

# Crisis on Sol Observatory

An original adventure for the  
**Dark Horizons Universe** Campaign Setting



Published by MGT Press, a division of Max Gaming Technologies, LLC  
Requires the use of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game* Core Rulebook and *d20 Future*,  
published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc

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## Crisis on Sol Observatory

While it is best suited to Dark Horizons Universe games, *Crisis on Sol Observatory* can easily be adapted to any d20 Future campaign.

### Preparation

To run this adventure, the GM needs the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, *d20 Future*, and the *Dark Horizons Universe Campaign Setting*. This adventure is best suited for a party of 6<sup>th</sup> level characters.

### Background Info

*Crisis on Sol Observatory* takes place on a research space station in orbit around Mercury. Built to study sunspots and solar flares, the station was equipped with two high-powered electromagnetic radiation-shielding generators to protect it from solar radiation. Unfortunately for the station's inhabitants, both of these shields malfunctioned during a recent and particularly severe solar storm. Sol Observatory was bathed in radiation that should have killed the occupants, but long-range scans by rescue craft shortly after the storm detected lifesigns on the station. The PCs are the emergency response team that has been sent to search for survivors, recover any valuable data, and find out why the shielding failed.

### Adventure Plot Basics

The PCs reach Sol Observatory via a small shuttlecraft launched from their search-and-rescue base ship, the *Valiant*, a patrol frigate in the employ of Midpoint Station. After the

PCs disembark from their shuttle into the Observatory, another violent solar storm erupts on the sun's surface. The storm destroys the insufficiently shielded shuttlecraft, and forces the *Valiant* to take cover behind Mercury, leaving the PCs to find their own way off the station before they succumb to radiation poisoning. Making this task more difficult is the fact that the survivors of the previous storm have mutated into cannibalistic ghouls...

In the course of escaping from the Observatory, the PCs will find evidence that questionable research was going on at the station, including what appear to be both conventional and biological weapons programs.

### Site Information

Sol Observatory is a relatively small station, roughly ovoid in shape, measuring approximately 200 ft. wide at its widest point and 800 ft. long from end to end. It is organized into 4 levels: Level 1 contains a docking bay and the Observatory's medical center, Level 2 (the largest level) contains housing for the Observatory's staff and the Observatory's shield generators, Level 3 contains the Observatory's lab and a second, malfunctioning docking bay, and Level 4 contains a bank of escape pods.

The radiation that killed many of the Observatory's inhabitants fortunately left most of its systems intact, so the station still has power, functioning life support, and normal gravity. One of the radiation shields appears to be operating in a diminished capacity, so the PCs are being exposed to less radiation than

were the original inhabitants. The entire space station is still considered highly irradiated (see Chapter 4: Environments in *d20 Future* for information on dealing with radiation sickness).

**Getting Started** The mutants in this adventure are aggressive and will attempt to consume anything organic, including the PCs. The mutants will attack the PCs on sight. The question is: how were they created? Persistent PCs will discover that a Tech Program created a mutation-inducing virus that caused the horrible mutations, and will be rewarded with finding one copy each of a mutation virus Tech Program and an anti-virus Tech Program.

In addition to the mutation virus and anti-virus Tech Programs, there are other prototype pieces of equipment that the PCs can find on the station. This equipment is listed in the Treasure section at the end of the adventure, and the location of each item is identified in the appropriate section of the encounter timeline.

### Encounter Timeline

The PCs start their adventure on Level 1 of the Observatory, and work their way upwards to Level 4, as described below. Note that the encounter levels represent a combination of the threat from hostile mutants and the radiation environmental hazard. To make sure that the encounter levels are appropriate to the encounters, the GM should keep careful track of the passage of time in game, and require periodic Fortitude saves to resist radiation.

### Observatory Level 1 (EL 3)

Three alpha mutants are lurking on Level 1, as indicated on the map. Two of these mutants are in the medical bay, and have been eating anything organic they can find, including blood plasma and cloned transplant organs. The third is lurking by the access lift, possibly lying in wait for the other two. The access lift can be taken to any level on the station. A food storage bay on this level has already been stripped clean of anything edible. If the PCs make a Search check DC 18 in the medical center, they will find two doses of Neutrad (anti-radiation) Chemicals. If they make a Search check DC 25, they will also find three Anti-Radiation Core Implant Upgrades (described in the treasure section).

