

ALTERNITY

ISSUE 4

# LAST RESORT



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### Staff

Founding Editor: Daryl Blasi  
Acting Editor: Matthew Esch  
Layout: SR Trudeau

### Associate Editors/Writers:

Gonzalo Campoverde [Ver. Omn. Lib]  
Odysseas Dallas [Action Emporium]  
Matthew Esch [Cook's Guide, Mind's Eye]  
Ryan Kersner [Legion]  
Dwayne Leonard [Species Catalog]  
Ranko Triflovic [Tavern Tales]  
SR Trudeau [Cyber Shop]

### Writers:

Dragan Ciric, Derek Holland, Ruin, Kevin Loughran, James Nostack

### Artists:

Dragan Ciric, Chirs Campbell, Sarah Hollman, Dwayne Leonard, Mike Meechan

How to contact the Last Resort

Email:  
[lastresortmail.yahoo.com](mailto:lastresortmail.yahoo.com)

How to join the Last Resort Staff

Email:  
[lastresortlist-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:lastresortlist-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)  
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**General Alternity**  
**Star\*Drive**  
**Dark Matter**  
**Gamma World**  
**Tangents**

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# Editorial: *A Time of Mourning*

by Matthew R. Esch

**Bri'-aitsya, level 22 Tech Op/FX Adept (Robotacist/ Sorcerer)  
(November 29, 1999 - April 4, 2005)**

It's been a fun ride. Playing a character for that long, the character grows on you. Old Bri' is one of these. How can one possibly say good-bye to someone that is as 'real' to me as any character in a good novel or movie? One can go down the list: Raistlin, from the Dragonlance Saga; Superman, in DC Comics; Spock, in "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan"; even legendary heroes such as Achilles or Hercules.

I doubt that Bri' will ever reach those levels of being recognized. But even those characters, and their demises, were created from imagination, grew with the plot, developed their own 'quirks'. It was the collaboration between mig\_nova, and myself that helped Bri' grow to what he became, and ultimately how he ended.

I created Bri' following a series of games, cutting my teeth on this new RPG, Alternity. An example of a predecessor to Bri' was "Eddie", inspired by the artwork of Derek Riggs for the Iron Maiden single, "Stranger in a Strange Land". (Available on TS.net & A.net as EDDIE.rtf.) Here, we were looking to explore this wondrous setting, Star\*Drive.

I give Vassilis Stratigakis, webmaster of TS.net (bka, GabrielConner) a salute. By his care, love and maintenance of TS.net, and his early, enthusiastic support of the campaign, EscapeVelocity2503 (EV2503; <http://games.groups.yahoo.com/group/escapevelocity2503/>), Bri', as the handle I use, and the hero many have known, became known to you, the reader.

Bri' was very enthusiastic, but certainly a follower. His eternal, unwavering friendship to Mig Nova shone through each session, each post. The loyalty between the two is as strong as was Robin's to Batman. Though him and Starbirth frequently got in each other's way, each eagerly trying to outdo the other, eventually a mutual respect between the two grew, but this road was a rocky one. Early in the campaign, bad blood came to a near-boil when Bri' chased Starbirth down the corridor of the "Liquid Sky", pistol drawn and trained for a head shot, ready to put a bullet in her head for even daring to go to Engineering without his consent. Bri' was genuinely friendly and fond of Sturhnak, the bhruu.

A very early development in Bri's story ultimately proved his undoing: finding the Electronomicon. The Dread Tome, currently in its 2nd version, the very alien artifact that he guarded with his body, mind and soul, claimed him. Frequently, the plot to defend possession of the Book was a common theme, and many tried, some succeeding, even for brief periods. Yloisan Targ, a level 22 gardhyi Krl'yth/ Krl'osar, though never came into possession of the Book, made a critical error in his fanaticism. Targ, caught in the ecstasy of being physically within the tangent of the I'krl's imprisonment, failed to see Bri' casting a few more incantations. Bri' closed the gate, pulling Targ through, and closed it. Bri' summoned more strength to summon the Great Old One himself, Cthulu. A struggle ensued, when Targ realized what Bri' had done, and knocked Bri' unconscious. Since the summoner of Cthulu was incapacitated, any hope of controlling the Sleeper Beneath the Seas was lost. Ultimately, nothing survived, except for the Dread Tome itself.

Bri' is gone. It's sad, but also very satisfying. "It's like losing my right arm", as Caramon put it. Bri' will be as much a part of me and my memories as my blanket when I was younger. There comes a time to move beyond, and he went out as he should have: as a hero.

Developments in a campaign such as this reverberate across the setting. EV2503's take on Star\*Drive will never be the same. Bri' cannot be replaced. But in his heroic, and largely unseen, final acts, he single-handedly crippled the invading Exeat. Perhaps this may turn the tide of the External War in your Star\*Drive game. Or perhaps not. It's your game.

Rest assured, folks, I'll still be around. I'm still using the moniker, bri\_aitsya, and will still answer to "Bri". No more in character from him. Now he is a memory, and a fond one at that. Farewell, old friend.

## Submissions

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

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

Action Emporium: arms, armor, and equipment  
Bestiary Bizarre: creatures for the Gamma World setting  
Cyber Shop: robotics and cybernetics  
Domain Virtua: detailed grid sites  
Foes Fantastic: creatures for arcane Alternity  
Grid Run: computers and gridrunning  
Home Rule Advantage: home rules for Alternity  
Legion: heroes, villains, and SCMs  
Mind's Eye: psionics  
Special FX: super powers and magic  
Species Catalogue: alien species for Alternity  
Sword and Staff: arcane Alternity  
Tavern Tales: game fiction  
Tangents: alternate worlds  
Veritas Omnes Liberant: conspiracies for the Dark Matter setting  
Xenohunter's Field Guide: xenofoms for the Dark Matter setting

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

If you have an idea for a new regular colum feel free to email us at: [lastresortmail@yahoo.com](mailto:lastresortmail@yahoo.com)

## Article Guidelines

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

## Art Guidelines

1. Art must be submitted as jpeg files. At a minimum, the art must be the size it will be when placed in the magazine at 150 dpi. It is better to go bigger than smaller.
2. Send title and/or captions (if applicable) for the piece, as well as artist name to insure proper credit.
3. For files larger than 500K email your intention to submit the picture to: [lastresmail@yahoo.com](mailto:lastresmail@yahoo.com)

# LIVING SPELLS

by Derek Holland

A living spell is an ooze that is made from one or more spells. Because I am going to use Red Dragon's complex spells for the examples here, I am personally limiting the idea to one spell. Red Dragon's rules can be found on the main page of the AlternityRPG.net website in the Resources section.

## Living Spell Template

Abilities STR X, DEX 1/2 X, CON X, INT 0, WIL 1/2 X, PER X. X=the rank of the spell that when casted formed the ooze.

Action Check is reduced by 3. Oozes are slow creatures.

Speed is reduced by 4 steps on the movement chart (to the minimum).

Durability is CON multiplied by 2 for stun and wound and by 1 1/2 for mortal and fatigue.

No skills with the exception of Awareness- perception.

Attacks are a single pseudopod each phase. Damage is d4s/d6s/d4w LI/O adjusted by strength. They have no armor. As an ooze, they are not affected by mental effects (eg telepathy).

The ooze is one cubic meter and two kilograms per rank.

Spells that can be used to create a living spell must affect an area effect and/or has a duration, does not affect the caster only, summons any creature or requires a complex check. So no enchant an item, metamagic, or metasurgery.

The physical contact with a living spell inflicts the spell upon the object or creature making contact. The spell is resisted as if the same casting occurred that created the ooze.

## Glow Ball

(Living Gleaming Spell cast at 8th rank)

STR 8 INT 0  
DEX 4 WIL 4  
CON 8 PER 8  
Dur 16/16/12/12 AC 2+/1/-/-  
Move Sprint 6/ Run 4/ Walk 2 # Actions 1

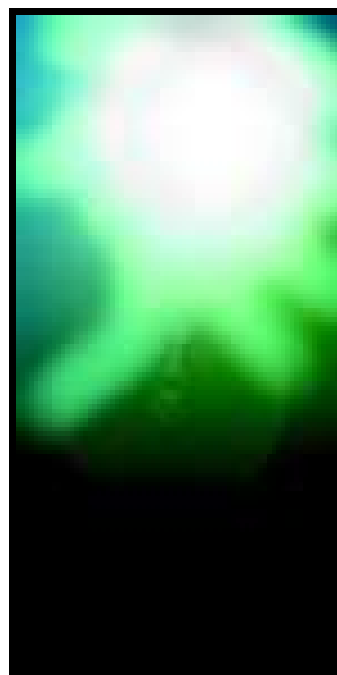
Attack  
pseudopod 4/2/1 d4s/d6s/d4w LI/O

Defenses  
-2 vs Melee  
-3 vs Ranged

Skill  
Awareness- perception 12 (16)

This glow ball is a very obvious creature- it makes every thing it touches glow at Good intensity. The ground, the walls, trees, animals, and people that it feeds on. This ooze was created by a Good casting. So it is 8 cubic meters and 16 kilograms in size.

Other living gleaming spells could create Marginal light or Amazing darkness. It depends on the casting that created it.



# Clogger

(Living Web Spell cast at 10th rank)

STR 10 INT 0  
DEX 5 WIL 5  
CON 10 PER 10  
Dur 20/20/15/15 AC 2+/1/-/  
Move Sprint 6/ Run 4/ Walk 2 # Actions 1

Attack  
pseudopod 5/2/1 d4s/d6s/d4w LI/O

Defenses  
-1 vs Melee  
-3 vs Ranged

Skill  
Awareness- perception 4 (8)  
The clogger is called so because it fills the whole area with webbing. It looks like it is made of white stands bound tightly together. It is 10 cubic meters and 20 kilograms in size. It tends to have a height of one meter and leaves webbing up to this height. Because of the high caster level, the webbing is fire resistant and causes paralysis.

Additional rank benefits for Web:  
6th- the webbing burns at half the normal rate.  
8th- the webbing burns at 1/10th the normal rate.  
10th- any contact with the webbing forces a Con feat check. Any failure results in paralysis for a duration on how well the spell was cast- 1 minute (O), 5 minutes (G), one hour (A).

# Flinger

(Living Reverse Gravity Spell cast at 10th rank)

STR 10 INT 0  
DEX 5 WIL 5  
CON 10 PER 10  
Dur 20/20/15/15 AC 2+/1/-/  
Move Sprint 6/ Run 4/ Walk 2 # Actions 1

Attack  
pseudopod 5/2/1 d4s/d6s/d4w LI/O

Defenses  
-1 vs Melee  
-3 vs Ranged

Skill

Awareness- perception 2 (6)

The flinger sends everything it contacts into the air even if there is no surface above it. All objects are sent 2d6 meters into the air and suffer falling damage if they strike anything and when falling back to earth.

A flinger is a jet black ooze that is 10 cubic meters and weights 20 kilograms. It keeps a height of 1/4 of a meter and thus covers 40 square meters and leaves damaged objects in its wake.

## Plot Seeds

Dark Matter:

A creature of amazing darkness has been released from its ancient sleep. Somehow the souls of those trapped in the grave site have called it into being.

It could be sent to get revenge for the dead or it could just be a mindless monster summoned by their grief and rage.

Gamma World:

Experiments in psychic energy created several unnatural creatures. This lab has recently been found and opened. Unfortunately this has released the psychic phenomenon that allows living ooze creatures to exist. On Gamma Terra these are not magical phenomenon, instead they are violent psychic energy.

# Magic Mutants

by Derek Holland

Ways of altering heroes and SCMs through the supernatural.

In 2002 Bastion Press released their campaign setting and in doing so came up with the idea of prestige races. The basic idea was that people living on a planet that is a prison for a trapped god can tap into the excess energy the god creates and alter their very nature. I have been working on various ways of converting this concept to Alternity and here are some rules and ideas on how to use them.

None of this is set in stone and I try to give as many variant rules as I can and also note I use the term *defects* instead of drawbacks.

## Gamemasters Note

If you use these rules, please keep an eye on balance and player over enthusiasm otherwise the heroes might not have the skill points needed for the adventures you plan.

One way is to allow the player to pick some concept that he wants his hero transform into be it a flyer, elemental or telepath. After the GM okays the basic concept, the player must select and or create mutations that will give him the end result he desires. To preserve balance, the hero must spend 4 achievement points for every mutation point gained. So when a hero gains a level, the player can decide to spend some or all of the earn APs to gain the mutations. Some GMs may want to limit this to one or two mutations per level and others may not depending on the events of his setting.

Another way of preserving balance is

to require that all APs earned be turned into mutation points and any points left over are lost. This may seem harsh, but realize that the hero is going through physical and mental changes that will make him superior to his unaltered teammates in various ways. In high-powered games, the GM may want to reduce the number of APs needed to buy mutation points to 3 or 2. In low powered games, the GM should limit the number of mutation points that can be bought (I personally suggest not more than 3).

If the GM is going to use this in his campaign, a source of the magic to cause the change must be decided or created. Some suggestions include gods, magical artifacts or locations, powerful spirits, dragons, the elements, demons, and magic itself. Some examples use current and altered mutations, some of which are found in the Gamma World book.

## Setting:

The setting is a archipelago and the communities are small and entirely human. The sources of power are small gods found in the form of statues found on each island. Only the extremely devout can ask for the transformation. The GM might require a 14 Wil (or higher) for this. And the GM may require that once a transformation has begun, it can not stop until finished (subsequent levels must be used for the transformation).

Our player wants his hero to become a sea child. The problem is that there are two varieties: those that are like fish and can't breathe air and those like frogs who can't dive very deep. The player picks the latter.

The mutations he picks are an altered form of gills (called amphibious), environmental adaptation (aquatic), enhanced reflexes, oversized limbs, and night vision. That is a total of 6 mutation points so he needs 24 APs to make the complete change. When the hero attains the 4th level, he gets a total of 21 APs. He can chose to spend most of them to get amphibious, environmental adaptation, enhanced reflexes and oversized limbs (for a total of 20 APs spent) and save the last one for next level. Or his GM might require him to buy only one mutation and that the mutations must be purchased in an order that makes sense for the transformation.

Player number 2 wants a flyer. The mutations he picks are wings, skeletal enhancement (for falls), increased speed, a new Ordinary mutation called feathers (protects against cold and assists in flight), and natural attack (talons) for a total of 48 APs. That is what you get for 2 Amazing mutations.

The player can burn up to 7 levels (when he gets 51 APs) on this. That is a lot of skill points gone, but the transformation gives the hero many abilities above and beyond his team mates.

If either player uses his new powers against his hero's god, the god will most likely inflict 2d4 points of defects on the hero.

Player number 3 has a demon worshipping hero that wants an easy road to success. The cost however is grave, for every 2 mutation points the hero buys, he also gets 1 point of defects. The demon does not inform his faithful of this fact until they are horribly altered. The demon makes another offer: in exchange for the hero's work, the defects will be removed.

A location based nexus of power involves a fountain. All those who bathe in it gain a number of mutations based on a Physical Resolve check at a 3 step penalty: a Critical Failure kills the hero, a Failure inflicts d2 defect points on the hero, an Ordinary result earns the hero 1 mutation point, a Good result earns the hero 2 mutation points and Amazing earns the hero 4 mutation points.

If the hero is stupid enough to bathe again, the check is at a 6 step penalty and has the following results: a Critical Failure or Failure results in death for the hero, an Ordinary result inflicts d4+1 defect points, a Good result inflicts d2 defect points and an Amazing result inflicts 1 defect point on the hero.

Some examples of new mutations for the 3 heroes above:

## Amphibious

Ordinary, Permanent, CON

The mutant has the ability to hold his breath for twice as long as well as swim twice as fast.

## Feathers

Ordinary, Permanent, CON

The mutant has a one step bonus to both

Acrobatics-*flight* checks and Stamina-*endurance* checks cause by cold conditions.

## Good Fortune

Amazing, Activated, Per

The mutant has a four-step bonus to any skill check that has the chance of making him money as well as a two-step bonus to any other Interaction check.

## Twisted Limb

Moderate, Permanent, CON

The mutant has an arm or leg that feels constant pain. If a leg is affected, reduce speed by 1/4. If an arm is affected, a two-step penalty affects all the hero's physical skills that require that arm. Also the GM should make additional penalties occasionally due to the pain.

## Lesion

Slight, Permanent, CON

The mutant has somewhere on his body a painful looking lesion. To those who can see it, the mutant has a two-step penalty to all Interaction checks. Lesions that are inflicted by a demons curses are usually hidden by clothing.

An alternate method of increasing power uses improved/enhanced/hyper type mutations. The hero must buy them in order, and may have to wait two or more levels in between or the GM may require that they be bought in succession to reflect the change in the hero.

If this method is used alone, I suggest that the costs be reduced to 2 APs for Ordinary mutations, 6 APs for Good mutations and 8 APs for Amazing mutations. This keeps the costs almost the same as in the base method.

Some examples of new mutations using the elements:

## Fire

Ordinary- Reduce fire damage taken by the hero to 1/2. Gain a fire attack like pyrokinesis (rank 1) from the GMG.

Good- Reduce fire damage to 1/4. Increase fire attack to rank 5.

Amazing- Hero is immune to fire and heat damage. Hero can change his form to fire for 10 + CON modifier minutes per day.



## Water

Ordinary- Hero's swim speed doubles and can hold his breath for twice as long.

Good- Swim speed quadruples and the hero can breathe water.

Amazing- Swim speed is 12 times normal. Hero can change his form to water for 10 + CON modifier minutes per day.

## Earth

Ordinary- Hero's flesh hardens and gains the following armor: d4/d4/d4 (LI/O) and gains 2 points to his CON.

Good- The hero's speed is reduced to half as his toughness becomes Good.

Amazing- Armor increases to 3d4/d6+2/d6+2 (LI/G) as speed is halved again. Hero can change his form to clay for 10 + CON modifier minutes per day.

## Air

Ordinary- Hero can glide (as per the mutation) and cause a strong gust of wind (15 mph) once per hour for 1 minute. Any better ideas?

Good- Hero can fly and create a burst of air (range 20 m) that does d4+4s/d6+4s/d12+4s (LI/O) to all in 10 meters once per minute.

Amazing- Hero's fly speed doubles. Hero can change his form to air for 10 + CON modifier minutes per day.

The powers that come with the change of one's form into an element is left to the player and GM.

So far I have been mentioning using these rules for heroes, but they can work for SCMs as well. Goblins who worship an ancient dragon gain the ability to spit fire and fly, fairies that serve the forest spirit gain the ability to "eat" sunlight and grow a bark like skin, and humans that serve the water spirit of a swamp gain the ability to breathe water and see in the dark.

Some other uses for this include maturity of a species (they "mutate" as they age), curses that may or may not be purchased, and gaining power that only the inhuman can gain (very powerful magic).

This also can be used in a sci-fi setting that does have some supernatural elements. I don't want to spoil the contents of Externals, but suffice to say that some of the magic in that Star\*Drive

book could be replaced or augmented with these rules.

If you have any questions or comments, here is the thread I started on A.net on these rules:

<http://alternity.net/onlineforums/index.php?act=ST&f=26&t=2768>

## Plot Seeds

Dark Matter:

As the tide of Dark Matter rises the world gets stranger and stranger. A priest has been corrupted and now preaches of the power that can be had by bathing in the tainted well.

He sends forth his warped and twisted brethren to bring further converts to the worship of the well.

Gamma World:

There was a time when many cultures throughout the world believed in animal spirits would could grants gifts to those who respected and worshipped them. The rise of technology and civilization all but buried these beliefs.

Now that both those forces no longer rule the world, some have begun to sense the return of the powerful nature spirits.



# ONE STAT: MANY MONSTERS

by Derek Holland

A new source of creature stats. Part I.

One possibly untapped source for creature stats is the ability to use one set, slightly altered or not, for many different species. The easiest way of explaining this is with examples.

Using the crocodile stats from the GMG (p.233), I have created the following creatures for Star\*Drive and or Gamma World:

**Grenslag** are mutant snakes that use a set of razor sharp scales on the tail to slash prey to death. An adult is around four meters long, green and light blue. The tail has several dozen sharpen scales on either side and are used to puncture the hide of prey. They are not poisonous and do not have fanges. Their teeth are even in size and break off into the prey fairly easily (they regenerate teeth all the time). They hide underwater (add gills) and wait for their prey to drink. Use the bite damage for the tail and the tail damage for the bite.

**Herger** are oversized terrestrial hermit crabs with claws like a fiddler crab. They look like boulders along paths and sit motionless unless they are hungry. The bite damage is used for the more powerful claw and the tail damage is used for the weaker claw. Add chameleon flesh and two points to their low impact armor rating.

**Sobos** are tree dwelling gastropods that use either a bite or a tail attack after falling on their target. The basic shape of a sobo is a flattened oval with four anterior tentacles and a mouth on the anterior underside of the body. They are immune to bludgeon attacks and falls under fifteen meters due to their very soft flesh. They have segmented shells like a chiton which provides them the listed amount of armor.

**Kentil** are large rodents that have nasty claws on their hind feet. They run down their prey and leap on it en masse using their weight (15 Kg) to help their claws slash into the prey. They run as bipeds

but walk on all fours. Most of the time, to those who don't recognize them, they look very docile. Add 5 meters to all speeds except swim which is dropped. Tail lash damage is used for their bite and bite damage is used for their claws.

**Gardins** are armored, carnivorous fish that hunt in the shallows of swamps. They have strong fins that allow them to move on land, but rarely they use that ability. They drag themselves through very shallow water to move to different seep areas if swimming is not possible. They are flat like a catfish and will hide themselves in the mud. Eliminate tail attack, sprint and run movement rates, and add six ranks of hide.

**Flensags** are pack hunters. They are low to the ground with strong limbs for sustained movement. Adults are 2.5 meters long and have six legs. They hunt in the overgrowth of jungles and temperate forests. A pack hunts like wolves and is generally made up of four to twenty members, depending on the amount of food. Remove tail attack, reduce armor by half, increase speed by two steps on the chart and add 6 ranks of Movement-*race*.

I hope to make this a column with one or two sets of stats expanded upon in each issue of Last Resort.

# THE 23RD CENTURY SOLDIER: THE 366TH ORBITALS “LEAPERS”

by Shadow Priest

## Mission Statement: Orbital Strike Forces

While orbital insertion tactics have been used since the early 21st century, the tactic didn't come into widespread use until the early 22nd due to increased space program funding, and the resultant militarization of space. The first mass orbital attack occurred during the Anglo-American war of 2108, but the strike suffered severe casualties, and the maneuver was not attempted again (en masse) during the entire eight year span of the war.

However, drop tactics have evolved since then, and though Near-Earth space has been declared a demilitarized zone, the tactics has been put to use in several inter-stellar conflicts, usually with large success.

The Leapers are still technically tasked under the Marine Corps, but their charter is specific to drop operations only, though its not irregular to see Orbitals attached to other marine

squads should a mission involve a drop. In short, Orbitals are a first strike force tasked with attacking strategic objectives without warning and clearing a path for a regular invasion force. The lightning speed and precision of these attacks, coupled with the soldiers gear and training makes them a formidable fighting force.

Unlike paratroopers, instead of relying on the speed of the main invasion force, Orbitals set the pace of the battlefield, if they are unsuccessful in taking a beach head, invasion forces *cannot* land to reinforce them. Additionally, although its fighting forces are generally what Orbitals are known for, their combat engineers are

where their true strength lies; without these brave men and women, *no reinforcements* would be able to land safely.

## Brief History of the Orbital Strike Forces

2028 – A squad of UN Special Forces becomes the first Orbital Strike Force when they use a shuttle transport to rapidly deploy to battlefields in Iran.

2056 – The UN commissions the first standing orbital strike force, several countries follow suit, USA and Great Britain task these duties to their Marine Corps.

2073 – Orbital strike forces see widespread use in Northern China.

2108 – The United States of North America launches a massive orbital strike against British assets in the middle east, the raids suffer heavy losses while airborne demonstrating the difficulty of orbital attacks on well defended air space.

2156 – Orbital strike forces are the deciding factor in

the “June War” on Mars.

2184 – Foundation of the 366th Orbital Strike Division of the UN Peacekeeper Corps, establishing Orbital Strike troops as their own branch with dedicated support, equipment, and infrastructure.

2199 – 366th is sent on its first major mission at Alpha Centauri to put down an armed rebellion. This mission serves as a major benchmark in Orbital Warfare History.

Orbitals are similar to Paratroopers of years-gone-by in some regards: they are dropped behind enemy lines ahead of a main invasion force to capture strategic objectives in support of a main invasion force.

The most notable historical example of this is the Invasion of Normandy in June 1944 when soldiers from the American 101st Airborne Infantry Division landed ahead of the main Allied invasion force and captured key strategic objectives.)

## The 366th, Perfection

The 366th was founded on the basis of one principle; Orbital Strike Forces are only as lethal as they are fast.

By establishing the 366th as a Standalone unit the UN military has allowed us to function more effectively, and more freely. The designation of ships under 366th command further increases this freedom, and allows us to function without necessitating Naval contribution.

Since our inception the 366th has been undefeated in battle, and we have refined the art of orbital strike warfare into a palpable science. Our tactics are recognized as the most dynamic, and the most lethal of any force in the field. We are trained to do what no one else can do, and to succeed doing it. We are the 366th, and we are the future of warfare.

### Tactics: An Orbital Strike in Action, Landing En Masse

#### Prephase:

Mother ship(s) emerge from Drivespace in low orbit over the planet, bombardment and landing begins immediately upon target confirmation. This prevents a planet's sensors from detecting the craft on approach.

#### Phase 1, Zero Hour:

Drop pods land Combat Engineers and Stand-off Infantry. The engineers clear an LZ while the Standoff units secure it and create a perimeter.

Extensive jamming and orbital weapons strikes (including counter-battery fire) occur at this phase, as the drop pods are vulnerable to ground fire.

