]-*swim* [22]; Stamina [15]-*endurance* [20]; *resist pain* [18]; Awareness [10]-*intuition* [12]; *perception* [12]; Resolve [10]-*physical* [18], *mental* [16].

arate ways. Half a year later, during late summer in the polar regions, the female gives birth to a single offspring. The young thraat matures rapidly, going off on its own before the time to hibernate comes around again.

Xe'reen

The xe'reen hold an unusual distinction among the alien species that humanity has encountered: For their first 50 years of colonization on Alitar, humans didn't recognize them as sentient. With no true hands, the xe'reen—or sealphins, as they used to be called—developed only the most rudimentary technology. They still live just as countless generations before them did, a seagoing race with little desire to adapt to the newcomers around them.

Xe'reen are aquatic mammals, much like the porpoises or seals of Earth's oceans. Curiously enough, their skeletal structure and body adaptations show signs that their ancestors did not return to sea only once, but at several points during their evolutionary history; the best guess now is that the xe'reen represent the fourth time that their species has become aquatic. No one has yet advanced a theory to explain why this happened, and no one gives much credence to the xe'reen tales of "fire-people" that chased their forebears from the sea on two occasions in their creation myths.

Alitar is a world with more land than water; it has no true oceans, but instead landlocked seas. Some of these are quite extensive, of course; the Misten Sea of the northern hemisphere is nearly 5,000 kilometers wide, and the Yellow Pan of the arid southern plains is well over 3,000 kilometers from end to end. Since these waters are separated by extensive stretches of dry terrain, the xe'reen are confined to the Misten. (None of Alitar's other seas appear to hold intelligent natives.) Since the Misten's shores were one of the last regions to be settled on Alitar, extensive study of the xe'reen—and the realization that they were a sentient, if nontechnological, race—came only 20 years ago.

Description: The early human explorers of Alitar first called the xe'reen "sealphins," a fairly accurate nickname. They are sleek, torpedo-shaped creatures covered in fine, oily fur over a thin layer of insulating blubber. Because it has returned to the sea quite recently in evolutionary terms, the xe'reen still has the limbs of a land animal; its tail is a single powerful flipper for swimming. As terrestrial creatures, xe'reen had an otterlike frame and gait, so their paddle-like arms and finned legs are quite short in relation to their long, sinuous bodies. Its face is streamlined, with nictitating membranes over its expressive eyes and bristlelike whiskers at its snout.

Xe'reen Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Cold-water seas, rocky islands

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 5–30 (5d6)

Organization: Clan

Niche: Medium carnivore

Intelligence: Aboriginal sentient

On land, xe'reen are much more comfortable on all fours, although they can balance and even walk on their hind legs for short distances. Xe'reen avoid spending a lot of time out of the water, and venture onto land only when necessity demands it.

Encounter: Xe'reen are not tool-users. Their forepaws are barely suitable for using the simplest of devices. They are swimmers of incredible skill, capable of holding their breath for more than half an hour and reaching depths of 200 meters or more. Xe'reen have an echolocation ability similar to that of Earth's bats or dolphins, providing them with the ability to "see" up to 200 meters underwater, regardless of lighting or visibility conditions.

Xe'reen are skillful hunters and feed primarily on fish that they catch on the fin. They can focus their echolocation pings into a short-ranged pulse of stunning force. This only functions underwater, and has a range of 2/4/6 meters (+1 penalty for medium range, +2 for long). Typically, the xe'reen uses this to disorient its prey before closing in to seize the target in its jaws.

The most outgoing individuals among the xe'reen have adjusted to the concept of a great, dry world beyond their native sea, and countless other worlds beyond the sky. A few have overcome their ingrained dislike for spending large amounts of time out of water, which has enabled them to leave behind their aquatic environment to explore the rest of Alitar, and even to take ships to the stars. Xe'reen tend to be curious about people and places, but have no interest in technology or material possessions.

Xe'reen Game Data

STR 9	(2d4+4)	INT 7	(d8+3)
DEX 9	(d8+7)	WIL 10	(2d4+5)
CON 9	(d8+7)	PER 7	(2d4+2)
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 11+/10/5/2	
Move: run 12, walk 6, swim 40		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Marginal/1		Last resorts: 0	

Attacks

Bite	12/6/3	d6s/d4w/d4+2w	LI/0
Sonic pulse	12/6/3	d6s/d6+2s/d4w	LI/0

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks (+2 in water)
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks (+2 in water)
 Armor: d6–1 (LI), d6–3 (HI), d6–2 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [9], Acrobatics [9]–*dodge* [12], Stealth [9]–*hide* [10], *sneak* [12], Movement [9]–*swim* [14], Stamina [9]–*endurance* [12], Awareness [10]–*intuition* [12], *perception* [12], Resolve [10]–*mental* [12], Interaction [7].





Habitat/Society: Xe'reen prefer the cold waters of Alitar's northern seas. They spend the majority of their time in the sea, roving thousands of kilometers as they follow the great shoals of fish along Alitar's high-latitude currents. A xe'reen may go months at a time without setting foot on land. The few islands and coves that the

xe'reen visit are used as meeting places and birthing beaches, and aren't permanent residences.

The xe'reen are an insular race, avoiding contact with offworld visitors. They knew of the arrival of human settlers more than a hundred years before the Alitaran humans discovered them, but chose to hide from the invaders. This wasn't an expression of xenophobia—on an individual basis, xe'reen tend to be friendly and open creatures. But as a culture, they simply viewed the human arrival on Alitar as unimportant.

That attitude changed as human fishing vessels set out into the Misten Sea and human towns appeared in traditional xe'reen grounds. The xe'reen clans were divided into three camps: those who wanted to hide, those who wanted friendly contact, and those who favored making war against the humans to drive them away. The xe'reen in favor of peaceful contact have won out . . . narrowly. But significant numbers of xe'reen adhere to their original views, vanishing whenever humans come near, or attacking human vessels and villages. Worse yet, this rift has caused a complex web of feuds and skirmishes between xe'reen clans.

The xe'reen are a prime example of why we should never go into a potential first-contact situation with any preconceptions. This species has a complex society and is capable of sophisticated behavior—facts that eluded the first settlers on Alitar simply because they disregarded the possibility that a creature without manipulable digits could nevertheless be sentient. As we bring more and more worlds into our stellar community, it is essential that we keep our minds open on the issue of sentience and remember, as we now have learned, that knowledge of how to use tools is a determinant of intelligence—but the ability to use those tools is not. — AV, CSS

Xe'reen as Heroes

While few xe'reen have left their native world, a handful have uprooted themselves from Alitar. Xe'reen are uninterested in material wealth or devices, and begin play with the Primitive flaw. If there's a way to do something without resorting to technology, the xe'reen will be strongly inclined to make do. Despite this trait, they're loyal companions who can be very useful as scouts and infiltrators.

Xe'reen heroes can't sprint, but their swimming movement rates are tripled, and they can automatically hold their breath for at least 30 minutes. Xe'reen sonar allows them to see up to 200 meters underwater, and hero xe'reen can attack with sonic pulses as described above. Xe'reen can be Combat Specs, Free Agents, or Diplomats; their free broad skills are Unarmed Attack, Acrobatics, Movement, Stamina, Awareness, and Resolve. They must meet the following Ability Score requirements:

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIL	PER
6/12	8/15	8/15	4/12	6/14	4/10

RELIANCE



Out of the thousands of stars in the Verge, less than a dozen are known to support Class 1, or Earthlike, worlds (although at least five others harbored Earthlike worlds at some point in the past). The string of fortunate accidents necessary to create a temperate planet with a nitrogen-oxygen atmosphere and seas of water just isn't very commonplace. Class 1 worlds almost always develop life; they're ideal. And, naturally, each one represents a little piece of the most valuable territory in the universe. Algemron is one of only seventeen recorded systems that boasts not one, but two Earthlike worlds.

While Class 1 worlds are few and far between in the galaxy, worlds like Reliance are far more common. Reliance required no oxygen-fixing microbes to alter its atmosphere, no lucky mixture of gases in just the right proportion, no cosmic circumstances to concentrate important elements near its surface to create just the right planetary chemistry. Like thousands of similar planets, it's basically a ball of dirty ice and metal-poor rock, a world of light elements drifting through the cold void on the outskirts of its parent system.

Surprisingly, Reliance is home to a thriving ecosystem of Series II life: hydrogen-breathing creatures that evolved in the frigid oceans of water and ammonia. While Series I life is about a 90% possibility on the rare Class 1 worlds, Series II life occurs on only 10% to 20% of the iceworlds charted by the Concord to date. Life has a much more difficult challenge in conquering a world like Reliance than in evolving on an Earthlike world. — **RG, CLA**

Reliance is an ice world, similar in some ways to Saturn's moon Titan. Beneath a cold smog of nitrogen and hydrogen lie seas of frozen water and ammonia. During the years-long summer of the northern hemisphere, these seas melt into organic slush. As the seasons slowly change, the northern seas freeze again while the southern seas thaw. Reliance has very little rock or metal in its composition; its shell of water and ammonia ice is estimated to be at least 1,000 kilometers deep.

Reliance

Parent: Algemron, G5
Orbital Radius: 4.59 AU
Orbital Period: 10.3 years
Rotation Period: 175 hours
Axial Tilt: Extreme (59.4°)
Diameter: 21,840 km
Density (Earth = 1): 0.76

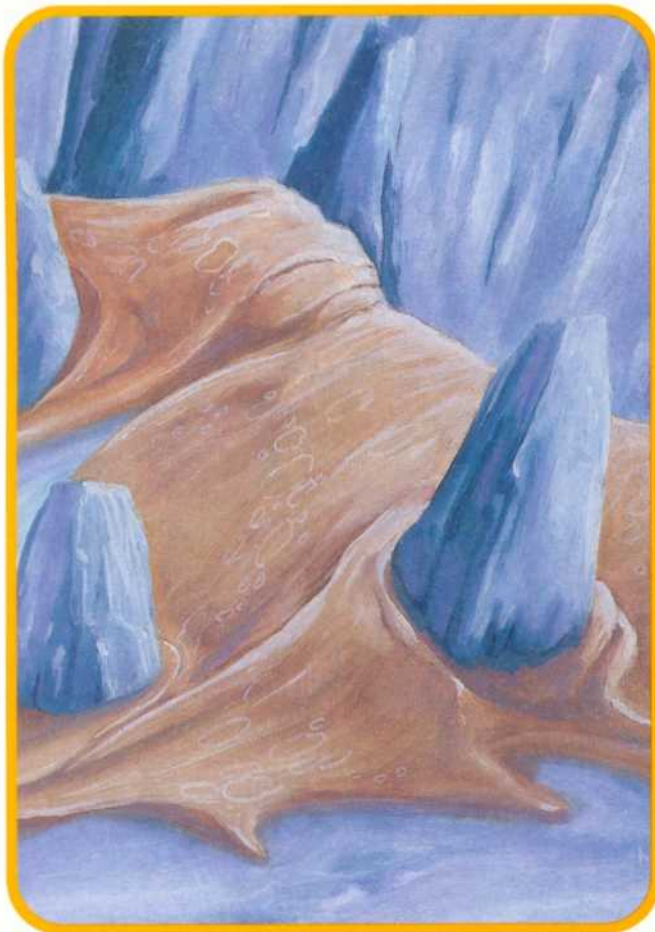
Surface Gravity: 1.31g
Atmosphere: H, N₂, CH₄
Pressure: 1.3 atm
Median Temperature: -120° C
Satellites: None
GRAPH: G3/R2/A1/P3/H1

Ammonite

One of the most common of Reliance's large lifeforms is the ammonite, an amorphous creature that feeds on anything it can engulf. Ammonites favor the warm cycle of Reliance's seasons, emerging in the planet's spring, flourishing in the summer and fall, and then dying off as Reliance heads into its long, dark winter. Slow-moving creatures with the intelligence of a sponge, ammonites are not a serious danger to anyone who exercises a reasonable degree of caution while conducting suited operations on the planet's surface.

Description: Ammonites appear to be shapeless blobs of protoplasm, fluid creatures that ooze over the icy plains and melt-ponds of Reliance's surface. Despite their appearance, they're not single-celled organisms; an ammonite is actually composed of hundreds of thin, meter-long strands of tough, muscular fiber, each of which secretes a viscous slime. This slime acts as a crude circulatory system, keeping the strands of cells bathed in nutrients and suspended hydrogen for respiration. A typical ammonite is about 2 meters in di-





ameter, no more than 20 centimeters thick, and weighs about 80 to 120 kilograms.

Encounter: Ammonites are sightless and deaf, but they're very sensitive to temperature differentials and to tactile sensations. Naturally drawn to heat, they're capable of detecting a suited human at a range of 500 meters simply by his or her thermal signature. With mindless persistence, ammonites move toward and try to attack anything they encounter.

An ammonite naturally blends into its surroundings with ease, and it is quiet and slow-moving. Heroes in a position to be surprised by the approach of an ammonite suffer a +1 penalty to their chance to notice the danger. When an ammonite attacks, it first seeks to engulf its prey, rearing up and throwing itself over the victim with surprising speed. Dozens of cell-strands loop around the victim,

Ammonite Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series II

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G3/R2/A1/P3/H1

Biome: Any land surface

Encounter Chance: Probable

Group Size: 2–12 (2d6)

Organization: None

Niche: Omnivore/scavenger

Intelligence: Low-order animal

smothering the hapless character in the ammonite's embrace (treat this as an overpowering attack, with no attack penalty). Once the creature has a hold on its prey, it secretes powerful corrosives through its slime coating. A captured character or creature can break free of the ammonite's deadly embrace by achieving a degree of success on a Strength feat check that's equal to or better than the ammonite's original attack. The creature will also relinquish its hold if struck by an attack that causes at least 1 point of wound damage.

To do further damage to an engulfed character with its corrosive slime, the ammonite must make a successful attack at the end of every round. This attack takes place at the end of the Marginal phase and does not count as an action. A Failure or Critical Failure result means that the slime does no damage in that round, but the creature continues to maintain its hold on the victim.

Ammonites can't be dazed or knocked out by the loss of stun points or by taking mortal damage. With no central nervous system or vital organs, they're tough to kill. Electrical shocks or weapons are unusually effective against them, causing their cell-strands to disorganize; arc guns and *electrokinetics* attacks inflict double damage.

Habitat/Society: Most of Reliance is boring from a human point of view—every place looks like every other place, an endless plain of ice, snow, slush, and ponds of dilute ammonia. Matlike mosses, barrel-shaped cacti, and tough broadleaf creepers break up the monotony, blotching the blue-white ice with dark browns and greens. Ammonites thrive in this bleak and sodden environment, moving over the dry ice fields and freezing slush-ponds with equal ease.

Ammonites are extremely primitive creatures and often turn on each other. They reproduce asexually, simply disgorging new bundles of cell-strands when the parent creature becomes too large to move. While ammonites may be instinctually driven to attempt to consume anything they come across, they can't actually digest human equipment or flesh, and have been known to lose interest in potential victims after trying to "taste" them first.

Ammonite Game Data

STR 11	(2d4+6)	INT 1	(Animal 2 or d4)
DEX 6	(d4+3)	WIL 6	(d4+3)
CON 15	(2d4+10)	PER 1	(Animal 2 or d4)
Durability: 15/15/8/8		Action check: 6+/5/2/1	
Move: walk 4, swim 6		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Marginal/1			

Attacks

Engulf	11/5/2	d4s/d6s/d8s	LI/O
Slime	15/7/3	d6s/d6w/d6+2w	En/O

Defenses

Immune to knockout effects
no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d4+2 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [11], Stamina [15], Awareness [6]—*intuition* [10].

Lightning Eel

The lifeforms of Reliance are divided into no less than four kingdoms: photosynthetic plants, chemosynthetic plants, and two distinct groups of animals. The first are creatures like the ammonites, simple nondifferentiated lifeforms with no organs or structures. The second, more familiar group are cellular animals such as the lightning eel. The eel is one of the top predators in Reliance's food chain, a nocturnal hunter that feeds on creatures forced into torpor by the long, cold night of Reliance.

Description: Despite its name, the lightning eel is not an eel, or even aquatic. It is an amphibian, comfortable both in and out of water. The eel's body has a distinct tadpole shape, with a round, heavy head and torso. It has no limbs except a long, powerful tail for locomotion. Its oversized mouth is ringed with razor-sharp ridges of cartilage, and its hide is a dark, mottled gray. The eel is 2 to 3 meters in length, and weighs 30 to 50 kilograms.

Encounter: The lightning eel prefers to hunt by ambushing its prey, finding a puddle of slush or a patch of ground cover in which to conceal itself. Make a Stealth-*hide* skill check for the eel to begin the encounter in order to see how well it has concealed itself.

When the lightning eel's prey comes within 4 meters or so, the creature attacks by lashing out with its long, thin tongue. The tongue

Lightning Eel Game Data

STR 7 (2d4+2) INT 1 (Animal 5 or d4+3)
DEX 7 (2d4+2) WIL 5 (2d4)
CON 9 (2d4+4) PER 1 (Animal 5 or d4+3)
Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action check: 9+/8/4/2
Move: walk 4, swim 16 #Actions: 1
Reaction score: Marginal/1

Attacks

Shock 13/6/3 d8s/d12s/d8w En/0
Bite 10/5/2 d6s/d4w/d4+2w LI/0

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d4 (LI), d4 (HI), d4+2 (En)

Skills

Unarmed Attack [7], Stealth [7]-*hide* [10], Stamina [9],
Awareness [5]-*intuition* [8], *perception* [8].



is an organic taser, with two prongs jacketed in fatty insulation. Through this living wire the lightning eel can deliver a tremendous electrical jolt. The barbs don't need to make contact with exposed flesh; the shock is powerful enough to pierce many forms of armor.

