

CEPHEUS JOURNAL



Issue #011

In this issue:

Raider's Lament Part 5

The Koszrans

Designing Aliens

Four Aliens

And More...

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From The Editors

Welcome to our eleventh issue. The theme for this issue is aliens. We hope that you will enjoy it.

Have you thought about how aliens are one of the important ingredients for your CE setting? Are there few or many aliens? (Or no aliens?) Are the aliens primitive, or very advanced, or at the same level as the humans? Are there precursor races? Is there a mostly mechanical alien race that is basically a brain in an advanced combat armor that wants to exterminate all life? (Daleks) Is there a race that tortures their prisoners with their bad poetry? (Vogons)

In previous issues there have been a few alien write-ups (like the Eroctopi by Timothy Collinson in issue #007 or the Nissi by Neil Lucock in issue #003). Now we wanted more aliens, and we got it. Thanks to everyone that has submitted an article or more to this issue.

We have Four Aliens from Jon Zeigler about four aliens from his own setting. We have Almost Alien from Jo Jaquinta about uplifted animals, and an adventure with that. Norton Glover gives us an alien for the Barbaric! and SoC settings. Jim Vassilakos has written an article (with an example) about designing aliens for your setting. Our editors have also contributed with The Koszrans from Paul Drye, Dump Demons by Brett Kruger and two aliens by me.

We also have several other interesting articles. There are two starships from Ricardo Emilio. Todd Bradley has made a Cepheus Deluxe Personal Combat Quick Reference Chart and an article about converting PCs from Cepheus Engine to Cepheus Deluxe. Jo Jaquinta has written about orbital stations and gives us part 5 of The Raider's Lament.

Finally, our Brett Kruger has interviewed Omer Golan-Joel and an article about borrowing ideas from a TV show.

Have fun!
P-O Bergstedt



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Cepheus Deluxe Personal Combat

A Quick Reference by Todd Bradley

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From Cepheus Deluxe © 2021 Stellagama Publishing

Combat Procedure Outline

1. Check for surprise (p. 87). If you surprise the enemy, you gain one free combat round.
2. Determine Initiative for all combatants
3. Start the combat round
 - Combatants act in Initiative order, highest first
 - On their turn, each character has two actions
4. Once the combat round is over, begin a new round
5. If necessary, triage and treat the wounded.

Initiative = 2D6 + Tactics + INT DM
Leadership/INT 8+ gives bonus equal to effect to your party's initiative rolls

Actions (you get 2 per round):

- **Attack**
- **Charge:** run up to 10m and make a single melee attack at DM+2
- **Inspire:** Leadership/INT 8+ to add +2 to a single character's next throw
- **Move:** up to 10m, or fall prone, or get up from prone
- **Overwatch:** delay then immediately attack in new initiative
- **Aim:** (ranged only) up to 3 actions, DM +1 per action
- **Other:** as decreed by Referee

Attacks

- **Melee Attack:** Melee Combat/STR 8+
- **Shooting Attack:** Gun Combat/DEX 8+ or Heavy Weapons/DEX 8+
- **Thrown Weapon Attack:** Athletics/DEX 8+
- **Grappling:** see p. 90

Special Melee Combat Notes

- **Frenzy:** If you are trained in Melee Combat and kill or disable an enemy in melee combat, you may move 2m and immediately attack another adjacent enemy. Repeat as many times as your Melee Combat skill level.

Special Ranged Combat Notes

- Thrown weapons effective range STR x 4m, maximum range STR x 8m
- Auto wpn / Single mode: attacks are made normal, uses 1 round
- Auto wpn / Burst mode: add Auto score to damage, uses 1 x Auto rounds
- Auto wpn / Full Auto mode: make number of attacks equal to Auto score, optionally against separate targets within 6m, uses 3 x Auto rounds
- Full Auto, Suppressive Fire: 3m x 3x area, anyone in area gets hit on 10+ (12+ if under cover), uses 3 x Auto rounds

Damage

- Damage = weapon dice + Combat skill effect
- Melee attack damage: add STR DM
- Apply (Damage - Armor) to Stamina
- After Stamina reaches 0, additional damage goes to Lifeblood
- Stamina > 0 is Scratched
- Lifeblood > half is Minor Wounds; DM -1
- Lifeblood < half is Serious Wounds; DM -2; make END 8+ or fall unconscious
- Lifeblood = 0 is Mortal wound; you have 60 minutes to receive trauma surgery or die