#### Phase 2, Zero Hour + 0030-0100:

Light shuttles land, deploying light cavalry and additional stand-off infantry. Light vehicles including APCs, IFVs, and light artillery are also deployed. The cavalry and mechanized standoff units push into enemy territory, neutralizing remaining weapons batteries. Mother ships withdraw if necessary due to ground fire.

#### Phase 3, Zero Hour + 0300-0600:

Heavy landing craft land, deploying the bulk of the invasion force as well as heavy cavalry, large support vehicles and CAS craft. The heavy cavalry and tank squads move to reinforce the infantry on the front lines, adding to the outward momentum. CAS craft are assigned to air superiority missions and the harassment of targets of opportunity, as well as precision strikes against strategic objectives.

#### Phase 4, Zero Hour + 1200-4800:

Once the batteries capable of damaging the mother ships are destroyed, the carrier vessels return to orbit, launching further orbital weapons strikes and

retrieving wounded personelle and damaged craft. Regular troops are landed on the "beach-head" to reinforce and relieve orbital forces.

### Tactics: An Orbital Strike in Action,

For this article the main body of Orbitals has been assumed to be equal to or greater than division strength, or about 6,000-10,000 men (Including support staff). In games set in the Star\*Drive universe, dedicated Orbital forces will probably be much larger, perhaps including as much as an army or more. However, Orbitals are very expensive soldiers to create and maintain, and this should be noted in any setting.

En Masse strikes on hardened targets usually follow intensive orbital bombardment from Naval Vessels. Additionally, en masse strikes will not, or perhaps cannot occur without first achieving air (space) superiority, landing "into the guns" of the enemies fleet is pure unadulterated insanity, and tantamount to suicide.

While the relative accuracy of the Stardrive seems to be in question, for the purposes of this article, given the data of the target, the skill of the navigators and the quality of the ships navigational systems it is assumed that Stardrives are accurate.

## Special Forces

### Phase 1, Zero Hour:

Heavy cavalry land via individual orbital insertion and establish a foothold.

### Phase 2, Zero Hour + 0045-0200:

When anti-orbital batteries are destroyed, drop pods containing light cavalry and additional heavy cavalry (or stand-off troops should the mission require) units are dropped, the mission proceeds.

### Phase 3, Zero Hour + Mission Time:

Dropships retrieve the Special Forces units and return to base.

### Psychology of the Elite:

#### Inside the Mind of a Leaper

There is no such thing as a standard drop troop; they range in experience from hand picked rookies to life time veterans. They range in motivation from fanatical purists, to "last-chancers," soldiers on the brink of court-martial or worse. However, there is one defining quality, universal to Orbitals; they are absolutely fearless. An Orbitals entire job is to hold off the enemy until reinforcements can arrive, and they will fight as long as it takes.

An Orbital strike is often an all or nothing attack, Orbitals can lay down devastating firepower over a short period of time, but they are not a standing fighting force. To reinforce this idea among ranks, its not uncommon for soldiers not to be given rations to take on missions. This harsh reality is not lost on Orbitals, and many develop cocky, elitist attitudes towards each other and their brethren.

Their situation can also elicit some strange behavior at home. While the Corp frowns on the hedonistic and/or bizarre practices of the errant of these soldiers, their record in the field is beyond reproach, and many generals have come to overlook the otherness of the Orbitals in the face of such results.

To other military forces, the Orbitals

are elites, a thing to be feared and respected. While some soldiers aspire to join their ranks, most are fairly hostile towards them, whether out of jealousy, fear, or the oddness that comes with seeing this near-feral force in action or at home.

Despite the disciplinary problems this implies Drop Troops are quite adept at keeping their own; Officers rely heavily on enlisted men being a self-policing force. When not at work or at play, Orbitals train with an almost religious fervor. Most training revolves around armor operation and marksmanship, but stamina and strength training are also very large parts of the regimen.

Augmented Soldiers make up a good deal of the Orbitals ranks, be they cybernetically or genetically altered. Cybertech is fairly restricted however, a soldier with unhardened Cybertech (I.e. CT vulnerable to EMP) will not be allowed into the field, the most common forms of CT in the ranks are endoskeletons, subdermal armor, and CF skinweave; bioart is popular among the

younger Leapers and often displays rank, serial and squad insignia.

Genetically modified soldiers are very common among Orbital ranks when compared to other military forces, other forces cannot afford to

have a soldier that is

uniquely vulnerable to bioweapons, but with the Leapers, this is not a problem, firstly due to the nature of their armor (NBC Rated) and the duration of their maneuvers (Usually under 48-72 hours) both minimizing exposure.

### The Armory

Orbitals use a vast amount of weapons and armor to accomplish their objectives. Most are high power, high rate of fire weapons designed to be as effective as psychological weapons as they are against physical targets. This philosophy is epitomized by the Orbitals hybrid Gauss/Charge weapons, be they MW2 Hybrid Pistols, MW9 Hybrid rifles, or the MWAGC 12.7 millimeter rotary hybrid cannon.

Numerous other, more exotic weapons are put to use in special rolls. For example the

In the Star\*Drive universe, individual soldiers will vary depending on parent nation, while a Thuldan and an Austrin Orbital squad serve much the same purpose, they probably have very little in common.



M36 Flamethrower is often put to use during close fighting, as is the MWG Mass weapon series. For more open combat there are numerous options, such as Bantam missile launchers, Rocket Launchers, MW121 Pulse Cannons, Mortars, or long-range rifles.

While more varied the Orbitals armor is no less impressive. Troops receive standardized armor depending on their position. Stand-off Troops and Combat Engineers are issued MA3 Cerametal armor, which, while designed with economy in mind, is none-the-less lighter, cheaper and more effective than previous Polymeric equivalents. Heavy Stand-Off Soldiers are issued MA12 armor, a relatively new armor that was designed specifically for firepower instead of mobility. The Cavalry has a wider spread of armor, and is commonly mission specific, however, all cavalry armor is flight capable, the most common types are the MA9 and the MA9E, a Scout Neutronite Bodytank; the MA10, a Heavy Neutronite BT; and the MA17, an armor developed recently that is fully flight capable.

## Small Arms

### MW2 8mm Hybrid Pistol

**Availability:** Controlled

**Cost:** \$600

**Mass:** 1.2 kg

**Payload:** 8mm Armor Piercing Bullet

**Accuracy:** -1

**Actions:** 4

**Mode:** F/B/A

**Type/Firepower:** HI/O

**Damage:** d4+1w/ d6w/ d4+1m

**Range:** 10/20/80 meters

**Hide:** +2

**Clip/Charge Size:** 18

**Clip/Charge Cost:** \$90

Notes: The MW2 is loaded with Armor Piercing Bullets by default, subtract 2 from the targets armor roll; alternatively, explosive rounds can be used, add +2 to the damage roll. By default the weapon includes a battery that is good for 2 clips, however Military Grade Magazines include a charge cell, standard magazines can be purchased at \$40 (include standard ammo). Firing on auto nullifies this weapons accuracy modifier.

### MW9 10mm Hybrid Rifle

**Availability:** Military

**Cost:** \$1,800

**Mass:** 2.6 kg

**Payload:** 10mm Bullet

**Accuracy:** -1

**Actions:** 4

**Mode:** F/B/A

**Type/Firepower:** HI/O

**Damage:** d6+1w/ d6+3w/ d6+1m

**Range:** 80/ 200/ 800 meters

**Hide:** -

**Clip/Charge Size:** 40 rounds/ 13 Bursts

**Clip/Charge Cost:** \$130

Notes: The MW9 is loaded with Armor Piercing Bullets by default, subtract 2 from the targets armor roll; alternatively, explosive rounds can be used, add +2 to the damage roll. By default the weapon includes a battery that is good for 3 clips, however Military Grade Magazines include a charge cell, standard magazines can be purchased at \$60 (Include standard ammo). This weapon often includes an underslung grenade launcher (PHB Stats). Also comes in Silenced Mode, MW9SD; subtract 1 from all damage figures and decrease ACC to 0, sound decreases to Marginal.

### MW11 12.7mm Hybrid Machine Gun

**Availability:** Military

**Cost:** \$8,500

**Mass:** 18.6 kg

**Payload:** 12.7mm Bullet

**Accuracy:** -1

**Actions:** 4

**Mode:** F/B/A

**Type/Firepower:** HI/G

**Damage:** d8+1w/ 2d6+2w/ d8+1m

**Range:** 220/ 700/ 1400 meters

**Hide:** -

**Clip/Charge Size:** 60 Bursts

**Clip/Charge Cost:** \$440

Notes: The MW11 is loaded with Armor Piercing Bullets by default, subtract 2 from the targets armor roll; alternatively, explosive rounds can be used, add +2 to the damage roll. By default the weapon includes a battery that is good for 1 clips, however Military Grade Magazines include a charge cell, standard magazines can be purchased at \$200.

## Heavy Weapons

### MW6 90mm Mortar

**Availability:** Military

**Cost:** \$2,750

**Mass:** 15kg (gun, targeting Computer) 3kg (bipod) 2kg/shell

**Payload:** Magnetically Accelerated Mortar Round

**Accuracy:** -1

**Actions:** 2

**Mode:** F

**Type/Firepower:** By Munitions

**Damage:** By Munitions

**Range:** 450m/ 4000m/ 10,000m (Minimum 50 Meters)

**Hide:** -

**Clip/Charge Size:** 1

**Clip/Charge Cost:** By Munitions

**Skill:** Heavy Weapons - Indirect Fire

Note: Fire computer adds no additional bonuses. Calculating a shot requires 2 turns. Can be mounted on an MA12 for 2

Hullpoints, if so consider it to have a clip of 5.

### MW121 Pulse Cannon

**Availability:** Restricted

**Cost:** \$13,200

**Mass:** 30 kg (Gun), 20 kg (Tripod/Assembly), 40 kg (Microreactor)

**Payload:** Broadband Energy Wave

**Accuracy:** -1

**Actions:** 2

**Mode:** F

**Type/Firepower:** EN/A

**Damage:** 2d4w/ 2d4+2w/ d6+2m

**Range:** 200/ 600/ 1800 meters

**Hide:** -

**Clip/Charge Size:** Special

**Clip/Charge Cost:** Special

**Skill:** Heavy Weapons – Direct Fire

Notes: The accompanying microreactor provides the MW121 with effectively unlimited ammunition, however, after each shot it requires a recharging period of three seconds (1 phase). Firing at this rate can overheat the weapon fairly quickly. This weapon takes 1 full turn to set up properly, and 1 phase to disassemble. The Pulse has a 4 meter area affect similar to that of an equivalent plasma weapon (Anything within four meters takes a good hit). Can be mounted on an MA12 for 4 Hullpoints.

## Armors

### MA3 Cerametal Power Armor

**Availability:** Military

**Cost:** \$5,600

**Mass:** 21kg

**Composition:** Neutronite Alloy

**Environmental Tolerance**

**Gravity:** G2-G3

**Radiation:** n/a

**Atmosphere:** A2-A3

**Pressure:** P1-P3

**Heat:** H1-H3

**Action Penalty:** +2

**Toughness:** Good

**LI/HI/En:** d6+1/ d8+1/ d6

**Hide:** -

**Effective Strength:** 15

**Skill:** Armor Operation – Powered Armor

Notes: Includes features similar to Polymeric Powered Armor (S\*D A&E Guide page 72).

### MA9 Light Neutronite Bodytank

(Stats as ABS-11 Dragoon Recon Armor, S\*D A&E Guide Page 74)

### MA9E Scout Neutronite Bodytank

**Availability:** Restricted

**Cost:** \$60,000

**Mass:** 60kg

**Composition:** Neutronite Alloy

**Environmental Tolerance**

**Gravity:** G0-G4

**Radiation:** R0-R4

**Atmosphere:** A0-A4

**Pressure:** P0-P4

**Heat:** H0-H4

**Action Penalty:** +3

**Toughness:** Good

**LI/HI/En:** 2d4+2/2d4+2/d8

**Hide:** -

**Effective Strength:** 15

**Skill:** Armor Operation – Powered Armor

Notes: Instead of a weapon system the MA9E includes a sensors/comms suite including an EM detector, Multiband Radar, Cellular Relay and a very powerful jammer (Range identical to Cellular Relay). The relay provides coverage to all cell comms within 300 kilometers and also provides encryption. For tactical engagements a force of MA9Es provides a

-2 Bonus to a Commander's Tactics check.  
Other features are standard.

**MA10 Heavy Neutronite Bodytank**  
(Stats as AAS-23 Titan Assault Armor, S\*D A&E  
Guide Page 74-75)

## MA12 Picket Armor

**Availability:** Restricted

**Cost:** \$60,000 (Unarmed)

**Mass:** 70kg + 15kg/HP

**Composition:** Neutronite Alloy

**Environmental Tolerance**

**Gravity:** G0-G4

**Radiation:** R0-R4

**Atmosphere:** A0-A5

**Pressure:** P0-P5

**Heat:** H0-H4

**Action Penalty:** +5

**Toughness:** Good

**LI/HI/En:** 3d4/3d4/2d4+2

**Hide:** -

**Effective Strength:** 17

**Skill:** Armor Operation – Powered

Notes: Can mount up to 4 hullpoints of vehicular  
weaponry at the cost of the unit's flight pack.

Other than the flight pack the unit  
includes standard features for a Heavy NBT and  
can move 50 kph over clear terrain, 30 over  
broken (if the MA12 mounts 4 hullpoints of  
weaponry consider all movement over broken  
terrain).

## MA17 Flight Armor

**Availability:** Restricted

**Cost:** \$85,000

**Mass:** 60kg (Armor), 40kg (Wingpack)

**Composition:** Neutronite Alloy

**Environmental Tolerance**

**Gravity:** G0-G4

**Radiation:** R0-R4

**Atmosphere:** A0-A4

**Pressure:** P0-P4

**Heat:** H0-H4

**Action Penalty:** +5

**Toughness:** Good

**LI/HI/En:** 2d4+2/2d4+2/2d4+1

**Hide:** -

**Effective Strength:** 16

**Skill:** Armor Operation – Powered

Notes: Has an Acceleration of 300 meters/phase<sup>2</sup>,  
a top speed of 3,000 kph, a -2 handling rating, and

two missiles, either Air to  
Air or Air to Surface. This armor's flight is  
devoted completely to targeting and handling, and  
as such cannot support an operator program,  
reserving it for Expert BT pilots. All other features  
are standard.

## Vehicular Weapons

### MWAGC Hybrid Gatling Gun

**Availability:** Restricted

**Cost:** \$64,500

**Hull Points:** 4

**Payload:** 10mm Neutronite Spike

**Accuracy:** 0

**Actions:** 4

**Mode:** F/B/A

**Type/Firepower:** HI/A

**Damage:** d6+1w/ d6+1m/ d8+1m

**Range:** 250m / 1000m / 5000m

**Clip:** 45 50 Round Bursts

Notes: The MW11 is loaded with Armor Piercing  
Bullets by default, subtract 2 from the targets  
armor roll; alternatively, explosive  
rounds can be used, add +2 to the damage roll.

### MWAAM Anti-Air Missiles

**Availability:** Military

**Cost:** \$50,450

**Hull Points:** 2

**Payload:** Serrated Rod Warhead

**Accuracy:** -3

**Actions:** 1

**Mode:** F

**Type/Firepower:** HI/G

**Damage:** d8w/d8+2w/d6+1m

**Range:** 2km / 6km / 12km

**Clip:** 6

### MWATM Anti-Tank Missiles

**Availability:** Military

**Cost:** \$83,200

**Hull Points:** 2

**Payload:** Kinetic Penetrator

**Accuracy:** -3

**Actions:** 1

**Mode:** F

**Type/Firepower:** HI/A

**Damage:** d6+3w/d4+2m/d6+2m

**Range:** 1km / 3 km / 6 km

**Clip:** 6

**Calgary, Alpha Centauri, September 5th 2184**

**1755 Hours [Radio Report]**

“This is Colin Bryant reporting live from the field, troops at Fort Nelson have just been mobilized and it is believed that UN Military forces are moving into position for orbital bombardment, as you know, the UN ships have thus far been maintaining a blockade of Calgary, but have not made any hostile moves towards the New Government. They have however, given President Eliza Erikson 48 hours to step down, a deadline that is fast drawing near.”

*[Sound of engines firing up]*

“We’re seeing a lot of activity here, all fighters are being scrambled, just behind me pilots are rushing to their craft ... and it ... it appears that the infantry have been mobilized as well.”

*[Sounds of shouting, indistinct]*

“We’ve just been informed that Fort Nelson is being evacuated, I can see that the command staff are ...”

*[Huge Explosion]*

“OH MY GOD! We’ve just witnessed a massive explosion ... The runway is on fire, several fighter craft have been destroyed, just absolute ...”

*[Several more explosions in rapid succession, static]*

**1810 Hours [TV Feed]**

[Camera pans over the remains of Fort Nelson, the buildings have been reduced to ash, utterly destroyed fighters and vehicles lay strewn among the scenery, everything else has been reduced to ash, camera pans to reporter]

“Tom, this is the scene from Fort Nelson, a base that was attacked a little over fifteen minutes ago by UN forces in orbit. We’re getting reports from all over the planet of similar levels of devastation at military targets; bases, supply depots, shipyards, all wiped out.”

*[Switch to Reporter in a studio]*

“What can you tell us about the losses at Fort Nelson?”

*[Switch]*

“Tom it appears that the base suffered total casualties, the UN attack proceeded earlier than planned and Search and Rescue teams have not yet been able to locate a survivor; in all, its estimated that 598 brave men and women died in this vicious attack.”

*[Switch]*

“Can we expect similar results in other places?”

*[Switch]*

“So far Tom, the story is Fort Nelson was hit much harder than most bases ...”

*[Sounds of high pitched shrieking]*

“Tom! We appear to have incoming!”

*[Camera pans up, several objects dot the sky]*

“They appear to be ...”

*[Man’s voice, indistinct]*

“Yes! I’ve just confirmed that they are in fact drop pods Tom! The UN Forces have apparently ...”

*[Static, switch back to studio]*

“Uh ... Ladies and gentlemen, we seem to be having some interference with the transmission. Please stand by.”

**1828 [TV Feed]**

*[Camera shows several heavily armed and armored soldiers firing over an embankment, Reporters voice]*

“Tom! As you can see, we’ve been able to re-establish communication! I’ve been told that the earlier interference is in fact electronic jamming from the ships above, we’ve also been unable to establish satellite communication, the Military Personnel I’ve spoken to say its likely they’ve been destroyed, so we’ve switched to ...”

*[Gunfire, Indistinct shouting, sound of grenade exploding, camera pans back to soldiers, one fires a Shoulder Mounted Missile, pans back]*

“... we’ve switched to burst relay transmission...”

*[In studio]*

“Tell us the situation at Nelson.”

*[Switch]*

“Tom, its utter chaos, moments after we lost transmission UN drop pods landed in the



wreckage of the base and UN troops immediately began pouring into the streets. The soldiers on the ground were completely over-run. However reinforcements have arrived and I'm being told that the UN forces are now contained within ten kilometer radius of Nelson."

*[Switch]*

"Have there been any other reported attacks?"

*[Switch, Reporter is shouting over gunfire]*

"While the situation here is contained sources tell me that there is also huge numbers of troops landing in the Johari Flats, the soldiers I've spoken to tell me this attack is probably a diversion!"

*[Sound of Gunshots intensifies, shouting, camera drops suddenly to the ground, static]*

**1852 [TV Feed]**

*[Static, man's voice]*

"Is it on? I thought you said you had it fixed!"

*[Static fades, reporter appears again on screen]*

"Alright ... Tom, we're back on the air here at Wakefield ..."

*[Back in Studio, Female Anchor]*

"This is Julie Lund, what's the situation at Nelson?"

*[Switch, reporter is putting on a BPV, a rifle is leaning against the wall next to him, gunshots can be heard outside]*

"Julie, this is Brian Scott from Wakefield ... The situation at Nelson has gotten even worse, after we lost transmission UN Dropships began landing at Nelson, reinforcing the troops on the ground. Since then they've been advancing inward and have overrun much of the city."

*[Switch]*

"What about earlier? Weren't the UN Forces contained?"

*[Switch, reporter is holding rifle, staring at*

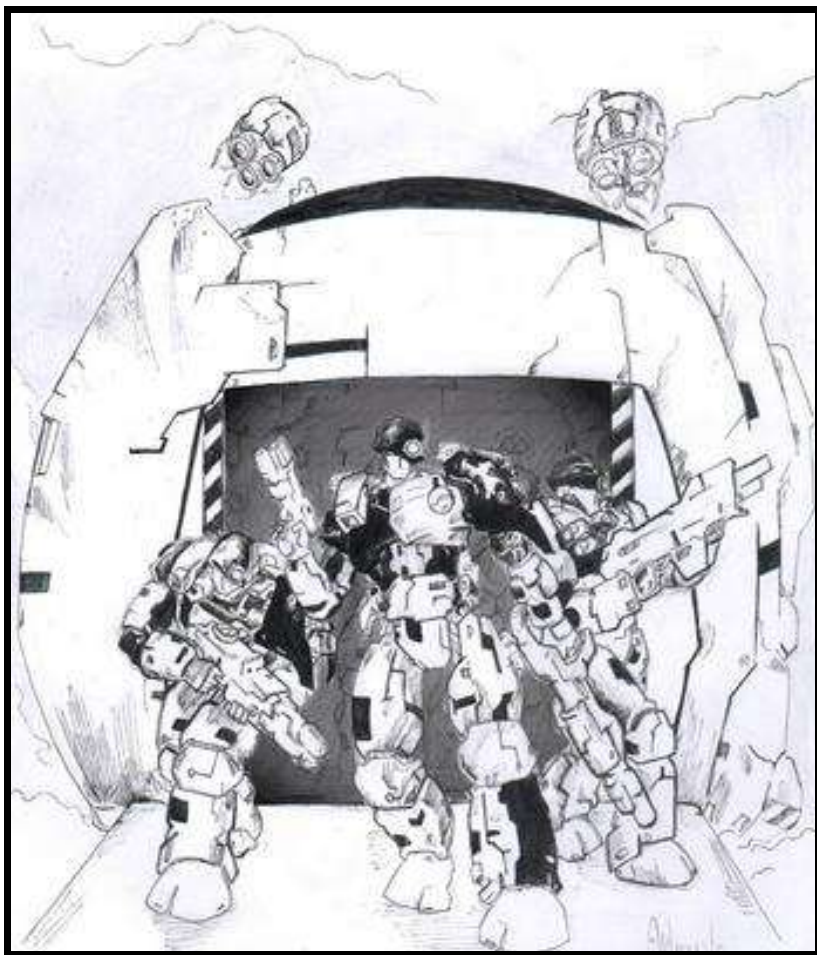
*door, whispering]*

"No Julie it would appear the UN troops that landed earlier were part of a pathfinder force sent to create a buffer around Nelson. When we got word that of incoming Dropships, they'd already started advancing again, and they were quickly reinforced from the Dropships."

*[Switch]*

"How are our troops holding up, Brian?"

*[Switch, camera is on the ground, reporter is off screen, whispering in the background]*



*[Switch]*

"Brian?"

*[Switch, camera tilts upwards, shows reporters face, Reporter Whispers]*

"Julie, our troops are being slaughtered, there's no better word for it ... the UN troops are extremely well armed and armored, and have been getting supporting fire from several low-flying destroyers and numerous other smaller craft since the advance started."

*[Reporter looks away, drops camera back down, whispering, Gunfire, Reporter shown thrown across the room, feed cut]*

*[Back in studio]*

“Ladies and gentlemen, the producers are telling me that we’ve lost the feed, we will, however, continue broadcast as long as possible, please stand by.”

## Aftermath:

The raid Orbital raid on Alpha Centauri took only 9 hours to establish a landing zone for the UN Army. Within 12 hours the combined force of the 366th and the 249th Armored Division had completely taken control of the capital city and had captured the rogue General Eliza Erikson. The casualties they inflicted on the rebel forces within the city are often described as horrific, but no official body count was ever taken.

## Definitions

**APC:** Armored Personnel Carrier, a troop carrying vehicle specifically designed to carry troops. Armor, armaments and speed vary. 366th APCs are Chimera Pattern APCs, and carry medium to heavy armament (depending on missile load-out), medium armor, and high speed.

**CAS:** Close Air Support, a craft deployed to work in forces with ground troops. Functions on the “Combined Force” principle. Armor, armament and speed varies. The 366th uses several CAS craft.

**Cavalry, Heavy:** Soldiers equipped with heavy bodytanks. May or may not have an ablative entry shield. Armament varies. May include tanks.

**Cavalry, Light:** Soldiers equipped with recon bodytanks. May or may not equip stealth units. Armament varies.

vehicle, similar to an APC, with the exception that an IFV sacrifices troop carrying abilities for heavier armament. Armor, armament and speed vary. The 336th uses several types of IFVs.

**LZ:** Landing zone, the initial target of Orbital forces, in simplest terms, an area of clear terrain in which it is safe to land and deploy troops and material.

**Stand-Off Infantry / (Mechanized):** Stand-off infantry are the basic infantry of the 366th (defined by other forces as Heavy Infantry). They are heavily armed, heavily armored, and sacrifice overland mobility for additional specialty equipment, weapons and armor. They lack the overall speed of their cavalry comrades, but the additional firepower and survivability makes them excellent for defense (Hence their name). They can be made more mobile by attaching APCs or IFVs to their squads. These combined force squads are called Mechanized Stand-Off Infantry.

# The Cyber Advantage

by SR Trudeau

## Introduction

For those heroes not fortunate enough to have been born with the gift of psionics, mutations or the ability to use FX, there is only one option remaining to raise themselves above their species' norm. Cybernetic enhancement.

At first glance, this option appears to be quite appealing. A few skill points, a bit of cash, and your hero is ready to take on the world. Maybe even the galaxy.

