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Alien Artifacts

By Lizard

In most space-opera or interstellar science-fiction settings, there is usually a presumption that the galaxy has been inhabited for a long time. Whether they are called Precursors, Elder Races, First Ones, or Ancients, the existence of once-mighty but non-vanished races is a common trope. Of course, the only way one knows of the existence of said races is from what they left behind – their tools, toys, constructs, and weapons, all of which are phenomenally advanced compared to even the most advanced science available to the current starfaring species. Many seem to defy all known laws of physics, or use materials whose physical properties cannot be fully understood. Wars might be fought to possess such items, and the rumor of one could set off a mad rush of treasure hunters.

And they are here!

Overview

This supplement for futuristic campaigns (using the **D20 Modern** system and supplements) presents a number of powerful alien artifacts, relics of long-vanished races and cultures. They can be considered Progress Level 9+ -- they are beyond common manufacture or use. Many have a definite 'science fantasy' flavor to them. Introducing one of them into a 'hard science' game will present an intriguing mystery; introducing many more can change the tone of the game, which may or may not be desired. Overall, they fit best into a space-opera or action-oriented game.



No price is given for these items. They are never offered for sale, at least not legitimately or knowingly. If they are purchased, it is usually from someone who does not know what they have. (This then leads to the characters being pursued by forces who want what they've just purchased and who will happily kill them in order to keep them from telling anyone about the item) If a relic is offered for sale at a 'reasonable' price, it will always be either a scam or a setup. Should the GM wish to have such items bought and sold, the price should be a purchase DC of 60 or more, at least equal to a small starship. In most cases, the value is not so much for what the item can do – sure, a tachyon blade is great, but, for the cost, you can hire an army of mercenaries – but for the potential to figure out how it works. In other cases, the item allows the user to do things no one else can – the chameleon cocoon, for example, can allow someone to infiltrate an alien race.

Because these are intended to be singular or very rare items, they come with a bit of back-story and flavor text. This can, and should, be modified by the GM to fit in with his own campaign background. The items should tie into whatever elder races or ancient powers once walked in his universe.

The Artifacts

Chameleon Cocoon

Perhaps the ultimate in infiltration or disguise technology, the chameleon cocoon makes such things as the hologuise seem no more effective than

a false mustache and a plastic nose. When used, it transforms an individual on a genetic level, making him a truly perfect duplicate of his target.

The device was believed to have been widely used in a galaxy-wide ‘cold war’ aeons past; it is often put to the same use today. A spy or infiltrator with access to the cocoon can perform acts of espionage or sabotage that no one else, no matter how skilled, can equal.

In its natural, inactivated, state, the cocoon seems like a small lump of orange wax, accompanied by a plastic sphere roughly an inch in diameter. The sphere can be opened, revealing a hollow interior. Placing any genetic material – blood, hair, skin cells – into this hollow begins the activation process. To use the cocoon, the owner must then find a safe spot, place the sphere into the soft ‘wax’ of the cocoon, and press the orange blob to his skin. In a few seconds, the material will begin to seep into the skin; in a few minutes, the user’s skin will turn orange and begin secreting an orange-yellow liquid, which rapidly hardens. (Hardness 6, 10 hit points) At this point, the user loses consciousness.

Over the next 1d4 hours, the user is remade genetically by the cocoon. When it is over, he will be not merely a physical duplicate of the individual whose DNA was placed in the sphere – he will be a genetic duplicate. His DNA will have been transformed. Only his thoughts and memories remain his own; his entire body has been remade. This transformation can include gender and species; the character will be ‘fully functional’ when it is over. When the process is complete, the crystalline shell liquefies and coalesces back into the original waxy lump.

The target of the transformation may be up to one size category larger or smaller than the original user.

The mechanism by which the cocoon generates or expels excess mass remains a mystery; the original manufacturers had many technologies inconceivable to the minds of lesser beings.

The only traits that the cocoon cannot replicate are such things as tattoos, birthmarks, and other environmental factors.

A transformed being retains his natural Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma, and all skill ranks. He has an instinctive understanding of how to use any abilities native to his new form – such as wings if he is transformed into a flying race. He does not gain any learned knowledge, such as languages.

To any visual inspection, the user *is* the target – no Disguise check is needed. Sense Motive may be used to notice odd or uncharacteristic behavior, and gaps in knowledge may tip off the wary. Since genetic tests will show the character to be who he is claiming to be, it is most likely that anyone who picks up on something odd will assume mind control, hypnosis, or insanity rather than disguise, unless the existence of such devices as the cocoon is common knowledge.