Ranged Combat DMs

Condition	DM
Target obscured (smoke, foliage)	-1
Target behind hard cover	-2
Target in heavy cover	-3
Target running	-1
Target behind total cover	-4 and direct fire impossible
Target prone	-2
Target prone behind cover	Cover DM with additional -1
Darkness	-2
Dim Light	-1
Per Aim	+1 per action, max 3





The Koszrans

By Paul Drye

Koszra (CA66378-1) is a desolate world a little larger than Earth and orbiting an F-class star. While life is abundant in the oceans and there is oxygen in the atmosphere, the land is a wasteland of sand, boulders and dried mud. It came as a great surprise when first survey of the planet found several dozen oases of complex life, inhabited by a complex ecology made up of dozens of species, with none more than a couple of square kilometers in area. Even more surprising was that the oases were inhabited by an intelligent species that toiled endlessly to maintain the oases, which would have been unstable and prone to dying out without their efforts.

History

The Koszrans and their accompanying biospheres were unrelated to the ocean life biochemically, which suggested that life evolved twice on Koszra—once in the seas and once on land, probably in a large endorheic lake before moving onto terra firma itself. This led to the additional theory that the planet had once had abundant life on land and what remained was what was left over after a mass extinction event. But evidence for this was scant and the universe presents many puzzles; there were no follow-up investigations, and it took another entirely unrelated world survey elsewhere to crack the mystery.

Iphis is an even less-promising planet over 30 parsecs from Koszra. It had been known but ignored for many years, as it was one of the many Venus-type worlds found throughout space; it was accordingly of little interest to settlers, scientists, or megacorporations. A late analysis of its initial, cursory survey suggested that it had flipped over into this state relatively

recently, some 550,000 years ago, and so a follow-up expedition took a closer look. There they found the scorched, dead remnants of a terrestrial biosphere and a technological civilization that had become extinct when the planet died. Further modeling showed that, coincidentally, the parent stars of Iphis and Koszra had been much closer together at the time, the two passing by each other at roughly 0.2 light years—as happens periodically to every star in the galaxy as they wend their way around their 200-million-year orbits of the galactic center.

Though there was precious little biological material left on Iphis to analyze, the planet's investigators were able to prove that the multicellular organisms found on Koszra were related. Perhaps those in Iphis's civilization knew that they were doomed or perhaps it was just a coincidence, but they must have used relatively primitive space drives such as light sails or Orion nuclear propulsion to bridge the nearly 13,000 AU between the two star systems and colonize Koszra. Though a poor settlement target by galactic standards, to the point that the Koszrans have dwindled in technology back to early farming-age technology, Koszra became a final refuge for the species after they went extinct on their original planet.

Culture and Psychology

While it's difficult to say how the Koszrans lived on their homeworld, on this planet they have settled into a culture of small-scale, local terraforming. While Koszra has abundant water and oxygen, life had never taken hold on the land prior to the arrival of the offworlders. Faced with a set of dead continents the Koszrans took the





plant and animal species they brought with them and constructed a stable ecological network suited to small areas—roughly 50 hectares (half a square kilometer, or 125 acres), with none larger than a few square kilometers. Each of the several dozen that now exist in the present day is enough to support several dozen Koszrans, who live in the centerpiece of each colony: a rounded spire some 30 meters tall and five wide, made from cemented sand and the saliva of a hand-sized insect-like organism analogous to an ant or termite. This is one of the things that is known to have been done by the Koszrans on Iphis, with collapsed “skyscrapers” up to 200 meters found here and there in that planet’s present-day scorched landscape. Scientists studying the Koszrans hypothesize that the pre-intelligent ancestors of the species lived commensally with the insects in their mounds, perhaps in exchange for general maintenance and cleaning of their mutual home. Certainly, this is what they do in the present day, though the insects are now completely dependent on their erstwhile roommates and are more like domesticated animals to them.

All of the other plants and animals in a Koszran local biome have a purpose too. The proportion of trees that produce edible fruits or seeds is far higher than in any natural circumstance. No less than fourteen different types of shrub produce leaves with medicinal value to the Koszrans or their domesticated animals. Even the “grass”, on close examination, resembles organic steel wool—all the better to break up and channel the planet’s usually torrential rains. Moreover, everything supports everything else, not just the Koszrans.