Not so fast, chromie, read the fine print. And the options. And the exceptions. And make a note to discuss the missing material with your GM. And don't forget to keep track of cykosis. And damage to your cybergear. Oh yeah, make sure you get a good (expensive) surgeon to avoid that cyber rejection thing. And... Hey, where are you going?

Are you wondering why cybertech isn't as smooth and easy as the other optional abilities? Do you wish there was a simpler, yet still balanced, way of handling it?

## Mission Possible

First off, let's dispose of the idea that a cybernetic implant is a tangible thing like a pistol or cell phone. From now on, there are no implants, just cyber advantages. Much like a perk, only this advantage must be purchased using three forms of currency: cyber tolerance, skill points and cash.

Of course, non-existent implants can no longer be targeted or damaged in

combat. Cybered heroes now take damage and heal just like non-cybered heroes. I have good reasons for removing this highly realistic vulnerability at this point, rest assured that it will reappear in a new form soon enough.

Second, let's simplify the functions and descriptions at the same time. Define a single function for each advantage and give it three power levels, one for each grade of Ordinary, Good and Amazing. To define this function even further, restrict it to the mechanics of game play. In other words, assign each function to a specific score on the hero's sheet.

Third, let's grant the implants independence. They no longer require the domination of a nanocomputer or the binding chains of cytronic circuitry. This also gives us the option of using the nanocomputer exclusively as an onboard Gridcaster, without having to share memory space with a collection of "dumb" implants.

The fourth item on our list concerns cyber tolerance. What's wrong with it? Nothing. In fact, let's use it to help us balance everything else. The concept of spending the same ten skill points whether the hero has one or eight implants is strange and it doesn't help us maintain a fair balance. Instead, let's make every cyber advantage cost a number of skill points equal to its cost in cyber tolerance. This way, the more complex or bulky an advantage is, the more training is required to get used to it. I know what you're thinking, that's going to get very expensive. However, compared to psionic or FX skills, it's still a bargain. Also, let's make the price of the advantage cost the same as its cyber tolerance cost times 1000. Sound strange? Believe it or not, the prices listed in Chapter 15: Cybertech of the Player's Handbook are very similar. Although our method is a bit more expensive, it isn't too off base.

For the fifth item, let's get back to the topic of damage to cyber gear. Instead of asking the GM to make a judgement call, let's define a system to handle this. Add a

cumulative +1 step penalty to each of the three spaces between the hash marks of the hero's cyber tolerance score. That penalty (+1, +2, +3) applies to any attempt to treat the hero's injuries, perform surgery (including the implantation of more cyberware) on the hero and all Resolve-*physical resolve* skill checks made during the process of healing.

Finally, let's take a stab at making cykosis a bit more flexible. There should be lots of things that could cause cykosis. However, there should also be a method of treatment. Even cyborg wannabes must have some friends and family who would surely intervene when they began noticing the changes in behavior. Perhaps law enforcement would be more likely to force a psychological examination on the more violent cyber users than just allow them to go cykotech and become a real problem. Let's choose a few of the riskier advantages and mark them with an asterisk. To balance this out, force a cykosis check only on Critical Failures and never dole out more than one point at a time. Regarding treatment, let's give the player a chance to reverse the damage by enabling the hero to seek therapy for his emerging cykosis. Let's make it expensive, though, say about five skill points per point of cykosis? Sure.

So what does all this mean? It's a simple slide from technological realism towards cinematic action. Fewer rules, short descriptions, simple concepts and (hopefully) a better gaming experience for everyone.

### Cybertech Examples

Although I encourage you to design your own cybertech items to suit your tastes, I thought a few examples of the more popular items might help you get started. As you will see, the descriptions are quite brief. Keeping the description short and to the point leaves very little to quibble about. It does precisely what it says and nothing more.

Unless the word "each" appears in

the title, the user may only choose an advantage once.

Statistics are given in Ordinary/Good/Amazing format.

#### Arm (each)

Size: 2/3/4

Effects: +1/+2/+3 STR (arm only)

#### Booster\*

Size: 1/2/3

Effects: -1/-2/-3 step Action Check

#### Cyberaudio (both ears)

Size: 1/2/3

Effects: see below

Ordinary Amplifier-Damper

Good Amp-Damper, Frequency Agile

Amazing Amp-Damper, FA, Noise Filter

#### Cyberoptics (both eyes)

Size: 1/2/3

Effects: see below

Ordinary Nightvision

Good Nightvision, Infrared

Amazing Nightvision, Infrared, Ultrasound

#### Increased Tolerance\*

Skill/Price: 4/6/8 (no Size cost)

Effects: +2/+3/+4 Cyber Tolerance score (first set of boxes)

Note: Upon successful implantation this procedure will add 1, 2, or 3 points (depending on grade) to the hero's cykosis score. This procedure, as well as the addition of cykosis points, is irreversible.

#### Leg (each)

Size: 1/2/3

Effects: +25%/+50%/+75% movement rate

Note: Round fractions down. Bonus is cumulative. So a pair of Good legs would increase movement rate by 100%.

#### Olfactory

Size: 1/2/3

Effects: -1/-2/-3 step bonus to Awareness-*perception* (odors).



### Psionic Energy Capacitor

Size: 2/3/4

Effects: +1/+2/+3 Psionic energy points

Note: User must be psionically active. Only the user can recharge his own capacitor. It costs 2 PEPs and requires 1 round for every PEP loaded into the capacitor.

### Ranged Weaponry Package

Size: 2/3/4

Effects: -1/-2/-3 step bonus (choose specialty skill)

Note: Skill choices available include Heavy Weapons-*direct fire* and any one of the specialty skills under Ranged Weapons, Modern and Ranged Weapons, Primitive (except *-sling*). Add 50% to the cost of every weapon used by this advantage.

### Reflex Wiring

Size: 3/4/5

Effects: +1/+2/+3 Dexterity score

### Regeneration Implant

Size: 1/2/3

Effects: 2x/3x/4x healing rate

Note: No effect on mortal damage.

### Skeletal Reinforcement

Size: 3/4/5

Effects: see below

Ordinary 3 stuns

Good 3 stuns, 3 wounds

Amazing 3 stuns, 3 wounds, 3 mortal

### Skill Processor (each skill)\*

Size: 1/2/3

Effects: -1/-2/-3 step bonus to any specialty skill

Note: Maximum number of processors equals Will divided by 3 (rounded down). Not cumulative with any other skill enhancing advantage.

### Subcutaneous Armor

Size: 2/3/5

Effects: see below

Ordinary d4(LI) d4(HI) d4(En)

Good d6(LI) d6(HI) d6(En)

Amazing d8(LI) d8(HI) d8(En)

### Synthetic Muscle

Size: 3/4/5

Effects: +1/+2/+3 Strength score

### Synthetic Organs/Glands

Size: 2/3/4

Effects: +1/+2/+3 Fatigue score

### Unarmed Attack Package

Size: 1/2/3

Effects: +1/+2/+3 point(s) of damage (on successful hit)

Note: Bonus only applies when fighting unarmed

### Announcement:

Cyber Shop will now be a regular feature of the Last Resort e-zine. In every issue Cyber Shop will offer something new in technology, gear, rules, enhanced critters, aliens and SCMs, as well as answer questions and accept articles for publication from you, the wise and loyal reader.

You can send your questions (or intention to write an article) to us here at LR (lastresortmail.yahoo.com) or to me directly at cyberfelinoid@yahoo.ca. Either way, please make sure you use "Cyber Shop" for the subject heading.

I'm excited to be involved in this project and will do my best to see it through as long as there are Alternity fans out there who want it. I also look forward to hearing from you, so dust off those nanocomps and get me those questions or ideas.

Sincerely,  
SR "Kzin" Trudeau

# Cook's Guide

by Montgomery Cook

Grith, the only Class I planet in this system, is technically a moon of the third planet of the system, Hydrocus. This jungle world features a native population of sesheyans, and is claimed by the Brethren of the Hatire Community. Originally



surveyed by StarMech Collective, their interests shifted from Corrivale, and specifically, Grith, to the Tendril system. StarMech sold the rights to the Hatires for settlement for 50 million Terran credits in 2319.

I arrived on the planet's only major spaceport via TDK Shuttle from the venerable *Lighthouse*, after re-supplying my lost items from my brief stay on Penates while on board, and charging the expenses to the *Guide's* main office. Upon arriving in Diamond Point's spaceport, I was dismayed to see the ruined conditions around me, fearing a replay of my Penates stay. After all, I had been warned, "visitors are to proceed with

caution". I learned some of Grith's history and culture from the Grid, noting with some alarm that piracy is a problem here (where *isn't* it in the Verge?). Some reports placed the blame on VoidCorp and its disagreement with the controversial ruling by Concord Administrator Ari Mahdra that favored the sesheyans claim. Get this: the sesheyans on Grith claim that they were plucked from their native Sheya over a thousand years ago by the former inhabitants of Grith. They claim that they were taken by the very same unnamed species whose artifacts and ruins dot the surface of Grith, and that Hatire colonists have studied in hopes of learning more of their venerated Cosimir. The Mahdra ruling firmly

places the Colonial Diocese as the sole recognized government on Grith.

The two inner planets, Inderon and Tricus are irradiated rocks, unsuitable for colonization, though mining companies have sprung up there. Hydrocus, the planet that Grith orbits appears huge in the Grith sky, as Grith

orbits every 14 standard days, with the ochre, yellow and reds readily apparent. Next out from Corrivale, lies the Inner Belt, an asteroid belt between Hydrocus and Lordan, unusual in its near spherical shape, surrounding the inner system. This belt is mined by a handful or so independent prospectors, and preyed upon by corsairs and pirates. Lordan, the fourth planet in this system, was aptly described by the initial StarMech survey: "Like Mars before the Solars terraformed it, only bigger". This terraforming issue, as I learned from my Grid research (after my stay on Penates, I'm no longer making planetfall without this, thank-you-very-much), is a hot legal

issue with claims to the uninhabited planet by the native sesheyans, the Colonial Hatires, and VoidCorp. The gas giant, Lectorion, is beyond doubt, the largest of the planets in this system, and is orbited by eleven moons, all uninhabited, but claimed by the Galactic Concord. This is the home of Omega Station, orbiting over the moon, Nike, and the Patrol Squadron 131 of Star Force. Following this lies the Outer Belt, which does not receive the attention of miners that the Inner Belt does. My journey will also include a stop to Iphus; a VoidCorp held ice world that produces processed ores mined here to quite a few other systems here in the Verge. Almaz & Chark, the last two planets of the Corrivale system, are frozen slush balls, unfit for human habitation.

I quickly learned of the power-players on Grith: the Colonial Diocese, the Aanghel Empire, and the Devli'yan. The latter two are groups of sesheyans, the former a loosely organized band of thugs and pirates, who abandoned the more traditional sesheyan ways, and the latter, the more "native". I booked my stay at the fine Diamond Point Plaza (\$ 200 Concord/night), and proceeded directly to the baccarat tables in the casino. Reconstituted by the Aanghels, I handily lost most of my hands, and much of my, or rather, the *Guide's* money. (This is business; after all... this is a business expense.) I think my dealer felt bad for me, and let me win my last hand as a consolation prize.

I hired a tour guide to take me to the Quenaalt ruins, a Ferdinand Heltbrenner, Hatire mind knight. Ferdinand, or as I like to call him, Fred, is a graduate of the Mindanaoth Academy, and was on leave from Forest Cathedral. The ruins are active with many archeological digs, and plenty of tourists. More than a few sesheyan bazaar vendors were hawking wares, and a few tried to sell the tourists some mugwort, a mild hallucinogen, openly. The "old ones" of Grith apparently abandoned the settlement about 5000 years ago, and very abruptly. It does not appear that these ruins are of Precursor origin, as I had asked the xenoarchaeologist, Dr. Ann Meyers, who was explaining her work in the ruins, and although there were plenty of artifacts, some suggesting the use of petrochemical power,

possibly pre-fusion tech, none are Precursor. She seemed rather patronizing in my line of inquiry to the Precursors, but it was a legitimate question, isn't it? Humph. Some doctor.

I spent some time visiting a Devli'yan settlement, along with my guide, Fred. Fred was clearly uncomfortable with this stop on my tour, but this tribe seemed to be friendly and open (as much as sesheyans are friendly and open, I guess), but got rather upset when I asked some more detailed questions about the "old ones". Touchy subject.

After a few days partying in some of the Aanghel clubs (the Hatires seem to pray for fun. *Booorrrriinnng!*), I departed Grith aboard the system ship, *Starrunner* for Iphus. The journey took about a day and a half, which passed without incident, unless you count getting violently constipated on their brand of canned rations. Iphus I, the primary settlement on Iphus, is a boring old mining town, which the tours of the mining facilities and processing plants were pretty educational, I guess. I'd much rather have stayed in my suite at the Corporate Travel Suites. These facilities are for the well heeled, (VoidCorp Employees of HA rank or higher), but are Spartan, and quiet. Too quiet. Well... Except for my setting off the smoke alarm with that mugwort pipe... Sorry about that.

After wrapping up my stay here in the Corrivale system, I'd have to say that this system has a lot of potential for development, and the Aanghels can really throw a good party... so long as you are respectful, and don't insult any Aanghel crime lord. I booked passage from Iphus aboard the passenger cruiser, VCT CL51478 (*Expediency*), bound for my next stop, the fledgling Kai system, and its rugged squatter colonists.

Yours faithfully,  
*Montgomery V. Cook*

# The Tesseract

by Dwayne L. Leonard

## Logs of the Starwind:

On the thirty-seventh day of our voyage into the beyond we have come across a strange sight. There is a ship of obviously alien design drifting in the asteroid fields of the twin suns of the Beta Orindi system.

I will give a short description of the physical characteristics of the ship before sending our boarding party over. The alien ship is triangular in appearance with a sort of flowing metallic hull. From the port (left) side of the ship a large barrel like object protrudes from the hull. This is probably a weapon but it could be a refueling nozzle or docking bracket. On the starboard side of the hull is a large extruded plate. It seems to serve no purpose, but I could be wrong about that. From just behind the cockpit to the aft of the ship a fin seems to run along the length of the ship down the center. At the aft end of the ship I can see a two engines and what appears to be a small docking bay.

Our boarding party will consist of the security officer and our engineer. At this point in time I believe just these two people are all that are needed to explore an obviously abandoned ship.

“This is Voss, I’ve suited up and I’m ready to go”

“Sergeant Elysa Wynn here, been waiting on you Voss”

Behind his blackened Visor Voss looks at Sergeant Wynn and smiles. He’s sure she knows that she looks good even in a space suit.

Sergeant Wynn releases the airlock door and prepares to make her way to the other ship. From her side she pulls out a grapnel gun and fires a magnetic hook attached to a tether over to the alien ship. She watches in annoyance as it slides off the fluid metal hull of the alien craft. Being a professional soldier Sergeant Wynn is prepared for this. She pulls another grapnel from her side and shoots it toward the alien craft. This second nanoweld tipped grapnel sticks to the semi-liquid surface of the alien ship. Sergeant Wynn hooks the tether to a hook on her own ship the Starwind and then through her space suit. She then activates her suit rockets and slides over to the other ship with Voss right behind her.



Voss calls to Sergeant Wynn, “it’s a good thing you’re such a good shot with that grapnel gun.”

“Why is that,” the Sergeant replies.

“Because,” Voss says, “If you hadn’t shot it so close to the airlock we would’ve had to walk across the hull without our magnetic boots.”

“Voss, Sergeant Wynn this is Captain Chase; use suit to suit laser links only we have two incoming space craft from different directions.”

Voss and Sergeant Wynn open the airlock and enter the alien craft. The first view from the inside of the alien craft is a hangar bay



that is much larger than it should be. Quickly making their way to the front of the hangar they find a small hatch on the starboard side that opens into a passageway and step through.

“My sensors show that upon leaving the hangar bay gravity has risen from .001 G to .937 G. This leads me to believe that whatever else we may find, whoever created this probably has similar physical requirement to our own.”

“Well that’s fine Voss, but do those fancy sensors in that glove of your tell you if anything or anyone is alive on this ship?”

“Sergeant my sensors don’t show any signs of life, but I seem to be getting some anomalous readings probably caused by that liquid metal used in the hull.”

“Well then Engineer Voss we’ll just have to do this the hard way and walk through the only door presented to us,” as the Sergeant draws her mass pistol.

Voss reaches out and opens the door. Sergeant Wynn springs forward and rolls through the door half expecting to get vaporized for her bravery. Instead she finds a control console for what looks like an engineering station. To the right, left, and straight-ahead are three more doors.

Quickly making her decision she steps through the door on the right to find what looks like a crew area. Just like Voss predicted the crew area seems to be setup for humanoid occupants. A quick search reveals no clue as to what these humanoids may have looked like.

Having made a quick once over at the engineering station Voss checks out the door to the left of where they entered. Inside is a weapons control console. Now he knows that the odd protrusion on the port side of the ship is actually a weapon of some sort.

Voss and Sergeant Wynn both make their way back to the engineering station so that they can enter the door to the front of the engineering cabin. Inside this room is the command deck for the craft. There is a console for the navigator and one for handling communications and the ships sensors.

“Hey sergeant how about we see if this thing has any power?”

“We might as well, because if it does we might not have to have it towed in.”

Voss returns to the engineering section and jacks his computer gauntlet into the station. After a few short moments the overhead lights come on and Voss knows that the ship still has power.

“Voss you need to get to the command deck now!”

“Why is that?”

“Well Voss it appears that the two ships that were approaching the Starwind earlier either blew it up or forced it to make starfall, and now they are battling to see who will get this ship.”

“Sergeant,” Voss speaks up, “It appears that this ship is equipped with some kind of star drive, and I think I can get it to work.”

“You’re the Engineer, but if you can’t get it to work I say we set this ship to destruct so that neither one of those other two ships can get it.”

After a few short minutes Voss and the Sergeant feel the shift to drivespace.

Ladies and Gentlemen this is how we acquired the alien ship designated as the Teseract for study.

It should be noted that the scout ship Starwind was lost battling two other space ships in the Beta Orindi System.

Found adrift in space the Teseract is an alien starship of unique design. The hangar bay appears to be made of a material that bends space in unusual ways. Calculations show that the hangar bay is exactly big enough to hold the Teseract itself.

# Teseract

PL 8

Cost: \$5.98 Million

Hull: Cutter (20 Durability)

Compartments: 3

Dur: 20

Maneuver Rating: 0

Acc: 3 Mpp

Cruise Speed: 2 AU/ Hour

Berthing: 6 Crew

Armament: Kinetic Lance

Defenses: None

Armor: Light Nanofluidic d8-1 LI/ d8-1 HI/ D8 En

Computer: Ordinary Computer Core

Engines: Inertial Flux Engine

Power: Dynamic mass reactors rated at 12 power factors

Drive: 5 light years per starfall

Hatches: Standard

## Weapon Data:

System: Kinetic Lance

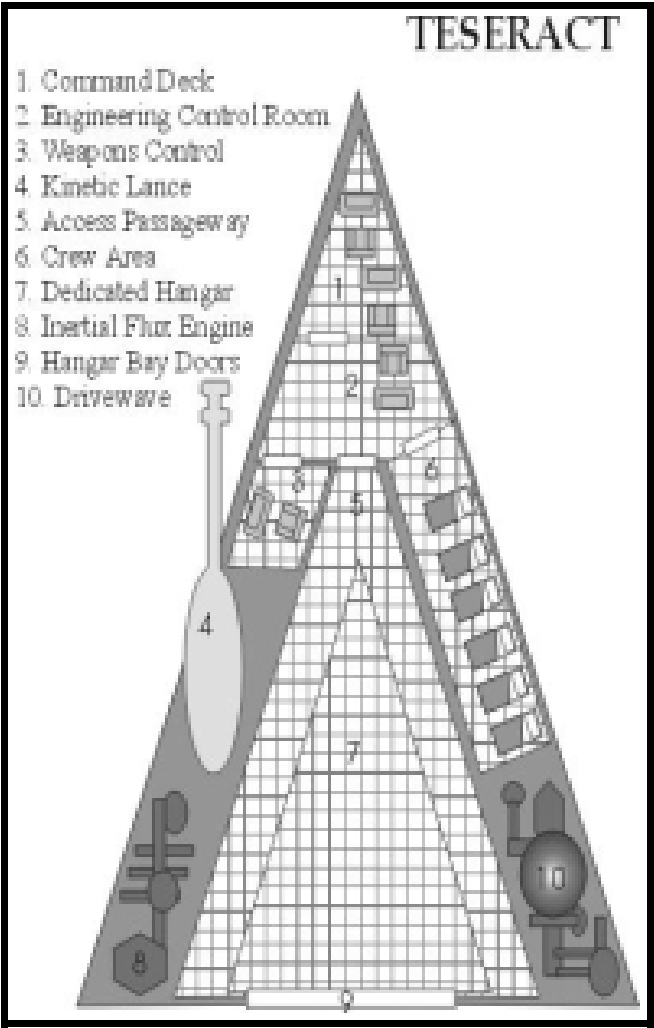
Acc: 0

Range: 5/10/20

Type: HI(e)

Damage: d4+1w/2d4w/d4+3m

Actions: 3



<i>Roll</i>	<i>Compartment</i>	<i>System (Dur/Pow)</i>	<i>Durability</i>
1-5	Command	Crew Quarters (1/0)	8/8/4
		Multiphase Radar (1/0)	
		Laser Transceiver (0/0)	
		Kinetic Lance (2/1)	
6-11	Engineering	Drivewave (1/*)	12/12/6
		Dynamic Mass Reactors (4/12)	
		Autosupport (0/1)	
		Inertial Flux Engine (1/1)	
		Ordinary Computer Core (0/0)	
12-20	Cargo	Dedicated Hanger Bay (10/0)	20/20/10

# Concord Marine

## A Career Concept

*Based on game mechanics created by  
Glenn Eidson and tweaked for this  
article by Duane Eggert.*

### Background:

The concept of boot camp and specialized training in current real world situations seemed like something that Star\*Drive setting could benefit from. This is basically reflected in a career with career path styled advancements. The intensity of the training program forces the necessity of success in a limited time frame. In game mechanics this is reflected in the skill point cost savings from use of the Teach skill. This career-path concept can be applied to other career types as well. It is just easier to draw from personal experiences for the first attempt.

Applying the benefit of the Teach skill has reduced the skill point costs of packages. Per the PHB this skill may reduce the skill point cost a hero pays in order to obtain ranks in a skill. The results of the Teach skill check yield skill point cost savings of -1/-2/-3 for Ordinary/Good/Amazing results with a limit of no more than 1/2 of the teacher's skill ranks being the end result. For example the Concord Marine skill package would cost a Combat Spec 46 skill points without any benefit, applying the Teach skill in this manner yields a skill point savings of 9. Other professions receive similar savings because of this. It is assumed that there are sufficiently qualified instructors to provide for this benefit. An army exists on the benefits of its training and this is how it is reflected gamemechanic wise. This career concept also uses the Alternity-team's Optional Rules 2a, b and c for skill point costs.

In practice this concept works best when starting hero level is greater than 1. In our games we typically start at level 5 in order to better come up with a working history and skills to match for the heroes, as well as better durability.

### Career: Concord Marine

Considered by many to be one of the



finest trained combat arms within the Stellar Ring, the Concord Marines are the point of the Concord's spear. Recruits undergo extensive training that washes out 5 out of every 10 trainees. To qualify for a career as a Concord Marine, a hero must not have any stats (STR, DEX, CON, INT, WIL, PER) lower than a 7.

Despite common misconception not all Concord Marines are Combat Specs by profession. There are opportunities for tech ops, diplomats and free agents as well. There are few Mindwalkers within the Concord Marine corps, however. They are usually recruited for other careers and purposes within the Concord. The career template provides for a first level character's starting package.

### Cost:

Diplomat/Free Agent/Mindwalker - 48 skill points (Sesheyan heroes pay 42 skill points instead since they receive Melee Weapons broad skill as a racial broad skill)

Tech Op - 47 skill points (Sesheyan



heroes pay 41 skill points instead since they receive Melee Weapons broad skill as a racial broad skill)

Combat Spec - 37 skill points  
(Sesheyan heroes pay 32 skills point instead since they receive Melee Weapons broad skill as a racial broad skill)

#### **Skill Package:**

Armor operation - *powered armor, combat armor*; Melee Weapon; Heavy Weapons- *direct fire, indirect fire*; Modern Ranged Weapons - *rifle 3*; Movement; Tactics; Knowledge - *first aid*.  
Use any remaining skill points as desired.

#### **Equipment Package (Standard Military Issue):**

11mm ch rifle (or zero-g version) or autoflechette shotgun  
9mm ch pistol  
Melee knife  
3 plasma grenades  
Cerametal armor with built in unit level com link

*Note that special equipment packages will vary depending on the mission, but in general this is a standard issue equipment package, along with compass and imaging or infrared goggles.*

After basic training, each Concord Marine is sent to an advanced school. The available branches consist of Infantry, Engineering, Armor, and Support. A Concord Marine must attend one advanced school before attaining third level.

#### **Advanced Schools:**

##### **Infantry Branch:**

**Skill package:** Infantry tactics and powered melee weapon.

**Cost:** Diplomat/Free Agent/Mindwalker/Tech Op: 5 skill points  
Combat Spec: 3 skill points

##### **Engineering Branch:**

**Skill package:** Demolitions

**Cost:** Diplomat/Free Agent/Mindwalker/Tech Op: 5 skillpoints  
Combat Spec: 4 skill points

*There are two options for Armor Branch: Driver/Commander, and Gunner.*

##### **Armor Branch- Driver/Commander:**

**Skill package:** Land vehicle ops and vehicle tactics.

**Cost:** (except for the following races: Sesheyan, T'sa and Weren which add 3 skill points to the cost but gain the vehicle ops broad skill)

Tech Op: 2 skill points

Combat Spec: 3 skill points

Diplomat/Free Agent/Mindwalker: 4 skill points

##### **Armor Branch- Gunner:**

**Skill package:** Systems Operations – *weapons*

**Cost:** Combat Spec/Tech Op: 4 skill points

Diplomat/Free Agent/Mindwalker: 5 skill points.