To change back, the user must place his own DNA into the sphere and repeat the process. He can also shift to another form without reverting to his original form. However, the surviving cocoons are rather old and prone to failure; there is a 10% chance per use that the cocoon will not reform following the transformation, leaving the user trapped in his new form, unless, of course, he finds another cocoon.

The cocoon can transform the user into any aberration, animal, dragon, fey, giant, humanoid, magical beast, monstrous humanoid, or plant, subject to the size limits noted above. It is up to the Game Master if any magical abilities (if such exist in the

campaign) are ‘genetic’ and thus duplicated or are something ‘apart’ from DNA and thus are not.

Dreamweb

A dreamweb appears as a long length of thin cord, most often striated in rainbow colors, with the ends fitted with connectors so that they can be linked together, forming a loop. A small number of controls, all unlabelled and confusing, are placed along the length of the cord. There is one fairly prominent control on the linking components; this control cannot be activated until the two ends of the cord are connected. When looped, the cord encloses an area 30 feet in diameter.

If the cord is laid out so as to form a closed loop and the primary switch (the one on the link) is thrown, all those within the enclosed area are subsumed into a powerful psionic induction field. Those failing a Will Save (DC 28), or choosing not to make one, are mentally transported into a virtual world which is completely indistinguishable, to them, from reality. All input from their physical senses is blocked; everything they perceive is sent to them directly via psionic induction. The thin ‘cord’ of the dreamweb contains advanced AI systems, immense amounts of data storage and cultured neural tissue which provides the basis for the psionic effects.

There is no visual or auditory manifestation. Those outside the bounds of the dreamweb see those inside simply collapse into a comalike state. The dreamweb is a mind-affecting device, and any being immune to mind-affecting powers is likewise unaffected by it.

The various controls along the edge of the dreamweb set the parameters for the simulation, including such things as lethality. Too few dreamwebs have been discovered to allow anyone to understand what the settings mean or even how to alter them; in general,

one must accept whatever settings are already entered into the web.

The world simulated by the dreamweb is perfect. All sensations, including taste, touch, and smell, are present. The beings encountered react intelligently and seem to have lives, histories, and desires far beyond the limits of the 'game'. The 'rules' of the dreamweb can vary considerably – those within it might have no skills or powers they do not possess in reality, or they might be given special or unique abilities, such as facility with a weapon they have no genuine proficiency in or even 'magical' abilities.

Combat in the dreamweb seems real, but may or may not be lethal. If the dreamweb is set to non-lethality, anyone 'killed' is simply removed from the simulation. If it is set to lethality, anyone killed must make a Fortitude save (DC 25) or be reduced to -5 hit points by sudden shock. If he fails to stabilize before reaching -10 hit points, he will die.

Anyone entering the dreamweb after it has been activated will be subsumed into its reality in 1d4+5 seconds.

It is possible for those within the dreamweb to activate certain internal controls, or deactivate the web entirely – if this is allowed by the settings. If it is, a Will save (DC 20) is needed to bring up the 'control panel' – this will manifest in different ways depending on the settings on the web. For example, it might appear as a strange clockwork device, a floating swarm of crystals, or an obedient servant.

The Game Master must decide what species or race designed the dreamwebs. If it was a very alien species, the 'worlds' within the webs will likewise be incomprehensibly alien. If it was some forgotten human race (perhaps from a long-vanished human

interstellar society), then the worlds might be recognizable or at least comprehensible.

Whether or not a dreamweb can be deactivated from the outside is dependant on the settings, as is the duration of the experience. The dreamweb might keep itself active indefinitely, or until some goal is reached, or until a preset amount of time has passed. The web provides *no* life support; those within it will starve or die of thirst unless appropriate measures were taken prior to entering the web.

Physically dragging someone from the web causes serious psychic trauma. A Will save (DC 20) must be made. If it fails, the character takes 1d4 points of temporary Intelligence and Charisma damage. (The Game Master may wish to increase this; some dreamwebs have an especially powerful grip. Removal can cause permanent damage or even death.)

Immortality Serum

Advances in medical technology as Progress Levels increase greatly extend the lifespan of most sentient races. Doubling or even tripling lifespan is not unheard of, and old age is spent free of most of the burdens of time – the mind is sharp and the body fit. However, not even the most advanced technology can do more than slow the process and provide increased resistance to the ravages of age. Even at PL 8, death remains as certain as taxes.