#### Alpha Mutant (Tough Ordinary 2):

CR 1; Medium-size humanoid; HD 2d10+4; hp 14; Mas 11; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 13, touch 12, flat-footed 13; BAB +1; Grp +2; Atk +3 melee (1d6+1, claws), or +1 ranged; FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL none; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will -1; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 8, Cha 10.

**Skills:** Jump +12, Intimidate +4.

**Feats:** Simple Weapons Proficiency, Brawl, Improved Brawl, Power Attack.

**Mutations:** Scent (-2 MP), Claws (-1 MP), Leaper (-1 MP).

**Drawbacks:** Brittle Bones (+4 MP).

**Possessions:** Ragged jumpsuit.

### Observatory Level 2 (EL 4)

The access lift leading from Level 1 to Level 2 opens up to a housing area, where many of the numerous bunks contain the half-eaten corpses of those crewmembers lucky enough to die in their sleep during the previous radiation storm. An alpha mutant blocks the hallway leading out of this room. There is also a locked closet in this room, inside of which is a beta mutant locked in from the outside, possibly by a human survivor who has since died or mutated.

**Beta Mutant (Tough Ordinary 3):**

CR 1.5; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d10+6; hp 21; Mas 11; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 13, touch 12, flat-footed 13; BAB +2, Grp +3; Atk +4 melee (1d6+1, tail slam), or +2 ranged +2; FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL none; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will 0; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 8, Cha 10.

**Skills:** Jump +12, Intimidate +4.

**Feats:** Simple Weapons Proficiency, Brawl, Improved Brawl, Power Attack, Improved Power Attack.

**Mutations:** Scent (-2 MP), Tail (-1 MP), Thick Fur Coat (-1 MP).

**Drawbacks:** Brittle Bones (+4 MP).

**Possessions:** Ragged jumpsuit.

Level 2 also contains a relatively empty mess hall/recreation center, another housing area full of rotting human remains, and two radiation shielding centers.

The radiation center to the west is operating at half power, but has two beta mutants lurking near it. Someone may have been attempting to repair it before succumbing to

radiation poisoning, being killed by a mutant, or becoming a mutant. If the PCs make a Repair check DC 20 on this shield generator, they will restore full power, which will reduce the Observatory's radiation level to Light. Failing this check by more than 15 will break the shield, raising the Observatory's radiation level to Severe. If the PCs make an Intelligence check DC 20, they will discover that the shield generator was sabotaged by what must have been a small explosive.

The radiation shield in the room opposite is non-functional. It appears that the shield itself is in working order, but whatever supplied its power has been obliterated, possibly also by an explosive. This shield generator can be installed in the sole escape pod on Level 4 to create a safe escape vehicle, albeit one with space for no more than 3 occupants.

If the PCs search the housing area opposite the one they entered, a successful Search check DC 15 will find a reinforced footlocker, which can be either unlocked with a Disable Device check DC 30 or pried open with a Strength check DC 25. If they open the locker, they will find that it contains 3 data disks. Two of these disks hold Tech Programs: on one is a mutation virus program, and on the other is its anti-virus program. The third disk is heavily encrypted, and if the PCs take the time needed to decrypt it, they will almost certainly die of radiation poisoning in the meantime. However, they might realize that these Tech Programs are the cause of the mutations on the station.

### **Observatory Level 3 (EL 4)**

On this level the PCs will find the main laboratory, a storage room in which one beta and two alpha mutants are lurking, and a malfunctioning docking bay.

If a PC makes a Computer Use check or Research check DC 20 on the computers in the lab, he will discover that the Observatory's scientists had been experimenting with military applications of solar flares. The recent severe solar storms have been a direct result of their project, which involved firing probes with QED-derived payloads into the sun's coronasphere. Research of this type is highly illegal and would be of great interest to Midpoint Station, which monitors and regulates such activities.

The PCs will also find several pieces of equipment under development in the laboratory: a Mercurian plasma sword, a solar rifle, and a personal EM shield. In addition, a successful Spot check DC 20 will identify a destroyed Tech Drone. Examining the drone will reveal that its memory core is intact, and a Repair check DC 12 will allow a PC to extract a memory cell containing the Repair Drone Tech Program.