*There are four options for Support Branch: Communications, Battlefield Surveillance, Intelligence, and Medical.*

##### **Support Branch- Communications:**

**Skill package:** Systems Operations – *communications*

**Cost:** Diplomat/Tech Op: 4 skill points

Combat Spec/Free Agent/Mindwalker: 5 skill points

##### **Support Branch- Battlefield Surveillance:**

**Skill package:** Systems Operations – *sensors*

**Cost:** Diplomat/Tech Op: 4 skill points

Combat Spec/Free Agent/Mindwalker: 5 skill points

##### **Support Branch- Intelligence:**

**Skill package:** Investigate – *cryptology*†

**Cost:** Free Agent/Tech Op: 5 skill points

Combat Spec/Diplomat/Mindwalker: 6 skill points

##### **Support Branch- Medical:**

**Skill package:** Medical Science – *treatment*

**Cost:** Tech Op: 5 skill points

Combat Spec/Free Agent/ Diplomat/Mindwalker: 6 skill points

† – *The cryptology specialty skill is introduced and detailed in the System Guide to Aegis Star\*Drive supplement.*



# THE NEXT MEN

by Dwayne L. Leonard

In time mankind will embrace the science of genetic engineering a new breed of people will be born. These people will be created for a purpose. Some will be unique while others will be mass-produced. These people may be called transhumans, but in reality they are the Next Men.

## Gunslinger

The Gunslinger series is designed specifically for ranged combat. All of their mutations are designed to give them an edge in ranged weapon combat. While their original design makes them ideally suited to distance fighting they find ways to survive even in times of peace. Quite often they can be found acting as pilots or professional drivers. Some turn their enhanced abilities to less unsavory jobs. These can be found usually acting as assassins or thieves.

### **Advantageous Mutations:**

Hyper Reflexes

Enhanced Dexterity

### **Drawbacks:**

Susceptible to damage (LI)

## Blaster

With genetic engineering it is now possible to engineer some psionic abilities into the host. This can make for formidable and unexpected opponents. The blaster is designed to a front line soldier or policeman of the future. Even without weapons the blaster can still incinerate their foes. Coupled with the

ability to absorb energy attacks modern blasters become nearly useless against them. Blasters have few career options out side of the police or military, but some have managed to find employment where their abilities serve them well. Many work for the power company or train as electrical engineers.

### **Advantageous Mutations:**

Psionic Power (Telekinesis-Pyrokinesis)

Energy Absorption

### **Drawbacks:**

Reduced Ability Score Slight (-1 Con)

## Psi-Hunter

With the advance of genetic engineering psionics have become accepted and almost common. Now it has become necessary for the police and government officials to know whom and if anyone is using psionic powers. To this end the Psi-Hunter series has been created.

### **Advantageous Mutations:**

Psi Resistance

Improved Will

Psi Sensitivity

### **Drawbacks:**

Reduced Ability Score Slight (-1 Con)

## Perceptor

Perceptors are designed to be the ultimate detectives. Their senses are heightened to the limit of the human genome. This enhancement to their senses comes with a price though. Normal levels of light are so painful that it often inhibits them from performing at the peak of their abilities.

### **Advantageous Mutations:**

Hyper Senses

Enhanced Will

### **Drawbacks:**

Light Sensitivity

## Survivor Series

This series is engineered to be low casualty field soldiers. Each of their adaptations makes them more durable or able to survive longer in a sustained conflict. They are highly resistant to damage and given



enough time capable of healing even the most deadly wounds without medical treatment. When employed as soldiers the Survivor series usually work on long-term missions.

***Advantageous Mutations:***

Hyper Healing  
Dermal Reinforcement  
Vascular Control

***Drawbacks:***

Reduced Ability Score Slight (-1 Dex)

**Thinker**

Thinkers are designed specifically to be scientists. Their genetic enhancements have guaranteed that they are good scientists or technicians. Their enhanced intelligence has left them with little empathy for their fellow man however.

***Advantageous Mutations:***

Hyper Int  
Improved Wil  
Improved Senses

***Drawbacks:***

Reduced Ability Score Moderate (-2 Per)

**Brute**

Brutes are big, strong, and tough. They are excellent in situations where physical size or muscle is useful. They can be found as baggage handlers, soldiers, and any other job where strength or toughness is important.

***Advantageous Mutations:***

Hyper Str  
Improved Con  
Dermal Reinforcement

***Drawbacks:***

Reduced Ability Score Slight (-1 Dex)  
Reduced Ability Score Slight (-1 Int)

**Moon Angels**

The Moon Angel series was designed as a flying human specifically for low gravity environments. While they can fly in earth normal gravity they prefer the lower gravity environments that they are adapted to.

***Advantageous Mutations:***

Flight  
Biorhythm Control

**Improved Senses**

***Drawbacks:***

Major Physical Change (Large usually attractive wings)  
Susceptible to damage (LI)

**Tough**

Toughs are specifically to be hard to kill. All of their mutations give them an edge in the survival game. This makes them excellent cops or soldiers. Toughs are often employed as frontline soldiers or mercenaries. Toughs may also be employed as thugs especially on worlds where weaponry is restricted.

***Advantageous Mutations:***

Enhance Con  
Redundant Vital Organs  
Toxin Tolerance  
Improved Immunity

***Drawbacks:***

Reduced ability score slight (-1 Dex)

**New Perk - Invisible Mutation**

Cost 3/6

Mutants who possess this perk are much harder to detect. At the three-point level anyone trying to determine the exact genetics structure or type of mutation possessed has a +2 penalty to any skill roll to do so. At the six-point level anyone trying to determine the exact genetics structure or type of mutation possessed has a +4 penalty to any skill roll to do so.

Even mutants with an altered appearance can take advantage of this perk. This perk will make it hard for any other mutations or type of mutations to be detected.

**Equipment**

***Genome Detector***

PL 6  
Mass 2  
Cost 1500

This is a portable device to designed to detect if a person is actually a mutant and to determine the exact nature of



their mutation(s). It appears to be a small box with a glass lid and a holographic display. The glass lid opens up allowing a small scanner to check a blood hair or skin sample of the suspected mutant. Each mutation requires a separate skill roll with a critical failure indicating a false result.

To be properly used this piece of equipment requires the character to have the Life Science broad skill or the Life Science-*Genetics* specialty skill.

### ***Mutant Detector***

PL 6

Mass 1

Cost 750

This small device looks much like a chrome cylinder with three green and one red light on it. One end of the device may be twisted causing a small sample tray to eject from the end. A sample of hair, blood, or skin may be placed on the tray for analysis. Unlike the genome detector this device only detects whether or not someone is a mutant.

When used the device will light up the red light if the target skin, hair, or blood sample possesses no mutant genes. If the character has 1-2 mutation points then one green light will come on. If the character has 3-4 mutation points then two green lights will come on. If the character has 5 or more mutation points then all three green lights will come on.

Unlike the Genome detector this device only requires the Knowledge or Life Science broad skill to use. Characters possessing Life Science-*Genetics* may however use their full skill.

### **New Career - Geneticist**

A geneticist is a Tech-Op who specializes in the science of genetic engineering. They attempt to understand the genetic code of DNA so that they may unravel its secrets. Their purpose can be anything from making a new disease resistant plant to the creation of whole new life forms.

While the base skills needed for a geneticist are listed here there are a few other skills that they can benefit from. Some of these skills are Physical Science-*Chemistry*, Investigate- *Search*, Business-*Corporate*, and Admin- *Bureaucracy*. If using skills from the Dark Matter Campaign then Knowledge-*Research* is definitely important as well.

### ***Signature Equipment:***

White coat, cell phone, portable biopsy kit, and copy of latest research journals.

### ***Skills:***

Knowledge-*Computer Operations*, Life Science- *Genetics*, Life Science-*Biology*, Life Science- *Botany(or Life Science-Zoology)*, Physical Science, Medical Science, Investigate. The cost is 31 points to play a Geneticist.

### ***Suggested Perks:***

Concentration, Observant

### ***Suggested Flaws:***

Obsessed, Spineless

# It's All About Skill

By Duane Eggert

One of the things that makes the Alternity® roleplaying game unique is its emphasis on skills. But are there more ways to express a character's individuality using skills? I think so and here are a few ways that a player can tailor his or her hero to have a greater emphasis on what he or she can do and become more of a unique character in the process.

Here are some suggestions that are oriented towards skills. They include new perks, rank benefits and achievement benefits all of which are oriented towards skills.

## New Perks

The following are new perks that are skill oriented and may provide some more customization for hero development.

### Adaptive Learning

**Cost 2/5/10, Special, Active**

This perk provides the character with the ability to treat non-professional skills as if they were professional skills. i.e., the cost is one less than the listed price.

Ordinary: character selects 1 non-professional skill

Good: character selects 1 + Int modifier number of non-professional skills

Amazing: character selects 2 x (1 + Int modifier) number of non-professional skills

### All I Need is a Hairpin

**Cost 3, Dex, Conscious**

The character has a natural ability to defeat locks. This perk provides a character with a bonus to his lockpick skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### Blessed Abundance

**Cost 7, Special, Active**

The character can have more perks than normal. Normally a character is limited to 3

perks, with this perk that limit is increased to 6.

This perk counts as one of the 6, so a character can have 5 additional perks but they all must be purchased normally.

### Evel Who?

**Cost 4, Str, Active**

This perk provides a character with an innate ability to successfully take chances that a normal being would find foolish. This translates into a -2 step bonus to all acrobatics-daredevil checks.

### Eye For Details

**Cost 3, Wil, Conscious**

A character with this perk can gain a bonus to his or her search skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### Good With My Hands

**Cost 3, Int, Active**

A character with this perk is very good with his hands when it comes to mechanical and electrical devices. He or she can reduce the penalties for working without tools by 1 step for any technical science skill check.

### Hey, I've Got a Credit Card

**Cost 4, Int, Conscious**

This perk provides a character with a bonus to his or her security devices skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### I Am a Highly Effective Person

**Cost 3, Int, Active**

A character with this perk is gains a -1 step bonus to any administration broad or specialty skill checks.

### I Can Do That

**Cost Varies (Broad skill -1), Special, Active**

The character has the ability to use any



specialty skill associated with a broad skill that can not normally be used untrained as if it could be used untrained, i.e., at ½ relevant ability score +1 step penalty.

The character selects which broad skill to apply this to and it may be taken more than once, keeping to the limits for number of perks a character can have, with each purchase associated with an individual broad skill.

The cost varies based on the cost of the broad skill. A character pays the cost for the broad skill at 1 less than the list price for that broad skill. For example a character can buy I Can Do That – *vehicle ops* for 2 sp and attempt a skill check for Water Vehicle or Space Vehicle specialty skills at ½ Dex +1 step penalty. As an additional example a character can buy I Can Do That – *acrobatics* for 6 sp (Free Agents can buy it for 5 sp) and attempt a skill check for Defensive Martial Arts or Zero-g at ½ Dex +1 step penalty.

The character must have the broad skill in order to purchase ranks in any associated specialty skill.

### **I'm in My Element**

**Cost 3, Wil, Conscious**

A character with this perk can gain a bonus to his or her street smart broad or specialty skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### **It's Always the Red Wire**

**Cost 4, Dex, Conscious**

This perk provides a character with a bonus to his disarm skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### **It's Called a Pocket Fisherman**

**Cost 3, Dex, Conscious**

The character has light fingers. This perk provides a character with a bonus to his pickpocket skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next

check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### **It's Just a Flesh Wound**

**Cost 4, Con, Conscious**

This perk provides the character with a bonus to his resist pain skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### **It's That Way Captain**

**Cost 4, Int, Active**

A character with this perk can reduce the situational penalties for any navigation skill check by 1 step. This never results in a bonus it only reduces the penalties.

### **It's This Way**

**Cost 3, Con, Conscious**

The character has an innate sense of direction and finding the quickest route to his or her destination. This perk provides a character with a bonus to his trailblazing skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### **Just a Few More Questions**

**Cost 3, Wil, Conscious**

A character with this perk can gain a bonus to his or her interrogation skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### **"Law and Order" Junkie**

**Cost 4, Int, Conscious**

This perk provides a character with a bonus to any Law broad or specialty skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is

made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### Leave it to the Geek

**Cost 4, Int, Active**

A character with this perk gains a -1 step bonus to his computer operation checks. The character is a relative genius with any I/O device and plays them like a virtuoso.

### Moment of Inspiration

**Cost 3, Int, Conscious**

A character with this perk can gain a bonus to his or her invention skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### No One Gets In or Out

**Cost 3, Int, Conscious**

This perk provides a character with a bonus to his or her protection protocol skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### Pick a Card, Any Card

**Cost 4, Dex, Active**

The character's hands move faster than most can follow and he or she is capable of great feats of manipulation. A character with this perk gains a -2 step bonus to his prestidigitation checks.

### They Call Me Mr. Monkey

**Cost 3, Str, Conscious**

This perk provides a character with a bonus to his climb and jump skill checks.

On a Failure result the character's next climb or jump check is made with no modifier.

On an Ordinary success, the check is made with a -1 step bonus; Good, -2 step bonus; Amazing, -3 step bonus.

### You Can't Lose Me

**Cost 3/5, Wil, Active**

The character has an extraordinary ability to track someone or something.

At Ordinary this perk provides a -1 step bonus to his or her track skill checks, at Good the bonus is -2 steps.

### New Rank Benefits

Not all skills in the Player's Handbook have rank benefits. Here are suggestions to the rules to provide rank benefits to some of the skills in question that may add some more color and incentive for increasing ranks in these skills.

#### Athletics-Throw:

**Greater Accuracy:** for a character with this skill at rank 6 situational penalties for throwing objects are reduced by 1 step. This only negates penalties and does result in a bonus.

**Improved distance:** for a character with this skill at rank 9 the distance an object can be thrown is increased. Short range is equal to STR x 1.5 in meters (rounded down); medium range is 3 X the character's STR meters (rounded down); long range is STR x 6 meters (rounded down). This benefit only applies to objects designed for throwing.

#### Survival – Survival training:

**Increased Effect:** As a character achieves higher ranks in survival training he is able to disregard more severe penalties. For a character with rank 9 the penalties for survival situational modifiers are reduced by 1 step.

#### Business-Corporate:

**Increased Effect:** As a character achieves higher ranks in corporate, he or she receives a greater situational die bonus; -1 step at rank 4, -2 steps at rank 8, and -3 steps at rank 12.

#### Demolitions-Disarm:

**Increased Effect:** As a character achieves higher ranks in disarm he or she receives a greater situational die bonus; -1 step at rank 6 and -2 steps at rank 12.

#### Demolitions-Scratch-Built Explosives:

**Increased Effect:** As a character achieves higher ranks in scratch-built explosives, he or she receives a greater situational die bonus; -1 step at rank 6 and -2 steps at rank 12.

### **Demolitions-Set Explosives:**

**Increased Effect:** As a character achieves higher ranks in set explosives, he or she receives a greater situational die bonus; -1 step at rank 4, -2 steps at rank 8, and -3 steps at rank 12.

### **Creativity-Specific Skill:**

**Inspired work:** At rank 4 the character gains a -1 step situational die modifier to his or her skill check.

### **Teach-Specific Field:**

**More Students:** At rank 4 the character gains the ability to teach an additional student at the same time. Instead of one student the character can teach two. At rank 8 this increases to three students. At rank 12 the character can effectively teach a small classroom full of students, a number of students equal to his Will score.

**More Effective Teacher:** At rank 6 the character gains a -1 step bonus to any teach skill checks he makes.

### **New Achievement Benefits**

The following are suggestions for new achievement benefits that give a greater emphasis on skills and their use in an Alternity® game.

#### **More Professional Skills:**

This benefit can be purchased twice.

When a character first gains this benefit he or she selects a number of non-profession skills equal to 1 + his Int mod and treats them as profession skills from that point on.

The second time he or she gains it he or she can add 2 x (1 + his Int mod) of non-professional skills to his professional skill list.

That is they may be purchased at one less than list price.

The achievement becomes available at the following hero levels:

**More Professional Skills 1:** Combat Spec 5th, Diplomat 4th, Free Agent 3rd, Tech Op 3rd, Mindwalker 4th.

**More Professional Skills 2:** Combat Spec 8th, Diplomat 7th, Free Agent 6th, Tech Op 6th, Mindwalker 7th.

And the costs for purchasing the achievements are:

**More Professional Skills 1:** Combat Spec 6, Diplomat 6, Free Agent 5, Tech Op 5, Mindwalker 6.

**More Professional Skills 2:** Combat Spec 12, Diplomat 12, Free Agent 10, Tech Op 10, Mindwalker 12.

#### **More Skill Points:**

This benefit can be purchased a total of three times starting at the level listed below.

Beginning at the next level, every time the character gains a level he or she gains an additional skill point.

The achievement becomes available at the following hero levels:

**More Skill Points:** Combat Spec 5th, Diplomat 4th, Free Agent 3rd, Tech Op 3rd, Mindwalker 4th.

And the costs for purchasing the achievement are:

**More Skill Points:** Combat Spec 5, Diplomat 5, Free Agent 3, Tech Op 3, Mindwalker 5.



# Soul Mechs

## Ultimate Man-machine Interface

by Dragan Ciric

In the year 2356, while researching how to implement cybernetics with humans to a greater degree, scientists on planet Proteuss created a device that detected the specific aura that surrounds and runs through living beings – soul. Further research discovered that every thing in the universe contains specific “aura” – something that defines matter on an entirely different level. Twenty-three years later a device was built that attunes the human soul with that of the machine. Soon after the first SoulMechs were created.

SoulMechs became the perfect solutions for many things. Conflicts could be waged without the loss of human life, since after the SoulMech is destroyed the soul immediately returns to the body. They could perform dangerous rescue operations with expert efficiency, go to space and explore planets and perform other tasks that would otherwise be harmful to humans.

The downside was that the time that soul could inhabit a SoulMech was limited, for without the soul, after some time, the original body would wither and die and soon after the soul itself would dissipate. Also, the distance that separates soul and body is limited.

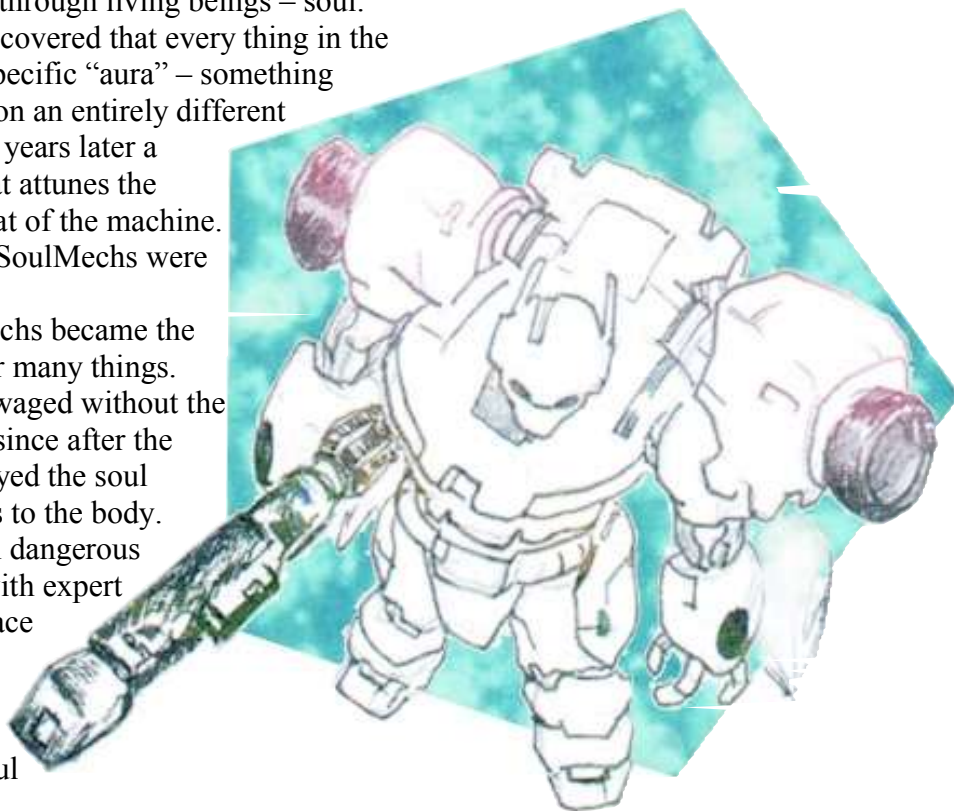
### Game Rules

Several abilities affect heroes time of stay in construct and its effective use of it.

**Will** –Affects heroes action check bonus/penalty and modifies SoulMechs number of actions per

round.

Will and Personality determine how much time the hero's soul can spend within the SoulMech before it must return to its body.



Will and Constitution determine how far can SoulMech go from heroes body.

**Constitution** –Affects time needed for soul to attune itself to SoulMech and make transition.

Together with Will it affects how far away can soul be carried by the SoulMech.

**Personality** –Together with Will, Personality affects souls stay time within SoulMech. If optional rule that SoulMechs can have their own Personality score is used, Heroes Personality affects Personality skills bonuses/penalties while his soul resides inside the SoulMech.



**Table 1: Will Modifiers**

WIL	Action Check Modifier	# of Actions
4-6	+1 step	-1
7-11	---	---
12-13	-1 step	---
14-15	-2 step	1
16+	-3 step	2

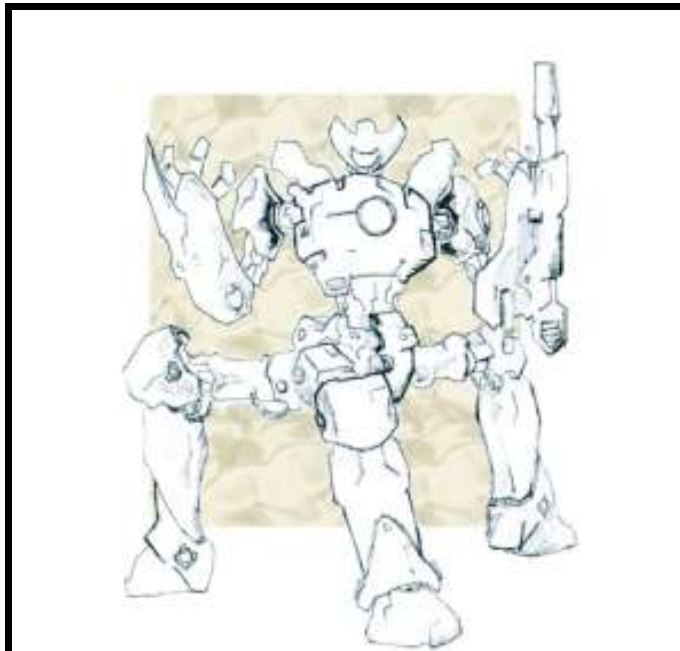
**Table 2: Personality Skill Modifiers**

PER	
4-6	+1 step
7-9	---
10-11	-1 step
12-13	-2 step
14+	-3 step



**Table 3: Soul Body Separation**

WIL+CON	No Penalty	+1 step penalty to action check and skills	+2 step penalty to action check and skills
8-14	3 km	5 km	7 km
15-22	7 km	11 km	15 km
23-29	15 km	21 km	27 km
30+	27 km	39 km	51 km



**Table 4: Soul Transition Time**

CON	Transition Time
4-6	3 Actions
7-10	2 Actions
11-12	1 Actions
13-14	Immediate

**Table 5: Soul Stay Time**

WIL+PER	Stay Time
8-14	12 hrs
15-22	36 hrs
23-29	84 hrs
30+	5 days

If the soul is not returned to its body in designated time a Stamina-*endurance* check is made every 30 minutes with +1 step penalty. Whenever check is failed hero loses 1 mortal. If heroes body dies, soul can reside inside SoulMech for 1 hour after which Resolve-*mental resolve* skill check with +4 step penalty must be made. If the check is failed, heroes soul departs to distant unknown. If the roll results in critical failure heroes soul becomes *Pale Reaver*.

## SoulMechs and Heroes Skills

### SoulMechs

There are two basic types of SoulMechs: warrior models – *AngelFire* and *Eclipsor* and multipurpose models – *StarLight* and *HumaniX*. All SoulMechs are modular, meaning that they have free slots to which additional equipment modules (such as *stealth module*) can be fitted.

When hero transfers his soul to SoulMech he retains his skill ranks but uses SoulMechs ability scores. Thus, hero with Strength 11 and skill rank 2 in *brawl* who transfers his soul to AngelFire SoulMech would have skill score 13/6/3 while in his body and 17/8/4 while in SoulMech.

Since all SoulMech are big (2.1 – 3,7 meters tall) and since they are the machines they suffer penalty to Stealth skill checks, based on a model of SoulMech.

OPTIONAL RULE: Talking to a 2 meter tall robot with cold metallic voice can be a little unnerving. Thus, as an optional rule for those who would like an additional dose of realism in their game, SoulMechs have their own Personality scores.

### AngelFire

height:3m

Str:15

Dex:12

Con:16

Per\*:7

Action check:+15/14/7/3

Base number of actions:2

Durability 16/16/8

Module slots: 4

Stealth penalty: +3

Weapons:

mounted Mass Rifle

mounted T-Bar TN Blade (good damage)

fists (power cestus with good damage)

Armor: 2d4+1/2d4+1/2d4+1 Good Toughness

Availability: Military

AngelFire is standard warrior model with both long range and hand to hand weapon choices. Assault variant usually has flight module, extra limb and multitask module and either repair or reinforce module. Recon variant usually has stealth module and either extra leg and repair module or two extra legs.