Even so, these miniature biomes are not permanently stable, though they are far closer to that standard than they have any right to be. For 500,000 years the aliens have had to carefully prune, fertilize, plant, and breed all of their charges, slowly building them up and always, always

keeping their garden homes from tipping over into collapse and extinction. The endless effort has molded Koszran psychology just as much as they have shaped the environment they live in.

Koszrans have two main themes to their thinking which colour everything they do. First, they are aware of how things connect to one another, and are very interested in how changing one thing will affect another thing. For example, humans are often surprised to find that, as alien as they are, Koszrans can quickly decipher their visitors’ social arrangements: who likes and dislikes whom, who’s a mentor and who’s a student, who’s in charge...who’s really in charge. They are also not averse to manipulating humans based on what they discern. Fortunately, this doesn’t grant them any near-supernatural ability to do so, but nevertheless humans can find them very canny at getting what they want.

Their other major psychological trait is conservativeness. Making the wrong choice in relation to the web of life that they maintain every day could mean the death of their home, and its reversion to the dead sand that covers most of the planet. This is not a hypothetical fear: it has happened in the past to some unfortunate oases, and every Koszran knows their stories.

Biology

Like all the animals on their original homeworld, the Koszrans are trilaterally symmetrical. Their body is a rounded triangle, point downward, and is flat in front while being convex at the back. Two limbs extend from each of the body’s three points, one pair of which at the bottom is specialized to serve as a base to stand on—this frees the other two pairs of limbs to act as manipulators. When walking, however, a Koszran tips forward and moves on all of its limbs at the same time. This means they can’t carry anything



while moving, and so most wear a cloth webbing into which they can tuck objects that they want to use when they reach their destination.

The species is somewhat smaller than a human, with average height while standing being 1.2 meters (3'11") and mass being 35 kilograms (80 pounds)—the latter actually being a bit higher on Koszra itself due to that planet's higher-than-terrestrial gravity.

There are three eyes around the edge of a Koszran's body, and so when prone they can see in all directions; when standing, the edge of the body folds forward slightly so that all three eyes point in that direction, which hurts their situational awareness but compensates by making it easier to see fine details of what they are doing with their manipulators. In the center of their flat front is a single, radial mouth used solely for eating. They breathe through six apertures, one located on either side of each eye. The two on the side of the sturdy bottom tentacle breathe in continuously as the Koszran's triple lungs work in sequence; air likewise flows out constantly from the four breathing holes on the upper part of their body. Koszrans speak with these outward-bound apertures, producing meaning out of their whistles. The species can't reproduce human language, but humans have invented small vocoder units which clip to their speaking holes and translate on the fly; not many Koszrans have them, but they are ubiquitous among those of the species who interact with humans regularly.

Though their appearance is not particularly unusual by the standards of the many alien species encountered by humans, the Koszrans are quite different at a more fundamental level. Life in the ocean was based around DNA, albeit with amino acids of opposite chirality to that used by terrestrial organisms—a common type throughout the galaxy. What made researchers realize that the Koszrans and the plants and animals of their microbiomes

were not related to the planet's sea life was the fact that the Koszrans were based on something much more unusual: 1,5-anhydrohexitol nucleic acid (HNA), which until then had only been seen in artificial laboratory conditions.

There are many different ways for life to code genetic information but, in general, if life in the galaxy does not use DNA it uses something very different indeed: consider the Penrose-tile sheets of the Zorreshi, or the aluminum-copper-iron quasicrystals of the Lisher-Unuria. Koszran biochemistry was particularly unusual because their HNA was similar enough to DNA that it could interact with human DNA, but different enough that it opened up new possibilities for DNA- and viral-vector based medicines that had never been seen before. A small ampoule of sap or blood from the Koszran biosphere could serve as the foundation for a pharmaceutical scientist's career—and promise huge profits to their employers should its study pay off.

Relations with Humans

This difference, and the lust for profits based on it, has colored Human-Koszran interactions ever since it was discovered. The aliens cherish the place each plant and animal species occupies in their oases, and rightly so: all are necessary, all have their purpose. While not totally set against giving some to humans, their inherent conservatism makes them slow to reach that stage. Impatient humans have sometimes short-circuited the process and, if they successfully get off-world with their loot, put themselves beyond any possible restitution or retaliation. Every time it happens, the Koszrans are made more reluctant to trade legitimately, and the human authorities strain to keep open that channel while also having to deal with powerful corporations that can protect malefactors, or at least keep the product of their thievery no matter what.