A sealed airlock leads into the malfunctioning docking bay on this level. The outer docking bay doors appear to be jammed open, leaving the bay itself in vacuum. A camera feed from the interior of the docking bay displays on the airlock's interface, and the image shows nothing physically blocking the outer doors. Also visible in this image are at least a dozen perfectly good

spacesuits hanging on the docking bay's wall.

If the PCs make a Computer Use check DC 23 on the airlock's interface, they will manage to bypass the safety protocols that are keeping the outer docking bay doors from closing. They can then close these doors and normalize the air pressure in the docking bay, granting access to the spacesuits.

Failing this check by more than 10 opens the airlock doors as well, sucking any adjacent character failing a Reflex save DC 14 into space. If the airlock is not closed within 10 minutes, the entire station will decompress and become uninhabitable.

If the PCs cannot get to the spacesuits from inside the Observatory, they can use the escape pod craft on Level 4 to fly into the docking bay from the outside and retrieve the spacesuits. If the PCs do recover the spacesuits, they will find that two of them are Sunspot armor – one heavy armor version and one powered armor version.

### **Observatory Level 4 (EL 5-7)**

Only one three-person escape pod remains in the escape pod bay on Level 4; the rest were used by crewmembers fleeing the station in panic during the previous solar storm. (Because the escape pods lacked radiation shielding, their occupants were all instantly killed.) Unfortunately for the PCs, the boss mutant has taken up residence in the bay, and they will not be able to access the remaining pod without being attacked by the mutant.

**Boss Mutant (Strong Hero 6):** CR 6; Medium-size humanoid; HD 6d8+12; hp 56; Mas 14; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 16, touch 16, flat-footed 14; BAB +6/+1; Grp +8; Atk +8 melee (1d6+4 piercing, acidic fangs; +1d4, acid), or +6 ranged; FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL none; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +1; AP 39; Rep +0; Str 15, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 6, Wis 9, Cha 9.

**Skills:** Climb +4, Jump +4, Swim +4.

**Feats and Special Abilities:** Simple Weapons Proficiency, Light Armor Proficiency, Medium Armor Proficiency, Power Attack, Sunder, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush.

**Talents:** Ignore Hardness, Melee Smash, Improved Melee Smash.

**Mutations:** Scaly Armor (-3 MP), Fangs (-1MP), Acidic Saliva (-1MP).

**Drawbacks:** Ability Decay (Int, +4 MP), Blood Hunger (+1 MP).

**Possessions:** Blood-soaked lab coat.

After fighting the boss mutant, the PCs can install the second radiation shield from Level 2 on the remaining escape pod by making a Repair check DC 10.

If the PCs have acquired enough space suits, the characters who cannot fit inside the pod can don the suits and tether themselves to the outside of the pod while the pod carries them all within the Valiant's recovery range. The field projected by the radiation shield will extend beyond the hull of the escape pod, protecting anyone tethered outside the pod from radiation.

If the PCs failed to get the space suits, then they will either have to

fight each other for the three spots on the pod, or wait aboard the station for a slow death from radiation sickness while hoping that the solar storm subsides soon enough to allow a rescue.

## Conclusion

After Surviving the gauntlet that was Sol Observatory, the survivors will rendezvous with the Valiant. Many questions still linger about the events that took place on that space station, including who sabotaged the radiation shield generators and why the scientists on the station were developing weapons instead of doing solar research.

If the PCs escaped with the encrypted data disk found with the two Tech Programs in the housing area, they will find a few answers. The encrypted files are notes accidentally left behind by one of the scientists. After inoculating himself, he spread the mutation virus, modified to turn anyone who was infected into a mindless mutant. The spy then sabotaged the shields; during the ensuing confusion, he stole a spare suit of Sunspot armor and an escape pod and made off with all of the station's research files. Who this person was, and who he was working for, is still a mystery.