### Eclipsor

height:3.7m

Str:16

Dex:11

Con:18

Per\*:5

Action check:+14/13/6/3

Base number of actions:2

Durability 18/18/9

Module slots:3

Stealth penalty: +5

Weapons:

mounted Plasma gun

mounted Bantam launcher

fists (power cestus with good damage)

Armor: 2d6+1/2d6+1/3d4 Good Toughness

Availability: Restricted

Eclipsor is heavy assault model that can withstand a lot of punishment. It also provides excellent support for lighter soulmechs when equipped with targeting module.

### StarLight

height:2,5m

Str:12

Dex:13

Con:14

Per\*:8

Action check:+13/12/6/3  
Base number of actions:2  
Durability 14/14/7  
Module slots:6  
Stealth penalty: +2  
Weapons:  
fists (power cestus)  
Armor: d6+1/d6+1/d6 Good Toughness  
Availability: Controlled  
StarLight is soulmech created for exploration and access to hazardous areas. It can be equipped with variety of modules and can easily be converted to combat model.

## HumaniX

height:2,1m  
Str:10  
Dex:13  
Con:12  
Per\*:10  
Action check:+13/12/6/3  
Base number of actions:3  
Durability 12/12/6  
Module slots:8  
Stealth penalty: +1  
Weapons: none  
Armor: d6+1/d6+1/d6 Ordinary Toughness  
Availability: Controlled  
HumaniXs major purpose are rescue and salvage operations. He is produced to be human looking so that victims of accidents can feel comfortable around him.

## Modules

*Stealth module* - reduces stealth penalty by 1 step.  
*Flight module* - There are two types of this module: standard and fusion. Fusion module allows space flight, takes up 2 slots and comes with magnetic pads for feet.  
*Targeting module* - reduces long range penalties by 1 step.  
*Repair module* - When activated this module releases a stream of nanobots that can repair 2 points of wound damage or 1 mortal.  
*Salvage module* – this module contains cutters, blowtorches and other equipment necessary for salvaging.

*Rescue module* – contains ropes, cutters, impact reduction foam and other equipment necessary for rescue operations.  
*Gridcast module* – allows access to grid.  
*Weapon module* – allows additional weapon to be attached to body (so it leaves hands free).  
*Multilimb module* – adds extra arm or leg to body. Attaching extra leg adds +4 to movement rate, attaching two extra legs adds +6 to movement rate and -1 step dexterity bonus.  
*Multitask module* – reduces penalty for performing two actions at once to +0/+2. Ambidextrous characters have all penalties negated.  
*Reinforcement module* – adds +2/+2/+1 to armor and +1 stealth penalty.  
*Self-Destruct module* – takes 2 slots. When Soulmech self-destructs it causes plasma grenade damage.  
*Surgery module* – takes two slots. Contains all necessary equipment for field surgery  
*Ablative module* – works as ablative field and has 30 points.

## Pale Reaver

There have been rare cases when body dies but soul does not depart to wherever souls go. Such souls quickly grow mad and turn into hideous, monstrous entities called Pale Reavers.

Pale Reavers appear like ghostlike figures that become more monstrous as the time passes. So in the beginning they look like normal human but later they grow , multiple eyes, claws, wings, tentacles and other strange appendages.

The greatest threats that come from Pale Reavers is that they extinguish souls of other living beings (and possibly create other Pale Reavers) and that they are not affected by normal weapons. Only thing that can harm them are soul burner weapons.

When someone attacked by Pale Reaver loses all wounds or mortals, Pale Reaver tries to possess the body. If he is successful, the victims soul is extinguished and body is under Pale Reavers control. The

body loses 1 wound per day. When all wounds and mortals are lost or when body is destroyed, Reaver leaves the body and searches for the next victim. While the body is possessed it acts like a madman, speaking incoherent words and moaning. In this stage Reaver is not aggressive and rather flees than fights. Soul burner weapons fired at it affect Pale Reaver, they do not damage the body. However, if the possess attempt is unsuccessful, victims soul becomes another Pale Reaver due to shock and trauma, and leaves in search for another body.

### Soul Burner Weapons

Soul burner weapons were developed in order to deal more easily with opposing SoulMechs. They do not damage the mech but instead fire soul disruption beams that force the soul inhibiting the mech to return to its body.

In game terms Soulmech struck by soul burner weapon must pass the *mental resolve* check or else his soul is returned to his body. Soul burner weapons have proven to be extremely effective against Pale Reavers.

Only limited number of these weapons were produced and they are not available on market (treat them as EXTREMELY restricted).

**KL SoulScourge Blade** forces mental resolve or does d4+1s/d4w/d4+1w (Li) to Pale Reaver  
skill:Melee-*blade*

**KL VoidShooter Pistol** forces mental resolve or does d4w/d4+2w/d4+3w (Hi) damage to Pale Reaver.  
Range: 20/40/60  
skill:MRW-*pistol*

**KL SoulScrambler Rifle** forces mental resolve with +1 step penalty or does d6w/d6+2w/d4m (Hi) damage to Pale Reaver.  
Range: 30/60/90  
skill:MRW-*rifle*

**KL SoulClipse Cannon** forces mental resolve with +3 step penalty or does d6+2w/d8+1w/d6m (En) damage to Pale

Reaver.

Range: 25/50/100

Skill:Heavy Weapons-*direct*

**SoulNova Grenade** forces mental resolve with +3/+2/+1 step penalty in 5m/10m/15m area or does d6+2w/d6+3w/d6m (Hi) damage to Pale Reaver  
skill:Athletics-*throw*

### Pale Reaver

STR 14 INT 9 DEX 15

WIL 15 CON 16 PER 2

Durability: 16/16/8/8

Action check: 17/16/8/4

Movement Rate: run 40, walk 8

Reaction score: Good/3

Attacks: claws 16/8/4 d8s/d6w/d4m LI/G

Defenses:

Affected only by soul burner weapons

-2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

-3 resistance modifier vs. ranged attack

-3 WIL resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Armor: d6+1

Skills:

climb 14/7/3

stealth 16/8/4

possess 15/7/3





by Dwayne L. Leonard

## History:

The early history of Ki can be debated, but this is the most widely accepted account. If there is any truth to this no one currently living can give it. Our investigations failed to reveal if this was a factual or fictional account.

Approximately 1100 years ago the sky opened and whole parts of other worlds moved to KI. Records tell us that ninety-seven towns and eleven monasteries arrived in the world of Ki on the island of Kotai.

In the early days the towns were distinct and separate, but a young Samurai named Toru realized that civilization might falter unless these independent towns banded together. He set out to unify the island of Kotai as one nation.

Toru began by setting up a school to train warriors. At first Toru trained only those people in his own town hoping to create a loyal army of followers. This worked so well that eventually Toru began training people from near by towns provided that they swore loyalty to him.

Having established a small army Toru set out to conquer the island of Kotai. The first few towns that stood against his army were completely wiped out. After this many towns swore their loyalty just to avoid being destroyed. Others banded together against the army of Toru, but all were defeated.

In time Toru had united most of Kotai

and established one government.

As the years passed him by Toru gave up rule to his children and their descendants. Toru's children set up a vast public works system allowing for the maintenance of roads a bridges insuring that all the towns could stay in contact. Toru's great grandchildren created schools to train both men and women as warriors in honor of their grandfather.

For almost 250 years the land was at relative peace, but this was destined to end. As the number of Toru's descendants increased two things became more and more common. The first was bickering between his descendants. The second was plotting against the descendants of Toru by outsiders. These two factors caused open warfare to break out between the descendants of

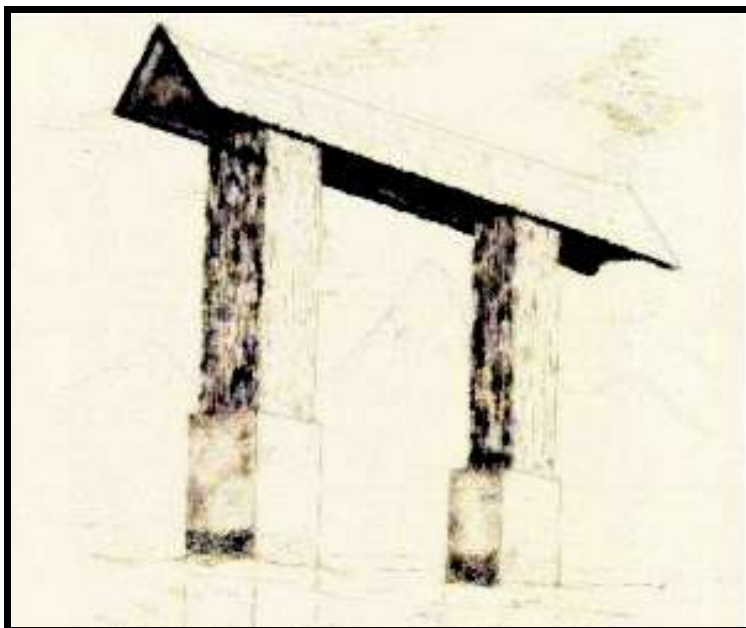
Toru. With none of the Houses of Toru able to gain and advantage over the others the island of Kotai was once again shattered into various splinter groups.

After many years of battle the Ryashi clan managed to gain control of island of Kotai. This is a notable fact for several reasons. The Ryashi Clan is the only clan not

descended from Toru ever to gain control of Kotai. Unlike Toru the Ryashi Clan was able to completely dominate the whole island.

Eventually the descendants of Toru banded together and revolted against the Ryashi Clan. This led to the destruction of the Ryashi Clan. After this the descendants of Toru agreed that anyone associated with even the name Ryashi be put to death.

For a time after the Ryashi rule the Watashi clan ascended to dominate Kotai. As with all of the rulers that preceded them the Watashi failed to maintain control. Clan wars were brought to the fore front and the Iashi Clan took over and has maintained relative peace for the last one



seventy-five years.

Currently only two of the major clans are engaged in an ongoing conflict. This conflict is between the Matsuo and Watashi clans. The reason for this continuing conflict is that the Daimyo of the Watashi clan was assassinated. When the assassin was killed she was identified as a Matsuo sympathizer.

### Clans:

There are many clans in the world of Ki, but our study consists of one major island (Kotai). On Kotai there are nine major clans and approximately forty-three minor clans. The major clans are Iashi, Kochan, Eyrasi, Dochasa, Chiobra, Matsuo, Tebura, Watashi, and Desuo.

Many clans can claim to be descendants of Toru. This gives them a rightful claim to the throne of Kotai. Of the nine major clans six are descended from Toru. These are Iashi, Kochan, Dochasa, Chiobra, Watashi, and Desuo. Also nineteen of the lesser clans can claim to be descendants of Toru.

There are several things that the major clans have in common. All are very well run. Each has a skillful samurai as its head. Even the current emperor who comes from the Iashi clan is said to be a very skilled samurai warrior.

Beyond the normal clans are the shadow clans. Rumors hint at their existence, but there is no real proof. It is said that the shadow clans are made up of the remainder of clans that have been decimated by battle. Some are said to have embraced dark magic in an attempt to regain their former glory while others practice the art of the ninja.

### Skills:

As the world of Ki is different from our main stream reality we have discovered that

emphasis is placed on different abilities. The common abilities possessed by most everyone in the region of Ki that we inspected are Athletics, Stealth, Stamina, Knowledge, Awareness, and Interaction.

### Society and Culture:

The society of Ki is very stratified. At the top is the Emperor, head of the entire kingdom. Below him are the Daimyos each responsible for their clans holdings. Sworn to the service of the Daimyos are the Samurai and the warrior class



established by Toru are considered just below them. Peasants can be of three basic types. These are farmers, artisans, and merchants. While merchants may be able to accumulate greater wealth they are still considered to be beneath all other classes of peasants. Beneath the peasant class are those people who are considered non-persons (typically criminals of all sorts).

Travel on the roads of Kotai are restricted. Each township or monastery issues a pass listing the number of people included, destination, and the town seal (or temple seal). A

list of travel passes issued in each township is kept for their records to allow the samurai to see if travel passes have been falsified or altered. Once it was common to find fruit trees planted along the side of the road, but when the Iashi Clan took control they had them all cut down so that travelers would be forced to eat at inns along the way. This allows for a more accurate account to be kept of all travelers.

While there are a couple of religions only one ever gained dominance. This is the Shinto religion. Shinto is the “Way of the Kami.” This is a worship of anything that is either powerful or awesome. This can include anything from spirits to a worship of the emperor himself. Basically these beings or creatures must be thanked or placated depending on the nature of what is being worshipped.

Kami can be of various different types. Some are powerful god like being representing such forces as the wind or fertility while others might watch over a single town or family.

Most towns have a well used Shinto Shrine. It is common practice for those entering the town stop at the Shinto Shrine for purification. Also those people entering the wilderness may stop at a shrine for purification to avoid offending the spirits that live in the wilderness.

Loyalty and honor are both very important concepts to the people of Ki. Loyalty to family, friends, and the empire itself all play an important part in the lives of the people of Ki. It is not uncommon for a samurai who has failed his Daimyo to commit suicide. In fact this is considered an honorable way to make restitution for the failure.

### Time:

The people of Ki are governed by a lunar calendar. Each month is worked around the revolution of the moon. By their schedule the 15th of every month coincides with the full moon. Even months have thirty days and the odd months have twenty-nine. To account for the shorter months every 3rd, 6th, 9th, 12th, 15th, 17th, and 19th years another month is added.

The days on Ki are broken into twelve sections each approximately two hours long. The daytime hours are broken into the Hare, Dragon, Serpent, Horse (noon), Goat, and the Monkey. The

nighttime hours are broken into the Cock, Dog, Boar, Rat (midnight), Ox, and the Tiger.

### Equipment:

#### *Kimono*

Weight: 1 kg (1.5 kg with padded shoulders)  
Cost: 10 shu (20 with padding). This is for a silk kimono.

Cost: 1 shu (2 with padding). This is for a cotton kimono.

Notes: The price for a woman’s silk kimono is twice that of a mans.

#### *Silk Cloak*

Weight: 1 kg  
Cost: 20 shu

#### *Straw Overcoat*

Weight: 5 kg  
Cost: 1 shu

#### *Silk Hat*

Weight: .5 kg  
Cost: 10 shu

Notes: This is the type of hat typically worn by a nobleman or Shintô priest.

#### *Straw Hat*

Weight: .5 kg  
Cost: 1 shu

Notes: This is the type of hat typically worn by travelers.

#### *Fan*

Weight: Negligible  
Cost: 1 shu

Notes: Some fans of this type are made to fold up and others are not.

#### *Sandals*

Weight: Negligible  
Cost: 1 shu

#### *Pouch (small or large)*

Weight: Negligible  
Cost: 1 shu (5 shu for a large pouch)

Notes: A small pouch can hold .5 kg of weight while a large one can hold up to 2 kg of weight.

### *Back Box*

Weight: 2.5 kg

Cost: 30 shu

Notes: The back box can hold up to 20 kg of weight

### *Abacus*

Weight: .5 kg

Cost: 1 shu

### *Book*

Weight: .5 kg

Cost: 1 shu

Notes: This is the typical price for a book and may be anything from a guide book to a book of poetry.

### *Ink Case*

Weight: .5 kg

Cost: 2 shu

Notes: The ink case contains the ink and brush needed for writing.

### *Mirror*

Weight: .5 kg

Cost: 5 shu

Notes: This is a polished steel mirror typically kept in a lacquered case. They may also be come in a leather or bamboo case.

### *Paper*

Weight: Negligible

Cost: 4 mon per sheet

Notes: This is for writing or drawing paper.

### *Tinderbox*

Weight: .25 kg

Cost: 16 mon

### *Candles*

Weight: 1 kg

Cost: 25 shu

Notes: This is for 1 dozen wax candles. Each candle will burn for approximately one hour once lit.

### **Characters:**

Characters in the world of Ki can perform many functions. The careers possible by characters can often be learned by one or more profession depending on what path the character follows.

## **Money**

Mon = 2/5 ¢

Shu = \$1

Bu = \$4

Ryo = \$16

1 ryo = 4 bu = 16 shu = 4000 mon

1 shu = 250 mon

Gold Coin Denominations

1 bu (ichibukin)

1 ryo (kobankin)

5 and 10 ryo (both referred to as ôbankin)

Silver Coin Denominations

1 shu (ichishugin)

2 shu (nishugin)

1 bu (ichibugin [ichishugin is for gold])

Copper Coin Denominations

1 mon (kaneitsuhô)

4 mon (bunkyueihô)

10 mon (hôteitsuhô)

100 mon (tempôtsuhô)

### ***Dorobo*** (Thief) [Free Agent]

For the most part a Dorobo is nothing more than a common thief. Some may specialize in breaking and entering while others might favor more simple crimes such as pick pocketing. Also sleight of hand scams are common by this class of criminal.

It should be noted that not all people who resort to a life of crime are non-persons. Many resort to crime when their normal occupation has failed to make enough money to allow them to survive.

#### *Signature Equipment:*

Length of rope, hishi (small dagger), and several pouches of various sizes.

#### *Skill Package:*

Athletics-Climb, Manipulation, Stealth-Sneak, Business-Illicit, Investigate-Search, and Street Smart. Cost 33 points.

#### *Suggested Advantages:*

Danger Sense, Good Luck, and Observant

#### *Suggested Disadvantages:*

Dirt Poor, Infamy, Obsession, or Powerful Enemy

#### *Character Improvement:*



Anyone playing this type of character may wish to consider taking any of the following skills to improve at their profession: Acrobatics-Fall, Melee Weapons, Stealth-Shadow, Manipulation-Lockpick or Pick Pocket, and Street Smart-Criminal Elements or Street Knowledge.

### **Ninja** [Combat Spec or Free Agent]

Ninjas exist as spies, saboteurs, and assassins. While they definitely touch on all levels of society they are not really part of it. People in the normal society will not even deal with someone suspected of being a ninja. Their lives are shadows with none of the trappings of a normal life. Friends, jobs, loved ones, and so on are parts of a normal life that have no place in a ninjas existence. Instead they belong to one of the shadow clans.

#### *Signature Equipment:*

Suit of black clothes, wazikashi, climbing spikes (-1 bonus), and a bamboo snorkel.

#### *Skill Package:*

Unarmed Attack-Power Martial Arts, Melee Weapon-Blade, Stealth-Sneak, Awareness-Perception, Resolve, and Athletics-Climb. Cost is 30 points for a Combat Specialist and 31 for a Free Agent.

#### *Suggested Advantages:*

Ambidextrous, Danger Sense, Reflexes, and Powerful Ally (Ninja Clan).

#### *Suggested Disadvantages:*

Infamy, Old Injury, and Powerful Enemy.

#### *Character Improvement:*

Ninja characters may also want to learn any of the following skills: Stealth-Hide or Shadow, Acrobatics-Dodge, Ranged Weapons-Primitive, Manipulation, Knowledge-Poisons, and Investigate-Track.

### **Samurai** [Combat Spec, Free Agent, or Tech Op]

Samurai are the nobles of the world Ki. It is their job to insure the safety and well being of the commoners and to protect the rule of the Daimyo that they serve.

It should be noted that some are samurai in name only and never progress beyond the basic skills of their profession. These often become bureaucrats and sometimes doctors.

#### *Signature Equipment:*

Katana, Wazikashi, Partial Plate Armor, and a Horse.

#### *Skill Package:*

Armor Operation-Combat, Melee Weapon-Blade, Unarmed Attack, Ranged Weapons-Primitive, Animal Handling-Ride Horse, and Resolve. Cost is 35 Points for a Combat Specialist and 40 points for a Free Agent or Tech Op.

#### *Suggested Advantages:*

Ambidextrous, Fortitude, Tough as Nails, Vigor, or Wealth.

#### *Suggested Disadvantages:*

Cod of Honor, Old Injury, Powerful Enemy

#### *Character Improvement:*

For those characters following the path of the warrior the following skills may be useful: Unarmed Attack-Power Martial Arts, Acrobatics-Dodge, Primitive Ranged Weapons-Bow, Tactic-Infantry, Leadership-Command.

### **Sanzoku** (Bandit) [Combat Spec or Free Agent]

This class of criminal encompasses both muggers and highwayman. They specialize in theft through the use of force or intimidation.

#### *Signature Equipment:*

Wazikashi, Hishi, Mask of some sort, and pouches of various sizes.

#### *Skill Package:*

Melee Weapon-Blade, Unarmed Attack, Stealth-Shadow, Knowledge-Local Area, Street Smart, and Interaction- Intimidate. Cost to be a Sanzoku is 27 points for a Combat Specialist and 28 points for a Free Agent.

#### *Suggested Advantages:*

Observant, Tough as Nails

#### *Suggested Disadvantages:*

Dirt Poor, Old Injury, Powerful Enemy

#### *Character Improvement:*

A dedicated Sanzoku might wish to learn any of the following skills: Business-Illicit, Resolve-Physical, and Street Smart-Criminal Elements or Street Knowledge.

#### **Advantages:**

**Fast Draw (3)** - The Fast Draw advantage allows a character to draw a weapon and use it in a single fluid motion. This advantage allows the character to draw and strike with no additional penalty. When players take this advantage they must decide

what weapon it applies to (sword, dagger, pistol, etc...).

*Weapon Master* (4) – Characters possessing this advantage have an exceptional proficiency with a single weapon. This advantage gives the character a –1 bonus with the weapon of choice.

### Shadow Skill

The Shadow Skill is a series of supernatural abilities supposedly possessed by various members of groups calling themselves Ninjas. Different stories often mention other abilities, but these are the most common. They are Vanish, Cloak of Shadows, Death Touch, Water Walk, and Impersonate.

Only Cloak of Shadows and Water Walk may be used untrained.

### Vanish

1 FX

4 Skill points to learn

Ninjas using the vanish technique can teleport anywhere within sixty meters. This teleportation is covered by a puff of smoke or a bright flash of light.

This technique has several useful rank benefits. At rank 4 the character can continuously teleport anywhere within their range for up to one full minute per level of success. At rank 8 the teleportation range increases to 120 meters per teleport. At rank 12 the character can teleport anywhere within their range for up to ten minutes per level of success.

### Cloak of Shadows

1 FX

4 Skill points to learn

By using this technique ninjas become very hard to spot in dark or near dark conditions. This power gives a +2 penalty to anyone trying to spot the character so long as there are some shadows to sneak through. This ability may also be conveyed upon others by touch. Each extra person requires an additional point of energy, but not an extra skill roll. Once activated it lasts for 1 minute per level of success.

The Cloak of Shadows has several

useful rank benefits. At rank 4 and 8 there is an additional +1 penalty. At Rank 12 the duration is increased from one minute to 10 minutes per level of success

### Death Touch

2 FX

5 Skill Points to learn

This power allows the user to channel their inner energies in a destructive manner. Characters can do d4+1w/D6+1w/ d4m depending on their skill roll. This damage is En/O and requires the character make physical contact with the intended victim.

Rank benefits for this power are as follows. At rank 4 the damage becomes d6+1w/ D8+1w/ d6+1m. At rank 8 the energy cost drops from 2 FX to 1 FX. At rank 12 the damage becomes En/G.

### Water Walk

1 FX

3 Skill Points to learn

This technique allows the character to move millimeters above the surface of any object. This allows the character to move across the surface without actually touching it. This technique can be used for walking across water, rice paper, or hot coals with no ill effects. Duration is one minute per level of success. This ability may be maintained for additional energy.

Rank benefits for this ability are as follows. At rank 4 the character can increase their movement rate by 50%. At rank 8 the character can use this ability for 10 minutes per level of success. At rank 12 the character's movement rate is doubled from the original value.

### Impersonate

1 FX

6 Skill Points to learn

This illusion based technique allows the ninja to assume the outward appearance of anyone that they have seen before. The duration is 10 minutes per level of success. There is a +1 penalty for anyone trying to see through the illusionary disguise. This ability may be maintained for additional FX energy.

Rank benefits for Impersonate greatly improve the usefulness of this ability. At rank 3 there is an additional +1 penalty to anyone trying to see through the illusion. At rank 6 the duration becomes one hour per level of success. At rank 9 there is an additional +1 penalty for anyone trying to see through the illusion. At rank 12 the illusion lasts up to 1 day per level of success.

### Using Ki

- Great for a one night run
- Tangent travelers accidentally stumble into the battle between Watashi and Matsuo Clans. They could take sides or quite possibly find out that the assassin was really a member of one of the shadow clans.
- Characters could be classified as non-persons in effect turning them instantly into outlaws.
- The player characters might be thought to be demons that could need placation, banishment, or destruction.
- The players could be from Ki and come across tangent travelers.
- One of the PCs could resemble Toru causing the clans of Toru to believe that he has been reincarnated. The clans may wish to serve or destroy this person and their strange allies.



Weapons of Ki								
Name	Skill	Acc	Damage	Act	Hide	Mass	Avail	Notes
Katana	blade	-1	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m	3	+1	2	Mil	
Wazikashi	blade		d4w/ d6w/ d6+2w	3	+1	2	Any	Japanese short sword
Bokken	blade	-1	d4w/ d6w/ d6+2w	3	+1	2	Any	Wooden practice sword, still fairly deadly
Nodachi	blade		d6+1w/ d6+3w/ d4+1m	2		4	Con	Great sword worn over the shoulder
Hishi	blade	+1	d4w/ d4+1w/ d4+2w	4	+3	1	Any	Small dagger favored by women
Kozuka	blade		d4w/d4+2w/ d4+3w	4	+3	1	Any	Knife used by Samurai and carried with the Katana. It was often used to carry severed heads.
Sai	blade		d4s/ d4+2s/ d4w	4	+3	1	Com	Forked Disarming Baton. To be used in pairs (one step less penalty). -2 bonus if used to disarm an opponent
Kama	blade		d4+1w/ d4+2w/ d4+3w	3	+2	2	Any	Long hand held sickle. -1 bonus when used to parry due to its design
Masarki	blade	+1	d6w/ d6+1w/ d4m	3		5	Any	Wood cutters axe.
Nata	blade		d4+1w/ d4+2w/ d4+3w	3	+2	1	Any	Hatchet
Bo	bludgeon	-1	d4+1s/ d4+3s/ d6w	3		2	Any	Short staff.
Jo	bludgeon		d4+1s/ d4w/ d4+1w	3	+1	1	Any	This is a man tall staff.
Yari	blade	+1	d6+1w/ d4+3w/ d4+1m	2		5	Any	Long thrusting spear.
Kusari	bludgeon		d4+1s/ d4w/ d4+1w	3	+3	2	Any	Weighted chain.