When its prey has been subdued by the electrical attack, the lightning eel slithers forward to finish off or devour the victim with its powerful jaws. While lightning eels have no fear of humans or their kind, and are almost certain to attack a traveler who wanders too close, they are discouraged by large numbers and bright lights—on Reliance's dim and barren surface, neither are very common.

Habitat/Society: Lightning eels live in submerged burrows near the shores of Reliance's meltponds and lakes. At dawn and dusk, they emerge to set ambushes for creatures leaving or returning to their lairs. During the middle of the day and the middle of the night, the lightning eel retreats to its own burrow.

Like most Reliance natives, the lightning eel hibernates for the coldest part of the year, when temperatures in the dark hemisphere

Lightning Eel Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series II
Environment: Class 3
GRAPH: G3/R2/A1/P3/H1
Biome: Seas and littoral regions
Encounter Chance: Possible
Group Size: 2–5 (d4+1)
Organization: None
Niche: Medium carnivore
Intelligence: Low-order animal

can reach -180° C. Since Reliance's year is more than ten Earth years long, the eel hibernates for three to four Earth years at a time.

Lightning eels are sociable creatures, with a fairly complex system of dominance and territorial displays. It's not uncommon to encounter several eels hunting quite close to each other.

Scraaghek

The most advanced lifeform on Reliance is the scraaghek, an aggregate creature composed of a dozen to two dozen smaller, independent segments. Each segment is a complete animal, with limbs, nervous and digestive systems, and the ability to reproduce—but in close company with others of its kind, the segments combine to become a single entity, possessing a group intelligence that approaches true sentience.

Description: A scraaghek segment is a small, centipede-like creature about one-half meter in length. Despite its appearance, it's not an arthropod; it has a ring-shaped backbone running the length of its body and a complex internal skeleton and musculature. The segment has six pairs of small, clawed limbs and a blunt head with a ring of six eyes and a circular, beaked mouth. Segments participating in a scraaghek collective actually lock their bodies together with a natural structure that resembles the coupling on a railroad car. Blood vessels and neural ganglia mesh from one segment to the next, making them into one creature for all intents and purposes. Scraagheks constantly rearrange their component parts, and break apart for feeding, fighting, and reproduction.

Encounter: Scraagheks are extremely inquisitive creatures, inclined to investigate any unusual events or phenomena in the area. They're not likely to attack humans unless the humans take some provocative action first, or the scraagheks clearly outnumber the humans and the humans appear to be unable to defend themselves. The exception is bright light; scraagheks have a violent and aggressive response to any powerful illumination and may attack with no other provocation, seeking to destroy the source.

The intelligence and capabilities of a scraaghek aggregate are determined by the number of individual segments that make up its body. To be capable of making attacks and otherwise fending for it-

self, a scraaghek must contain at least 6 segments. Smaller creatures have a durability rating, a movement rate, and the benefit of armor, but can't attack or employ skills. (A single segment has a durability rating of 1/1/0/0—it is killed by any attack that inflicts 1 point of wound damage on it.) Most scraagheks are composed of 6 to 16 (2d6+4) segments, although much larger aggregates are not impossible. The scraaghek's Ability Scores are derived from the number of segments it possesses, so a scraaghek of 12 segments has the following scores: STR 18, DEX 10, CON 18, INT 4, WIL 16, PER 4. Scraagheks of 12 or more segments have telepathic ability, and can communicate in this fashion. They are not self-aware and only concern themselves with issues of food, danger, shelter, and such things, but a clever Mindwalker might be able to winnow out more detailed information by phrasing his questions or comments in terms the scraaghek can respond to.

If a scraaghek sustains mortal damage or exhausts its stun or wound points, it breaks up into its component segments and scatters. It can't reassemble for d6 hours. In combat, scraagheks attack with a powerful bludgeoning blow of their long, whiplike torsos to stun

Scraaghek Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series II
Environment: Class 3
GRAPH: G3/R2/A1/P3/H1
Biome: Any land
Encounter Chance: Possible
Group Size: 1–6 (d6)
Organization: Loose pack or troop
Niche: Medium omnivore
Intelligence: Low-order animal to subsentient

and incapacitate their foes. When a foe falls, the scraaghek swarms over him, attacking with a painful and dangerous bite. A scraaghek of 12 or more segments will break up into smaller aggregates (no fewer than 6 segments per aggregate) so that each of the creatures can make a separate bite attack.

Habitat/Society: Scraagheks are nomads, migrating to remain in the summer hemisphere throughout their lifetimes. Since Reliance's seasons proceed so slowly, they can take years to move from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere and back again, but they rarely linger in one place for long. As part of an aggregate, scraaghek are at the top of Reliance's food chain and fear no native rivals, but an individual segment is very vulnerable and often serves as a meal for creatures such as the ammonite or the lightning eel.

Aggregates focus most of their social skills on maintaining their union, but they have a dim recognition of each other and travel in loose packs or troops. Aggregates within a single social grouping often exchange segments, passing memories and knowledge to each other in this fashion.

Scraaghek Game Data

STR	6 + 1 per segment	INT	1 per 3 segments
DEX	10 (2d4+5)	WIL	4 + 1 per segment
CON	3 per 2 segments	PER	1 per 3 segments
Durability:	3/3/2 ¹	Action check:	13+/12/6/3
Move:	run 30, walk 10	#Actions:	4
Reaction score:	Ordinary/2		
Psionic energy points:	16		
	¹ Per each 2 segments.		

Attacks

Bludgeon	12/6/3 ²	d6+1s/d6w/d6+2w	LI/O
Bite	12/6/3 ²	d6-3w/d4-1w/d4w	LI/O

² For a scraaghek of minimum size (6 segments), increase the base skill score by 1 for each additional segment.

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks³
 no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 -2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills³
 no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills³
 Armor: d6+1 (LI), d6-1 (HI), d6-1 (EN)

³ For a scraaghek of minimum size (6 segments), resistance modifier improves for creatures with higher Ability Scores.

Skills⁴

Stealth [10]-sneak [12], Movement [9], Stamina [9]-endurance [11], Awareness [10]-intuition [12], perception [14], Resolve [10], Telepathy [6]-contact [10], mind shield [10], mind blast [10].

⁴ Skill scores are for a scraaghek of minimum size (6 segments) except for Telepathy, which assumes a creature having 12 segments. Increase scores accordingly for larger creatures.



WREATHE

The strangest of Algemron's life-bearing worlds, Wreathe is one of the least hospitable bodies to support a native ecosystem. It's not really a world at all, but instead a moon-sized asteroid only two thousand kilometers in diameter, an asymmetrical lump of nickel-iron, sulfur, and carbonaceous minerals tumbling through the cold, lightless depths of the Algemron system. Despite its small size, a thin wisp of yellow vapor clings to its surface, a tenuous atmosphere of sulfur dioxide, and within this fragile shell Series IV life has evolved to fit these rigorous conditions.

Wreathe has become an important base of operations in Algemron's inner asteroid system, home to several shielded colonies and heavy refineries. The miners and colonists remain inside their subterranean dwellings, and rarely set foot on the surface. Despite this, their industrial activity is slowly but surely encroaching on Wreathe's fragile ecosystem. Only a handful of Wreathe's species are dangerous to man, but confrontations with native lifeforms have been steadily increasing in recent years. — *AV, CSS*

Wreathe isn't a planet at all, but instead an asteroid large enough to maintain the faintest trace of an atmosphere. Its form and composition tell a violent and spectacular tale of its formation, billions of years ago. Wreathe was once part of a superterrestrial world orbiting another star system altogether. But about two billion years ago, the Algemron system actually passed through the other system.

The collision wreaked havoc in the exposed portion of both stars' planetary systems. Wreathe was wrested from its parent star into a highly elliptical orbit around Algemron, and in time it collided with the gas giant Havryn. Wreathe was shattered into countless fragments, some of which became part of Havryn, while others became the great central asteroid belt of Algemron. Havryn lost so much angular momentum that its orbit collapsed inward, and it now circles much closer to its parent star. Wreathe spent millions of years as a molten fireball, liquefied by the force of the collision, before condensing into the twisted, jagged landscape of today.

Wreathe

Parent: Algemron, G5	Surface Gravity: 0.6 g
Orbital Radius: 3.1 AU	Atmosphere: SO ₂
Orbital Period: 5.7 years	Pressure: 0.07 atm
Rotation Period: 29.5 hours	Median Temperature: -100° C
Axial Tilt: Extreme (144.9°)	Satellites: None
Diameter: 2,198 km	GRAPH: G1/R2/A4/P1/H1
Density (Earth = 1): 3.51	

Terragin

Most Series IV lifeforms are relatively simple creatures, limited by their biochemistry. However, Wreathe boasts a number of high-order animals, sophisticated and flexible creatures capable of surviving on Wreathe's hostile surface. Two fortunate accidents account for this: First of all, Wreathe's orbit lies close enough to Algemron that it receives a modest amount of insolation, and its temperature hovers near the -100° C mark. Secondly, the extreme violence of Wreathe's formation created a world with its minerals and volatiles completely

unstratified. All of the elements necessary for life are present and accessible on the surface, making Wreathe nearly ideal for Series IV creatures.

The terragin is one of the most successful of Wreathe's animals, a tough scavenger and omnivore found in great numbers both on the surface and in Wreathe's subterranean biomes. Generally, terragins are not dangerous to humans, but under some circumstances they have been known to attack travelers on the surface.

Description: Most humans are reminded of a giant pillbug or snail when they see a terragin up close. Its tapered, hemispherical body presents nothing but an impenetrable shell to all sides. Beneath this armored mantle, the creature is a soft-bodied mollusk with a dozen short, muscular tentacles or pseudopods that act as its feet. These remain out of sight, under the cover of the rock-hard mantle. Two stalked eyes and two long feelers protrude from the lower forward edge of its shell. The terragin is slow-moving but persistent, and it can deploy its tentacles for the attack with surprising speed.

Encounter: At first glance, most people think that terragins are not dangerous to man. They're inclined to ignore creatures in their vicinity, concentrating on the deliberate scraping of life-sustaining minerals, mosses, and lichens from the ground. However, this behavior is deceptive. Small terragins may ignore humans as prey too big for them, but the larger members of the species (those with a Strength score of 8 or better) are perfectly willing to make a meal out of an unwary traveler. It just takes a long time for the attack to develop.

In order to strike, the terragin must get within 4 meters of its prey. They're not hunters or ambushers, and simply move toward their quarry in the open. If the victim allows the terragin to get too close, the creature suddenly elevates the forward part of its shell by a few centimeters and extrudes two long whips, powerful tentacles lined with small sacs. These sacs break open and smear the prey with a very powerful glue, giving the terragin a hold equal to its initial success in the attack (for example, if the terragin scores a Good hit with its tentacles, the victim is effectively overpowered with a Good pin). This inflicts a +2, +3, or +4 penalty to the victim's own combat actions, depending on the degree of success of the tentacle attack (Ordinary, Good, or Amazing). The terragin will then reel the victim in or advance to its prey while holding it in place, in order to attack with its hidden mouth parts. The creature gains a -2, -3, or -4 bonus to bite a victim ensnared in its tentacles, again depending on the degree of success achieved on the original tentacle attack.

The victim can escape by making a Strength feat check against the terragin. He must achieve a better degree of success than the terragin's hold in order to break free.

Habitat/Society: Terragins vary widely in size. Small terragins of 30 kilograms or less are far more common than the large ones of 100 kilograms or more. Like many low-order animals, they grow continuously throughout their lives, shedding their shells every three to five years. During this time they are very vulnerable to predators, and many terragins do not survive more than one or two moltings. Terragins are not sociable creatures and take almost no notice of



each other. If more than one is encountered in a given area, this is simply a result of happenstance; the creatures do not behave in a cooperative fashion for any reason. Two or more terragins will attempt to attack the same prey, but as soon as one of them scores a hit, the others leave the attacker and its prey alone.

Terragin Game Data

STR 8	(2d6+1)	INT 1	(Animal 4 or d4+2)
DEX 6	(d4+3)	WIL 8	(d4+5)
CON 8	(2d6+1)	PER 1	(Animal 4 or d4+2)
Durability: 8/8/4/4		Action check: 7+/6/3/1	
Move: walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Marginal/1			

Attacks

Tentacles	12/6/3	d4s/d6s/d4w	LI/0
Bite	12/6/3	d4w/d4+1w/d4+2w	LI/0

Defenses

-1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 -1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: 2d4+4 (LI), 2d4+2 (HI), 2d4+1 (En)

Skills

Stamina [8]-endurance [10], Awareness [8]-intuition [10], perception [10].

Terragin Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series IV

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G1/R2/A4/P1/H1

Biome: Any land

Encounter Chance: Probable

Group Size: 1-6 (d6)

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Scavenger and herbivore

Intelligence: Low-order animal

Veerkiller

The top predator of Wreathe's limited biosphere, the veerkiller is an animal that has evolved to exploit the asteroid's extremely light gravity. Although Wreathe's atmosphere is too thin to support true flight, it is possible for agile creatures to leap great distances and achieve ballistic flight of a sort. A veerkiller can jump up to 10 kilometers with ease, and sometimes as much as 20 to 30 kilometers with elevation on its side. Equipped with eyesight of uncanny precision, a veerkiller pounces hundreds or thousands of meters from its target, falling out of Wreathe's dark skies like a silent missile of death.

Description: The veerkiller is a creature of ephemeral grace and beauty, a fragile-looking hexaped with long, sparlike legs and translucent wings. Catlike and sinuous on the ground, the veerkiller stiffens its body in flight to become a living javelin, steering with its delicate wings. The veerkiller's hind legs are jointed twice, enabling powerful leaps, and its spine is extremely flexible—it can bend almost double to launch itself into the air. Its head is flat and wedge-shaped, armed with a mouth full of sharp teeth. A veerkiller may be 6 to 8 meters from nose to tail, but it weighs only 40 to 50 kilograms.

Encounter: A veerkiller typically climbs to the top of a sheer elevation, setting itself to watch over a valley floor or open area a kilometer or two distant. Its eyesight is extraordinarily keen; it can spot prey the size of a mouse at this distance. When a likely creature

Veerkiller Game Data

STR 9	(2d4+4)	INT 4	(Animal 8 or d6+5)
DEX 14	(d4+12)	WIL 12	(2d4+7)
CON 7	(2d4+2)	PER 3	(Animal 7 or d6+4)
Durability: 7/7/4/4		Action check: 16+/15/7/3	
Move: run 20, walk 8, glide 80		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			

Attacks

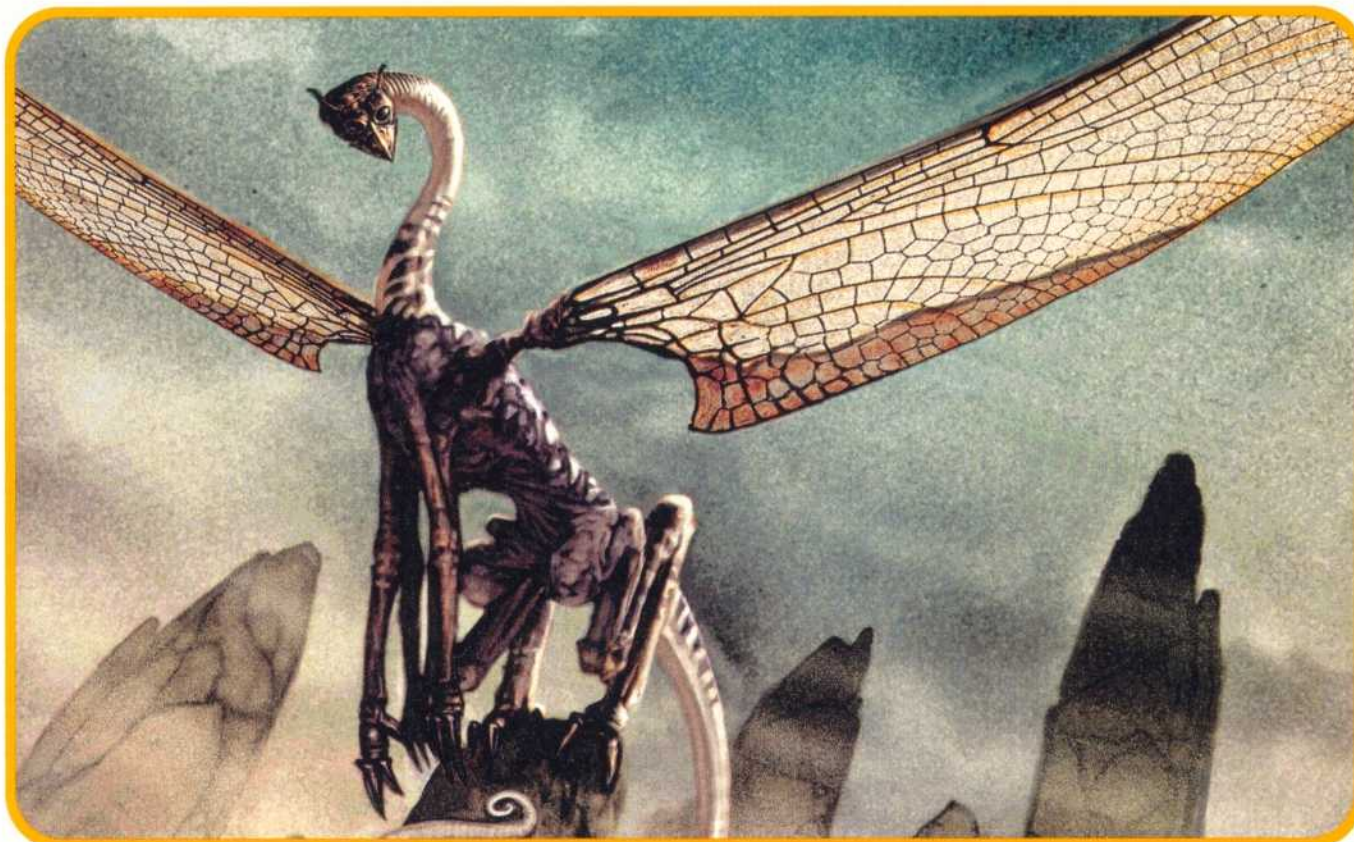
Talons	15/7/3	d4w/d6w/d4m	LI/0
Bite	13/6/3	d6s/d4w/d4+3w	LI/0

Defenses

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

Skills

Athletics [9]—*climb* [16]; Acrobatics [14]—*flight* [18];
 Stealth [14]—*sneak* [20]; Stamina [7]—*endurance* [12];
 Awareness [12]—*intuition* [16], *perception* [20]; Resolve [12].



wanders into the area where the veerkiller is watching, it springs, carefully leading its prey and using its wings to correct and guide its body in mid-leap. The veerkiller is entitled to a Stealth-*sneak* skill check with a -3 bonus to determine just how hard it will be for its prey or any other observer to spot its approach before it can strike. The veerkiller's jump carries it toward its prey at a rate of about 75 meters per phase (300 meters per round, or 1,500 meters per minute)—it might be in the air for several minutes when gliding toward distant prey.