## Treasure

### Solar Rifle

One of several weapons illegally developed at Sol Observatory, the solar rifle fires a spherical force field filled with hydrogen under high pressure. Upon impact with a solid object, the force field collapses in on itself rapidly before dissipating,

causing the hydrogen inside to super-heat. The result depends on whether the rifle is fired in a vacuum or in an oxygen atmosphere. In a vacuum, the super-heated hydrogen expands rapidly, severely burning whatever it hits, dealing 2d12 points of fire damage. In an oxygen atmosphere, the hydrogen violently explodes, dealing 4d12 points of fire and concussive damage to any susceptible object within a 20-foot radius, and knocking down any character caught in the blast who fails a Strength check DC 15.

The solar rifle has a five-chambered cylinder, each chamber of which holds a single 3" x 5" round of ammo. Each round contains a solid chemical compound that holds a large amount of hydrogen in an inert state. When the rifle is fired, the hydrogen is released into a chamber that forms the unstable force field that contains it until contact with an object.

The main drawback of this weapon is that outside of Sol Observatory, ammo is unavailable and must be custom-made. Five rounds of solar rifle ammo can be made by following the rules for crafting a single complex explosive using the Craft (chemical) skill found in Chapter Two: Skills in *d20 Modern*.

### **Mercurian Plasma Sword**

Built from ultra-strong and thermally resistant ceramics found on the surface of the planet Mercury, the Mercurian plasma sword can incinerate any weapon built from conventional materials. This weapon is crafted like a two-handed sword, with a broad epee-style guard to protect the wielder's hands from

being melted. When the sword is activated, a 5-foot long "blade" of plasma-fire erupts from the hilt. On a successful hit, the Mercurian plasma sword deals 4d10 points of fire damage. This weapon requires the Archaic Weapons Proficiency feat to use without a penalty.

### **Sunspot Armor**

This armor comes in two versions: heavy and powered. It was designed to allow the wearer to survive within the sun's coronasphere. These prototypes can survive within the coronasphere for only a few minutes, but they can withstand large amounts of heat energy bombardment from most non-coronal sources. The key to this ability is a heat absorption and discharge system.

Sunspot armor is embedded with an array of thermal conduits connected to a thermal energy battery. When the armor would take fire damage, the fire's heat is instead absorbed into the conduits and stored in the battery. The armor can absorb and store up to 100 points of fire damage. While the battery is still capable of receiving more energy, the armor's wearer is immune to fire damage. When the battery is full, the armor's wearer loses this immunity.

The energy stored in the battery is discharged via a high-capacity laser called the Sunspot laser, attached to the armor's torso for that purpose. For every point of fire damage the armor has absorbed, the laser can deal one point of fire damage to a single target with a ranged attack. The armor's wearer can choose to expend as many points of fire damage as he has accumulated in

any one shot, but must declare that amount before the attack roll. Use of the Sunspot laser does not require a proficiency.

In addition to its heat-absorbing capabilities, Sunspot armor is a fully functional spacesuit with an environmental seal, 12-hour life support, and maneuvering jets. The jets grant a fly speed of 40 ft. in free fall, +8 to Jump checks in low gravity and +4 to Jump checks in normal gravity. The powered armor version grants +2 to Strength and has a hardness of 10.

### Personal EM Shield

The personal electromagnetic shield was an attempt by scientists on Sol Observatory to provide individual protection from radiation exposure. Unfortunately, the miniaturized field generator is incapable of projecting a field large enough to effectively shield a Medium-size creature from radiation exposure. However, with a few modifications, the personal EM shield can be set to deflect most projectiles and energy types away from a space roughly the size of a humanoid torso. When worn on the chest or affixed to a set of body armor, the personal EM shield grants a +2 Deflection bonus to defense.

### Mutation Virus

Biomedical

**Tech Level 3 (ENT)**

**Purchase DC:** 18

**Restrictions:** Black market

**Hardware Requirements:** Small fabricator

**Run Time:** 3 hours

**Target:** Living creature

**Duration:** See description

**Saving Throw:** None

### ENC Cost: 5

The mutation virus program directs the creation of an unstable mutation virus that will give an infected creature one random beneficial mutation and one random detrimental mutation. The mutations take one day to manifest, and an infected character will not know what mutations he has until that time. If an infected creature does not receive the mutation anti-virus within 48 hours, the mutations will become permanent.

A single creature cannot be infected with multiple mutation viruses at the same time; the first virus present will fight off any other mutation virus that enters the creature's system and will vaccinate the creature, making it immune to future exposures.