# SCARLET ORCHID TOWER

## A DARK MATTER ADVENTURE

by Jim Clunie

### Adventure Overview

Heroes in Hong Kong find themselves investigating a severe case of Sick Building Syndrome at the newly completed Scarlet Orchid Tower. Two security guards have already been killed in a particularly bloody fashion, and more death and destruction is likely to follow.

The contractor responsible for the building has decided to use large amounts of stone quarried from a natural landmark called Grey Dragon Hill, on the Chinese mainland. The exploitation of the hill has severely disrupted the hill's *feng shui* (geomantic value). The contractor's cynical young *feng shui* adviser ordered the quarrymen to find the mystic Earth Pearl that centres the *ti lung*'s essence, transferring a twisted part of its vitality to the tower block.

In a wrong-headed attempt to restore the rightful state of affairs, geomancer Lo Zheng has instead awakened a vengeful and powerful spirit, strengthened by the Dark Tide. The earth dragon (*ti lung*) of Grey Dragon Hill is crippled and maddened with pain as a result of the damage to its stony body. Lo's working has attracted the spirit's full attention to the Scarlet Orchid Tower, and it has already begun to wreak havoc.

### Plot Summary

The night before the heroes' arrival, two of the tower's security staff are killed, after one of the guards becomes possessed by the dark spirit, strikes down his co-worker, then takes his own life. The scene of these deaths is closed off by the tower's management.

The heroes witness a manifestation of the *ti lung*'s spirit that leaves one of the residents (or one of the heroes) burdened by the same curse

that caused the security guards' death.

As the heroes search for the meaning of these events (perhaps spurred on by violent and unsettling events that surround one of their own), the apparitions within the tower continue. The heroes may learn more from the tower staff, residents, and from the geomancer Lo Zheng, who is hanging around the tower, still hopeful of forestalling the dire forces at work there.

In order to remove the terror from the Scarlet Orchid Tower, the heroes must undo Lo's working and send the dragon's spirit to rest, by destroying or returning to its rightful place the Earth Pearl that contains the dragon's essence. If they fail to do so, the building will be destroyed by the *ti lung*'s vengeance with great loss of life.

This adventure is event-based and moderately open in plot. After the opening scene, a number of possible encounters and events should be paced by the GM as determined by the heroes' actions.

### Scenes

**1. The Lobby** and its follow-on scenes introduce the danger, threaten the heroes, and provide various events of weirdness and horror, drawing them in to the plot.

**2. The Geomancer** allows the heroes to find out the cause of the events and directs them to obtain the Earth Pearl to end the danger.

**3. In The Contractor**, the heroes gain the Earth Pearl and have a chance to dispel the spirit.

**4. (Optional) Grey Dragon Hill:** Returning the Earth Pearl to the quarry reawakens the dragon at its natural home, ending the danger to the Scarlet Orchid Tower at the same time that it triggers an enormously dangerous scene for the group.

### Involving the Heroes

The party should have reason to travel to Hong Kong for several days, and to visit the Scarlet Orchid Tower. They should have free time to investigate. Perhaps they have a series of people to meet (business or criminal contacts, informants, or even a family member of one of the heroes), or an international conference. If the heroes work for



an investigative organisation such as the Hoffmann Institute or Department-7, their employer may have received reports of strange occurrences in the building, beginning about two days ago.

## 10-Second Guide to Hong Kong

The territory of Hong Kong was a British colony for most of the 20th century, until it was returned to China in 1997. It is now a Special Administrative Region of China. Hong Kong maintains a free-market economy but its Chief Executive's appointment is dominated by the Beijing government.

This tropical location consists of the island of Hong Kong, Lantau Island and various minor islands, and an area on the mainland called the New Territories. It has densely populated urban areas on both sides of Victoria Harbour (the strait between Hong Kong Island and the mainland).

Hong Kong was badly affected by the SARS outbreak of early 2003.

*Languages:* Cantonese (a dialect of Chinese) and English are both official languages of Hong Kong. Standard Chinese, formerly known as Mandarin, is the language of the PRC government and of classical Chinese literature. The distinction is important in this

adventure. If a hero has "Chinese language" or similar as a skill, the GM might choose to revise this to either Mandarin language or Cantonese language.

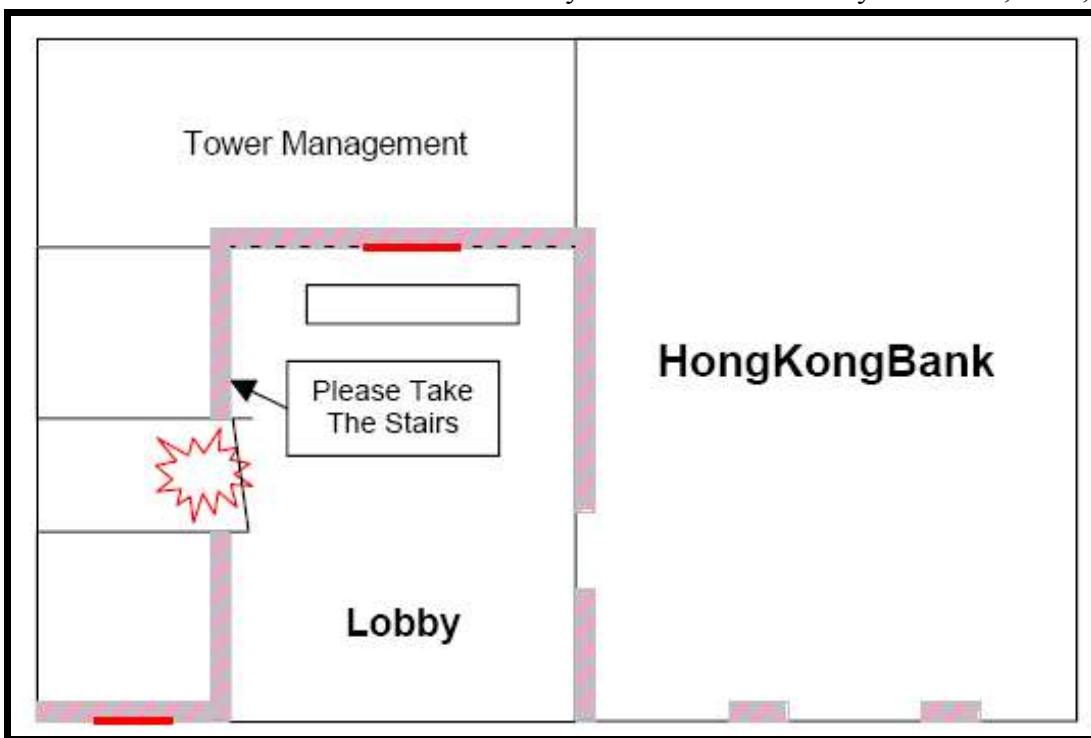
*Names:* In Hong Kong (as elsewhere in the Pacific Rim), people of Chinese descent might choose to

go by either a Chinese surname followed by a Chinese personal name, or a Western name followed by a Chinese surname. The person's Western name might sound similar to his or her Chinese personal name, have the same initial in the Latin alphabet, or might be entirely unrelated.

## The Scarlet Orchid Tower

The Scarlet Orchid Tower, in Hong Kong's Central District, is a 50-storey building of mixed upscale residential apartments, serviced apartments (hired by the night to travelers) and professional offices. Fulltime maid staff live on the premises and security guards patrol the building 24 hours a day. There is a gym and Olympic-size pool in the basement. The second-to-top floor contains a single penthouse apartment (currently empty). The top floor has an observation deck and a boardroom where the building's condominium board meets each quarter. The boardroom is more often used for working committees, resident social gatherings, or occasionally hired for meetings by companies who are tenants of the building. The tower has just been completed. About half of the apartments and offices are occupied. A general meeting of the condominium board is scheduled in three days.

The tower's exterior is mostly glass and steel, with feature buttresses of grey stone. The lobby has a sheer two-storey back wall, floor,



## Dragon Power

### • The Dragon's Gaze

Francis Wu (or the hero who had the highest degree of success on a PER check) sees the 2-metre-wide bulge, high on the lobby wall, writhe and crack open in the shape of a giant eyelid, revealing an orb of glowing gold streaked with dark red. The recipient is drenched in golden light (visible to all heroes with WIL 10 or higher) and plunged into a strange sensation.

The recipient senses himself waking from sleep into a shadowy realm, with the sensation of tiny verminous creatures crawling everywhere over his skin, into his mouth and eyes. They scratch, then cut with excruciating tiny razor-sharp bites, deeper and deeper into muscle and internal organs.

If a hero falls under the dragon's gaze, she should make a *Resolve-physical* resolve check at a +2 penalty. Francis Wu will succeed in this check. On a Failure, the hero passes out and suffers 1w damage from a hard fall to the polished stone floor. On a Success, the recipient remains conscious. The pain is incredible as the unseen little horrors carve open the recipient's body, laying bare his ribs and vertebrae.

The vision ends, with the recipient's muscles aching and skin drenched in cold sweat. Note that the recipient now has the dragon's gift.

At the initial scene in the lobby, the dragon's spirit is still mostly sated with the destruction of the previous night and the fear of many humans in the lobby, so its curse lies dormant until later. In later contacts of this sort, if the dragon has not caused any deaths in the past 12 hours, its gift immediately becomes active in the first stage of transformation.

If the GM determines that a manifestation occurs (see below) where the recipient is present, the *ti lung's* power may

activate the dragon's gift. The GM may instead decide that the power activates at a chosen time, or when the recipient is afraid or angry. See "Manifestations" for more details. These manifestations are intended for the GM to use to move along the plot. In general, random occurrences of the dragon's gift should manifest no more than once in 12 hours.

The recipient begins to feel agonising slicing pains, as he sees cold mist welling up accompanied by tremors, groans, flashes of crimson or blue-white light, runnels of dark blood from the corners of walls, and other peculiar events. (At the GM's option, the party member with the highest WIL score might also see these changes, or they could be confined to the recipient alone.) The GM may require the recipient to make a *Resolve-physical* resolve check at no penalty. On a success, the recipient undergoes a transformation of increasing potency. On a Failure, the recipient's pain and the weird occurrences in the area fade without further effect.

If the recipient decides unprompted to call upon the dragon's gift, he immediately becomes the centre of a manifestation and achieves the next stage of transformation.

The first stage of transformation for a particular recipient may take the form of either the Dragon's Claw or Dragon's Eye, at the GM's discretion. The second transformation uses the other of these two forms. The third and fourth transformations are increasingly extreme.

### • First or Second Stage: The Dragon's Claw

The recipient perceives that his arm and shoulder have swollen and changed, forming a monstrous 2-metre-long, scaled and spiked reptilian limb ending in talons like sword blades. (This change is not visible to others.) The claw lashes out, directed by the recipient's conscious or unconscious impulses. If the recipient does not choose to attack, the limb strikes at the nearest living creature once per round in the Marginal phase, beginning with those known to the recipient.

The claw has STR 14 and strikes with a base situation die of +d0, regardless of the recipient's skill or ineptitude in hand-to-hand combat.

	Skill	Acc	Damage O/G/A	Type/Firepower
Claw	Unarmed-brawl (14/7/3)	0	d4 + 3w/d6 + 4w/d6m	LI/G

The GM should use an optional rule for upgrading damage of Good Firepower against Ordinary Toughness targets: each hit does damage as for one higher grade of success, Amazing damage being doubled (d6 + 4w/d6m/2d6m). Don't add the recipient's damage bonus to this attack.

The transformation lasts for 2, 3 or 4 rounds depending on the recipient's degree of success. As soon as it wears off, the recipient's arm locks up in an uncontrollable paralysis, as ugly yellow and black bruises appear over his shrunken skin. The arm cannot be used.

### • First or Second Stage: The Dragon's Eye

In the recipient's second successful transformation, his eye appears to expand into a yellow reptilian orb surrounded by a mass of fierce scaled and spiked bone ridges. (These changes are not visible to others. The recipient can easily catch sight of the changes to his eye in any polished surface.) The transformed eye sees perfectly in darkness, and sends a killing gaze. If the recipient does not decide to attack, the dragon's gaze falls on the nearest living creature once per round in the Ordinary phase.

The killing gaze causes a gruesome partial transformation, changing areas of the victim's flesh permanently to heavy mudstone. This is a ranged attack based on the recipient's INT, with a base situation die of -d6 (-2 Accuracy). The gaze reaches as far as the recipient can see clearly in daylight (refer to page 39 in the *Gamemaster's Guide* if desired) without applying range or darkness penalties. If the target is wearing armour, the dragon's gaze causes the armour to become brittle and fall away, applying a -1 to each armour roll for every point of damage absorbed, until the subtraction from the armour roll equals its die value, indicating that the armour is destroyed.

Any surviving victim of the dragon's gaze who receives surgery to remove the transformed flesh (curing the Mortal damage that was caused by the gaze) loses 2 points of CON and STR for every Mortal point healed. The mudstone can be returned to flesh by pouring over it the *ti lung's* fresh blood, in the form of either the blood that pours out when the Earth Pearl is destroyed, or the black liquid from the Grey Dragon Hill quarry.

	Skill	Acc	Damage O/G/A	Type/Firepower
Killing Gaze	Special	-2	1m/1d3m/1d6m (no secondary damage)	En/O (see above)

The recipient's transformation lasts for 2, 3 or 4 rounds depending on his or her degree of success in the initial Resolve-physical resolve check. As soon as it wears off, the recipient's becomes swollen and blankly white, seeing nothing.





screens, they may notice (on a successful Awareness-*perception* check, Ordinary success) that there are remains of mostly-mopped-up stains smeared over the floor under the screens, along with the smell of strong disinfectant. On an Amazing success, the hero detects a smell of iron and bodily wastes in the air, covered by the disinfectant.

There is a sudden hubbub as the building trembles with a grinding rumble. Metal furniture scrapes, small objects clatter to the floor, and puffs of dust billow across the lobby. Any heroes with a WIL score of 10 or above (or the hero with the highest WIL score if none qualify) can see that the haze flooding the lobby is actually a fine mist, not enough to obscure vision, but sufficient to blur the edges of objects and fill the air with a clean, damp coolness. As the floor shakes, the walls flex and bulge oddly, and occasionally show a strange broken texture. The red orchid logo on the back wall is gone. In its place, the grey stone has contorted into a complex knot-like bulge.

Each hero should make a PER feat check without modifiers. If no heroes succeed in their PER feat, one of the Chinese businessmen in the lobby suddenly cries out and collapses, writhing, on the floor. This is Francis Wu, a dynamic, hard-partying and more than slightly arrogant investment banker, who has just received the dragon's gift of destruction and despair. (Treat as an Ordinary Trader.)

If one of the heroes succeeds in her PER check, consult the "Dragon Power" sidebar. The disturbance subsides without further incidents. There is no damage to the building and the red orchid logo is back in its proper place. The earth tremor was localised to this building, and nobody outside the building has noticed anything unusual.

### Interviews (Encounter Scene)

The heroes may want to question the tower staff, or others, to find out the reason for these strange occurrences. In general, attempts to ask either the tower staff or tower residents about strange events in the Scarlet Orchid Tower suffer a +2 penalty. At this point, there is little information to find. Occasional sudden chills, odd groaning noises, and minor accidents during the

construction of the building have caused some comments among the construction workers, but no more so than on other building sites.

Manifestations within the last two days, before last night's incident in the lift lobby (described above), have been relatively minor, witnessed by few residents, and not many of the witnesses are sensitive enough to recognise their odd aspects. The tower staff and unit owners will avoid questions that might suggest construction defects or bad luck in the building. These events reflect badly on the tower and might make the informant seem foolish or deluded.

Heroes who are unfamiliar with Hong Kong (those who do not have the relevant Culture-*etiquette* specialty skill, unless they are from Hong Kong themselves) suffer an additional +1 penalty, reduced from the usual penalty for a foreign culture due to the cosmopolitan nature of the former colony. Each group of staff and residents begin the encounter with a Neutral attitude, unless the heroes are accompanied by a figure of authority (either building manager counts for all staff and residents, or the security guards count as authority figures for the receptionists only). The heroes may use Interaction-*charm* to render a particular group more cooperative. If a SCM is Friendly or has been ordered by his or her superiors to assist, the heroes may use Interaction-*interview* to gain further information. Depending on their attitude, SCMs will act, or reveal information if asked specific questions, as follows:

#### • Security guards

(5 x Marginal Brawlers, 1 x Ordinary Brawler. Replace Street Smart with Security for each guard)

The security guards are edgy, and the youngest of them is visibly nervous. If the heroes ask about strange occurrences the guards' eyes shift involuntarily to the lift lobby (Awareness-*intuition* check to notice). The guards are unwilling at first to volunteer information, as for all of the tower staff, but they are worried about their own safety and are most likely of all the staff to have seen something strange. If the heroes establish themselves as serious investigators, and seem to have a plausible theory about what is going on, they no longer suffer a +2 penalty when questioning these guards.

#### • Receptionists

Attitude	Actions	Information on request
Combative	Throw heroes out of the building.	None.
Hostile	Tell heroes to move on from the lobby.	None.
Neutral		Name of Lo Zheng and location of his office. Date of the next condo board meeting.
Friendly		Death of two security guards the previous night. Examine the building plans in manager's office.
Charmed	Ask other staff/residents to help the heroes.	Details of the attack on the security guards. Other strange occurrences in the building for the past two days. Copies of the building plans and construction history.
Fanatic	Lie for the heroes to the police. Act as armed backup for the heroes.	As for Charmed.

(2 x Marginal Administrators)

The two girls at the reception desk only work during the day, and have not been told about the deaths in the lift lobby last night. They rely on the security guards to deal with any strange or threatening events, or visitors who are causing trouble (which might include the heroes).

#### • Office workers and visitors

(Typically Marginal Traders)

The recipient of the dragon's gift (if not one of the heroes) wants only to get out of the building and find time to think about what happened. He will brush off any attempt at questioning. If the heroes try to detain him they will be interrupted by the tower's security guards, allowing the recipient to get away.

Only about 1 in 4 of the other workers who were in the lobby noticed the weird events that accompanied the tremor, and few of them want to risk being seen as disturbed or hallucinating. None will admit to seeing the great eye in the back wall. The office workers will nervously suggest that the event might have been a minor earth tremor, a subway train passing, or subsidence in the building's foundations (built, like most Hong Kong high-rises, on a site reclaimed from the sea by landfill, over the site of a previous tower block).

Even with thorough questioning of the tower's residents, the heroes can find at most three witnesses who may have noticed something in the past two days. In the course of this investigation, they should come across at least two false leads.

#### • Geomancer

The wild-haired older man is Lo

Zheng, a serious-minded Taoist scholar of geomancy (*feng shui*), and astrology. He is once again trying to convince the security guards, as he has been for the past two days, to give him access to all parts of the tower and to its construction documents, to divine the nature and intentions of the spiritual force that inhabits the Tower. He suspects that something nasty has happened in the screened-off lift lobby and has been trying to convince the guards to tell him about it. The guards dislike Mr. Lo, refuse to answer his questions, and have already told him to leave before being interrupted by the apparent earth tremor.

Mr. Lo is intent on finding out anything he can in order to continue his attempts to control the dragon spirit. He is not interested in anyone else's help and does not volunteer information. If the heroes claim to have any news, he will gladly speak with them. If they ask a lot of questions without providing any information, Lo suspects that the heroes are mocking his work. His answers become short and surly, and he demands to know who the heroes are and what they want.

#### • Scarlet Orchid Tower management

The day manager is Terence Forbes (Ordinary Administrator), a dapper young Caucasian man with an affected English public-school accent covering his Cockney background. The tower staff may call him in response to various approaches by the heroes. He will begin with the same attitude as the tower staff member who called him (or Neutral if the heroes contacted him directly). Other members of the tower staff will defer to Forbes, starting with the same attitude

as he does if he accompanies the heroes, and cooperating (as if Charmed) if he asks them to do so.

The night manager is Polly Fong (Ordinary Administrator), a pudgy, short-tempered, middle-aged Chinese woman who prefers speaking Cantonese to English (+1 penalty to encounter skills for heroes who speak to her in English or Mandarin).

Either of the building managers can locate copies of the building plans easily (on a Friendly or better attitude). Records of the construction phase are in storage, making them more difficult to locate, and Forbes or Fong will question why the heroes need the information (will only provide these documents if their attitude is Charmed or better).

#### • Michael Chan, Security Specialist

(Ordinary Scientist: replace Life Science with Security, and add these skill ranks: Computer Science *hardware 1*, Technical Science-*repair 1*, Security-*security devices 3*, System Operation-*sensors 3*)

Michael Chan maintains the Scarlet Orchid Tower's electronic security systems, and can provide access to the closed-circuit camera videotapes of different parts of the building over last night, if he has a Charmed attitude or is asked by one of the building managers to help.

Chan is an outside contractor. In order to speak with him, the heroes will need to convince the security guards or building manager to call him to the Scarlet Orchid Tower.

#### • Building history

If the heroes wish to pursue the possibility of a previous building on the same site, they may waste a day or two at the city archives, which are chaotic at best when it comes to tracing urban developments. The previous apartment building on this site was built in 1994 (replacing a building dating from 1986) then demolished when it became unfashionable and poorly designed for current investment trends. Before 1986, the site was broken into a number of smaller building lots, occupied by a bewildering series of small commercial buildings and apartment blocks, many of which had their own structural problems, commercial failures, criminal incidents and so on.

The city archives also have copies of the building plans, and a construction approvals file that lists the history of the building's construction.

#### • Lift lobby

The security guards will try to stop anyone shifting or peering behind the screens that close off the lift lobby. If the heroes manage to do so, the area behind the screens is an empty lift lobby, lined on all four walls and the floor with grey granite. The heroes should make an Awareness-*perception* check as described at the start of Scene 1, but with a -1 bonus because the stains and smells of death are much thicker in the lobby itself, despite the janitors' heroic cleaning efforts.

#### • Security camera footage

Video footage of the two guards' killings shows one of the guards suddenly swiping at his companion with his left hand, causing enormous slashing wounds that spray gouts of blood across the lift lobby. The second guard's body is almost cut in half. The first guard screams, and waves his left hand in a peculiar uncontrolled fashion, before the left hand lifts up and spreads to cover the guard's face. The guard's head crumples in his own grasp, oozing blood and gore, as he slumps to the floor.

If the heroes have heard about an earlier manifestation (see below) from one of the office workers or residents, and check the security cameras for that time and place, the video footage shows the resident cringing, crying, and possibly running in terror from a seemingly empty upper-floor lift lobby, lined with greypink granite on the floor and walls.

If the heroes check the video footage for the tower's main lobby two days ago, each hero may make a check using Investigate-*search* or *research*, System Operation-*sensors* or Awareness-*perception*. If anyone succeeds, they notice Mr. Lo in the scene, moving furtively around the lobby dropping small objects into inconspicuous places. When the security guards are not watching, he quickly grabs one of the chairs from the reception area and hustles out the door with it. Lo does not show up again on the video until the day that the heroes arrived and first encountered the dragon's manifestation.

If the heroes check the places where Lo dropped items, they may find small mirrors, talismans, or strips of paper marked with formal vertical lines of Chinese script (these are mystic formulae written in Mandarin). At the GM's discretion, disturbing one of these tokens may cause a manifestation of the dragon spirit.

## Manifestations

### • Timing

After the first two events described above (the fatal attack on two security guards the previous night, and the appearance in the lobby), the *ti lung* will continue to show its presence. The GM should choose, or roll a d12 to determine randomly a time within the period listed below when a manifestation will occur, if the heroes are present at any of these locations:

Once per day, or when threatened, any hero who has received the dragon's gift will experience a return of the terrible pains that they felt at first, and may suffer a transformation as described above. See below, for manifestations that will affect Francis Wu, if he is the recipient.

Once per day, if the heroes are not in the Scarlet Orchid Tower, a serious manifestation will occur that they will hear about either in the papers or through their contacts in the building.

Once per 12 hours, if the heroes are present in the Scarlet Orchid Tower, a manifestation will affect them as described below. These will most often happen in the main lobby or near the lifts, where large expanses of grey-pink granite are used as feature walls.

Once per 6 hours, a manifestation as described below will happen where the Earth Pearl is located.

In any of these locations, a manifestation can be triggered by the presence of Lo Zheng, his horoscope of the dragon, or any of the items that he used to try to alter the *feng shui* of the Scarlet Orchid Tower.

### • Flesh

Doors into the area slam shut and jam closed. The walls begin heaving inward to the sound of wheezing, labored breaths. The movement grows more violent, pressing close enough to buffet the heroes or pin one of them, briefly constricting the corridor down to less than a metre of clear space.

Heroes in this situation should make Resolve-*mental* resolve checks. On a Failure, the hero tries desperately to flee, or embarrasses herself in some other way. (If using Fear, Horror and Madness Check rules, this is a Moderate Fear check, with an additional +1 penalty due to the confined space.)

Heroes with 10 or higher WIL, who have not failed their *mental* resolve checks, can see that parts of the wall are overgrown with spiky, gleaming grey scales edged with gold, silver and red.

In a few minutes, the movement subsides, leaving the walls undamaged (apart from anything that the heroes have done to try to escape).

### • Blood

Thick black liquid begins to pour from the edges between wall and ceiling, and from the edges of each panel. The hot sticky stuff splatters over everyone in the area, drenching clothes, and pours in rivulets to the floor, leaving it awash up to ankle depth. Heroes with WIL 10 or greater can smell the choking combined stench of decaying flesh, mud and crude oil.