Beyond the limits of known science, however...

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the immortality serum is that it works on any organic life form. It seems to operate on something more fundamental than genetics. Speculation of subspace nanobots or temporal warps is common, but neither hypothesis has much supporting evidence. What *is*

known is that those few people who have found and used this artifact have become incapable of dying by natural causes, and are very hard to kill unnaturally.

The serum is always found in liquid form, a pale yellow fluid much like honey. It is found in sealed containers; it rapidly degrades upon exposure to air. When swallowed or even rubbed into the skin, it begins to work, inducing the following changes:

If the user is beyond the physical prime of his species (around 25 for humans) he begins to de-age towards that point, at a rate ten-fold that of passing time – for each day which passes, he de-ages ten. This is not noticeable immediately, but after a few months, it is evident and after a year, impossible to conceal without Disguise.

All tattoos, piercings, scars or birthmarks fade within 1d4 days.

The user ceases to age, at all. There is no further cellular degeneration. The process does not seem to slow down, but to stop completely.

The user gains a +8 natural bonus on all Fortitude saves against poison, disease, starvation, thirst, suffocation, massive damage, or environmental effects.

The user gains Regeneration (Radiation).

The user's massive damage threshold is increased by +6 if using the Massive Damage=Constitution rule, or +25 if using Massive Damage=50 points rule.

The immortality serum will affect any humanoid, animal, dragon, giant, magical beast, or monstrous humanoid. It may or may not affect an aberration – if the creature is basically a flesh-and-blood mortal

being, it will. Fey, outsiders, elementals, oozes and plants cannot be affected by the serum.

Gravitic Wand

This artifact is the remnant of a culture which believed that controlling a device should be as simple as possible – even if the device was amazingly powerful. The raw technology of the device is only a millennia or two beyond an advanced PL 8 culture, but the small size, efficiency, and unique control mechanism mark it as the product of a far more advanced species. It is likely the wands were primarily tools, not weapons, as countermeasures would have been widely available in the original culture. In the current era, however, the wand can be remarkably useful in combat situations.

The wand is a featureless silver cylinder an inch thick and a foot long, tapered at one end. The non-tapered end is where the wielder holds it. Once it is grasped, the user receives a flood of telepathic information instructing him in the operation of the device. All that is required is, literally, ‘point and think’.

The wand can raise or lower local gravity, or the mass of a specific object. It can reduce the gravity of and area or the mass of an object to effectively 0, or increase them to 5 times their natural levels. If used to affect an area, the wand can affect a region up to 20 feet in diameter and 500 feet in height; if used to affect an object or objects, it can affect 1 Huge, 2 Large, 4 Medium, 8 small or 16 Tiny or smaller objects. The range of the wand is 500 feet.

If an object has been reduced to 0 mass, the wand can be used to move it from place to place. It can affect multiple objects at once, but a group must all move in the same manner; to move some objects left and some right, two uses of the wand are required. Objects can be moved to a maximum of 500 feet from the wand and travel at a speed of 60 feet per round.

The wand is controlled entirely by thought. There is no need to set complex controls to narrow the beam or switch it from ‘increase’ to ‘decrease’ or to select a few objects out of a mass. The user merely aims the wand in the general direction of the desired effect and thinks of what he wishes down. This allows him to pluck an individual out of a crowd, lower the gravity in an area of any shape (within the maximum 20 foot diameter radius), or lift the eggs out of a carton while leaving the carton on the ground.

The mental control of the wand is so fine that it can be used to grab an object from someone’s hands, turn screws at a distance, or perform other feats. The user may make Sleight of Hand checks on ranged objects, with a total bonus of 10+his Intelligence modifier. He may also attempt to tear a held object from someone’s grip. The wand is assumed to have a Strength bonus of +5; if it wins a contest of strength, the object has been grabbed.

Using the wand is a standard action which does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

Some uses for the wand include:

- Increasing local gravity to prevent individuals from moving.
- Flying (the user may reduce his own mass and direct himself with the wand; he flies at 60 feet/round with Perfect maneuverability.
- Raising an object up and then increasing its weight so that it does tremendous damage to those below.
- Placing a person high in the air and then allowing him to fall.
- Increasing gravity in a region in front of the character, causing solid projectiles to plummet or lose power (all attacks involving solid missiles, such as arrows or bullets, suffer a 20% miss chance and do half

damage if they hit.)