This program can be used only on creatures that can have mutations and that are not immune to disease.

Use the following table to determine which mutations manifest; make separate percentage rolls for the beneficial and detrimental mutations.

| d%     | Beneficial Mutation | Detrimental Mutation |
|--------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 01-10  | Claws               | Light sensitivity    |
| 11-20  | Fangs               | Pheromone repulsion  |
|        |                     | Weak immune system   |
| 21-30  | Energy diffusion    | Lethargy             |
| 31-40  | Scent               | Festering sores      |
| 41-50  | Darkvision          | Frailty              |
| 51-60  | Scaly armor         | Reduced speed        |
| 61-70  | Vexing voice        | Lost arm             |
| 71-80  | Telepathy           | Ability decay        |
| 81-90  | Radioactive         |                      |
| 91-100 | X-Ray vision        | Thin skin            |

If prepared and stored for later use the virus has a shelf life of 6 months.

**Options and Upgrades:** For every 5 additional ENC units spent, the runner can remove one mutation from the table, removing the possibility of manifesting that mutation. (If that mutation is rolled, make a re-roll.) This upgrade can be used no more than 5 times per virus, and can be used to remove beneficial and/or detrimental mutations.

### Mutation Anti-Virus

Biomedical

**Tech Level 3 (ENT)**

**Purchase DC:** 18

**Restrictions:** Black market

**Hardware Requirements:** Small fabricator

**Run Time:** 3 hours

**Target:** Living creature

**Duration:** Instantaneous

**Saving Throw:** None

**ENC Cost:** 5

This program has a very specific purpose: to create a single dose of anti-virus to counteract the mutation virus created by the *mutation virus* program. This anti-virus is only effective if administered within 48 hours of exposure to the mutation virus.

**Options and Upgrades:** If the runner spends 5 additional ENC units when running this program, the dose of anti-virus produced is effective against all viruses, removing any viral disease effects currently affecting the target, and makes the target immune to virus-based diseases for one week.

### Repair Drone

Utility

**Tech Level 3 (Enc)**

**Purchase DC:** 13

**Hardware Requirements:** Small fabricator, Tech Drone

**Run Time:** 1 standard action

**Target:** Runner's Tech Drone

**Duration:** 1 hour + 25 minutes/runner level

**ENC Cost:** 5

This program temporarily turns the runner's Tech Drone into an automated repair-bot by fabricating a set of repair tools usable only by the drone and granting the drone 10 ranks in the Repair skill in addition to any it ranks it already has. The program also allows the drone to use ENC to repair mechanical objects, healing one hp for every 3 ENC spent. The drone can heal an amount of hp equal to the runner's level plus his Intelligence bonus per round on an adjacent target mechanical object.

The Tech Drone makes repairs as a full round action under the direction of its Encoder; directing the drone is a free action for the Encoder. While this program is active, the Tech Drone is unable to run any other programs.

**Options and Upgrades:** For every 2 additional ENC units spent, the program's duration increases by 25 minutes.

### Anti-Radiation Core Implant Upgrade

This upgrade helps the host human cope with radiation poisoning. People who work in areas where they might be exposed to

radiation almost always have an anti-radiation core implant upgrade.

**Benefit:** This core implant creates a steady supply of nanites that seek out radioactive particles in the host's body and help flush those particles out of his system as waste. This reduces the degree of radiation