Heroes in this situation should make Resolve-*mental* resolve checks. On a Failure, the hero is unable to act for the rest of the scene, due to desperate attempts to avoid the disgusting liquid and wipe it off herself. (If using Fear, Horror and Madness Check rules, this is a Slight Horror check.)

Abruptly, the liquid is gone, leaving the floor and walls clean. The heroes' bodies are still covered in filth. The stuff slowly evaporates over the next hour, leaving only a damp ruin of business clothing and hair, and a lingering smell of rotting flesh.



## • Earth Tremors

The building shakes, seemingly to its foundations, with a deep grinding note. The floor wobbles, making it hard to stand. Small objects fall. The violent shaking increases over several minutes. Heroes with WIL 10 or higher hear distant roars of rage and pain, perhaps of some large animal, but with a disquieting note of intelligence.

Heroes in this situation should make *Resolve-mental resolve* checks. On a Failure, the hero tries desperately to flee, or embarrasses herself in some other way. (If using Fear, Horror and Madness Check rules, this is a Slight Fear check.)

The tremors cease. No other part of the building was disturbed, nor did the other occupants hear anything, apart from any shouts and other noises the heroes may have made.

## • Gaze

Provided that none of those present have received the dragon's gift, each hero who has a WIL score of 10 or above should make a PER feat check without modifiers. The hero who has the highest degree of success is driven to his knees by a flood of intense golden light amid a strange plangent chord (perceptible to all heroes with WIL 10 or higher), or borne to the floor by a gout of stinking black fluid, and plunged into a strange sensation. See the "Dragon Power" sidebar for further details.

## • Claw

A cool, dense white mist begins to cascade down the walls, smelling of river mud.

Any hero with a WIL of 10 or above sees a section of the wall warp and bulge, sprouting a massive reptilian limb with claws like scythes. As the weird arm raises to strike, a man-sized eye of gold filmed with blood-red glares down from the center of the thing's palm.

If none of the heroes can see the clawed limb, its first strike misses, scoring deep rents into the floor with a rending crash. Otherwise, resolve the attack normally. The attack is accompanied by a fierce grinding and the roars of some monstrous creature.

The dragon's claw has an Action Check of 12/6/3, two actions per round, and the following attack values:

	Skill	Acc	Damage O/G/A	Type/Firepower
Claw	14/7/3	0	d4+3w/d6+4w/d6m	LI/G

The GM should use an optional rule for upgrading damage of Good Firepower against Ordinary Toughness targets: each hit does damage as for one higher grade of success, Amazing damage being doubled (d6+4w/d6m/2d6m).

Even if the heroes can see the limb, attacking it is ineffectual, since the claw is immaterial and attacks strike the wall behind it. The claw attacks for three rounds before it folds into the wall and vanishes. It cannot reach opponents more than 4 meters from its point of attachment. If the claw cannot reach any targets on its action, it vanishes.

Unlike other manifestations, damage that the claw causes to the floor and walls remains after the manifestation ends.

## Watching Overnight (Combat Scene)

The heroes may want to patrol the building overnight. They may convince the building staff to let them watch with the guards, leave their rooms if they are staying in serviced apartments, or sneak into the building.

There are three security guards on duty at night. One remains at the front desk, while the other two patrol the building together, since they're nervous about attacks.

On the first night after the visitation in the lobby, after 1d6 hours of watching, the dragon's spirit will manifest in a violent fashion just as the pair of security guards approach the heroes' position. Unless a hero with the dragon's gift is already present, the dragon's Gaze manifests as described above. Make checks both for the heroes, and for the security guards. If none of the heroes is possessed by the dragon's gift, one of the security guards succeeds in acquiring the gift.

The recipient of the dragon's gift is transformed immediately, though the effects are not visible to others present. Make a *Resolve-physical resolve* check to determine the duration of the transformation. The transformation lasts for 2, 3 or 4 rounds depending on the recipient's degree of success, counting Failure results as Ordinary.

The Dragon's Claw attacks the nearest security guard and succeeds in its first attack. The others present see the recipient plunge his open, stiffened hand through the torso of the unfortunate guard, spraying gore in a gaping wound. Make an attack for the claw as described above, counting a Failure result as Ordinary success, and apply damage.

If the second guard is not the recipient, he is stunned by the violence of the attack and unable to act for one full round. The heroes, including the recipient if this applies, must make *Resolve-mental resolve* checks. On a Critical Failure, the hero is paralysed with terror and unable to act for 1d4 rounds. On a Failure, the hero loses one action. On Ordinary success, the hero is badly frightened and suffers a +1 penalty to actions for the rest of the round. On Good or Amazing success, the hero continues her actions normally. If the recipient loses actions or is shaken by fright, the claw continues to attack on the

recipient's initiative and does not suffer any penalty.

If using the Fear, Horror and Madness check rules, this is a Moderate Fear check, or Extreme Fear if the guard was killed outright by the first attack.

Resolve the combat for as many rounds as the transformation persists. If the security guards survive until the transformation ends, they will continue firing at the recipient until he falls, unless the heroes can reduce them from a Combative attitude to Friendly using Leadership-*inspire* followed by other encounter skills.

## Francis Wu's Party Trick (Challenge/Combat Scene)

In the opening scene, investment banker Francis Wu may have received the dragon's gift. If so, the heroes encounter Wu as his deadly transformation progresses. On the afternoon after the opening scene, Francis Wu is mugged near the racetrack in Happy Valley. He kills two muggers in a messy fashion. Wu does not report the attack to the police. The killings are a minor news item without details the next day (the heroes are unlikely to notice anything odd about the news report) and will remain unsolved.

The next morning, Wu is struck with pain while crossing the street to his office. His gaze falls on a group of pedestrians several dozens of meters down the street. As Wu stares in horrified fascination, not realising that the event has anything to do with himself, a man's body falls stiffly to the sidewalk, with his arm snapping off on impact. The victim's companion collapses, screaming in fear. The man's petrified body is taken in by the police as evidence. His wife is too overwrought to tell the police anything useful. Her condition is reported prominently in the afternoon papers as "BIZARRE PARALYSIS".

That evening, Francis Wu goes to Lizard, a bar on Wellington Street in the Lan Kwai Fong entertainment district. While there, his third transformation occurs, and draws him into a murderous battle. The heroes may be at Lizard for their own reasons. If not, they will hear about the fight, more or less distorted, in the news, and may decide to visit Lizard, where Francis Wu will return and undergo his final transformation.

## Mrs Trixie Bellamy

The heroes may go to visit Mrs. Bellamy. The hospital does not want reporters talking to Mrs. Bellamy and will only admit visitors if they show evidence that they are relatives, police, or have some other legitimate reason to see her.

She has a breathing tube linked to a respirator and is strapped in place. Mrs. Bellamy has a sheet draped over her body, and objects in a tearful and terrified manner if anyone tries to remove it.

Under the sheet, the right side of her body is encased in stone and her right arm and leg are completely petrified. The substance is a dark grey-brown roughsurfaced rock, which has cracked in places on her torso, leaking blood. It is perfectly shaped to the contours of her body in a slightly bent walking pose. The edges of the inclusion are covered with a thick band of adhesive bandaging, with blood spots showing through.

Any heroes with Physical Science-*chemistry* or *planetology* skill ranks will recognise the substance as sedimentary rock. A successful Physical Science-*planetology* check identifies the stone as mudstone, and a Good success in Physical Science-*planetology* or use of a local reference text will confirm that the stone is typical of mudstones found in Hong Kong and in the nearby Guangdong province of China.

A hero who makes a successful Medical Science-*medical knowledge* or *forensics* check can confirm that the stone parts are identical in surface contours to the human body, and seem to have replaced Mrs. Bellamy's flesh to a variable depth, with only superficial attachment. The stone parts could be removed by surgery, then the exposed surface will have to be closed by artificial ribs and skin grafts. She will lose her arm and leg, but the hero can tell on a Good or better success that the damage does not seem to have prevented the function of any vital organs.

The nurses will say that Mrs Bellamy's doctor is not available (in fact, the doctor has taken the afternoon off in bafflement and depression). Nobody at the hospital can provide any explanation for Mrs. Bellamy's condition.

men and serious injuries to three others. Several of the dead men had known gang ties. The nature of the injuries, and witness statements, suggest the use of Chinese broadswords or similar large bladed weapons. (This is inaccurate, based on the rapid multiple deaths and the slashed and pierced condition of the bodies, not helped by the dim lighting or the drunk and excitable condition of the witnesses.)

In fact, the fight had nothing to do with the victims' organized crime affiliations. Francis Wu didn't know the victims, though his annoyance at their loud and obnoxious behaviour fuelled his rampage. After less than a minute of carnage, Wu's transformation faded and he was flung into a dim corner of the bar, unnoticed. In his crippled and distressed condition, he has crawled out the back entrance of the bar, up a service stair in an adjoining alley, and is now hiding in the loading dock of one of the neighbouring buildings facing Wyndham Street. He will return to Lizard in a confused state after dark.

If the heroes are at Lizard at the same time as Francis Wu, they may get into combat with him. The bar has been decorated by an international team of experts in a slick corporate fusion of Chinese, Japanese and Western international trends, highlighted by hanging red printed lanterns, a brilliantly spot-lit curved white marble bar, and a floor-to-ceiling internally lit fish tank. It's loud and crowded with suited young men and slim, heavily made-up young women.

The heroes are alerted by screams and a general rush backwards, away from a man who was sitting at the bar (or has just staggered in the door), but has now levitated off the floor in a dramatic martial arts pose, with gleaming, feral eyes and hands hooked into claws. See the "Dragon Power" sidebar for further details of the third or fourth transformation.

Wu immediately attacks those nearest to him, striking indiscriminately with the claw and gaze of his transformed body, until the transformation ends or he is killed. (If the heroes need help, some of the bar patrons may once again be armed gangsters – three Marginal Brawlers on the first evening, or up to six Ordinary Brawlers on the second evening who have returned for revenge for their downed colleagues.)

In the aftermath of the battle, the

If the heroes are not present on the first evening, they hear that there has been a melee at the Lizard leading to the gruesome deaths of five

L A S T R E S O R T

heroes will find it difficult to leave the bar due to screaming panicked patrons trying to get out, and numerous police trying to get in and control the situation. The police will certainly want to take them in for questioning. Heroes who fired guns, killed an apparently innocent man (Francis Wu), seem to be associated with gangsters, or who tell wild stories to try to get out of police custody, could be held or charged.

### Lo Zheng Persists (Encounter Scene)

After the tremor and weird transformation that he witnessed in Scene 1, the geomancer Lo Zheng is more determined than ever to find out what is happening in the Scarlet Orchid Tower. He tries again the next day to speak to the building manager (resulting in another argument with the guards at the door). If the heroes stay at, or repeatedly visit the tower, Mr. Lo may recognise them and approach them in the street. He insists that he needs to know what has happened in the building, to have access to the building plans and records, and to know the exact date of its construction. Lo says that it is a matter of life and death, and that everyone in the building could be killed if they do not listen to him. He is highly agitated and clearly thinks that he knows what is going on.

However, if the heroes respond with questions, Lo is cagey and suspicious. He does not want to reveal his own part in the disturbance, and does not believe that others (especially *gwai lo* so-called investigators, though he will not call them such names) are capable of solving the problem. He insists that the heroes should get the building plans and construction records, as well as anything that they can find out about strange things happening in the Scarlet Orchid Tower, and bring them to his consulting room (he provides the address). He refuses to explain.

### Scene 2: The Geomancer's Apartment (Encounter/Challenge Scene)

#### Consulting Mr. Lo

Lo Zheng has a consulting room with attached one-bedroom apartment (really a bedsitter) in an aging ten-storey mid-rise office tower, the Jade Lantern Imports Building, in the Western District. The heroes can reach the Jade

Lantern Building by traveling partway up the Hillside Escalator Link, an 800-metre-long series of escalators, landings and stairs that carries office workers from Central to their apartment blocks in the Mid-Levels. The Hillside Escalator is one-way, running downhill in the morning and uphill in the evening.

The building has a wide marble-paved central staircase and a small lift that smells vaguely of sandalwood, with blurry bronze-mirrored walls.

Mr Lo's front room, where he will speak to the heroes if he is present, is a mid-sized office filled with natural light (or the glow of streetlamps at night). From the entrance, the direct line of sight into the room is blocked by a paper screen that the heroes must walk around to enter.

The office has tasteful handmade wooden furniture arranged into a pleasing irregular pattern, several porcelain and jade statues depicting the Twelve Immortals, scrolls with Chinese lettering, a complex antique-looking coloured wall-chart (showing the phases of the North Polar stars and constellations, in the Purple Pavilion system of Chinese astrology), and an eight-sided mirror hanging high on the wall.

A door, discreetly screened by the placement of office furniture, leads into Mr. Lo's private lounge, which he uses as a study. If the heroes have brought plans and construction records of the Scarlet Orchid Tower, Lo Zheng will invite them into his study to look over the documents. If the heroes don't have the documents, he will insist that it is important for the heroes to locate them (see "Lo Zheng Persists" above) and will not answer any questions.

The study has a curtained alcove containing a narrow single bed, a door leading to an ensuite, and a fire escape outside the window. The study is lit by a desk lamp. It contains a large wooden desk, three rows of bookshelves, a sofa, and a small table with two light framed chairs (one of which is piled with books).

Mr. Lo is a widower who lives alone. His desk and shelves have several old photographs of his deceased wife and three children, now grown, whose infrequent letters are collected neatly in one of the desk drawers.

The study also has several statues of the Immortals (smaller, but older and more valuable than those in the public office) and two





## Studying Mr. Lo's Books

The books spread over the desk and on one of the smaller chairs are a mixture, combining several books of a similar appearance to the ones on the shelves with other, more colourfully printed, newer titles. The older books are all advanced works in Chinese astrology written in Mandarin. The newer books are recent texts in both Mandarin and Cantonese, borrowed from a local university, some covering the geology of Hong Kong Island and Guangdong Province, and others covering conventional astronomy, particularly star catalogues and the movements of stars in the Galaxy (one of these is in English).

Many of these books have places marked with slips of paper or are sitting open to the relevant page, but none of them have been underlined or otherwise written on, at least, by Lo Zheng. The pencil-scribbles of other students may fool the heroes – apply a +1 penalty to a player who states that she is looking for underlining and marks.

The map is a detailed topographic view of Guangdong Province issued by the People's Republic of China Lands and Cartographic Office in 1967, with a spot height next to a small village neatly circled. The map scale is denoted in Arabic numerals, but the place names and marginal notations are all in Chinese characters. Place names, including the circled location (Grey Dragon Hill), can be read by anyone with a Chinese dialect skill. All text on the map can be read by a hero who knows Standard Chinese/Mandarin.

If a hero has the Knowledge-Mandarin *language* skill and reads some of the more basic texts on Lo Zheng's bookshelves for 1d4 hours, she can pick up enough understanding of Chinese astrology to try to interpret the chart on the desk. This is a complex check using Lore-*occult lore*, or untrained WIL feat checks if the hero does not have any Lore skills, each with a +2 penalty due to the unfamiliar and complex task. (Ignore the +2 penalty if the hero actually knows something about Chinese astrology.)

On one success, the hero realises that there is something very unusual about the chart. On three successes, the hero can tell that the chart refers to a date in the extremely distant past. On five successes, the complex check is complete, and the hero can tell the approximate date that is

## Security at the Jade Lantern Imports Building

If the heroes decide to break into the building after hours, the following details might be relevant.

The building does not have a security guard, though it has an alarm system engaged at night with sensors covering the ground floor windows, linked to a security company with armed response (two armed Ordinary security guards, equivalent to those at the Scarlet Orchid Tower, with 9mm pistols, will arrive in 5+d20 minutes).

The front door of the building is a 3-metre-high metal affair that can't feasibly be charged down (a Good toughness reinforced door as described in the *Gamemaster's Guide*), with a Good-quality lock that will require 4 successes with Manipulation-*lockpick* to defeat, imposing a +2 penalty on each check.

There is also a side entrance off an alleyway, with an ordinary-sized door secured by an Ordinary lock, but covered by an alarm sensor that will trip if the heroes break down the door.

The lobby has no motion detectors, though loud noises at night might be heard by several live-in residents of the building (Awareness checks against a skill score of 9, with a base +d6 modifier adjusted by the degree of loudness of the noise) who will call the security firm or the police.

represented in the chart: a time 109 million years ago.

A hero who reads the reference books on astronomy may make a Physical Science-*astronomy* check (+2 penalty if he only reads English, -1 bonus if he also reads Cantonese). On an Ordinary or better success, he may provide one success to the complex skill check to interpret the horoscope. Once the date in the chart is established, if the same hero had a Good or better

success, he realises that there is an error in the chart (see below).

Once the date in the chart is established, a hero who reads the works on geology may make a Physical Science-*planetology* check (+2 penalty if he only reads Cantonese, +1 penalty if he only reads Mandarin, or -1 bonus for both). On an Ordinary or better success, he realises that the date is the same as the age of a formation of granite centred on the village of Grey Dragon Hill, in Guangdong Province.

## The True Horoscope

Lo Zheng has made a serious error in his horoscope for the *ti lung* of Grey Dragon Hill. He has failed to account for the influence of a variable star that existed at the time of the dragon's creation, but which has long since destroyed itself, forming a dim nebula. If properly calculated into the horoscope, the variable star is a terrible omen, casting dire influences over every part of the prediction. A more accurate transcription of the horoscope's meaning would be:

"The dragon will die in madness, his blood will soften the stone, when the thieves from the West pierce his heart."

### Lo Zheng's Journal

The GM may decide that Mr. Lo keeps a journal, written in Cantonese, somewhere in his study (Investigate-*search* check to find it). A hero who reads carefully through the journal for two hours may make an Investigate-*research* check.

Depending on the hero's degree of success, the GM may explain as much as he feels appropriate of the information above and in the introduction.

The sequence of skill checks listed above relies on at least some of the heroes having a combination of Chinese languages, Lore and Physical Science skills. If the heroes are lacking in these areas, but at least one hero reads Cantonese, the journal may explain a large part of Mr. Lo's work on the *ti lung*'s horoscope, and may provide a Cantonese transcription of the horoscope's

result.

### Scene 3: The Contractor (Challenge/Combat Scene)

#### Locating Tommy Leung Constructions

The name of the building contractor is printed on the building plans and construction records, if the heroes have a chance to view these. The heroes can check through back issues of any relevant magazines or journals (property investment, financial news, gossip, or general newspapers) with an Investigate-*research* check to locate the name of Tommy Leung Constructions and the fat profits that the company made on the Scarlet Orchid Tower due to the "interest of prominent Island figures".

The name of the construction company is also engraved on the building's foundation stone (Awareness-*perception* or Investigate-*search* to find it).

Further research can provide the location of current building projects by the company (Ordinary complex skill check) and may net the location of Tommy Leung's home (any Amazing success, or a Good complex skill check at +1 penalty).

Tommy Leung Constructions has an office in the Central District. The accountants and project managers who staff the downtown office have no knowledge of Mr. Leung's ambitions to seize the dragon's *feng shui*, nor anything about a heart or a pearl, and will not divulge Tommy Leung's whereabouts or home address.

#### Construction Sites

The heroes may question Leung Constructions' workers at the company's various building sites. The construction crews are not inclined to take up work time to answer questions that may get them in trouble (Neutral attitude).

However, they have no great loyalty to the management and will help if brought to a Friendly attitude by successful Interaction-*charm* or Deception-*bribe* checks.

Heroes attempting to influence these workers suffer a +2 penalty if they speak only English and a +1 penalty if they are unfamiliar with Hong Kong society. Any hero who speaks the minority Hakka dialect can obtain a -1 bonus to interaction checks, since many of the workers are

## Construction Site Battle

If the heroes manage to insult or antagonize the construction workers (Combative attitude), each site will have 5 + 2d10 Ordinary Labourers ready to fight. The workers will arm themselves with various tools equivalent to clubs (50%), maces (20%) and flails (10%) as well as power tools (15%) and nail guns (5%).

	Skill	Acc	Damage O/G/A	Type/Firepower
Power tool	Melee Weapons -powered	+2	d4 + 2w/d6 + 2w/d6 + 4w	LI/O
Nail gun	Modern Ranged Weapons	See below	d3w/d4w/d3m	HI/O

A nail gun has a safety lock that only allows it to fire when pressed against a hard surface. The gun can be used in melee against an enemy wearing armour with a +1 accuracy rating. Otherwise the operator can force down the safety lock with an improvised item, allowing it to fire with a +2 accuracy penalty at a range of 2/4/8 metres.

Fighting on a construction site is hazardous due to the many gaps in the floor, unfinished wall frames, and heavy objects and machinery laid around ready for use. Improvised weapons are easy to find for any combatant. If a combatant suffers a Critical Failure on a melee attack, or an opponent deliberately forces him into a hazard or collapses an unstable item on him with a successful Unarmed Attack-*brawl* check, the victim must make an Acrobatics-*fall* or *dodge* check as if for a Short fall:

Critical Failure: d6 + 2w damage + pinned or fallen down

Failure: d4 + 2w damage

Ordinary to Amazing: No damage

A character who suffers a Critical Failure on this check either falls down several levels or has a large object fall on top of him, and may need to make a Strength feat check, Athletics-*climb* check or a run move to return to the combat, at the GM's discretion.

Hakka.

The construction workers can give many details about the company and the Scarlet Orchid Tower, including any dates of construction that the heroes may want, the source of the grey marble, and the location of the company office and Tommy Leung's home.

### Leung House

Tommy Leung has a mansion in the hills above Stanley, a new suburb south of the city of Victoria that was formerly a separate small town. Mr. Leung, his wife and teenage son are currently on holiday in California, but the house is well guarded by Mr. Leung's staff and guards.

The house sits near the crest of a hill

with a stunning outlook over rolling hills to the distant ocean, where a fishing fleet of traditional sampans comes and goes over the day and evening. Rows upon rows of new terrace houses spread across the lowlands between the mansion and the sea, with salmon-coloured plaster walls and roofs of orange-painted metal shaped to look like tile.

The house rests on its own site, a rarity and sign of prestige in Hong Kong. The main part of the house is a boxy three-storey block with white plaster walls, mostly taken up by full-height or two-storey areas of windows surrounded by ornate blue-painted decorative bands, and a blue-tiled roof. A porte-cochere (a solidly built sheltering roof supported by pillars) thrusts



forward, covering the place where a semicircular tiled driveway meets the main formal entry to the house. The narrow strip between the front of the house and the street is planted with semi-formal garden beds, centred on a fountain and scattered with modern sculptures in stone. A separate wing extending from the back of the house provides amah's quarters for the staff of Filipino maids. To the left of the house, a driveway half-screened by ferns leads to a three-car garage.

The interior of the house is planned around a great two-storey-high living room,

surrounded on three sides by a balcony at first floor level, with a full-height window wall facing out from the back of the house into an enclosed courtyard with a 20 metre swimming pool. The ground floor includes a formal dining room, breakfast room facing the pool and a set of rooms for children to play separate from the movements of their parents. The second floor houses more private rooms including bedrooms and Tommy Leung's offices: an outer public office, study, then a private room opening off the study (see "The Red Pearl" below).

The security station is also on the second floor, at a corner that provides rapid access to two sides of the balcony and to the stairs down.

Closed-circuit cameras survey the entrance driveway, paths and courtyards around the exterior of the house, each entry, and the length of the living room. The areas that are covered by cameras are lit at night by spotlights outside and by low feature lighting inside. Outside doors are secured with Good-quality locks.

Windows are wired to an alarm system, tripped by

breaking of the glass.

## Guards and Staff

The house is watched at all times by shifts of armed guards. The guards spend a lot of their time in their room next to the security station, and also patrol the exterior and check the corridors of the house periodically.

Each shift of guards consists of six men. Five are Ordinary Brawlers, each with the System Operation skill in addition to those listed and with Unarmed Attack-power *martial arts* in

place of *brawl*. See below for the disposition of the other guard. Successive shifts of guards remain in the house for no more than fifteen minutes during a shift change, each eight hours.

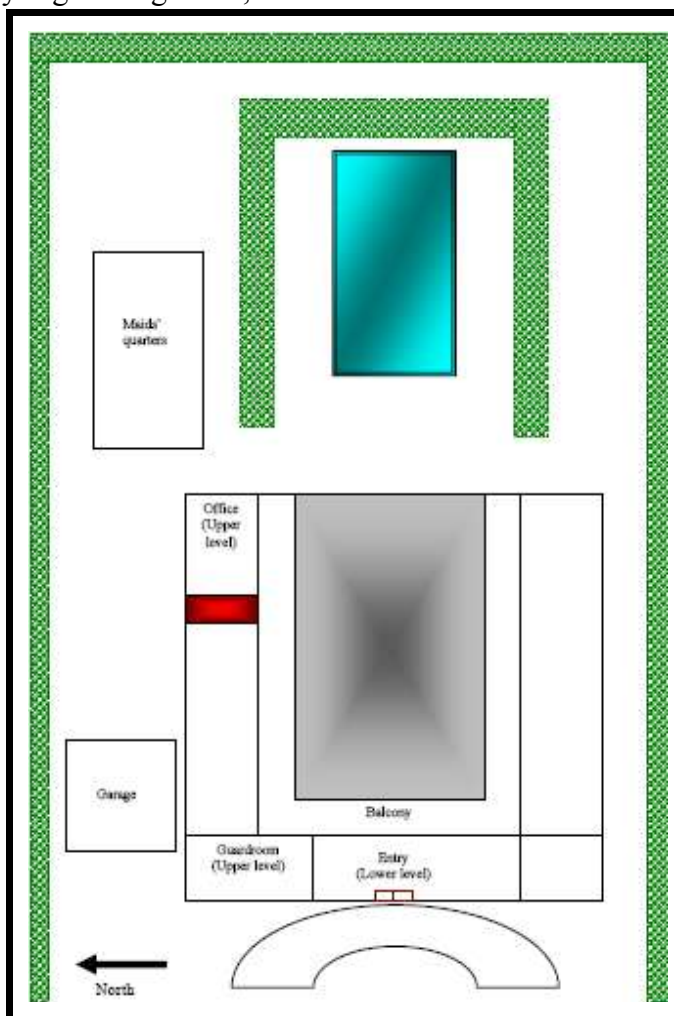
Each guard has a 9mm pistol, a butterfly knife (treat as a dagger), a battle vest, a hand-held radio, one pair of steel handcuffs and five expandable plastic cuffs. At the GM's option, up to two of the guards may not be wearing their armour if they don't expect any threat. Two 9mm submachineguns are kept in the guardroom.