Accordingly, access to Koszra is restricted. The free-trade elements of the off-world human government have made sure that the planet stays open to some extent, but those who are looking to protect relations with the Koszrans have managed to make the human port of Creswell Terminal, located on the shore near a half-dozen Koszran oases, the only allowable landing place. Human colonization is absolutely forbidden, and the planet still belongs to its quasi-native inhabitants.

But as always, the authorities are overstretched, and have a hard time keeping 100% of visitors within the port as required by law. If nothing else, the system for getting a scientific study permit to travel is notoriously corrupt.

- While individual Koszrans vary, a few basic rules can cover most NPCs of the species:
- All Koszrans have at least Farming-1 and Veterinary Medicine-1
 - The Koszran ability to quickly pick apart and understand social relations can be modeled by giving them some combination of Admin, Advocate, Bribery, Liaison, and Streetwise. The exact combination should be tailored to that character's life up to that point (e.g., Advocate and Streetwise are more likely for characters who have been offworld and experience human society).
 - Oasis leaders will have Admin-1 and Leadership-1 or -2. It's rare for either skill to be much higher as most oases have a population under 100 and are not particularly complex societies as a result.
 - Some Koszrans will specialize in Medical, which will teach them how to use the bounty of their plants and animals to treat ill or injured Koszrans.
 - Koszrans do not have vehicle related skills, as their oases are small, low-tech, and they do not even have any riding animals. The exception might be one who has been offworld, but even in that case they are much likelier to have been passengers than drivers.
 - Other skills are constrained by Koszra's tech level of 1.

Koszran NPCs

A Koszran will be 105+2D centimeters tall and mass 32+1D kilograms; they are much less variable in these ways than humans are.

Despite their alien shape and biology, Koszrans have characteristics superficially similar to those of humans. Roll 1D+1 for ST and 2D-1 for DX. Social Standing in human society will be 1D/2, rounded up, while in their own society it will be 2D-1. If their social standing is 10, it will mean that they are the leader of a single oasis, while 11 makes them the leader of a small confederation of oases. Other characteristics are rolled in a standard manner.



Adventure Seeds

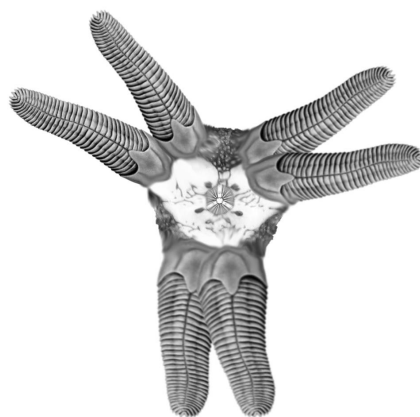
Race for the Prize: A group of bio-pirates has raided a distant oasis for several samples of Koszran life, intent on escaping off-world and selling them. Their ship is far off in the desolated landscape and will take time to reach but is similarly far from the authorities at the starport. The thieves will likely make it to their destination. The PCs are in a better position to catch them but will have to deal with the hazards of a planet-sized desert, from the punishing light and heat of the F-class sun to flash floods when it rains. They will also need to decide if they are on the side of the angels, or if they intend to rob the robbers and claim the booty for themselves.

No Plan Survives First Contact: An accident, either in orbit or while traveling the desert, leaves the PCs stranded. They will be able to arrange a pickup by the port authorities in a week, but they have minimal resources to keep them alive until then. There is an oasis just a few kilometers away, but these Koszrans' history with humans has made them highly suspicious and prone to violence. The adventurers can choose to make contact and try to smooth things over enough to obtain some supplies, or if they decide to take their chances with staying put the Koszrans will decide to come and deal with the interlopers on their own terms.

Tricks of the Trade: Our heroes have received permission to negotiate with a friendly settlement of Koszrans for whatever they will agree to, up to and including the ever-valuable biosamples. However, two other groups have received the same go-ahead and only one will be permitted to actually trade in the end. The contenders will have to compete with one another by means fair and foul, while also having to account for this being exactly the sort of complex social situation that Koszrans are good at exploiting.