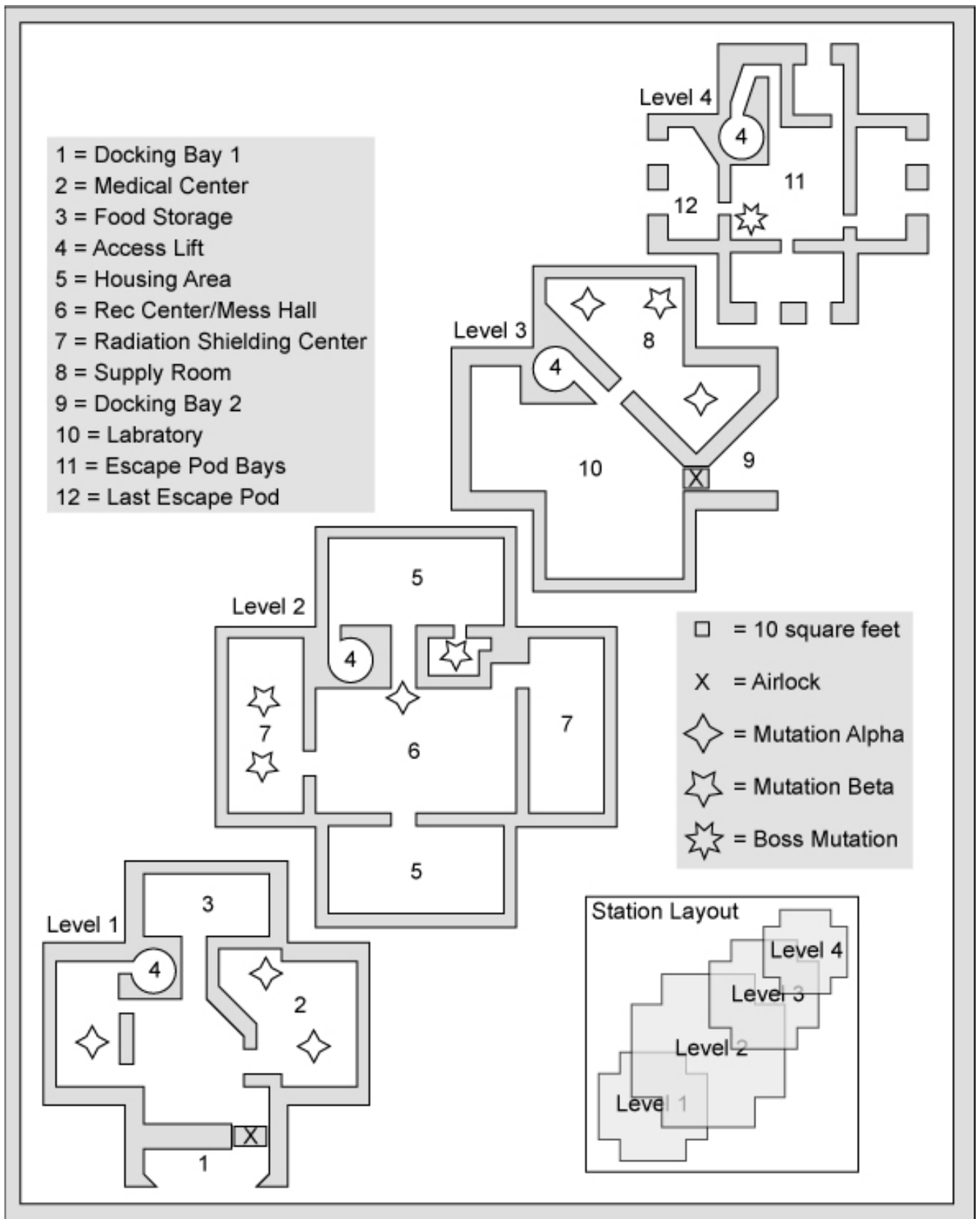
exposure by one (as described in Chapter Four: Environments in *d20 Future*). If the original exposure is mild, its adverse effects are completely negated.

**Base Purchase DC:** 18

**Restriction:** None.

| Weapon                                              | Damage Crit. |    | Damage Type | Range Incr. | Rate of Fire | Mag.   | Size  | Wt. (lb.) | Purch. DC | Rest.    |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------|----|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Solar Rifle (Personal Firearms Proficiency)         | See Text     | 20 | See Text    | 60 ft.      | Single       | 5 int. | Large | 15        | 28        | III (+4) |
| Mercurian Plasma Sword (Archaic Weapon Proficiency) | 4d10         | 20 | Fire        | -           | -            | -      | Med.  | 8         | 25        | III (+4) |

| Armor                 | Type         | Equip. Bonus | Nonprof. Bonus | Max. Dex Bonus | Armor Pen. | Speed (30ft/20ft) | Wt. (lb.) | Purch. DC | Rest.    |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Sunspot Heavy Armor   | Experimental | 5            | 2              | +2             | -4         | 20 ft./10 ft.     | 20        | 25        | III (+4) |
| Sunspot Powered Armor | Experimental | 6            | 2              | +1             | -6         | 20 ft./10 ft.     | 28        | 32        | III (+4) |



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