One guard will always remain at the security station and

may make a System Operations-sensors check to notice anything unusual on the closed-circuit cameras (+1 penalty at night due to reduced lighting).

The heroes might encounter 1-3 guards patrolling outside, 1-2 inside the house, or one guard wandering on his own to use the bathroom, smoke, get some food, or for similar minor personal reasons. The others are usually in the guardroom unless alerted.

If a security camera or light fails for no



apparent reason, two guards will investigate, unless the guard at the security station succeeds in an Awareness-*intuition* check, in which case all the available guards will arm themselves fully and take up positions to prepare for intruders.

The guards will try to capture intruders, but if they are shot at they will return fire. Once the guards have captured or disabled all the intruders that they know about, or if they are clearly outmatched, they will regroup in the guardroom and call the police, who will arrive in 10 + d12 minutes.

Treat the maid staff as Extras. When not working around the house or in the kitchen, the maids often leave to shop or relax at local parks during the day. Otherwise off-duty maids will be in the servants' wing. They will try to stay out of sight and contact the guards by the intercom if they notice any intruders. During the day, the heroes may encounter a single maid anywhere in the house, or make a Personality check to determine if they find 1-2 maids in the amah's quarters. At night, the heroes may encounter one maid in the kitchen (preparing food for the guards) and four others are in the servants' wing.

### The Front Door

Generally it won't be feasible for heroes to convince the staff to let them into the Leung house. A guard will answer the door, backed up by another guard and with their two colleagues on alert in the guardroom. The guard will say that Mr. Leung is not available (he will not volunteer the information that Leung is away) and ask the heroes to leave the property. The guards will not let anyone into the house short of Hong Kong police with a valid search warrant.

### The Red Pearl

One of Mr. Leung's most experienced men was entrusted to watch over the pearl. However, he has been destroyed by a manifestation of the *ti lung*'s revenge. Tommy Leung's private display room off his study, which had been richly decorated in polished wood, velvet and brass fittings, is now a slaughterhouse of dismembered body parts.

As the heroes open the door to the small room or large closet, each should make a Dexterity check to avoid being smeared with blood. Actually entering the room requires a

second check at a +3 penalty. The Earth Pearl sits on a shelf opposite the door in an open lacquered box, remarkably untouched by the surrounding carnage.

This sight is grounds for a Resolve-*mental resolve* check for each hero (a Slight Horror check). On an Ordinary success, the hero recoils from the scene in shock and nausea. He must leave the study, or the house if he can, and even when he has calmed down he cannot return to the display room. On a Failure, the hero stares flabbergasted at the scene until pulled away, and suffers nightmares every following night, getting no rest and suffering 1 Fatigue each night. On a Good or Amazing success the hero is revolted by the sight, but able to continue with his actions.

If any of the heroes has the dragon's gift, the GM may decide that the gift manifests just outside, or immediately upon opening the display room. Otherwise, the heroes can take the box without difficulty. A manifestation of the *ti lung* will occur randomly in each 6-hour period wherever the Earth Pearl is located.

### Scene 4: Grey Dragon Hill (Challenge/Combat Scene)

Heroes who have learned the significance and source of the grey-pink marble used in the Scarlet Orchid Tower, either through Mr. Lo's references or by tracing construction records, may wish to visit the quarry site of Grey Dragon Hill, in Guangdong Province of the People's Republic of China. This provides an opportunity to witness the consequences of the desecration performed there.

### Entering the PRC

The crossing between the mainland part of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (the New Territories) and Guangdong Province is no longer an international border, but still attracts heightened control from the Armed People's Police, compared to travel within China.

The official China Travel Agency and many others offer package tours, which consist of trips from one to 11 days long by hover ferry, bus and rail through the interesting scenery of traditional Chinese rice, duck and fish farms, visiting a few extremely dull provincial museums and attractions, such as the exterior of a concert

hall built in 1931 as a memorial to Sun Yat-sen. The tours do not go anywhere near Grey Dragon Hill.

It's also possible for foreigners to travel into China away from the official itinerary. The heroes may encounter many other Westerners crossing to shop for cheap goods with often suspect labels at Shenzhen or Guangzhou. The trip requires visas, which cost HK\$250 to pick up by 2pm the next day, and a Customs check at the extremely busy Lo Wu Border Control, manned by numerous Armed People's Police in old-style heavy serge uniforms, armed with Norinco assault rifles.

### The Tainted River

To reach the abandoned village of Grey Dragon Hill, the heroes will need to drive for 20km along the local road that joins a stream running down through slightly rolling hill country.

Near the highway, the road consists of decades-old tarseal, wide enough for two cars to pass but without lane markings. The roadway is cracked by weeds towards the edges. As it continues, potholes and irregular dips are followed by broken slabs, stretches of weedy gravel, and muddy drop-outs on the stream side of the road.

The driver must make four Vehicle Operation-*land vehicle* skill checks, the first two at no penalty, then +1 and +2 respectively. On a Failure, the vehicle skids in a bad patch and may be damaged as if by a 5-20 km/h crash. On a Critical Failure, the vehicle falls into a collapsed section beside the stream, suffers damage as a 21-60 km/h crash, and is stuck until winched out of the gooey mud. The third and fourth skill checks are beyond the range of cellphone coverage in this area.

The stream itself has a smell, shows floating streaks of a black oily substance and is fringed by yellowing vegetation and bare patches of mud. At the start of the road each hero may make an Awareness-*perception* check to notice these signs. As the journey continues, the stream's poor quality is plain to

all, developing into a lifeless muddy gully with eddies and pools of black slime, stinking of dead things.

The area shows the effects both of too little and too much rain. Trees and grasses are dead or dying, leaving bunches of coarse black reeds in an expanse of greasy grey mud. Dull clouds with tints of yellow and brown gather in the sky as a damp, slow, warm and foul-smelling breeze plays fitfully across the skin. Later in the afternoon, the humid, threatening weather may break into a constant drizzle of warm polluted rain. The stream bed fills quickly with gunmetal-grey water flowing with slimy black gobbets. Increase the above driving checks by 1 step of difficulty as the road surface grows slick and the mud underneath becomes weakened and waterlogged.

The road ends at the foundations of a reinforced concrete bridge that has collapsed and almost entirely disappeared into the black stream. A group of dilapidated buildings begins about 200m on the far side. The heroes will have to wade the waist-deep stream of black slime or find some other means to cross, if they intend to enter the village.

### Grey Dragon Hill Village

A successful Knowledge-*deduce* check reveals that the village is in an unnaturally rapid state of decline, considering that production of stone from the quarry ended barely a year ago. Part of the settlement has been crushed by a mudslide of slimy grey clay. The remainder of the prefabricated timber houses have cracked walls spotted with black mould, tin roofing rusted to a jigsaw puzzle of unstable sharp-edged pieces, and sagging, unsafe floors and foundations. The roads are cracked and potholed, but the entire village is almost free of weeds or any other living plant life, with occasional children's toys, plastic bags and other minor debris scattered about on the mud.

### The Garbage Pit





an Acrobatics-*dodge* check to avoid being crushed, in ascending order of PER scores). Randomly placed spurs and faces of rock crack open with beams of golden light, manifesting scaled claws or red-gold eyes that attack any living thing – refer to Manifestations, except that the dragon's own body has a STR of 22 and INT of 16 as the base scores for its attacks. The upheaval lasts for many minutes before the immortal spirit finally expires.

If a hero chooses to enter the pool of stinking slime at the base of the quarry, for whatever reason, the GM may require a *Resolve-physical resolve* check to touch the disgusting matter and a CON feat check to avoid disease. However, this substance has a mystic correspondence to the dragon's blood mentioned in Lo Zheng's horoscope, and will immediately restore any body parts that have been transformed to mudstone.

## Resolution: Destroying the Earth Pearl

The red pearl indeed contains the essence of the *ti lung* and represents its heart. According to Lo Zheng's horoscope, the heroes must either destroy the pearl or return it to Grey Dragon Hill to end the dragon's mad rampage.

The pearl can be harmed by any normal assault that would damage a hard and flawless piece of stone. It will not break when thrown on the floor, dissolve in water or wine, or burn in a cigarette lighter's flame. A sledgehammer or a blowtorch would be adequate.

The pearl breaks in two under the attack, releasing a gout of bright red blood. The recipient of the dragon's gift feels a sharp, piercing pain in his or her chest and must make a CON check: Critical Failure – d4m damage, Failure – d6w, Ordinary – d4s, Good to Amazing – 1 point stun. A sudden sense of relief strikes, as if an oppressive presence had departed.

Over the next few weeks, the marble décor of the Scarlet Orchid Tower

shows an unpleasant change, turning brown and leaking smelly fluid. The management must decide in the end to replace all of the stonework at a cost of several hundred thousand dollars. No further deaths occur at the tower, except in the normal course of a community of several hundred rich, self-centred and unhealthy individuals.

## Resolution: The Collapse

Three days after the heroes' arrival, fifty of the owners of units in the building, along with a bevy of accountants, lawyers, and Tommy Leung, gather in the top floor boardroom for the annual condo board meeting. The room has naturally received a large share of the building's signature stone, covering the walls, floor, doors and even the tabletop.

If the heroes have not stopped the *ti lung*, its vengeance falls upon the gathered owners wholesale. The doors of dragon stone shut and seal themselves, hiding the screaming and carnage within as the upwardly mobile die, torn apart by giant claws, drowned in conjured torrents of mud or leaping from the 50th floor windows. Blood leaks under the boardroom doors in runnels. Panels of stone throughout the core of the building begin to twist unnaturally, buckling and cracking the structure of the tower. The building wavers and crumbles inwards, falling thunderously to the street, ending the crime of its existence.

## The Kindly GM

The GM may wish to shorten or simplify the adventure by some of these means:

- Allow Lo Zheng to find and steal the Earth Pearl, keeping it somewhere in his apartment (perhaps Lo will fall victim to the same fate as Tommy Leung's hapless henchman in the standard plot).
- Reduce the number and competence of Tommy Leung's guards.
- Reduce the litter serpent's toughness to Ordinary.

# Biokineticist

by Matthew R. Esch

## Biokineticist SCM Template (Human)

A Biokineticist concentrates on the Biokinesis broad skill and its specialty skills. This is the psionic healer, the character who takes on damage and disease upon himself and alleviates it through concentration.

The biokineticist usually augments his psionic abilities with a few mundane skills. He enjoys science-related skills, but avoids diplomatic skills because biokineticists are generally introspective and self-absorbed. Among the other psionic skills, ESP is often a biokineticist's second choice.

### Skills:

●*Marginal*: Athletics; Vehicle Op; Stamina; Biokinesis-*heal*, -*transfer damage*; Knowledge, Medical Science; Awareness; Interaction.

●*Ordinary*: Athletics; Vehicle Op; Stamina; Biokinesis-*heal 2*, -*rejuvenate*, -*transfer damage 2*; Knowledge, Medical Science-*treatment*; Awareness; Interaction.

●*Good*: Athletics; Vehicle Op; Stamina; Biokinesis-*heal 3*, -*rejuvenate 2*, -*transfer damage 2*, -*control metabolism*; Knowledge-*first aid*, Medical Science-*treatment 2*, ESP; Awareness, Interaction.

●*Amazing*: Athletics; Vehicle Op; Stamina, Biokinesis-*heal 4*, -*rejuvenate 3*, -*transfer damage 3*, -*control metabolism 2*; Knowledge-*first aid*, Medical Science-*treatment 3*, -*psychology* **OR** -*xenomedicine (specific)*, ESP-*empathy 2*.

### Equipment:

Various pharmaceuticals (PL4+), first aid kit (PL5), medical scanner (PL6), surgical kit (PL6; if SCM possesses -*surgery*), 3 trauma packs, type I; life support pack (PL7), medical gauntlet (PL7).

## Biokineticist SCM Template (Fraal)

### Skills:

●*Marginal*: Vehicle Op; Biokinesis-*heal*, -*transfer damage*; Knowledge, Medical Science; Awareness, Resolve; Interaction, Telepathy.

●*Ordinary*: Vehicle Op; Biokinesis-*heal 2*, -*rejuvenate*, -*transfer damage 2*; Knowledge, Medical Science-*treatment*; Awareness, Resolve; Interaction, Telepathy.

●*Good*: Vehicle Op; Biokinesis-*heal 3*, -*rejuvenate*, -*transfer damage 3*; Knowledge-*first aid*, Medical Science-*treatment 2*, *surgery*; Awareness, Resolve; Interaction, Telepathy.

●*Amazing*: Vehicle Op; Biokinesis-*heal 4*, -*rejuvenate*, -*transfer damage 4*; Knowledge-*first aid 2*, Medical Science-*treatment 3*, *surgery 2*, -*psychology* **OR** -*xenomedicine (specific)*, ESP-*empathy*; Awareness-*perception*, Resolve; Interaction, Telepathy.

### Equipment:

Various pharmaceuticals (PL4+), first aid kit (PL5), medical scanner (PL6), surgical kit (PL6; if SCM possesses -*surgery*), 3 trauma packs, type I; life support pack (PL7), medical gauntlet (PL7).

Human				
	Marginal	Ordinary	Good	Amazing
Strength	6	7	8	9
Dexterity	9	10	11	12
Constitution	12	13	14	14
Intelligence	9	10	11	12
Will	11	12	13	14
Personality	7	8	9	11
Action Check	12+/11/5/2	12+/11/5/2	13+/12/6/3	14+/13/6/3
# of Actions	2	3	3	3
Psionic Energy Points	11	12	13	14

Fraal				
	Marginal	Ordinary	Good	Amazing
Strength	6	7	8	9
Dexterity	9	10	11	11
Constitution	9	10	10	10
Intelligence	10	11	12	14
Will	12	13	14	16
Personality	8	9	11	12
Action Check	11+/10/5/2	12+/11/5/2	13+/12/6/3	13+/12/6/3
# of Actions	2	2	3	3
Psionic Energy Points	18	19	21	24

## Author's Note

The GM has the option on the Amazing quality Biokineticist SCM of choosing either Medical Science-psychology or – xenomedicine (specific). Naturally, the GM should specify which species the xenomedicine is specific to, and should choose a species other than the SCM's.

Additionally, the equipment list specifies various gear by Progress Level. Consideration should be made for the overall Progress Level, or more specifically, the Progress Level of Medical Science in the setting, and adjust accordingly.

# ALTERNITY® Science Fiction Role-playing Game

## PERSONAL DATA

Name: Yloisan Targ	Race: Gardhyi	Profession: Mindwalker/ I'krl Faith FX Talent	Career: Krl'osar/ Krl'yrtā
Alias: The Darkman	Sex: M	Ht: 2m	Wt: 80 kg
Homeworld: within the Gardh Technarchy	Alliance*: Exeat/ self	Hand: Right	Social Status: Krl'xenoth
PL: PL7/8			

Ability		Score	Untrained	Res Mod	Action Check Score			
Strength		12	6	+2	Marginal	Ordinary	Good	Amazing
14	7	+2	16+	15	7	3		
Constitution		13	6		Die: 0	Actions Per Round: 3		
Intelligence		13	6	+2	COMBAT MOVEMENT RATES			
Will		12	6	+1	Sprint: 26	Run: 16	Walk: 6	
Personality		13	6		E. Swim:	Swim:	Glide:	Fly:

## DURABILITY

STUN	13	□□□□□□□□	□□□□□□□□	FATIGUE	7	□□□□□□□□
WOUND	13	□□□□□□□□	□□□□□□□□	MORTAL	7	□□□□□□□□

#	Attack Forms	Skill	Score (O/G/A)	Die	Acc	Mode	Range (S/M/L)	Form/FP
1	Unarmed	UA-power martial arts	16	10	7	0	-	/ /
	Blacklaser pistol	MRW- pistol	17	10	6	-1	-1	/ /
	Shadow bolts (2)	I'krl-darts of Vhusak	18	12	9	0		/ /
	Ritual of Excoratt	I'krl- Ritual of Excoratt	14	8	5	0		/ /
5								/
6								/

#	Damage (O/G/A)	Act	Clip Size / Ammo Used	Hide	Wt
1	D6+1s	D6+3s	D4+1w	□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□	
	D4+2w	D6+2w	D4m	4	1
	D4+2s	D4+4s	D6+4s	2	
	D4+2w	D6+2w	D8+2w	1	
6				□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□	

## EQUIPMENT

Armor (worn): CF Long coat	Skill: (none)	AP: Type: O LI: d4	HI: d4	En: d6-2	Hide:	Wt:
Armor (spare):	Skill:	AP: Type: LI:	HI:	En:	Hide:	Wt:
Blacklaser pistol						
Starweb						



F/X Energy: 15				□□□□□□□□□□□□□□	Psionic Energy: 12			□□□□□□□□□□	
Atb	B/S	Prof	Cost	Skill	Rank	Score (O/G/A)			Description/Rank Benefits/Special
Str	B			Athletics		12	6	3	
Str	B			Unarmed Attack		12	6	3	
Str	S			-power martial arts	4	16	10	7	Knockout, +1 STR resistance
Dex	B			Manipulation		14	7	3	
Dex	S			-lockpick	2	16	9	5	
Dex	B			Modern Ranged Weapons		14	7	3	
Dex	S			-pistol	3	17	10	6	Quickdraw
Con	B			Stamina		13	6	3	
Int	B			Knowledge		13	6	3	
Int	B			Computer Science		13	6	3	
Int	S			-hacking	3	16	9	6	
Wil	B			Investigate		12	6	3	
Wil	S			-interrogate	2	14	8	5	
Wil	S			-search	1	13	7	4	
Wil	B			Resolve		12	6	3	
Wil	S			-physical	1	13	7	4	
Wil	S			-mental	1	13	7	4	
Per	B			Culture		13	6	3	
Per	S			-diplomacy	1	14	7	4	
Per	B			Deception		13	6	3	
Per	S			-bluff	1	14	7	4	
Per	S			-bribe	1	14	7	4	
Per	B			Interaction		13	6	3	
Per	S			-intimidate	3	16	9	6	
Wil	B	Psi		Psychoporation		12	6	3	
Wil	S	Psi		-teleportation	6	18	12	9	Range=250m/500m/1km; mass = Will x5
Per	B	Psi		ESP	(-d4)	13	6	3	(bonus applied)
Per	S	Psi		-necognition	6	19	12	9	1 extra specialty skill; travel time bonus
Per	S	Psi		-precognition	7	20	13	10	Duration = rank x weeks into future
Per	S	Psi		-mind reading	3	16	9	6	Extra time = 1 additional phase/ success
Int	B	Psi		Telepathy		13	6	3	
Int	S	Psi		-datalink	4	17	10	7	Duration +1 minute/PEP; inc. distance 4m/8m/12m; 1 slot active memory; edit.
Int	S	Psi		-illusion	5	18	11	8	Vanish vs. 5 targets; each additional, +1 penalty
Int	S	Psi		-suggest	6	18	12	9	Programmed suggestion
Wil	S	F/X		Coda of Kri'saran Wrath	3	15	9	6	Duration +2 rounds
Wil	S	F/X		The Darts of Vhrusak (shadowbolts)	6	18	12	9	Total bolts = 2; increased damage
Wil	S	F/X		Thenark's Requiem (Call shadows)	4	16	10	7	Area of effect = 4m
Wil	S	F/X		The Prophet's Eye (darkzight)	3	15	9	6	Duration +20 minutes
Wil	S	F/X		The Ritual of Excoratt	2	14	8	5	(only useable vs. mindwalkers)

**Other Notes:** Yloisan (y LO is An) Targ was exiled from the Gardh Technarchy upon discovery of his mindwalking capability. He found power in the Kri'osar training of the I'kri Theocracy, and became a believer when the I'kri granted the vision that ultimately formed the Event. Seeing the Event as a means to an end, he became Kri'yth, as well as rising in religious rank to Kri'xenoth. He spend nearly 6 decades in the Verge, collecting intelligence, and when the strike came, was rewarded with a small task force, and wide berth to pursue any new leads on dimensional travel. A series of news reports led him to the Kai system and the small, forsaken Nariac base on Kirlinao, which bolstered his kroath ranks, thanks to his kandaran lieutenants. So far, his intelligence on the dimensional travel has lead him to a t'sa, Bri'-aitsya, who he feels holds some sort of key that can open the I'kri's prison, and position himself as most favored of the I'kri indeed...

# Andrew Head

## "Paladin"

**LR:** Hey... you there?

**Andrew Head:** You there?

**LR:** Yep.

**Andrew Head:** ok good question away. I will try to answer to the best of my ability

**LR:** No problem. Here's your first q.: When did you start playing RPG? s (not necessarily Alternity)?

**Andrew Head:** Well I'm relatively young in the RPG field compared to my friends. I started when I was around 14-15 years old.

**LR:** So... I guess that would beg the question of how old are you now (so the readers can gauge how long you have been playing RPG's for)?

**Andrew Head:** I'm 21 years old.

**LR:** Ah... Good age to be. LOL

**Andrew Head:** Ill be 22 on the 17th

**LR:** Well, Happy Birthday from LR!

**Andrew Head:** LOL

**LR:** When did you start playing Alternity?

**Andrew Head:** Actually Alternity was the 3-4 game I sorta broke my teeth on. Rifts was the first, Then Robotech, Then DND... yea then Alternity. I broke the other three systems with my first legal characters.

**LR:** Hey... I'm piecing together a tabletop Robotech game to run for the first time (I played about 13 years ago, never ran it). Just out of curiosity, which version of D&D did you play?

**Andrew Head:** 3rd edition. Paladin. I love paladins. It's Lawful Good Not Lawful Stupid. I pissed off a lot of GM's when I didn't go rushing in to the evil monster lair along with everyone else and instead used tactics.

**LR:** So no experience with the previous editions, eh? (I'll spare you my rants) Why Paladins? Obviously that is a key class for you to play (especially given your A.net handle).

What about the paladin class draws you to play

one?

**Andrew Head:** Well it started with Final Fantasy 2. I loved how the main character started out Evil and then became a PALADIN becoming good. Well that set me down a road I have never once looked back. Some people have actually made fun of me because I play one. I don't care. Those same people have had their butts pulled out of the fire by my characters more than once because of the way I play one. The laughs died down real quick and turned into respect because of my skills. I don't want to sound bold or anything but a few GM's can't kill me. Others refuse to let me play if I play a paladin cause I am good at what I do.

**Andrew Head:** Also My dice are blessed

**LR:** What are your past contributions to the Alternity community?

**Andrew Head:** Well I am running a few games, besides that nothing. Currently I am doing a Dragonriders of Pern game for Alternity, only doable cause the Lady loosened her death grip on it.

**LR:** I met her once... she came to speak at my gifted program back in the day. She's an odd one. She described herself as in her "Year of the Tiger", so imagine this older lady with steel gray hair dyed purple & pink...

**LR:** What Alternity projects are you currently working on?

**Andrew Head:** As for projects see above.

**LR:** Right, your Dragonriders game, AvP [Alien vs. Predator]... am I missing anything?

**Andrew Head:** nope that's it for right now just those two

**Andrew Head:** I hope to do more

**LR:** Are you familiar with the various A.net projects out there? If so, what project would you most like to see accomplished for Alternity?

**Andrew Head:** I'm not too familiar with many of them. I helped Anime\_Kidd with his Aliens stuff and the Marines stuff, [and] then I ran it at his request.

**Andrew Head:** Anything having to do with Starcraft is something I would love to see.

**LR:** What is the most recent RPG-related book/item that you have acquired?

**Andrew Head:** That Would be Werewolf the forsaken, I have purchased/Preordered the Starship Troopers RPG but it doesn't come out till June this year. I am really looking forward to it.

**LR:** Any good (Alternity or other) websites to recommend?

**Andrew Head:** Not Really. There was a few that I visited but A-net was the only one worth marking and adding to favorites.

**LR:** What is/are your favorite sci-fi/fantasy book(s) and why?

**Andrew Head:** Oh God. Now you got me thinkin'. This might take a few minutes

**LR:** I'll settle for whatever comes to mind first.

**Andrew Head:** Any Anne McCaffrey Novel. Her works are richly detailed and well written. Any novel set in the Warhammer 40,000 universe. These novels are intense you almost feel like you are on the battlefield. There are others these are just on the top of my head right now.

**LR:** Fair enough. Which sci fi/fantasy character in a book, television show, video game, or movie would you most like to be and why?

**Andrew Head:** ok. Book: It would have to be Justicar Alaric of the Grey Knights from Ben Counters book GREY KNIGHTS. TV show Macguyver. Movie strangely enough Hicks from aliens

**LR:** Any particular reason why for those?

**Andrew Head:** The answer to the first one is you fight demons. You don't publicly exist. You save the human race and no one get to hear your tale.

**Andrew Head:** 2 Macguyver solved may problems with only his brain and never once fired a gun.

**Andrew Head:** 3 Hicks was just a badass.

**LR:** LOL Ok... last (official) question: What profession/career and level are you in Real Life and what is your highest skill rank?

**Andrew Head:** Ok laugh if you want. I am an

environmental service worker in a gynecology department. (Janitor) Id say level 2 cause I have only been there 2 years.

**Andrew Head:** It is compatible with my college schedule.

**LR:** No laughing here.

**Andrew Head:** Ask me that question after I get out of college and I could probably give you a better answer.

**LR:** Fair enough. That's all, Andrew. Thank you.

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