In the last moment before impact, the veerkiller flares its wings to lose velocity and then snaps them back and out of the way, striking with its deadly talons. Due to its momentum, the veerkiller gets a 2-point bonus to the damage inflicted by its first strike. The victim must succeed on a Strength or Dexterity feat check to remain standing if the veerkiller strikes him with this initial attack. If the first strike fails, the veerkiller quickly recovers and sets on its prey with tooth and claw. They're fearless predators and unlikely to break off an attack until they sustain a serious injury from their intended victim.

Veerkillers can't digest anything besides other Series IV lifeforms, and often cut short their attack once they get a mouthful of human (or other Series I) flesh. Each time a veerkiller successfully bites a character, there's a 50% chance that it realizes that the victim is not palatable and gives up on the meal. Naturally, the creatures don't extend this courtesy to other natives of Wreathe.

Veerkiller Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series IV

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G1/R2/A4/P1/H1

Biome: Chaotic/mountainous terrain

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 2-5 (d4+1)

Organization: Aerie or nest

Niche: Large carnivore

Intelligence: High-order animal

Habitat/Society: Veerkillers favor the rocks and crags overlooking plains, crater bottoms, or canyon floors. From these heights, they can keep watch over an extensive area, pouncing on any creature that shows itself. They are sociable creatures that gather in twos and threes, sharing their kills with each other. Each individual watches over a different area near the lair, ensuring coverage of the greatest possible territory. Their aerie is usually a small cave, sheltered ledge, or crevice high up on a cliff face.

Life on Wreathe's surface is difficult and unforgiving, so veerkillers have evolved as very efficient and conservative hunters—a missed leap means the loss of energy that may be irreplaceable.

Whitespike

Terragins and veerkillers can physically threaten a human venturing onto Wreathe's surface, but whitespike poses a much more insidious threat. This rare organism is the only known source of biaxinin, a hallucinogen that commands astonishing prices in the more sordid portions of the Verge. Biaxinin is a magnet that draws the desperate and the greedy to Wreathe's inhospitable surface; each year, hundreds of would-be collectors are killed because of e-suit accidents, encounters with dangerous lifeforms, or confrontations with other biaxinin seekers.

Description: Whitespike is often mistaken for a plant, but it's not. It's more accurately classified as a simple corallike creature, a communal coelenterate that builds spikelike shells in a rippling pattern. Hundreds of microscopic animals form a single growth, which may be anywhere from 20 to 80 centimeters in diameter. A single spike is about 5 to 8 centimeters long, and about 1 centimeter in diameter, with a crusted, stonelike appearance.

Encounter: Whitespike is completely inoffensive, with no defense mechanisms or mobility. The tiny organisms within feed on organic detritus in Wreathe's soils. The spikes, while somewhat alarming in appearance, are quite brittle. This creature is basically part of the scenery.

Habitat/Society: Whitespike is typically found in the mineral-rich alluvial pans and canyon floors of Wreathe's most chaotic terrain. It

is not very common, and given the demand for biaxinin, a patch of whitespike can be very hard to find. Nevertheless, the lure of ill-gained riches draws a continuous stream of prospectors to Wreathe. These scavengers spend everything they have to outfit themselves with substandard e-suits and unreliable equipment, then set out into Wreathe's endless maze of gorges, crags, and boulder fields.

The police of Wreathe's domed cities don't leave their artificial habitats to patrol the surface. Instead, they concentrate their efforts on confiscating whitespike after the successful prospectors struggle back to civilization. Beyond the dubious safety of the cities, Wreathe's surface is a lawless badland of scavengers and bandits. A few of the more enterprising prospectors have set up small "farms" where they cultivate new growths of whitespike and then sell parts of the crop to customers who are too lazy or too unskilled to find their own.

Whitespike Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series IV

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G1/R2/A4/P1/H1

Biome: Chaotic/mountainous terrain

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1-4 (d4) growths

Organization: Communal

Niche: Immobile filter-feeder

Intelligence: None



LEEN

In the coming years, it's likely that I'll return to the Oberon system dozens of times. It's a populated area, lying across a primary trade route for the Verge. It serves as a fine and relatively safe point of resupply in the space beyond Aegis. But I'll never look forward to coming back.

The people of the system—primarily those of the planet Lison—are polite enough, although more than a little introverted and parsimonious. But like the barren world, they're desperate. They fight with one another for rhodium profits, fight with local pirates and criminals, fight with the Jennings family of the Star Consortium, fight with stellar nations to keep free, and fight with the planet itself to stay alive. They're a hard, proud people, but I'd hesitate to call them happy.

Someday, perhaps, they'll leave Lison—and many of their frustrations—behind. Compared to Lison, Leen is a lush and inviting world. Still only lightly settled, Leen promises to serve as the home for millions—even billions—of sentients from the Stellar Ring. The question, as always, lies in the nature of the who and the how. Many stellar nations are interesting in exploiting Leen, in addition to the native Vergers in the system. And then there's the native life to consider. . . . — **RG, CLA**

Some people never catch on that too much of a good thing can kill you. Leen's a fine example of that. Don't let the dominant nitrogen-oxygen atmosphere ratings deceive you; Leen air can kill. And this time it's not some fine particulate matter measured in parts per million. It's the oxygen itself—something that we depend on, but a gas that's almost 50% more common on Leen than what humans are used to. In such quantities, it's a poison to just about all nonnative fauna—including humans and other bipedal sentients.

Just why the oxygen runs so high is something of a mystery. On Earth, iron in the primeval oceans absorbed much of the planet's free oxygen; Leen's low ferrous content may have something to do with the situation. Another theory holds that early eukaryotic organisms were not quite as successful on Leen, and the atmosphere and later life paid the price. Whatever the cause, today a filter mask, or a specialized decompressor mask, is required to survive even short trips to the planet's surface. And since oxygen is mildly corrosive—and reactive with human tissue—it's even necessary to wear e-suits during long stays.

At least, until the terraformers arrive. — **AV, CSS**

Leen

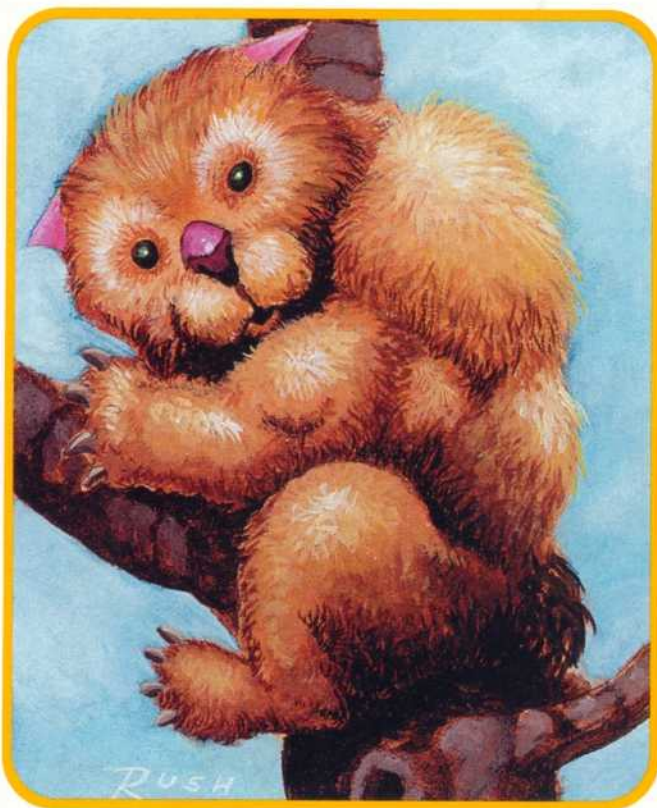
Primary: Oberon, K0	Surface Gravity: 1.14 g
Orbital Radius: 0.76 AU	Atmosphere: N ₂ , O ₂
Orbital Period: 270.5 days	Pressure: 1.61 atm
Rotation Period: 54.8 hours	Median Temperature: 10.3° C
Axial Tilt: Moderate (14°)	Satellites: Two
Diameter: 15,614 km	GRAPH: G2/R1/A3/P3/H2
Density (Earth=1): 0.93	

Kilishorn

In exploring the Orion Arm—and the Verge specifically—humanity has been lucky to discover so many interesting varieties of life in all of their stages of development. From a purely statistical standpoint, the chance encounter with a primitive lifeform, whether sesheyans in the Stellar Ring or kilishorn on Leen, should be more rare. With a twist of a few dozen millennia—merely an instant of geologic time—

it might have been the primitive, presentient kilishorn that developed space travel.

As it is, the existence of kilishorn has been documented since the early days of colonization. Even as most of the effort focused on Lison, homesteaders working on Leen encountered the kilishorn soon after arrival. And put them to work.



Description: Fortunately for the creatures themselves, the colonists of Leen didn't settle for the most obvious name for this species. To the average human boy or girl, though, kilishorn most resemble teddy bears. With soft fur covering most of its 1.3-meter-tall body, a kilishorn appears much like a child's toy. But the creature is much more formidable than any toy—the sharp claws that its fur conceals, and its sharp teeth and powerful jaw muscles, are used for breaking open the hard-shelled fruits indigenous to Leen. Both the kilishorn's nose and its short tail are a pale, fleshy pink color, but the rest of the creature is covered in a fur that ranges from white to dark brown.

Encounter: Leen is a slightly cool, but generally habitable world. The ice caps are large, but near the planet's equator, moderate temperatures support a variety of life—including the kilishorn. Most of the kilishorn live in simple, nomadic communities that wander the depht forests of the major continent of Leen. During the planet's day-time, wandering groups have been found in numbers as large as twenty; bands of this size and smaller wander the forests.

Kilishorn met "in the wild" are likely to flee or hide whenever

possible. Unless the kilishorn community has had previous contact with other sentients, its residents typically show initial fear; if chased or cornered, they may strike back with tooth and claw. On average, though, an ignorant kilishorn can be coaxed into friendliness with offers of food.

It's their friendliness, their curiosity, and their ability to be bribed that have changed the nature by which most visitors to Leen are likely to meet a kilishorn. Just about every human settlement on Leen uses kilishorn as a source of cheap labor.

Habitat/Society: Kilishorn society consists of two groups: those that work alongside humans and other nonnative sentients, and those that live free in the wild.

The lives of those that live among humans are typically filled with relaxing ease. No longer concerned only with procuring food, they lounge about, spending most of their day in lazy, leisurely games, finding humans to watch and play with, or fellow kilishorn with which to mate for an afternoon. The typical human settlement has only a vague idea of how many kilishorn have come to live nearby, but a few communities have taken the time of late to issue radio identification tags to their "protected" kilishorn.

In exchange for protection and food, kilishorn do all sorts of work around a settlement. They're fine messengers, couriers, and errand runners. They're more than apt at tending to agriculture, and they can be sent out to gather depht berries from nearby woodlands.

The stratification of kilishorn society continues as the wild members of the species are driven back by farming and the overharvesting of depht berries near human settlements. The wild kilishorn are being driven farther and farther away from their adopted brethren. Of late, large clusters of wild kilishorn have become targets—for conscription to the closest settlement, or as the occupiers of prime real estate for a new settlement.

Kilishorn Game Data

STR 9	(2d4+3)	INT 6	(2d4+1)
DEX 9	(2d4+4)	WIL 9	(3d4+1)
CON 9	(d6+10)	PER 8	(d8+5)
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Claws (×2)	12/7/3	d4+1s/d4+1w/d6+1w	LI/0
Bite	10/5/2	d4+1w/d6+1w/d8+1w	LI/0

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 –1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Athletics [9]–throw [10]; Unarmed [9]–brawl [12]; Stealth [9]; Movement [9]; Stamina [9]; Survival [9]; Awareness [9]–perception [10].

Kilishorn Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series Ic

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G2/R1/A3/P3/H2

Biome: Middle latitude forests and grasslands

Encounter Chance: Probable

Group Size: 3–18 (3d6), up to 200 in settlements

Organization: Small communities

Niche: Herbivore

Intelligence: Subsentient



Minshore Crystal

Named for its discoverer, Angelika Minshore, this crystalline form of life eluded the attention of scientists, explorers, and colonists of Leen for more than a hundred years. I had the opportunity to meet with Minshore herself, once a botanist who has taken up xenobiology with a passion. It is from her accumulated information of the last five years that we have gained most of our knowledge of this light-projecting creature. — AV, CSS

Much like the crystallis living on Polyphemus in the Lucullus system, the Minshore crystals of Leen have evolved to fit the particulars of their environment. This crystalline lifeform takes in light like the crystallis, converting its moving photons into energy that can be harnessed to fulfill all the necessities of life. And while Series I lifeforms have met with moderate success on Leen, this Series V organism has evolved in a fashion that allows it to completely circumvent the problems of Leen's atmosphere.

Description: Despite their both being relatively simple crystalline creatures, there's much to distinguish the Minshore from the crystallis. For one, color variance among Minshore crystals tends to be muted; for those xenologists interested in aesthetics, the Minshore's appearance is less brilliant and generally held to be less attractive. Minshore crystals form colonies that average several meters in length and width; the largest observed specimen was 8 meters tall, and half that in width and height.

Encounter: Those who chance upon a Minshore crystal are unlikely to know what they're experiencing. For although the Minshore possess only a single, rather weak attack that's accomplished by means of sonic waves, their true talent is for a natural, if simple, holographic simulation. Minshore crystals can make things appear that aren't there; even more important, they can use their talent to conceal themselves "beneath" a hologram of rock. It's a sophisticated form of camouflage, and it suggests another Minshore trait that's yet to be completely understood: intelligence.

In order to successfully use its camouflage talent, the Minshore must have a perception of its surroundings and a talent for cloaking itself by producing an image similar to those surroundings. It's not

precisely clear what the scope and extent of this talent is. Some Minshore crystals, after being repeatedly annoyed, have demonstrated an ability to project images of unreal geographic formations—abruptly appearing cliffs and even avalanches. The self-defense mechanism encourages the average lifeforms of Leen to leave the Minshore quite alone.

Some visitors to the planet have reported encounters during which ghostly images of men have appeared. Although no Minshore has demonstrated an effective ability to integrate its power to produce a high-quality audial and visual illusion, observers of these ghost-images have reported that the visual holograms of humans move their lips—as if making an attempt to communicate.

A Minshore must succeed on a Will feat check to create a hologram. Doing so also automatically causes 1 point of fatigue damage to the Minshore. A Minshore can create holograms in a radius around itself equal to its Will score in meters.

Habitat/Society: As far as can be discerned, Minshore crystals have no actual society. They live alone, moving very slowly over the landscape as they keep themselves in direct sunlight throughout much of the day.

Unknown to the human newcomers to Leen, Minshore crystals are products of more than a billion years of crystalline development and evolution. But for the last several million years, there has been remarkably little change in the successful lifeform. After sitting at the cusp of full sentience for such a long time, it may be the invasion of humans that proves whether Leen's unique lifeform disappears or pulls itself up.

Minshore Crystal Game Data

STR 2	INT 6	(d4+4)
DEX 9	(d6+6)	WIL 9
CON 9	(d6+6)	PER 6
		(d4+4)
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: walk 0.1		#Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0

Attacks

Sonic wave 12/6/3 d4w/d4+2m/d6+2w En/0

Defenses

–2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
–1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Produce illusion/camouflage (see text)

Skills

Awareness [9]—perception [14].

Minshore Crystal Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series V

Environment: Class 3

GRAPH: G2/R1/A3/P3/H2

Biome: Middle latitude mountains and scrub

Encounter Chance: Slim

Group Size: 1

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Herbivore

Intelligence: Subsentient

MOEBIUS BELT

ENDOMAR: MOEBIUS BELT: DIAGOSTO CLOUD



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When we arrived at the Endomar system, it seemed apparent that we had struck a dead end. Endomar is one of the loneliest outposts of civilization in the Verge, a desolate island of asteroid miners and robotic refineries in the middle of empty and inhospitable space. Vast belts of shattered rock occupy its temperate zone, and the worlds of the outer system are completely barren. The local miners insisted that space monsters plague the asteroid belts, but could produce no proof that any such things existed.

I ordered the *Kepler* to begin recharging for another starfall immediately. While the tachyon accumulators filled, we entered the innermost asteroid field, the Moëbius Belt, to occupy ourselves in "monster-hunting" while we waited for our next jump. Dr. Veras and I placed little credence in the miners' tales, and, to be perfectly honest, I conducted the search simply to keep the crew of the *Kepler* on their toes.

On the third day of our survey, we were struck amidships by an uncharted asteroid. To our amazement, we discovered that we'd been boarded! Five spikespores gained entry to our ship, and caused the deaths of several crewmen before we managed to capture the creatures. Rather than leaving at the first opportunity, we conducted an extensive survey of the Moëbius Belt over the next four weeks, discovering an astounding ecology of space-based lifeforms adapted to the harsh vacuum and conditions of the asteroid field. — **RG, CLA**

Endomar is a perfect illustration of why Earthlike worlds are not often found circling binary or trinary stars. Endomar's chaotic planetary system has no life-bearing planets—the binary prevented the formation of any worlds within the habitability zone of either star, and the outer system contains nothing more than an assortment of worthless, frozen rocks.