- Manipulating the controls of a device from a distance.

The wand is fairly obvious in use – the user must hold it out and aim it, making it fairly obvious what the source of the various effects is. Careless users will find their prize taken from them.

The wand can affect one target per round; a ‘target’ is an area, object, or group of objects moving together. Switching targets is a free action.

The wand draws power from an unknown source, most likely zero-point energy. It never needs recharging. There is a 1% chance per round of use that it will fail due to age.

Morphic Arsenal

The wide variety of weapons available to an advanced culture (and what better measure of advancement than the number of ways in which you can kill people?) means that for any job, there is a proper tool. Unfortunately, most beings cannot carry two or three dozen weapons around with them at all times, leaving them to have to pick carefully among the available options and hope they’re prepared. Those few who have found a morphic arsenal have no such problems.

A morphic arsenal always appears to be a typical hand weapon of excellent manufacture. If it is found at some xenoarcheological site, the construction and styling will most likely be very alien, but the functionality will be no more than that of a well-made (masterwork) weapon of the current culture – it will seem to have no unusual or exotic properties, and relic-hunters may dismiss it as something of interest to collectors or historians only.

However, careful examination of the weapon (Search check, DC 25) will reveal some hidden controls. The most important of these is the scanning beam. This beam can scan an area up to 5 square feet. Any weapon – gun, beam blade, rusting dagger – placed in the beam will be scanned and then absorbed. Once absorbed, the morphic arsenal can change itself *into* that weapon. It is believed that the weapons are modified by the scanning and absorption process to add the necessary shifting controls, and then placed in a subspace compartment.

The weapons have no other modifications to functionality. Weapons which require power cells will still require them; weapons which require ammunition will need it. The morphic arsenal can absorb grenades, but using it in this manner will destroy the weapon. (The grenade will explode as expected; this will destroy the controls which shift weapons to and from their holding place.)

A morphic arsenal can store 12 different weapons. If a 13th is desired, the oldest stored weapon will be ‘ejected’ from subspace.

When found, a morphic arsenal will usually have stored 1d4+1 weapons. These will be the alien equivalents of PL7 to PL8 devices.

A morphic arsenal has many uses. Smuggling is one such; a person can be seen to be carrying nothing more than a ceremonial dagger, then draw forth a pulse rifle and begin a massacre.

The scanning and storing system of the morphic arsenal is capable of distinguishing ‘weapon’ from ‘non weapon’, and will not scan items which are not designed or intended to cause harm. Some form of AI coupled with a low level telepathic field is apparently involved.

Switching weapon modes is a free action which does not incur an attack of opportunity. The user must have the necessary hands free to wield the weapon – if he switches from a one-handed to a two-handed weapon, he must have nothing in his second hand.

Subspace Storage Trunk

It is unknown if these devices were extremely rare items used by the elite of their creating culture, or if they were so common that tourists in some forgotten age considered them a simple necessity of life. Either way, they are very rare today, and much prized.

These trunks come in a variety of styles and shapes – a dozen have been found in the galaxy, and no two are like. Some speculate each is an artifact of a different culture, but advanced dating and archeological techniques imply this is not the case. This has not ended the common-vs.-rare debate; some xenoscientists claim this means they were unique and handcrafted items, while others claim it proves they were a consumer good made in a variety of styles.

Trunks range in apparent, external, size from 1 foot by 1 foot by 6 inches to 6 feet by 2 feet by 1 foot. The outer surface is generally smooth and almost featureless, and appears to be either a high-impact plastic or a strong metal. No trunk with an ‘organic’ surface texture has been found. The size of the trunk limits only what can be placed within it, however, not its internal size.

The trunk always appears empty when opened. Any item placed within will seemingly vanish when the trunk is closed. In actuality, the item is teleported to a subspace pocket dimension whose dimensions are 100 feet by 100 feet by 100 feet. In order to retrieve an item deposited, the same person who placed it into the trunk must visualize it while the trunk is open; it will then materialize inside the trunk.

This means that no item which cannot fit into the trunk when closed can ever be placed into it, and that only the person who added an item can remove it. Multiple people can add items to the same trunk.

If a trunk is found, 10+1d20% of its internal storage capacity will already be consumed by other items placed there by long-dead owners.