My Old Koszrani Home: A recent chance discovery of records on Iphis have finally elucidated the method by which the Koszrans on that planet managed to travel to their new world. When the two planets' stars were close to one another a very large comet bound to the destination sun was nudged by their gravitational interaction and ended up passing through Iphis' outer solar system. This 100-kilometer body meandered through over the course of more than a decade, which gave the Koszrans time to turn it into an ark. Its orbit was perturbed enough that, while it carried the Koszrans to their new home system, it was now on a hyperbolic arc and carried off into interstellar space after a single pass. The Koszrans off-loaded to their new world and the comet carried on. Somewhere out in space is a massive slower-than-light starship, abandoned for half a million years.

While it will be difficult to find, the orbit retrieved from the Iphisian records is good enough to narrow down the possibilities for its position in the present-day. Sufficiently determined adventurers just might be able to track it down and board it to see what might be worth examining—either as scientists or looters.



Designing Aliens

By Jim Vassilakos

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Prior Literature

There have been numerous books and articles published about aliens and alien design. Indeed, several RPGs also come to mind: Star Trek, Star Wars, and Traveller among others. These each have numerous alien compendiums. There was also Alan Frank's *Galactic Aliens*, the Spacefarers Guides to Alien Monsters and Alien Races, Patrick Huyghe's *Field Guide to Extraterrestirals*, and Dickinson's and Schaller's *Extraterrestrials*. These, of course, are all compendiums of imagined

creatures. When it comes to alien design, other books spring to mind: Schmidt's *Aliens and Alien Societies* as well as Pickover's *The Science of Aliens*, Michael White's *Life Out There*, and Cohen's and Stewart's *What Does a Martian Look Like?* To name only a few. Likewise, there have been several articles in the RPG magazine literature discussing alien design. Here's a pruned list that my little RPG magazine database program (still a work in progress) spit out:

Ares #2: alien life forms: speculation on extraterrestrial creatures

Ares #16: creating alien races for traveller

Dragon #51: make your own aliens (traveller)

Dragon #58: traveller alien generation

Dragon #123: designing aliens for star frontiers

Judges Guild Journal #15: planning ecology (monster/alien creature design)

Nuts & Bolts #12: ahh... those aliens (comments on designing alien races)

Omni 10/92: how to build an alien (designing aliens & alien cultures)

Shred #2: aliens (random tables for alien design)

Troll #2: non-humanoid alien design (soapbox, gygax)

Valkyrie #22: babylon 5's real ancients: incorporating powerful aliens into sfrpgs; dark they were, and kind of petty: godlike aliens in sf & gaming; would you let an orc babysit? (thoughts on aliens & speciesism)

VIP of Gaming #1: alien races & how to identify them (alien design, sf-rpgs)



Random Aliens

Many years ago, in preparation for work on an Science Fiction RPG project, I wrote a program called Rand, a random stuff generator for MS-DOS, and as part of this program I included some tables for random alien generation. Jaron Martin helped to flesh these out, and so this section of the program essentially became a collaborative effort which we eventually test-drove, generating several aliens in the process.

Unfortunately, there was a bit of a problem in that the program often produced

strange results, results so strange, in fact, that Jaron finally decided (rightly, in my opinion) that this really wasn't a very good method for alien design, although it could help in terms of brainstorming. In any case, the tables are too long to reproduce here, but if anyone wants a copy of the program, you can find it at <http://jimvassilakos.com/dos-programs/rand.html>. In the meantime, I'll have the program draw up one random alien just to give you a feel for how it works and how I would try to interpret the results.^[1]

Possible Racial Names: Dallpen, Brakenholm, Metellus

Homeworld Gravity: High

Natural Habitat: Jungle

Size: Tiny

Basic Design: Bilateral

Legs (locomotional appendages): 2

Leg/Foot Structure: Unguligrade (Walks on toes supported by pad like elephant or rhino)

Arms (manipulatory appendages): 2

Arm Joints: 2 (shoulder/elbow)

Fingers (manipulatory digits): 7

Wings: None

Tail: No

Skin texture: Smooth

Skin Color: White

Skin Patterns: None (solid)

Number of Horns: 0

Number of Eyes: 2 (short visual angle but good depth perception)

Eye stalks: No

Visual Sensitivity: Infrared

Number of Ears: 1

Audio Sensitivity: Sharp (able to hear faint sounds)

Smell/Taste: Excellent

Poisonous Sting: No

Diet: Carnivore

Sexes/Castes: 2 (f/m, males rare, each is owned by a group of females)