The Moëbius Belt is the innermost of Endomar's asteroid fields, a wealthy region of valuable metals and useful carbonaceous compounds. Twisted into a long ellipse by the binary it circles, the Belt is composed of millions of tumbling rocks and boulders, some hundreds of kilometers in diameter, others no larger than a human's fist.

Moëbius Belt

Parent: Endomar, K2/M4 (binary)	Surface Gravity: none or negligible
Orbital Radius: ~3.0 AU	Atmosphere: none
Orbital Period: variable	Pressure: n/a
Rotation Period: variable	Median Temperature: -273° C
Axial Tilt: n/a	Satellites: n/a
Diameter: n/a	GRAPH: GO/R3/AO/PO/HO
Density (Earth = 1): variable	

DiAgosto Cloud

Rocks and ice aren't the only constituents of the Moëbius Belt. Dense clouds of dust and gas mantle the asteroid belt, the leftovers of a gas giant that never formed in this star system. Like the asteroids themselves, these clouds are extremely rich in the CHON elements—carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen, the building blocks of organic chemistry. Water, methane, and simple alcohols exist as tenuous va-

pors throughout this region of the Endomar system. These gaseous seas form the cradle of Endomar's space-dwelling life.

The DiAgosto clouds are descended from the first organic molecules that formed in the dust clouds of the Moëbius Belt. They are vast, mindless creatures, some of them hundreds of kilometers in diameter. Using energy gleaned from Endomar's double sun, these be-

ings convert the raw compounds of the Belt's gaseous "atmosphere" into food and structure. The DiAgosto clouds, or creatures much like them, were certainly the forerunners of the asteroid-based life that now prevails throughout the Belt. From time to time, parts of these creatures are caught on passing asteroids, leaving behind a thin organic film in which other life can develop. These remnants gave rise to creatures such as the moëtillus and the spikespore (see below) hundreds of millions of years ago.

DiAgosto clouds are named for the noted xenobiologist Salvatore DiAgosto, who was part of the original team that surveyed the Endomar system more than one hundred years ago. Dr. DiAgosto discovered these silent titans and spent the rest of his career studying them in detail.

Description: Dozens or hundreds of kilometers in diameter, a DiAgosto cloud is so incredibly tenuous that its total mass rarely exceeds 1,000 kilograms. The only true substance to its entire form is a thin, invisible film that serves much like the cell wall of a microorganism, defining the creature's shape while allowing critical nutrients and light to pass through. The creature is almost completely transparent and intangible; spaceships and suited humans have actually entered DiAgosto clouds without even noticing.

Encounter: A DiAgosto cloud is mindless and incapable of independent motion. Despite its vast size, it is incapable of harming a human. But the creature is also practically immune to harm—its membranous covering seals itself within moments of a perforation. If a cloud suffers a major insult, such as a collision with a fast-mov-

DiAgosto Cloud Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VII

Environment: Class 4

GRAPH: GO/R3/AO/PO/HO

Biome: Molecular gas and dust clouds

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 1

Organization: None

Niche: Primary producer

Intelligence: None

ing ship, it's likely to split into two smaller but intact individuals. Because it poses no threat to spacefarers and provides no benefits that individual characters could take advantage of, a DiAgosto cloud is only of academic interest to most people.

Habitat/Society: DiAgosto clouds are the basis for much of the ecosystem in the Moëbius Belt. Drifting silently through space, these gigantic organisms survive in an environment inherently lethal to most other forms of life.

If we could find a way to move one of these creatures without destroying it, we could seed lifeless star systems with creatures capable of converting inorganic gases to organic materials, suitable for spaceborne agriculture. The scientific, not to mention commercial, potential of such an endeavor is enormous. — AV, CSS



Just as Earth's current biosphere was shaped by the oxidizing action of microorganisms over billions of years, the existence of food-producing gaseous organisms altered the environment of the Moëbius Belt. Over eons, the asteroids of the region were seeded with organic molecules. These organisms evolved to meet the challenges of life on the inhospitable surface of an asteroid in open space. The moëtillus is one of the most successful of these lifeforms, a free-floating scavenger that moves from asteroid to asteroid, stripping the rocks of smaller and simpler organisms.

Description: The moëtillus takes its name from the nautilus of Earth's seas. Like its namesake, it's a tentacled invertebrate that lives inside a sturdy shell. Accumulated water and oxygen are stored in the chambers of its body. Most of these creatures are about a meter in diameter, with tentacles about 3 meters long.

Incorporated into the anatomy of the moëtillus is a spectacular secret: Its shell is actually a vast, micrometer-thin photon sail, normally kept furled close to its body in a spiral hundreds of layers thick. When the moëtillus needs to relocate, it propels itself into open space and then deploys a sail almost 100 meters in diameter. (The flying movement rate given in "Game Data" applies only to tactical movement, such as what takes place during a combat scene. On long-range flights, the moëtillus can build up much more speed.)

Encounter: Moëtilli possess an extremely acute sensitivity to magnetic and gravitational fields, which allows them to detect asteroids and other large objects at distances far beyond visual range. It's not uncommon for a moëtillus to spot a passing ship or asteroid at a range of 100,000 kilometers. The creature's photon sail allows it to reach a speed of roughly 500 kph at best, so a moëtillus can spend several days traversing the distance from one rock to the next.

When a moëtillus arrives at a new asteroid, it immediately begins to gorge itself on any organic material it can find. In the absence of other organisms, it can metabolize CHON compounds to survive, but

Moëtillus Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VII

Environment: Class 4

GRAPH: GO/R3/AO/PO/HO

Biome: Asteroid surfaces and interiors

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 2–12 (2d6)

Organization: Pack

Niche: Scavenger and lithovore

Intelligence: Low-order animal



Moëtillus Game Data

STR 7 (d4+5) INT 2 (Animal 7 or d6+4)
 DEX 9 (d4+7) WIL 9 (d4+7)
 CON 11 (2d4+6) PER 2 (Animal 8 or d4+6)
 Durability: 11/11/6/6 Action check: 12+/11/5/2
 Move: fly 30, (crawl 4) #Actions: 2
 Reaction score: Ordinary/1

Attacks

Tentacles (×2) 10/5/2 d4s/d4w/d6+1w LI/O
 Bite 8/4/2 d4w/d4+1w/d4+3w LI/O

Defenses

-1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d4+6 (LI), d4+2 (HI), d4+4 (En)

Skills

Acrobatics [9]-flight [12], zero-g [18], Stamina [11]-endurance [18], Awareness [9]-intuition [16], perception [14], Resolve [9].

this type of food is a poor substitute for the energy concentrated in a living creature. Moëtili are a nuisance to miners and workers in the Belt because they often mistake human ships for neighboring asteroids, and may wreck equipment or attack personnel.

In combat, a moëtillus attacks with two of its twenty tentacles, dangerous weapons equipped with sharp barbs, and a bite from its rasping mouth. While they're not exceptionally dangerous on an individual basis, moëtili travel in packs, and a group of them can easily overwhelm a lone miner or refinery worker. Moëtili can stand up to a significant amount of punishment due to their tough flesh and strong shells.

Habitat/Society: While the Moëbius Belt may be an environment unique to Endomar, it's not much more hospitable than any other



asteroid belts. Moëtili could survive on any small, airless moons, rings, or asteroids with a respectable source of heat or light. Microgravity or lack of gravity altogether is an absolute necessity; a moëtillus "flies" by using tiny, controlled puffs of gas to remain airborne. It can settle to the surface of an asteroid and move slowly by pulling itself along with its tentacles, but it would be trapped on this body forever if the asteroid had a surface gravity of 0.1 g or greater.

Although the creatures travel in small packs of two to twelve individuals, they're fiercely competitive with each other and do not demonstrate any cooperative or social behavior. They often turn on each other, making a meal of their sick or injured comrades.

Spikespore

The most sophisticated and dangerous creature in the strange biosphere of the Moëbius Belt, the spikespore is a fearsome predator equipped with a devil's cunning. These fiendish creatures account for hundreds of deaths in Endomar's refineries and mining stations every year, and in recent years they've demonstrated a talent for hitching rides on ships going outsystem. An infestation of spikespores caused more than a dozen deaths in the Tendril system only a few years ago, and the prospect of one of these creatures finding its way back to Old Space is terrifying.

Although a lone spikespore is a very dangerous foe, the real threat lies in the species' method of propagation. A single spikespore can reproduce dozens or hundreds of its kind when it finds itself in a rich hunting ground, using the living bodies of its prey to incubate

its larvae. Unlike most other unsavory aliens, it doesn't restrict itself to hunting within its own native ecosystem; any lifeform composed of the CHON compounds (including biochemistries of Series I, II, III, and V) can fall prey to a spikespore's attack.

Description: The spikespore presents two different faces to the world. In its "spore" stage, it is a dense, brittle sphere of black chitin about 60 centimeters in diameter. In this form it can drift for years in open space. When a potential meal approaches, the spore wakens and becomes a pupal cocoon, in which the alien's second body form develops. This is a gaunt, upright tripedal creature, with three long arms and a nightmarish face full of needle-sharp fangs. Its mottled exoskeleton is covered with long, bladed spikes.





Encounter: Spikespores are driven by the need to consume other organisms and incubate their progeny in the bodies of their prey. In their "spore" form, the creatures are unreactive, incapable of defending themselves. However, they can sense the presence of large

masses or significant heat signatures (such as spaceships, or asteroids that are the sites of mining stations) within several thousand kilometers. Spores move toward passing asteroids or ships at the rate of 100 kph, using gas jets. Upon making contact with their target, they secrete a powerful organic glue to attach themselves to the object that attracted their attention. After 2d4 hours, the spore breaks open and the creature's active form emerges.

Once it awakens, the spikespore is a relentless hunter that uses *Stealth-hide* and *sneak* to isolate small groups of characters or creatures and overpower them. If it knocks out its prey, the spikespore almost always drags the victim to a secluded location in order to plant a larva in the victim's body.

The creature's glue has a holding Strength of 18. It often uses this substance to block doorways or secure captives. Spikespores can communicate and plan with a high degree of intelligence; a group of them will coordinate their efforts to seize captives and implant them with spores.

Habitat/Society: A school of spikespores may drift for dozens of years in their dormant stage before an asteroid (or ship) comes close enough to gain their attention. Jetting toward the approaching object, the spikespores attach themselves and begin their metamorphosis to their adult form. A group of spikespores can strip a small ship or asteroid outpost of all other life, gorging themselves and implanting dozens of new spikespores in creatures captured for that purpose.

Each young spikespore feeds on the body of its host for a total of 4d4 days. (The victim must make a Constitution feat check each day with a cumulative +1 penalty. Failure means the victim perishes.) At the end of this time span, the fully formed young spikespore bursts forth from the body of its host (an occurrence that kills the host if it isn't already dead).

It takes another d4 days for the young spikespore's shell to harden, after which time it begins waiting for chance or circumstance to carry it to new prey. Before the shell hardens, the young creature is defenseless and extremely vulnerable, having no means of attack and a durability rating of 2/2/1/1.

Spikespore Game Data

STR 13	(3d4+5)	INT 5	(Animal 13 or 2d4+8)
DEX 13	(3d4+5)	WIL 15	(2d4+10)
CON 14	(2d4+9)	PER 3	(Animal 9 or 2d4+4)
Durability: 14/14/7/7		Action check: 18+/17/8/4	
Move: run 50, walk 10		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Good/2			

Attacks

Claws (×2)	20/10/5	d6w/d6+2w/d4+1m	LI/G
Bite	18/9/4	d8w/d4m/d4+2m	LI/G

Defenses

Good toughness
 +2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 -1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 +3 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: d6+2 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6+6 (En)

Skills

Athletics [13], Acrobatics [13], Stealth [13]-hide [20], sneak [20], Stamina [14]-endurance [20], Tactics [5], Awareness [15]-intuition [24], perception [20], Resolve [15]-physical [18].

Spikespore Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VII

Environment: Class 4

GRAPH: GO/R3/AO/PO/HO

Biome: Any

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 1-8 (d8)

Organization: School

Niche: Large carnivore

Intelligence: Subsentient



YELLOW SKY

The star system of Tychus is one of the most remote outposts of humanity in the galaxy, dozens of light-years from the nearest habitable system. It was first surveyed by an Orlamu-sponsored mission only 10 years before the beginning of the Second Galactic War. Tychus's sole habitable planet, the noxious swamp-world of Yellow Sky, was settled the year the war started. Forgotten by everyone, the colonists struggled through horrid privations and dangers for years. Yellow Sky's hostile climate and lifeforms ruined many of the technological devices the colonists had counted on to be able to survive on the planet's surface, and drove some settlements back to preindustrial building and agriculture techniques.

Yellow Sky boasts a rich and diverse biosphere with organisms belonging to both Series I and Series III. The chlorine-breathers naturally prefer the lowlands, where the chlorine is more concentrated, while the chlorine-tolerant oxygen breathers of Series I remain in the planet's uplands. The Orlamu colonists have engineered several varieties of chlorine-resistant crops and livestock, with mixed success.

The Precursor species known as the Stoneburners left extensive ruins in Yellow Sky's lowlands, as well as scattered outposts and structures in nearby star systems. Some xenoarcheologists have theorized that the Stoneburners were enemies of the Glassmakers eons ago, and that they were responsible for the destruction of High Mojave's atmosphere. — *AV, CSS*

Somewhat larger than Earth, Yellow Sky is a tortured combination of soaring uplands (the remnants of titanic ancient impacts) and vast, deadly swamps and lowlands. Its atmosphere contains heavy concentrations of chlorine and carbon dioxide, and humans must wear respirator masks to breathe. Yellow Sky's uplands, several kilometers above sea level, are home to the planet's human settlements—the atmospheric pressure is a thick but tolerable 2 to 3 atm, and the heavy chlorine and CO₂ tend to be concentrated at the lower altitudes.

Yellow Sky

Parent: Tychus, K2	Surface Gravity: 1.14 g
Orbital Radius: 0.62 AU	Atmosphere: CO ₂ , Cl, N ₂
Orbital Period: 203.2 days	Pressure: 6.6 atm
Rotation Period: 30.5 hours	Median Temperature: 48.3° C
Axial Tilt: Minimal (4.4°)	Satellites: Three
Diameter: 15,076 km	GRAPH:
Density (Earth = 1): 0.97	G2/R2/A2-A3/P3-P4/H3

Black Fever

In most cases, modern antibiotics and nanotechnology can handle even the most pernicious alien diseases . . . but black fever is a different matter. This deadly pestilence has caused thousands of deaths among Yellow Sky's colonists over the last eighty-odd years. Visitors to this world are advised to obey with alacrity all posted warnings and procedures for avoiding contamination.

Black fever is a fast-acting virus that attacks red blood cells, breaking them apart. The victim perishes from anoxia as his bloodstream loses its ability to oxygenate the body. The destruction of

blood cells thins the blood and causes dead cells to pool around capillaries, resulting in extreme bruising. In effect, the victim suffers from many of the symptoms of hemophilia during an attack of black fever.

The black fever microorganism is an airborne virus found mostly in the uplands; its ability to infect creatures is inhibited by the denser concentrations of chlorine found at lower altitudes. The virus is not extremely common; a character visiting the uplands of Yellow Sky only contracts black fever from the surrounding environment by achieving a Critical Failure result on any Constitution-based skill



check or feat check. It's also possible to catch the disease from an infected companion; a character in the company of a black fever victim becomes infected if he or she gets one Critical Failure or two Failure results on Constitution-based skill checks or feat checks in the same scene.

If a character does contract the virus, he or she must make a Constitution feat check with a +3 penalty to determine whether the character's body is able to resist the disease (see "Disease" on page 57 of the *ALTERNITY Gamemaster Guide*). The incubation time of black fever is 2d4 hours.

Normal diseases require an ill or extremely ill character to make a Constitution feat check once a day to see if his or her condition changes, but black fever is so virulent that all victims must make feat checks every 6 hours—one way or the other, the disease runs its course relatively quickly.

Black fever can be treated with injections of coagulant (see "Pharmaceuticals" on pages 138–139 of the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook*). Many victims have survived attacks by means of this treatment. However, all other treatment methods incur a +2 penalty when applied against black fever.

Dimensional Horror

The dimensional horror is a living example of the Stoneburners' work—a biological war machine originally brought to this universe from some nightmarish alternate reality, modified by the Stoneburners' science. In most encounters, dimensional horrors have been sighted near old ruins, but cases are also known in which travelers have encountered horrors in the wild.

Description: The dimensional horror's body consists of two major sections: a cowl or mantle of gleaming black muscle from which its numerous insectile legs sprout, and a head structure that hangs beneath the forward edge of the mantle. A nest of stalked eyes, proboscises, and needle-fanged sleeved mouths makes up this part of its body. In general form it resembles a titanic roach that carries its body on stalklike legs, with a nest of squirming worms for a head. The dimensional horror is about 2 meters long, 1 meter wide, and stands about 2 meters tall.

Encounter: The Stoneburners were a species so different from the human conception of life that their creations are completely inimical to any normal beings unfortunate enough to encounter them. A dimensional horror relentlessly tracks down and slaughters any creatures that stumble upon whatever site, device, or information it guards. It is cunning in the extreme, capable of sophisticated ruses, feints, and ambushes.

Dimensional horrors have the inexplicable ability to shift their bodies into an adjacent reality. This shift requires a full action round,

The Stoneburners

Immersed in the toxic smog of Yellow Sky's lowlands, Stoneburner sites loom up out of the haze like primeval monsters crowned with fluted spires of glossy black rock. Dozens of major sites have been charted extensively in the vicinity of the Yellow Sky colony, and it's almost certain that many significant discoveries lay hidden still by the jungle and murk.