Items placed in the trunk lose all perception. Living beings report nothing from the instant the trunk is closed on them to the instant they are retrieved. Time does not pass – the most sensitive instruments show not much as a femtosecond passes between the instant the lid is closed and the instant the item is retrieved. This means that cameras, microphones, or other means of seeing what is ‘inside’ a trunk fails.

A trunk weighs 1 pound (for the smallest sizes) to 8 pounds (for the largest). This weight is not affected by what is stored within.

Tachyon Blade

These weapons were created for an elite warrior corps. It is believed each is unique, hand-crafted, probably via the use of extremely powerful psychokinetic manipulation of matter at the sub-quantum level. Over countless aeons, most have been lost, but once in a century or so, one is discovered on some dead ruin of a world. If the finder possesses the skill to wield it, it can be the most potent melee weapon in the galaxy. An Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Tachyon Blade) feat is required.

The hilt of the blade is usually made of diamond, a single stone of perfect clarity, shaped to fit a typical humanoid hand. (A few have been found which seem to fit somewhat more alien appendages...) Within the diamond hilt, controls of ruby, emerald, and sapphire are set. These gemstones move and slide through the

diamond as if it were liquid, without disturbing the crystal matrix in any noticeable way. It seems as if the desire of the wielder to manipulate them causes them to momentarily phase slightly out of the normal universe, then, when they have been slid or set to their desired location, they settle back in place. The controls allow the generated blade to range in size from 1 foot to 5 feet in length, and from 1/2 inch to 3 inches in width.

In general principle, the tachyon blade is similar to a beam saber, and represents the ultimate evolution of that device. When activated, an energy beam emerges from the hilt, contained within a field of negative gravitic energy. The blade itself, though, is composed of pure tachyons – faster than light particles. Their effect on normal matter is astonishing.

Firstly, the blade ignores all armor, force fields, or damage reduction. Nothing which exists can resist it – it cleaves through the most advanced Energy Age armor as easily as it passes through air. Targets gain no Natural, Equipment, or Armor bonuses to Defense, and the Tachyon Blade can penetrate any form of Damage Reduction, whether natural or the result of a force field.

Secondly, the tachyon force of the weapon literally warps time around the target. Any living being stuck by the weapon must make a Fortitude save (DC 15+1/point of damage done, or increase one age category – from Adulthood to Middle Age to Old to Venerable. Effects of aging are covered in the D20 Modern rules. Once a character has passed Venerable, if he fails the Fortitude save upon being struck, he dies.

Normal healing will not reverse aging. Exotic methods, such as cloning a younger body and then transplanting a brain into it, might work. The immortality serum, described in this document, may also prove useful.

The tachyon blade ages objects as well. In addition to ignoring all Hardness associated with an object, it does double damage. This also applies to robots.

Beings which do not age and which are not constructs suffer no effects from the tachyon blade other than the damage done, which is often enough.

The blade of a tachyon beam is a deep black – light cannot escape it.

Transit Cards

Transit cards are the remains of what was once a galaxy-spanning transportation network. Each card is 5 inches by 3 inches by 1/2 inch thick, and composed of a hard, wear resistant and transparent substance, akin to diamond but stronger. Encased within the clear shell is a holographic image – a city, a beach, a mountain, a forest – which seems extremely sharp and real. It does not look like an image so much as a view through a window, frozen in an instant. A small number of indentations can be felt along the edge of the card; these are controls.

When the indentations are touched in the proper sequence (which usually requires experimentation), the user and his gear is immediately teleported to the location shown on the card. However, it must be noted that the cards are *very* old and the civilization which built them is long vanished. The city is most

likely an abandoned ruin or buried beneath miles of debris; the forest may not be a savannah, a desert, or an urban complex. The cards will never teleport someone into a solid object or high above the ground, but there are no other safety features – if the ocean has eroded away the beach, the user will appear four miles from shore.

The cards are one-way; there is no ‘go back’ option. The citizens of the original civilization would carry packs of them, but time and chaos have resulted in only single cards being found. Sometimes, it is possible to calculate where a card may lead – for example, if a starscape is visible, a Knowledge (Astronomy) check (DC 30) may be able to reveal what world is shown on the card. Most often, though, using the cards is a one-way trip to an unknown world.

If the user is in physical contact with others, up five other beings of size Large or smaller may be taken along.

There is a base 10% chance of any card burning out upon use.

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