The Stoneburners were bulky cephalopods well suited for life in the wet environs of the planet's lowlands, slow-moving chlorine breathers with a command of certain esoteric sciences that baffles our best scientists. They could treat or alter simple stone in ways that humans have not been able to emulate, building structures that have endured for hundreds of millions of years in the corrosive atmosphere of Yellow Sky. Some evidence exists that they could travel from star to star without the need for space-faring vessels.

The atmosphere and conditions of Yellow Sky are not conducive to a metallurgical technology, especially in the lowlands. To an altitude of 1,000 meters, open flames cannot burn, and many metal-bearing ores were dissolved by the chlorinated atmosphere before the Stoneburners appeared. In response to their environment, the Stoneburners mastered other sciences—the opening of portals into other dimensions, the organization and transmission of matter, and genetic manipulation.

The Stoneburners seem to have had outposts on a number of planets in this region of space, all within 30 light-years from Tychus. As might be expected, the best preserved and most extensive relics are on Yellow Sky. We came across the remains of massive complexes in the barren heights of the highlands, sites that have not survived the eons as well as the lowland sites have. Many Stoneburner sites have proven to be extremely perilous; automated defenses, dimensional stasis fields holding horrible monsters, and other hazards make these sites dangerous places to visit. — *RG, CLA*

Dimensional Horror Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series VII

Environment: Class 2

GRAPH: G2/R2/A3/P4/H3

Biome: Any (lowlands preferred)

Encounter Chance: Slim

Group Size: 1–2 (d4 ÷ 2)

Organization: Solitary

Niche: Unknown

Intelligence: Sentient



so if the horror begins to shift in the Good phase of one round, it won't actually vanish until the Good phase of the next round. While it's in the process of shifting, the horror is unable to make any attacks, but its tough natural armor usually keeps it from being seriously hurt during this time.

The creature can remain in its alternate dimension indefinitely, but returning requires the same amount of time. The horror can see into our own dimension from this other place, and one of its favorite tactics is to trail its chosen prey by observing it from this other world. Physical obstacles are thus meaningless to the dimensional horror—it's been known to board a shuttlecraft by simply passing through the hull and follow a victim all the way to a ship in low orbit before reappearing to renew its attack.

In combat, the horror attacks with its powerful limbs, striking twice per action. It can also extend two of its many mouths to snap at any enemy standing within 2 meters of its head, totaling four attacks with a single action. If the horror scores hits with both of its



Dimensional Horror Game Data

STR 14 (2d4+9) INT 9 (2d4+4)
 DEX 15 (2d4+10) WIL 15 (2d4+10)
 CON 16 (3d4+8) PER 2 (d4)
 Durability: 16/16/8/8 Action check: 17+/16/8/4
 Move: run 40, walk 8, (climb 20) #Actions: 4
 Reaction score: Good/3 Last resorts: 0

Attacks

Claws (×2) 16/8/4 d8s/d6w/d4m LI/G
 Bite (×2) 18/9/4 d4w/d6+1w/d4+1m LI/G

Defenses

Good toughness
 +2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +3 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 +3 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 no INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: d6 (LI), d8+3 (HI), d8+5 (En)

Skills

Athletics [14]—climb [20], Manipulation [15], Stealth [15]—hide [18], sneak [18], Stamina [16]—endurance [20], Awareness [15]—intuition [20], perception [20], Investigate [15]—search [20], track [24], Resolve [15]—physical [18].

legs against the same target, it overpowers the victim automatically. It can then begin its dimensional shift, dragging its victim back to its own dimension to be killed and devoured at its leisure. Few characters abducted in this fashion are ever seen again, but there's some evidence that killing the horror while it's on the other side may force the return of any prey it has captured.

No attempts to communicate with one of these creatures have succeeded. Given the circumstances under which they are typically encountered, it's likely that communication or interaction may be next to impossible.

Habitat/Society: The Stoneburners created hundreds, perhaps thousands, of pocket dimensions. Some of these were used for interstellar travel, similar to the way that humans utilize drivespace. Others were storage areas, hidden caches of technology and information, or even Stoneburner cities. The dimensional horrors are the guardians of these portals. However, not every Stoneburner site is watched over by one of these creatures, and over the course of millions of years many dimensional horrors have either died or abandoned their duties.

Dimensional horrors have no natural place in the ecology of Yellow Sky, or any other world for that matter. While two of them may appear simultaneously at very important sites, they do not communicate, cooperate, or interact with each other except in the most basic fashion.

No one has ever managed to recover the body of a dimensional horror for study. We don't know what they eat, what they breathe, how they reproduce (if they do at all), whether or not they age and die. We have only the haziest ideas of how they can enter the so-called "parallel dimension" and what they do there. All in all, a completely intolerable level of ignorance on our part. — AV, CSS



Siren

One of the most insidious creatures yet discovered in the Verge, the siren is a telepathic hunter that uses its mental powers to draw its prey into its jaws. Acclimated to the chlorinated smog of Yellow Sky's lowlands, sirens are unable to tolerate the thinner air of the uplands and do not pose a threat to the colonies and settlements established in these areas. However, explorers, scientists, prospectors, and other people with reason to enter Yellow Sky's inhospitable lowlands should be extremely vigilant for signs of siren attacks.

The chlorine-based respiration of a true Series III lifeform is very inefficient compared to the energy transaction of oxygen respiration. Yellow Sky lifeforms developed two major responses to this obstacle; either they found a way to breathe oxygen instead, or they augmented their chlorine-based physiology. The siren is an example of the second strategy. It can use a secondary respiration system based on oxygen to create high-energy compounds, supplementing the chlorine reactions it relies on.

Description: The siren is a bulky animal that mimics the appearance of Yellow Sky's trees. Its body is a tall, barrel-shaped tube of tough, glossy hide. Eight powerful tentacles sprout from its lower end, but these are usually immersed in the muck and mud of the swamplands it favors. Eight frondlike tentacles ring the upper rim of

its trunk, surrounding its gaping maw. Finally, eight long, feathery auditory organs crown the creature. To most strangers, the siren appears to be nothing more than a bloated plant of some kind. A siren stands 3 to 4 meters tall, and its trunk is about 1 meter in diameter.

Encounter: Sirens are capable of movement, but they hunt by bringing their prey to them. Their ancient ancestors developed rudimentary psionic powers, and over the course of evolution the siren has become a dangerous telepath. It turns the desires of nearby characters against them, luring an individual within reach of its deadly tentacles in order to make a meal of the unfortunate passerby.

A siren's eyesight is poor—it has eight eye-spots concealed in the foliage at the upper part of its body, but it can't see more than 20 meters or so. However, its hearing and sense of smell are incredibly acute. Its long sensor-fronds can detect the sound of a human walking at a range of 200 meters, even more with a favorable wind. Once the siren detects a potential meal, it attempts to establish telepathic rapport with the victim, using its *mind reading*, *illusion*, and *suggest* skills to make the victim believe that something the victim wants is right where the siren is



Siren Game Data

STR 9 (2d6+2) INT 6 (2d4+1)
DEX 9 (2d6+2) WIL 14 (2d4+9)
CON 13 (2d4+8) PER 9 (2d4+4)
Durability: 13/13/7/7 Action check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: walk 4 #Actions: 3
Reaction score: Ordinary/2
Psionic energy points: 14

Attacks

Tentacles (×2) 10/5/2 d6s/d6+2s/d4w LI/O
Bite 14/7/3 d6w/2d4w/3d4w LI/O

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
–1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
+2 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: 2d4+1 (LI), d8 (HI), d8+1 (En)

Skills

Stealth [9]–hide [15], Stamina [13]–endurance [14], Awareness [14]–intuition [16], perception [16], Resolve [14]–mental [16], ESP [6]–empathy [9], mind reading [13], Telepathy [9]–contact [12], illusion [19], suggest [19], tire [16].

Siren Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series III

Environment: Class 2

GRAPH: G2/R2/A3/P4/H3

Biome: Lowland bogs, swamps, and thickets

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 3–8 (d6+2)

Organization: Colony

Niche: Large carnivore

Intelligence: Subsentient, telepathic

standing. In most cases, the victim is entitled to an Awareness-perception check to detect something wrong.

A siren can use its *illusion* skill on a character within 50 meters of its position. If the victim starts to suspect or tries to escape, the siren may use its *tire* skill to exhaust the victim, and then move up to deal with the victim at close quarters. It attacks by using its upper set of frond-tentacles to grasp its victim and stuff him or her into its mouth. The siren must succeed in overpowering the victim and keep him or her overpowered for 1 full round (4 consecutive phases, not counting the phase in which the overpowering occurs) to get its prey into the gaping maw. Once the siren has its prey in position, it can attempt normal biting attacks. A victim can escape from the siren's maw by succeeding on a Strength or Dexterity feat check.

A siren can only employ its mental powers against one victim at a time, so the inhabitants of a siren nest often divide their attention between all the members of a band of travelers. A character who is slapped around, shaken, or otherwise interfered with by his unaffected comrades is entitled to a second Awareness check to see through the siren's illusions and suggestions.

The siren is not truly sentient, in that it lacks the sense of self-

awareness that humans and alien characters possess. However, it is quite clever in its own way. If heroes find a way to communicate with the creature (telepathic contact is the best bet, if somewhat risky), they may be able to reason with or negotiate with the siren, possibly exchanging food for the life of a trapped comrade, for instance. However, the siren is not particularly trustworthy and may turn on the heroes at the earliest opportunity.

Habitat/Society: Sirens are usually found in small groups of three to eight individuals, all living within a few hundred meters of each other. They instinctively cooperate with each other, but no individual in a group of characters will be attacked by more than one siren, even if that individual successfully fights off the siren's pernicious mental influence.

Sirens are asexual creatures that reproduce by casting tiny spores to the wind. These spores may drift for dozens of kilometers before falling to the planet surface, where a new colony takes root. Although several hundred young are produced each time the siren releases spores, chance and small predators usually kill off the great majority of the siren's brood.



Yellow Sky's unique chemistry has led to the evolution of several subkingdoms beneath the general classifications of plant, microbe, and animal. The planet's lifeforms consist of Series I or Series III creatures, along with a few rare organisms that can endure both conditions. The plants of Yellow Sky come in two basic varieties: the blue plants that live in the chlorine-free highlands, and the black plants native to the toxic lower elevations.

Speargrass is an example of the black plants. In the acidic waters of Yellow Sky's swampy lowlands, the normal wooded or leafy foliage of Earthly plants can't survive. Instead, chlorinated organic compounds make up the structure of the plant's trunk, leaves, and roots. In effect, Yellow Sky's black plants are made of organic plastics. The bladelike fronds of speargrass are made of a material tougher than steel.

Speargrass is quite common in the lowlands of Yellow Sky. Like many other black plants, it supplements its subsistence diet of dim sunlight and poor soil by trapping and killing careless animals.

Description: Speargrass is not really a grass; it grows in thick patches with dense, woody stems that form a forest of daggerlike points. Over these deadly caltrops grows a luxurious carpet of soft, innocuous-looking grassy tassels. The plant favors low, marshy regions where its blades are hidden a few centimeters below the surface, while its tassels spread out to form a soft, wet mat over the blades. Because the plant blends perfectly with the vegetation around it, many victims don't realize their peril until they've blundered into the spears.

Encounter: Speargrass can't move, attack, or affect a group of heroes in any way—unless they blunder into it. A careless traveler

could easily mistake the tassellike upper layer of a speargrass plant for a little more of the harmless, swampy vegetation that covers so much of Yellow Sky's lowlands. A hero may be allowed an Awareness-perception skill check (or, for someone who has encountered the plant before or learned about it, a Life Science skill check) to spot a patch of speargrass before he or she steps into it or wades through it. If the hero is distracted or running, a +1 or +2 penalty would apply to this skill check.

If a hero doesn't spot the speargrass, or is forced to enter the patch anyway, he or she must make a Dexterity feat check. The amount of damage the hero suffers is based on his or her grade of success: Amazing, no damage; Good, d4w; Ordinary, d6w; Failure, d6+2w; and Critical Failure, d4m. Armor may negate some or all of this damage.

If wound damage or mortal damage penetrates a character's armor, the victim is impaled or caught on the barbed spikes and can't move. He or she must succeed on a Strength feat check to pull free,

Speargrass Ecological Data

Biochemistry: Series III

Environment: Class 2

GRAPH: G2/R2/A3/P4/H3

Biome: Lowland bogs and marshes

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 1–4 (d4) patches

Organization: Patch

Niche: Carnivorous plant

Intelligence: None





Speargrass Game Data

STR 2	INT 0
DEX 2	WIL 0
CON 8 (2d4+3)	PER 0
Durability: 8/8/4/4	Action check: n/a
Move: none	#Actions: n/a
Reaction score: n/a	

Attacks

Blades¹ see text d4w/d6w/d6+2w/d4m LI/0

¹ Damage tied to victim's DEX feat check; see text.

Defenses

-3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

-2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

Armor: d4 (LI), 3d4 (HI), 2d4 (En)

Skills

none

suffering d4w in the process (armor doesn't help against this damage). If the hero can't pull free, he or she can try to use a bladed weapon to cut the spikes away, but must inflict at least 8 points of wound damage or 1 point of mortal damage to the plant to do this. Most small or weak creatures can't get out of a speargrass patch once they are caught.

A typical speargrass patch is about 3 meters in diameter, although much larger patches (or multiple patches) may appear in marshy areas that are especially thick with vegetation. Speargrass can't be rendered unconscious; its durability rating simply indicates how much punishment a hero must dish out to render the patch harmless by chopping it into pieces—in the case of a typical specimen, 8 points of wound damage and 4 points of mortal damage.

Habitat/Society: Speargrass is a nonintelligent plant with no mobility. Its victims are simply caught on its spikes and held fast until they die. When a speargrass patch catches something, the portion that impales the victim naturally subsides, sinking below the rest of the plant over the course of several days. This resets the trap by carrying the carcass out of sight, and also positions the body where its decomposition will do the most good for the speargrass patch.

EXTERNALS

The human race has encountered a vast array of different alien species in the three and a half centuries of exploration and colonization since the development of the stardrive. In that time, "external" has come to be used as the classification for aliens outside the human sphere of influence. Until a species was categorized, cataloged, and brought into the human alliance (either through absorption, treaty, or annexation), it was listed as "external" in all official and unofficial databases.

In recent years, especially in places such as the Verge, the external classification has taken on darker, more foreboding connotations. More and more, external species are considered to be dangerous, mysterious, even hostile. Most scientists attribute these feelings to the inherent dangers of life on the human frontier, but that only explains part of it. Since humans first left Earth, there's been a segment of society living on the edge of known space. Only since contact with the Verge was reestablished have tensions and paranoia begun to run rampant.

Whatever the cause of the paranoia and hysteria, the fact remains that not all externals have sinister motives. After all, the five major alien species were all once considered to be externals—and today, aliens such as the fraal, mechalus, and t'sa are all considered to be valuable members of the galactic society.

External Weaponry

All of the external species encountered in the Verge so far employ unusual weaponry. The major factor that differentiates these weapons from those built by humans is their biotechnological nature. Instead of appearing clearly mechanical, the weapons have characteristics usually associated with living creatures. Some have speculated that an unknown source is arming these various external species, but most authorities consider this to be nothing more than paranoia. As a popular Arriver saying goes, "Ask a Verger about the weather and hear about the latest conspiracy."

The biotech nature of the weapons leads to two major problems for humans and their allies. The weapons quickly degenerate when removed from their hosts. These weapons appear to die and decompose at a remarkably fast rate. Even those captured relatively intact can't be used by humans or any of their alien partners, as the weapons seem to be keyed to the biosignature of their host aliens.

The weapons include:

Blacklasers: Broad-band laser weapons tuned to the highest portions of the visible light spectrum. These devices work much like masers, but do not impart as much heat or light. The klicks (see the STAR'DRIVE™ Campaign Setting) and the gardhyi are known to employ blacklaser weapons.

Dark plasma guns: These powerful weapons work much like the plasma guns developed by humans, but the plasma mixture is derived from dark matter. Due to its greater mass, the bolt strikes with a much greater energy than a human-made plasma weapon. Dark plasma weapons are favored by the kroath.

Filament chain: This melee weapon, used by the kroath, has a cutting edge made from molecular filaments.

Neural blade: The neural blade, a melee weapon used by the n'sss and occasionally by the gardhyi, is a batonlike weapon that projects a short, spade-shaped field that causes any organic molecules it touches to dissociate, killing the tissue.

Render guns: Often found in the possession of the n'sss, these are similar to the renders described in the *ALTERNITY® Player's Handbook*.

Sliver gun: Not encountered very often, these n'sss weapons are handheld magnetic accelerators that hurl a deadly shower of needlelike crystal slivers.

Cluster rockets: Yet another feature of the arsenal of the n'sss, these small missiles carry miniature matter-bomb warheads. Three are fired at once, each is an area-effect weapon inflicting Good damage to a range of 4 meters from impact, and Ordinary damage to a range of 8 meters.

Complete game statistics for these weapons are provided on pages 122 and 126 in this book—except for the blacklaser weapons, which are described in detail in the STAR'DRIVE Campaign Setting.



Blix

Humans immediately feel comfortable in the presence of a blix. These aliens first appeared in the Verge about 15 years ago, arriving in the Aegis system inside a spherical vessel that appeared to use starfall technology. It immediately expelled a few dozen escape pods, then exploded in spectacular fashion within sight of the Bluefall settlements. The blix, which had been crammed in the pods, were stranded in the Aegis system.

Since that time, the friendly but silent aliens have made friends throughout the Verge. Their helpfulness and knack with technology make them valuable to spacers, and it is now looked upon as good luck to have a blix or two crewing aboard traders and other vessels traveling the space lanes of the Verge.

Description: A blix is a small, 1-meter-tall humanoid. Its blue skin and four arms mark it as alien, as do the four nimble fingers on each of its hands. Most blix continue to wear the featureless jumpsuits they wore when they arrived, but some have taken to adorning themselves in outfits cobbled together from the various species they have since encountered. Each blix carries a universal tool that draws energy from the blix's unique bioenergy signature. The tool changes to meet the needs of the job at hand, though no one but that individual blix can make the tool function.

The blix never speak or seem to communicate in any way. Some scientists speculate that they communicate with each other through some form of psionic link, but none of the Mindwalkers who have scanned them have found any evidence of psionic energy or activity. The blix's friendly appearance, diminutive size, and helpful nature make them very welcome among human crews. Mechalus and fraal find them tolerable, and sesheyans and 'sa have no strong opinion on the matter, but most weren find them to be extremely infuriating. Perhaps that reaction has something to do with a blix's ability to go about its business even with a two-and-a-half meter tall weren bellowing in its face.

Encounter: Blix fix things. They are the ultimate spacehands, capable of repairing damaged technology, maintaining mechanical components, and even making minor adjustments to improve efficiency, power output, and energy consumption. Since arriving in the Aegis system, the blix have been adopted by the Vergers. Indeed, many spacers consider the blix to be valuable resources and often compete and bargain to gain a few of the aliens for their crews.

Most blix travel in groups of three to nine, but it isn't uncommon to see a solitary blix looking for something to fix. It has been theorized that the blix were repair drones charged with keeping the ship they arrived in in good repair. When something went wrong and the vessel began to self-destruct, the blix fled. Now they seek other technology to care for, since this task seems to be an inherited part of their very nature. Of course, because the blix have never revealed anything about their origin and seem incapable of supporting or refuting such claims, these theories remain idle speculation.

Unattached blix, either singly or in groups, seek out high tech-

nology to care for. Most blix attach themselves to spaceports or starships, though some can be found working in factories or other planet-bound installations. They can't be hired or bribed; a blix must approach a vessel or facility in need of care and offer its services. This isn't done with words, but by deeds. If a spacer has something in need of care, and a blix finds this care to be worthy, it simply gets right to work. Though not everyone feels comfortable allowing these strange aliens access to their engines and power plants, most Vergers consider it bad luck to turn away a blix.

All a blix requires is a place near its work site to sleep, food and water, and the freedom to accomplish its life's purpose. When a ship or facility no longer appeals to a blix, it leaves. This is seen as an omen of bad days ahead, and most spacers either completely overhaul blix-abandoned vessels or junk them at the first opportunity. A blix uses its universal tool to accomplish its work. It also has a tendency to sometimes add alien technology to the mix—strange bio-organic components that improve human technology but still aren't completely understood by human engineers.

Blix aren't the least bit violent or aggressive. They exhibit a single-mindedness when it comes to technology, often taking things

Blix Game Data

STR 7	(d4+5)	INT 12	(d6+8)
DEX 13	(d8+8)	WIL 10	(d6+6)
CON 8	(d4+6)	PER 12	(d6+8)
Durability: 8/8/4/4		Action check: 15+/14/7/3	
Move: run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Good/2		Last resorts: 2	

Attacks

none

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 -2 bonus to resist Constitution-based hazards
 +2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Special Equipment

Universal tool: -4 bonus to all Technical Science-repair skill checks

Skills

Athletics [7]-climb [9], jump [16]; Manipulation [13]-lock-pick [15], pickpocket [14]; Stealth [13]-hide [14]; Stamina [13]-endurance [15]; Computer [12]-hardware [14]; Demolitions [12]-disarm [13]; Security [12]-devices [13]; Technical [12]-juryrig [13], repair [16].

apart and putting them back together to apparently gain complete understanding of how an object or device functions. When something in their care breaks, they descend upon the mechanical component like a swarm of locusts, working fast and nimbly to get it back in good repair. Indeed, it often seems that blix can't tolerate technology that isn't working to its utmost capacity—and if it's broken, that's even worse.

If attacked, blix refuse to fight back. If they're in the middle of making repairs, they won't even acknowledge violence until they suffer so much damage that they can't continue to work. If not yet attached to any technology, a blix flees from violent behavior and seeks more peaceful locations to ply its trade.

Habitat/Society: Where do the blix come from? That's a mystery that no one has been able to answer. It is almost certain that they come from outside human space, but thus far the blix have been unwilling or unable to identify their place of origin. They seem to thrive quite nicely in Earthlike environments, and have no trouble existing in human-compatible environmental conditions. They can tolerate more radiation than humans, however, and aren't adversely affected by repairing mass reactor breaches without the protection of e-suits.

Though the blix have an innate understanding of starship technology and can even repair stardrives, they exhibit no signs of special cultural or scientific advancement or sophistication; instead, they seem to fix and repair things by rote, demonstrating no true originality or capacity to build from scratch. Alone, a blix will work on the most severely damaged section of a mechanical device first, then go on to the next most severely damaged, and the next. In groups, without so much as a word or a gesture, they immediately divide the work and attack the problem with the same enthusiasm as an army attacks an enemy fortification.

The Concord has been studying the blix since coming to the Verge. Concord authorities are acutely aware that since the blix refuse money of any sort, the possibility of extensive abuse exists.



The Concord doesn't want these silent, unobtrusive aliens to become slaves of more aggressive species. And even if the blix don't ask for help in this matter, the Concord feels obliged to provide it.



When humans encounter the evrem, they can't help but think of the legends of kind benefactors from Earth's past. This species, though friendly and more than willing to discuss many different topics, remains close-mouthed about one particular subject—the evrem won't or can't talk about where they come from. For this reason, the species is given the external classification.

The evrem are new to the Verge. The first contact with this species occurred in 2498, when one of their crystalline vessels entered the Lucullus system. Since that time, two huge crystalline vessels have been charted crisscrossing the Verge, carrying many smaller vessels that then spread out to interact with the inhabitants of this region of space.

Description: An evrem has a humanoid form, though the creatures tend to be somewhat taller and much thinner than the average human. An evrem's face has unique features that clearly differentiate it from the human species. Eyes that range in color from pale sil-

ver to light blue, with no visible pupils, shine from an evrem's placid, cherubic face. Only a hint of a nose can be seen beneath the eyes, and an evrem has no mouth. Its hairless flesh glows with a perceptible radiance, and gossamer wings sprout from its back. Three long, thin fingers stretch from each of the evrem's delicate hands. Common dress for the evrem is either a bright tunic and pants or robes made from a star-patterned material of unknown composition.

Evrem communicate through the use of psionic abilities. Most humans report that the mental link is often accompanied by a music-like background noise that helps set them at ease despite the psionic intrusion. In fact, everything about the evrem expresses their fundamental nature—they appear to be good and kind beings who genuinely enjoy meeting new species and interacting with the people of the Verge.

Encounter: The evrem travel the Verge in two huge glowing, white crystalline vessels. These ships are about half the size of a standard





fortress ship; armament, if they have any, is not apparent and has not been revealed. Smaller ships emerge from the larger vessels to broaden the area that the evrem can cover during a circuit through the Verge. And what do the evrem do as they travel the region? They engage in trade.

Evrem visiting the Verge operate as traders and diplomats, carrying exotic goods from one corner of the Verge to the other. They refuse to accept money for their wares. Instead, they barter for other trade goods to add to their coffers. They deal in all manner of Verger-produced materials and technology, as well as items of their own manufacture that they have either carried with them from their homeworld or constructed in the depths of their huge vessels. They do not deal in anything that can be used as a weapon or even a defense; they seem to be morally opposed to conflict of any sort and refuse to take even a small part in such negative activity. Mostly, they trade in cloth and art of their own design, and sometimes have quantities of a beverage the Vergers call "evrem nectar."

Contrasting with their benevolent and pacifistic air is a no-nonsense attitude that comes out when the evrem engage in face-to-face commerce. Many people with whom they have done business say the evrem remind them of Rigunmors in terms of how they conduct themselves when an offer is on the table—always willing to trade, but never willing to accept anything less than the best possible deal they can get for themselves.

Whenever two parties have a problem that needs to be negoti-

Evrem Game Data

STR 8	(d4+6)	INT 12	(d6+8)
DEX 10	(d6+6)	WIL 14	(d8+8)
CON 8	(d4+6)	PER 12	(d6+8)
Durability: 8/8/4/4		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	

Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+2s/d6+2s	LI/O
Pyrokinesis	18/9/4	d4+2w/d6+2w/d8+2w	En/O

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 +1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 +2 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills

Stealth [10]—shadow [12]; Vehicle [10]—space [13]; Business [12]—small [14]; Awareness [14]—intuition [16]; Resolve [14]—mental [16]; Culture [12]—diplomacy [13]; Interaction [12]—bargain [14], charm [13]; Biokinesis [8]—heal [10], transfer damage [10]; ESP [12]—clairaudience [14], clairvoyance [14], empathy [13], mind reading [15]; Telekinesis [14]—kinetic shield [16], levitation [16], pyrokinesis [18]; Telepathy [12]—contact [13], illusion [14], mind shield [14], suggest [16].

ated, the evrem offer their services as mediators and arbitrators. Most of those who have accepted such service have been pleased with the fair and impartial manner in which the evrem reach a decision. Indeed, many claim that it's as though the evrem knew exactly what was in their hearts regarding the matter in question. With their psionic abilities, this assessment is probably more accurate than most of the evrem's customers suspect. An evrem will only agree to mediate a dispute if both parties accept the evrem's final ruling and if both sides have something worthwhile to offer the evrem. What does an evrem consider worthwhile? In cases of mediation, the evrem requires items that mean something to the participants: family heirlooms, good luck charms, important mementos, and so forth.

Though friendly and kind, the evrem can also come off as aloof and mysterious. They definitely have their secrets. They also have a tendency to look down upon certain human traits. They have no tolerance for rudeness, physical aggression, or hostile behavior. In the face of such activity, evrem simply turn away and depart—or remove the offending party from their presence if the incident occurs aboard an evrem vessel. If attacked, evrem defend themselves with their psionic abilities. They have never been seen with any weapons, and to date there are no reports of evrem having initiated a violent act. If severely threatened, however, they have been known to use powerful mental abilities to protect themselves.

No Verger or Arriver has ever been deep within an evrem ship. Every evrem vessel has a “public” bay that has come to be called “the fair.” In the fair, visitors can come to view wares and make deals in a festive and almost churchlike atmosphere. Perhaps this type of environment is more due to the design of the bays than any action on the part of the evrem: The bays have high, vaulted ceilings made of the same glowing crystal as the exteriors of the ships. Evrem also sometimes set up shop in space stations or on planet sites, but whenever possible they like to conduct business in their own vessels—and most Vergers want to visit the evrem fairs in any event.

It appears that both the huge evrem vessels and the smaller trading ships possess some sort of faster-than-light technology that enables the evrem to cover distances of as much as 25 light-years in a remarkably short time. Questions concerning such technology and efforts to further investigate such matters have thus far led nowhere. This has made some Concord officials nervous, but not yet nervous enough to press the matter more forcefully.

Habitat/Society: To date, the evrem have refused to answer any questions about where they come from. In fact, they seem embarrassed and ashamed when someone asks such a question. The individual turns away, its radiance darkens, and it attempts to change the subject as diplomatically as possible. This has led some observers to speculate that the evrem have come here after fleeing from some planetary or astronomical disaster, or perhaps some form of political upheaval. They seem quite comfortable in human environmental conditions, and the environment within the fair bays is always set at Earth standard.

Two major evrem vessels are known to be present in the Verge. It is estimated that approximately 10,000 evrem live and work on each vessel. These ships are known to carry smaller trader-sized craft; it is estimated that there are 24 of these smaller ships on each of the larger ones.

The evrem seem to have an ordered society, though the Concord has yet to completely fathom its structure. No evrem seems to be of higher station than another, though they have some method for selecting who speaks with outsiders and who engages in trade. Male and female evrem have been observed, and though it is speculated that there are children somewhere in the evrem vessels, no younger members of the species have yet been observed.

Though the evrem possess beautiful wings, they have never been seen flying. Xenobiologists believe that the wings have no function; any power of flight they may have once possessed has long since faded from the gene pool.



The gardhyi (pronounced gar-DYE-ee) have been around for a long, long time. Just as the fraal influenced all kinds of legends about elves and fairies on Earth, the gardhyi may be the origin of ancient tales about monsters in the mythology of the major galactic species. Humans have called them “evil spirits” and “Men in Black,” among other things, at various times in Earth’s history. Weren legends speak of the terrible “necromancers” who once roamed Kurg. Sesheyan tales tell of the “shadow-lurkers” who bring ill fortune and evil magic to the jungles of Sheya. According to conspiracy theorists, these legends and others appear to have some connection to the gardhyi, who have apparently had significant contact with various species in times past. The discovery of the gardhyi in the Verge—and their familiarity with the history, language, and customs of humans and their alien partners—has resulted in a rash of disturbing nightmares among Vergers and Arrivers alike.

At first, reports of the gardhyi were sketchy and inconclusive.

Few authorities were quick to believe the strange stories concerning these dark-clad humanoids, and most attributed the reports to spacer exaggeration or too many golden novas imbibed at taverns throughout the Verge. When influential citizens began encountering these aliens, the Concord decided to take a more serious look at the claims.

Description: In the Verge, a gardhyi works very hard to blend in. Most of them blend in so well that they are rarely, if ever, recognized for what they truly are. Because the general size and shape of a gardhyi is close to that of a human or a mechalus, individuals of the species are often mistaken for such, especially when they are wearing their traditional dark clothing, dark eyeshades, and either a dark hood or hat of some kind. Without such garb, a gardhyi would never be able to pass for anything other than an alien of unknown origin and intentions.





Gardhyi Game Data

NOTE: All gardhyi encountered in the Verge are extremely capable beings. Regardless of their profession, they're characters of at least level 11. These statistics reflect a typical gardhyi Free Agent.

STR 12 (d6+9) INT 13 (2d4+8)

DEX 14 (d6+11) WIL 12 (2d6+5)

CON 13 (2d4+8) PER 11 (2d4+6)

Durability: 13/13/7/7 Action check: 16+/15/7/3

Move: sprint 26, run 16, walk 6, swim 12 #Actions: 3

Reaction score: Good/2 Last resorts: 2

Psionic energy points: 12 FX energy: 10

Attacks

Unarmed 16/8/4 d4+4s/d6+4s/d4+2w LI/0

Blacklaser pistol 17/8/4 d4+2w/d6+2w/d4m En/0

Arcane Magic FX (Shadow Bolts, see below)

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

+3 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

+2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

+1 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Armor (improved CF): d6+2 (LI), d4+3 (HI), d6+1 (En)

Skills

Athletics [12]—*climb* [14], *jump* [14]; Unarmed [12]—*power* [16]; Manipulation [14]—*lockpick* [16]; Modern [14]—*pistol* [17]; Stealth [14]—*shadow* [17], *sneak* [15]; Vehicle Operation [14]; Stamina [13]—*endurance* [15]; Knowledge [13]; Administration [12]; Awareness [12]—*intuition* [14], *perception* [14]; Investigate [12]—*interrogate* [14], *search* [13]; Resolve [12]—*physical* [13], *mental* [13]; Culture [11]—*diplomacy* [13]; Deception [11]—*bluff* [12], *bribe* [12]; Interaction [11]—*intimidate* [14]; ESP [13]—*clairvoyance* [14], *mind reading* [15], *navcognition* [14], *postcognition* [15], *sensitivity* [14].

FX

Call Shadows

Arcane Magic, Conjure spell: WIL, gathers shadows that obscure the area immediately around the gardhyi for 1 hour (+1/+2/+3 penalty to other's Awareness checks).

Shadow Bolts

Arcane Magic, Conjure spell: DEX, produces dark bolts of numbing shadow that fire from the gardhyi's hands (d4s/d4+2s/d4+4s, En/0).

Star Web

Super Power, Overscience gadget: WIL, allows a gardhyi to make journeys through drivespace without a ship for a distance of up to 75 light-years, depending on the success achieved (25/50/75).

A typical gardhyi averages about 1.8 meters tall and has a humanoid form. Its hairless, medium-gray skin is abrasive, not unlike a shark's hide. It has six digits on each hand, two thumbs with four fingers between them. A gardhyi's feet have a similar configuration. The shadows beneath its hood or hat are designed to hide the most strikingly alien features the gardhyi possesses—dark, narrow slits of eyes with no irises or pupils evident; a disproportionately wide mouth full of sawlike, triangular teeth; a flat, slit nose and small, slit ears.

The gardhyi also possesses a cartilaginous instead of a bony skeleton. This gives its frame and limbs an oddly flexible and rounded appearance, as its joints are much simpler and more resilient than those found in a human's body.

Encounter: Gardhyi prefer to operate in the shadows, doing little to advertise their presence and leaving no evidence behind to indicate their passing. These aliens project an air of subterfuge, conspiracy, and clandestine purpose. The maddeningly sparse proof of their existence and the scattered reports coming in indicate a darker plan if one looks deep enough and allows for leaps of logic that wouldn't stand up in any court of law.

Working either alone or in pairs (and rarely in groups as large as four individuals), the gardhyi roam the Verge, apparently gathering information about a variety of disassociated topics. They have been reported questioning survivors of and witnesses to encounters with external species, examining alien wreckage and Precursor sites, wandering military facilities, and spying on diplomatic functions occurring in such widely diverse locations as Bluefall, Port Royal, and the *Lighthouse*.

In most encounters, gardhyi pose as human or mechalus agents, asking questions or intimidating their targets into silence. They claim to be sanctioned by a mysterious Concord agency, a secret stellar nation bureau, or a clandestine division of some nameless corporation. They have been known to bribe, cajole, frighten, confuse, harass, watch, or steal from those who catch their unfathomable interest. Most of those who fall under the scrutiny of the gardhyi usually end up discredited, ridiculed, or worse.

When recognized, gardhyi flee. Most reports state that these aliens simply disappear the moment they manage to get out of sight of their pursuers. A few of the more elaborate stories claim that the gardhyi can literally step out of reality, much the same way a starship drops into drivespace. Of course, there is no known method for entering or exiting drivespace without a driveship. No evidence of such an ability, either natural or through the use of some new technology, has yet been produced.

Gardhyi are surprisingly strong and resilient for their size, capable of near-superhuman physical effort. They can flatten their bodies to a width of only 10 centimeters, gain a -2 bonus to any Dexterity feat check to resist impact damage, and double the jumping distance, swimming rate, and climbing rate dictated by their Strength and Dexterity scores. Gardhyi can hold their breath 10 times longer than a human with similar Constitution, and they gain a -2 bonus to resist toxins, poison, radiation, disease, and other harmful agents due to their robust physiology.

Gardhyi have a number of tools at their disposal to aid them in their efforts. First of all, they are capable of dimensional travel. This is accomplished by a nanotech web implanted in the alien's body; in

effect, the gardhyi can teleport to any one of dozens of sites "keyed" to its web, some of which may be up to 75 light-years away. The web draws its power from the gardhyi's own life force, and using it costs the creature 1 fatigue point for a shift of 100 kilometers or less, 2 for a shift from one place to another on the same planet, 3 to travel from one astronomical body to another within the same star system, or 4 to dimension-shift to another star system (in addition to the FX energy required to power this overscience gadget). These costs are doubled for the second dimension shift in the same day, tripled for the third, and so on—if the gardhyi doesn't have enough fatigue points remaining for the jump, the creature must make up the difference in mortal points. Keying the web to a site requires special surveying equipment, so a gardhyi can't dimension-shift to a place it has never visited.

A gardhyi naturally makes use of native dress, armor, and weaponry to blend in with the surroundings it's working in. However, a gardhyi that expects to become involved in heavy combat or anticipates the possibility of isolating its target in a remote or insulated area may make use of more formidable technology. Gardhyi favor blacklaser weapons, particularly the easy-to-conceal pistol, but some may substitute Melee Weapons for their Modern Ranged Weapons skill and wield neural blades instead. A gardhyi often wears a special skin-tight softsuit of material similar to carbonate fiber beneath its outer clothes, adding extra protection.

The nanotech web that provides a gardhyi with its dimension-shifting ability also serves as a capable self-destruct device. When a gardhyi is rendered unconscious by any means, the web immediately slugs itself and kills the gardhyi in the process. The gardhyi can also trigger this self-destruct feature as a conscious action, using the device to prevent the creature's capture if it fears that it might be bound or otherwise incapacitated without losing consciousness.

Habitat/Society: Nothing is known of the gardhyi homeworld or social order. The creatures have proven to be extremely elusive; any who have been captured and faced with the possibility of interrogation have simply killed themselves on the spot.

We can guess that they come from an Earthlike world, since they're perfectly comfortable in Class 1 environments. So far, no one has reported an encounter with a female gardhyi. It's suspected that males might outnumber females by a great margin, perhaps ten to one, and the females are bound by social mores or traditions to domestic duties. Gardhyi are not very warm toward females of any species (of course, they're not friendly toward anyone), and seem to naturally dismiss females as insignificant or harmless—a cultural predisposition that has cost them from time to time.

As far as their government or organization, gardhyi seem to all serve a common body of some kind. They cooperate and communicate with each other extremely well, suggesting a unified structure that all gardhyi belong to, each playing some tangible role.

Conspiracy theorists speculate that gardhyi have become secret advisers to political, military, and private sector leaders. The wildest claims place these mysterious beings alongside the highest-ranking officials in the Galactic Concord, Thuldan Empire, and Orlamu Theocracy. No firm proof has been presented, but that fact just seems to strengthen the theorists' claims—of course no proof is available, they say; that's the best example of just how insidious and well engineered this gardhyi infiltration really is.

Kroath

The star systems of the Verge hide more secrets than they reveal. One such secret revolves around a hostile external species that Vergers have named the kroath. All contact with this species has ended in battle (or slaughter, depending on which Verger settlement the contact was with), and all efforts to locate a kroath homeworld have been unsuccessful. One report places kroath soldiers alongside a n'sss battle group, but if there is a connection between these two apparently unrelated external species, it has yet to be confirmed. Regardless, travelers and remote settlements are encouraged to be wary of these aggressive intruders.

Description: Kroath soldiers (the only type of kroath thus far encountered) are fully encased within armor that obscures their true forms. All that can be ascertained by looking at an armored kroath is that he is humanoid, standing approximately 2 meters tall, though this appears to be more attributed to the bulkiness of the armor than to a kroath's true height. The armor features a combination of life-support apparatus and combat-oriented accoutrements interwoven to give the casing an organic feel. Indeed, pulsing veins of glowing liquid and nodules of semitransparent material intermingled with the dark-colored armor gives the suit an appearance of life aside from the kroath within it.

Spikes, sharp edges, and bony plates make every surface of the armor a weapon. In addition, a kroath's suited hands end in powerful talons that make it deadly in close-quarter combat. All kroath carry weapons of unknown origin that have thus far eluded human understanding. These weapons are similar in basic nature, although not in form or function, to biotech weapons employed by the n'sss and other external species. Many in the Verge have speculated that the kroath may be the original source of all these weapons, since their armored suits also have a distinct biotechnical appearance. Most humans and even members of the other prominent alien species consider the armor to have a disturbing, almost sinister appearance. To date, no one has been able to ascertain what an unarmored kroath looks like.

Encounter: The kroath have attacked a handful of Verge settlements since they were first identified in 2490. Most of these attacks have been directed toward remote locations, though Concord Marines deployed in Hammer's Star and Hatire troops in Corrivale have reported skirmishes with kroath soldiers. Most of the time, kroath infantry engage in raids that seem to be more a test of a target's strength and defenses than an actual bid to conquer and de-

Kroath Game Data

STR 10	(d8+6)	INT 10	(d8+6)
DEX 11	(d6+8)	WIL 8	(d6+4)
CON 12	(d8+8)	PER 8	(d6+4)
Durability: 12/12/6/6		Action check: 11+/10/5/2	
Move: run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

Attacks

Claws	12/6/3	d4w/d4+2w/d6+3w	LI/O
Dark plasma rifle	13/6/3	see description	
Dark plasma trigun	11/5/2	see description	
Filament chain	11/5/2	see description	
Enraged	Provides a -2 bonus to all attacks and action checks for d6+1 rounds; can be activated once per scene.		

Defenses

no resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 no INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
 Armor: d8+2 (LI), d6+2 (HI), d8+2 (En)
 Biotech Gel: Heals 1 stun and 1 wound point per phase; if kroath is rendered unconscious or if any mortal points have been lost, the gel becomes a powerful acid and destroys both the kroath and the armor.

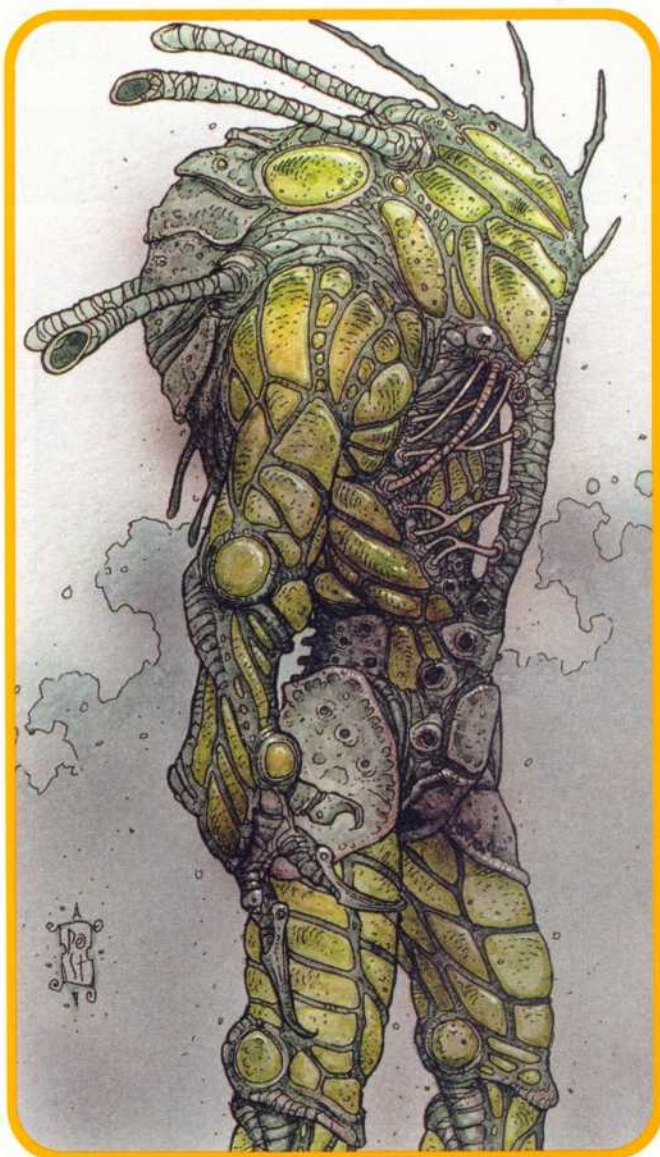
Skills

Armor [10]-powered [12]; Athletics [10]-throw [11];
 Melee [10]-powered [11]; Unarmed [10]-brawl [12];
 Modern [11]-pistol [12], rifle [13]; Stealth [11]-sneak [12];
 Vehicle [11]-space [12]; Movement [12]; Stamina [12]-resist pain [14]; Awareness [8]-perception [9].

stroy. There have been two confirmed all-out attacks made by the kroath, however. Both of these resulted in the complete destruction of small outposts located in the Armstrong and Crow star systems. One battle, the Argos Victory of 2499, resulted in the complete destruction of a kroath raiding division—mostly due to the unexpected arrival of a Concord cruiser on patrol in the area.

Kroath Weaponry

Weapon	Skill	Acc	Md	Range	Type	Damage (O/G/A)	Actions	Clip	Hide	Mass
Dark plasma rifle	Modern-rifle	0	F	80/200/400	En/G	d8+1w/2d6w/2d6+3w	2	10	-	4
Dark plasma trigun	Heavy-direct	0	B/A	100/250/600	En/G	d8+1w/2d6w/2d6+3w	4	-/12	-	5
Filament chain	Melee-power	-1	-	Personal	LI/G	d6+1w/2d4+1w/3d4+2w	3	20	+1	2



Armored dropships that have the same general look as kroath armor deposit raiders on worlds ripe for attack. The kroath have yet to knowingly take on clearly superior forces. Instead, they target small colonies, lightly defended outposts, and hard-to-protect work details operating in asteroid belts or on resource-rich moons and planetoids. A typical raiding force features six to twelve squads, each squad containing six kroath soldiers. The largest known kroath force gathered for the attack on the Crow industrial camp; it consisted of a reported eighteen squads. The smallest reported kroath raiding party was made up of just a single squad, though more soldiers may have been waiting in reserve.

A typical kroath soldier uses his armor and battle claws to optimum advantage in close-quarters fighting. Before such a battle can occur, however, the kroath uses the rest of his carried arsenal to eliminate his enemies. The kroath soldier is normally outfitted with a dark plasma gun and a filament chain.

It is also believed that kroath operate the small, single-crew attack craft that have been harassing traders operating throughout the most distant Verge systems. These exceedingly fast vessels are 3-meter-diameter spheres that have the same distinct biotech appearance as kroath armor. Vergers call the small ships "kroath spheres."

Most authorities believe that the attack craft must be housed in larger carriers, but no larger kroath vessels aside from their dropships have been identified.

Habitat/Society: No one knows where the kroath come from. Some speculate they originate on an as yet unexplored planet somewhere in the Verge, but others believe that their recent appearance indicates that they come from a star system outside the boundaries of the region. Kroath seem to be bred for battle, since they have exhibited only hostile behavior in all confirmed encounters. They refuse to communicate or negotiate. They do not accept surrender or take prisoners. They seem impervious to pain and often fall only after suffering extreme amounts of damage.

The kroath armored suits have a few interesting properties that have led to much speculation. Most scientists who have studied the holoviews believe that the armor serves as an environment suit, providing whatever atmosphere the kroath need to survive. The suits contain a mucuslike gel that appears to ooze out and harden to seal cracks and holes suffered during combat. Indeed, kroath have demonstrated an uncanny ability to keep functioning despite taking great amounts of damage. It isn't until the armor is broken beyond its ability to self-repair that a kroath soldier goes down. Then the gel reacts with the outside environment and becomes a powerful acid that quickly destroys both the damaged armor and the kroath inside it. Due to this property, no kroath has yet become available for study, and no intact suit of armor has been captured for analysis.

Kroath spheres demonstrate the same characteristics as the armored suits. One noted Verge scientist has speculated that a kroath pilot floats suspended within the gel-filled sphere, operating the vessel via biolinks and cybercomputers. Until a vessel can be captured intact, no one will know for sure.

Kroath Sphere

Compartments: 2 Durability: 10
Maneuver Rating: -1 Acc: 4 Mpp
Cruising Speed: 3 AU/hour Berthing: 6

Armament: Mass cannon

Range 5/10/15 Mm d6+2s/d6+1w/d6+3w (LI (p)/A)

Defenses: Jammer

Armor: Moderate (unknown)

1 dur d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6+2 (En)

Computer: Marginal computer core

Engines: Kroath engine (specifics unknown)

Power: Kroath plant (specifics unknown) rated for 8 power factors

Drive: None

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Durability
1-7	Command	Multiband radar (0/0) Radio transceiver (0/0) Jammer (0/1) Turret: mass cannon (3/3) Reentry capsule (0/0)	6/6/4
8-20	Engineering	Kroath engine (3/3) Kroath plant (3/3) Airlock (0/0)	12/12/6

Magus

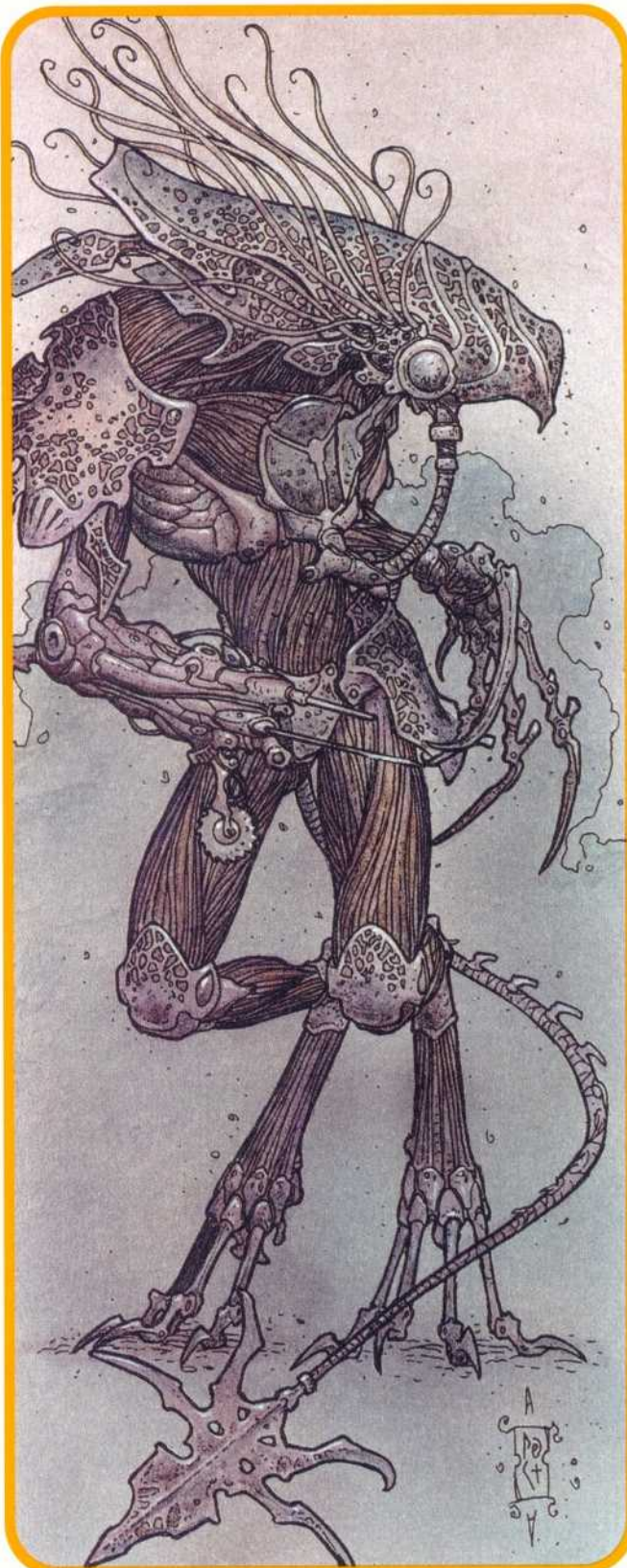
The alien assassin referred to as the magus has become a frightening figure to spacers and Concord Marines alike since the image of one of these creatures was captured on a security holo in 2500. With a few vague reports that began circulating before the Arrivers returned, the magus was well on its way to becoming the “bogeyman” of the Verge. In 2500, when one of the creatures killed three ambassadors on Nova Station, the reality of the magus was confirmed. Of course, the only reliable information on the alien has been provided by sketchy reports and seven minutes of holoview data from the Nova Station internal security sensors.

Because the magus hail from an as yet undiscovered world, possess alien technology, and operate with unknown motives and purpose, they remain classified as an “external” species. All Concord data also contains the following footnote: “The magus are considered to be hostile and extremely dangerous. No attempts at peaceful contact should be attempted. All military personnel are ordered to attack magus on sight.”

Description: A magus stands more than 2 meters tall, with a humanoid form and a sinister appearance. The creature looks as though it has been skinned—its body consists of exposed tendons, muscle, and bony protrusions. A long, spiny tail seems to aid the creature’s balance and has also been demonstrated to serve as a weapon. The magus that was holorecorded also had a variety of apparently cybernetic components interwoven among its powerful musculature. Its face was hidden behind a grotesque mask the alien wore—the front portion of a human skull, one of the creature’s victims on Nova Station. It has been speculated that this was a ritualistic observance on the part of the alien, though other xenologists believe the magus is simply a sadistic killer who enjoys taking trophies from its victims.

The magus filmed on Nova Station matches the general description given in earlier reports. It demonstrated attributes that suggested it was a member of an unknown alien species, but one prominent xenologist has a different opinion; she believes the magus on the holorecord was an extremely advanced robot. Dr. Altun points out, among other things, the creature’s mechanical, jerky motions, though that could just be a function of the many cybernetic implants observed within the magus. In any case, when it attacked, it attacked with a fluid speed and grace that wasn’t the least bit similar to battle robots used during the Second Galactic War.

Encounter: The events at Nova Station coincide with earlier reports of magus activity. The creature arrived on the space station unannounced and in secret; station authorities weren’t aware of the magus’s presence until it was too late to save the Old Space ambassadors. It systematically located its targets, slaughtered each in turn in a style extremely reminiscent of human serial killers, then attempted to slip away in the same unknown manner in which it arrived on the station. Though the first two murders were committed in diplomatically secure sections of the station (no security recorders



active), the third murder took place in full view of the security sensor in the Star Balcony—a park on the station enclosed in a transparent bulkhead, allowing visitors to gaze out into space. It was this attack and the battle with security forces that provided the bulk of the information now known about the magus.

Shadows and dark corners are the creature's domain. It stalks its victims from such vantage points, moving with silent, calculated purpose.

Magus Game Data

STR 14 (d12+4) INT 12 (d6+8)
DEX 12 (d6+8) WIL 10 (d6+6)
CON 12 (d8+8) PER 10 (d6+6)
Durability: 12/12/6/6 Action check: 14+/13/6/3
Move: run 16, walk 6 #Actions: 3
Reaction score: Good/2 Last resorts: 1

Attacks

Claws 16/8/4 d4+2w/d4+4w/d6+4w LI/O
Tail 15/7/3 d4w/d4+2w/d6+2w LI/O
Weapon¹ 14/7/3 d6+1s/d8+2s/d6+3w En/O

¹ Dark energy stream; see text.

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
+1 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: d4+4 (LI), d6+2 (HI), d6+4 (En)

Skills

Athletics [14]—climb [15], jump [16]; Melee [14]—bludgeon [15], Unarmed [14]—brawl [16]; Acrobatics [12]—dodge [14], fall [15]; Manipulation [12]—lockpick [13]; Modern [12]—pistol [14]; Stealth [12]—hide [14], shadow [13], sneak [15]; Movement [12]; Stamina [12]—endurance [14], resist pain [15]; Security [12]—devices [13]; Awareness [10]—perception [13]; Interaction [10]—intimidate [12].

pose. It has two primary weapons: a powerful clawed hand for close-quarters combat and a cybernetic ranged weapon mounted on its other arm. The weapon fires an energy stream of black radiance that inflicts terrible pain and massive damage to living targets. In the Nova Station incident, the magus used the ranged weapon on one of its victims, rendering him helpless so that it could finish the job slowly with its surgically sharp claws. The cybernetic weapon also has an attachment that looks very much like a medical injection device, though no one has yet formulated a conclusive theory on its true purpose.

When forced to fight Nova Station security, the magus reverted from silent, sadistic hunter to battle-crazed warrior. It sparingly used its ranged weapon, giving rise to speculation that the device requires a lot of power and time to rebuild a charge. Instead, it demonstrated remarkable leaping ability, even using its foot claws to scurry across bulkhead walls as it moved from enemy to enemy. Its arm claws and spiked tail sliced through light armor and clothing with little difficulty, and eight security guards were killed or wounded in the encounter. It eventually made its way to a maintenance conduit, where it escaped immediate detection. From there, it got off the station, presumably using the same unknown method by which it arrived.

Habitat/Society: The origin of the magus remains a mystery. While most authorities believe it to be a member of an as yet unidentified species, other theories exist concerning the nature of the creature. The wildest theory, but the one that has a disturbing ring of truth, is that the magus is either a robot or a genetically engineered lifeform developed by one of the stellar nations. Perhaps it is the culmination of military research conducted during the Second Galactic War, or maybe it is the newest breakthrough in genetic manipulation or robotics. Or, just maybe, it really is the harbinger of an alien species new to the Verge.

So far, the magus has been a solitary creature. There has been only one such alien described in each of the reports logged to date. It is extremely resilient, impervious to damage, and some have speculated that it is capable of surviving in vacuum—that's the only explanation that has thus far made sense concerning its escape from the Nova Station incident.



Rapacious and remorseless, the n'sss (pronounced niss) appear to be a warrior species enamored of technology. The first recorded encounter with this mysterious external species occurred in the Verge more than 60 years ago. Reports of a series of lightning raids against isolated outposts near Zin Point were logged for a period of three standard weeks in 2436. Then, abruptly, the raids stopped. At the time, most believed that the attacks were related to the ongoing galactic war. Later, when the evidence was studied, the technology was found to be clearly of unknown and alien origin.

Within the last decade, traders, colonists, and others living and working in the more remote corners of the Verge have once again filed reports of attacks by an unknown enemy. The Vergers have

come to call these ghost ships and their alien occupants the n'sss. Most authorities doubt that the creatures are even remotely related to the legendary monsters said to have been first encountered in the T'sa Cluster, but the name has stuck.

Description: A chance meeting with a Concord cruiser in 2499 provided the most hard, scientific data to date about these ruthless aliens. The shadowy, amorphous n'sss frigate was severely damaged and then apparently self-destructed, but two battle pods were captured. This gave Concord scientists their first opportunity to study the n'sss, thanks to the dead creatures within the pods.

N'sss are not remotely humanoid. They're hydrogen-breathers

that combine insect and coelenterate (jellyfish) features. N'sss seem to have evolved as aerial drifters or swimmers in the dense envelope of some unknown gas giant, and can only enter other environments while protected within armored pods that serve as life-support systems and deadly fighting machines. These hulking devices are mechanical monstrosities that ride on a dozen powerful metal tentacles.

Inside its protective pod, a n'sss is a gossamer creature of translucent tissue. Inflated gas cells provide rigidity and structure to the n'sss, and a dozen long, delicate, manipulative tentacles dangle from the creature's thorax. It's only about a meter and a half in length and weighs 15 kilograms or less, but the armored pods are much larger.

Encounter: Every encounter with the n'sss thus far has demonstrated the creatures' arrogance, aggressiveness, and ruthlessness. Though encounters with the n'sss ghost ships are becoming increasingly more common, they aren't everyday events. In fact, many Vergers and most people back in the Stellar Ring consider the n'sss to be nothing more than wild spacer legends. Other than some elements of the Concord, only the t'sa take the threat posed by the n'sss seriously.

N'sss battleships are built using an as yet unidentified technology that allows the vessels to behave more like living creatures than mechanical constructs. When seen, the vessels appear to shimmer and change shape against the backdrop of the endless void. They have the ability to phase in and out of sight, becoming invisible to the naked eye and to sensors. Fast, well armed, highly maneuverable, and apparently capable of entering drivespace, n'sss ghost ships attack with a combination of massive render cannons and cluster rockets.

To date, the n'sss have been uncommunicative, elusive, and extremely aggressive. They attack from hiding, flee, or battle to the death when encountered. No one has yet been able to capture a n'sss alive, track them to their point of origin, or enter into even the simplest of form of communication.

In recent months, various outposts and colonies have claimed to have been attacked by n'sss—attacks that have involved ground-based troops of various kinds! Concord scientists have determined that the n'sss they studied can't survive in normal Class 1 or Class 2 environments. They must protect themselves with mechanized survival pods. These devices act like the powered armor employed by humans, except that the n'sss pods lend their Strength directly to their occupants, boosting all of the creature's Strength-based skill scores accordingly.

N'sss pods are self-sealing. If a n'sss suffers mortal damage, however, the pod is considered to be breached, and the creature

N'sss Game Data

NOTE: The typical n'sss is equivalent to a Level 5 Tech Op. However, tougher individuals might be encountered, as well as n'sss Diplomats or Mindwalkers. See the description of n'sss battle pods for details of physical abilities, defenses, and attacks.

STR 4 (d6+1) INT 13 (d8+8)
DEX 11 (d8+7) WIL 9 (2d6+2)
CON 11 (2d4+6) PER 9 (2d6+2)

Durability: 11/11/6/6 Action check: 14+/13/6/3
Move: run 16, walk 6, fly 10 (or by pod) #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2

Attacks

by pod varies see pod & weapon descriptions

Defenses

+2 or +3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks (in pod)
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
+2 INT resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
no WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
Armor: varies by pod

Skills

NOTE: Numerical values for Strength-based skill scores depend upon which pod a n'sss is enclosed within.

Armor [STR]—powered [STR+3]; Melee [STR]—powered [STR+2]; Heavy [STR]—direct [STR+1]; Vehicle [11]—space [13]; Modern [11]—rifle [13]; System [13]—engineering [15]; sensors [15]; weapons [15]; Technical [13]—intervention [14]; repair [15]; knowledge [15]; Awareness [9]—perception [10]; Interaction [9]—intimidate [10]

within dies instantly unless within its native environment—the dense atmosphere of a gas giant.

Habitat/Society: The unknown homeworld of the n'sss must be a gas giant. They apparently evolved in the aerial ecology of the planet's middle cloud layers, and over the course of time managed to establish a technological civilization. What has been learned about the n'sss comes from limited observation, battle reports, and the precious few captured bits of technology and dead creatures collected in recent years. The n'sss ghost ships are almost complete mysteries, but the pods have been observed on planets and around remote

N'sss Weaponry

Weapon	Skill	Acc	Md	Range	Type	Damage (D/G/A)	Actions	Clip	Hide	Mass
Render pistol	Modern—pistol	−1	F	20/40/100	En/O	2d4s/d6+3w/d4+1m	3	10	+3	1
Render rifle	Modern—rifle	−1	F	60/120/500	En/O	2d4+1s/d6+4w/d4+2m	3	10	—	3
Sliver gun	Modern—SMG	−2	B/A	20/40/60	HI/G	d6w/d8+1w/d4+2m	3	—/6	+1	2
Render cannon	Heavy—direct	−1	F	100/300/500	En/G	2d6s/2d8w/2d4m	3	6	—	4
Cluster rocket	Heavy—indirect	0	A	200/400/1200	HI/G	d6+3w/d4m/d4+3m	1	—/6	—	10
Neural blade	Melee—power	0	—	Personal	En/O	d6w/d4+1m/2d4m	3	10	+2	2



N'sss Survival Pods

Aerial Attack Pod: STR 13; Move: walk 10, fly 200.

Armor d4+2 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4 (En); Toughness Ordinary. Armament: 2 cluster rockets, render rifle; Size: 2 meters in length.

Claw Pod: STR 15; Move: run 30, walk 10.

Armor d4+4 (LI), d4+2 (HI), d4+1 (En); Toughness Good. Armament: 2 neural blades; Size: 2 meters in length.

Command Pod: STR 14; Move: run 30, walk 10, fly 50.

Armor d4+3 (LI), d4+2 (HI), d4+2 (En); Toughness Good. Armament: render pistol, neural blade; Size: 3 meters in length.

Heavy Attack Pod: STR 16; Move: walk 10.

Armor 2d4+2 (LI), 2d4+1 (HI), 2d4 (En); Toughness Good. Armament: render cannon, sliver gun, cluster rocket; Size: 3 meters in length.

Light Attack Pod: STR 14; Move: run 60, walk 20.

Armor d4+3 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4 (En); Toughness Ordinary. Armament: cluster rocket, render rifle, neural blade; Size: 2 meters in length.

Science Pod: STR 13; Move: run 20, walk 10.

Armor d6+3 (LI), d6+2 (HI), d6+1 (En); Toughness Ordinary. Armament: render pistol, neural blade; Size: 3 meters in length.

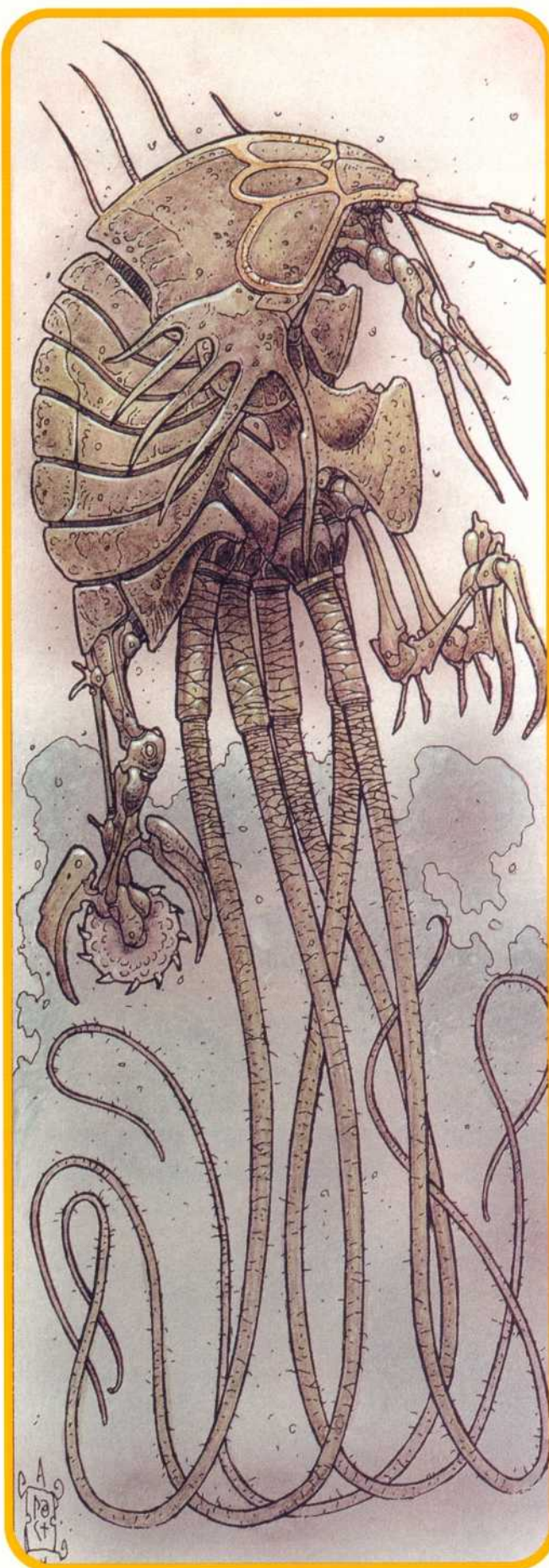
space stations. The few that have been identified have been named for the activity they have been seen engaging in.

The typical n'sss science group features one science pod, two aerial attack pods, and two light attack pods. It engages in activity that seems to be related to research, study, and reconnaissance. Science groups have been spotted at the edges of human settlements, in uninhabited star systems, and in the vicinity of various astronomical phenomena.

The typical battle group consists of a command pod, two heavy attack pods, and two claw pods. The battle group moves in random directions, apparently without reason or purpose. Some observers have likened their patterns to those of sharks, trolling space instead of oceans in search of prey. When a n'sss ghost ship encounters vessels piloted by members of other species, it dislodges a battle group and engages its target. Sometimes a battle group breaks off after testing its opponent, and at other times it fights until one side or the other is destroyed.

Science groups and battle groups can be combined, but they are usually observed working singly.

Most of the information we have about the n'sss is derived from a careful analysis of wrecked n'sss battle pods. The rest is based on random reports, spacer tales, and t'sa legends. As sketchy as this information may seem, it's more extensive than the body of knowledge we've compiled about any other external species. — RG, CLA





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Aliens Grouped by Intelligence and Biochemistry

Nonintelligent: crystallis, DiAgosto cloud, firethorn, speargrass, whitespike

Low-order animal: ammonite, blackworm, brimstone, disruptor, drexen, gevlin, giant urchin, kettledrake, lightning eel, moëtillus, mudfiend, scraaghek, shuriken, spidermist, sunsoarer, terragin

High-order animal: arachnon, bunyip, egistron, flamering, levian, Moore's shark, sandgrotha, sandray, scraaghek, terador, thraat, veerkiller, veractor

Subsient: calliope, centurion, kilishorn, Minshore crystal, razorcat, scraaghek, silicate, siren, spikespore

Sentient: bedestrin, bhruu, blix, corstar, cykotek, deepfallen, dimensional horror, evrem, fraal, gandercat, gardhyi, ke'kekt, kroath, magus, mechalus, n'sss, orbweaver, riglia, sandgrotha, sesheyan, t'sa, warbeast, weren, werewisp, xe'reen

Series I: arachnon, bedestrin, bhruu, blackworm, deepfallen, drexen, egistron, fraal, gandercat, gevlin, giant urchin, ke'kekt, kettledrake, kilishorn (Ic), mechalus (Ia), Moore's shark, orbweaver, razorcat, riglia, sandray, sesheyan, spidermist, sunsoarer, t'sa (Ic), terador, thraat, veractor, warbeast, weren, xe'reen

Series II: ammonite, lightning eel, scraaghek

Series III: siren, speargrass

Series IV: terragin, veerkiller, whitespike

Series V: bunyip, corstar, firethorn, levian, Minshore crystal, mudfiend

Series VI: brimstone, crystallis, flamering, silicate

Series VII: calliope, centurion, DiAgosto cloud, dimensional horror, disruptor, moëtillus, shuriken, spikespore, werewisp

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