Male Genitalia: External

Birth: Live birth

Liter Size: Small (1-3)

Feeding of Young: Milk glands on mother

Language: Vocal (similar to human speech patterns)

Cybernetics: Uncommon (up to minor accessories such as voice-comms)

Society: Restricted Monarchy

Control: Moderate

Status/Power: Slave race (captive associate, powerless, fully controlled)



Commonality Outside Home Territory: Very rare
Friendliness: Conservative (business-like but impatient)
Demeanor: Agreeable (ultra-polite, will rarely speak openly/honestly)
Specialty: Starships
Recent Event: Tournament

Initial Thoughts

The first thing that jumps out at me is that the program says they're tiny, but it also has them walking on padded toes, usually a feature of heavy animals. Granted, their world's gravity is high, and being descended from jungle inhabitants, perhaps their padded toes are a defensive mechanism against attacks from poisonous plants and smaller jungle critters.

Second, the program has them building starships for which they'd presumably need either large brains or the cybernetic enhancements to make due with small ones.^[2] The only other thing I can imagine is that their brains are the work of design rather than evolution, and hence perhaps can pack more raw intellect into less volume. Assuming this to be the case, we're looking a product of genetic manipulation.

Third, I sort of have a problem with the way these guys look. At least structurally speaking, they look a lot like we do. It is not too often that the program generates a creature with two arms, two legs, two arm joints, and two eyes, so I'm afraid that you're not going to get a feel for the weirdness that usually results. Nonetheless, I'm going to roll with it and see what happens.

Fourth, there seems to be a potential for joining some of the physical, psychological and social attributes into an interesting synthesis, a sort of nexus that can give this species a story by which they might be better understood. This is something I look for every time I generate a random alien, so I'm pleased to see it here. I'm looking mainly at the fact that the females seem

to run the show, and also at the excellent sense of smell. Such creatures tend to be highly territorial, or, at least, the larger gender (usually the male) is this way. Yet these guys are apparently psychologically agreeable. In short, they seem to be anything but territorial. Proceeding into the social dimension, they're also a slave race. Given that we're already assuming some degree of genetic manipulation, why not also assume that their psychology and, in fact, their whole society has been manipulated as well? Perhaps, by carefully selecting which males are allowed to breed, the race has been psychologically conditioned away from territoriality and confrontation and toward a demeanor highly amenable to subjugation. In this way, they might be slaves who prefer slavery to such an extent that they consider their masters to be their best friends in the universe.

A fifth and final thought, before I begin this travesty. There's an alien species on pages 86-87 of Patrick Huyghe's *Field Guide to Extraterrestrials* which is based on a 1951 encounter by Illinois resident Harrison Bailey. Bailey, a steelworker at the time, purported years later to have encountered a number of short, walking amphibians who briefly took him captive. Because the program has generated this guys to be short, basically humanlike in structural design, and descended from a jungle environment, it seems to me that I might be able to draw a bit from this supposed encounter, although I'll have to change the color of their skin from solid white to brown and striped if I want to stay consistent to Bailey's description of them.



Preliminary Write-Up – The Dallpen

Brakenholm is a large, terrestrial world in the Metellus system. It is the homeworld of the Dallpen, a small humanoid species which fell under control of the Hafaru during their territorial expansion.

Physical Characteristics: The Dallpen are fairly small, only around eighteen inches (45cm) on average. Normally, such a small species would never have developed intelligence, so their genetic manipulation by the Old Ones, even at first glance, is most obvious.

Humans find them somewhat “froglike” in appearance, their bellies tan, dark brown mottled stripes covering their back and limbs. Structurally, they are very similar to humans, being consistent with the sorts of creatures the Old Ones preferred to uplift: Two arms, two legs, two eyes. Their feet, however, despite initial Solian descriptions of the species dating as far back as the 1950s, are heavily padded, allowing them to sprint as well as aiding them in jumping from trees. Likewise, their seven-fingered hands are ideal for grasping tree branches or manipulating objects in their natural jungle environment.

Natural Senses: Bred to be starship engineers, their vision extends naturally into the infrared wavelengths so they can easily discern temperature fluctuations, a sure sign of impending power leaks and other containment breaches. Likewise, instead of having two or more ears, a common feature of many naturally evolved species, they have only one, a finely-tuned subdermal ear in the area of their forehead which they often press to various parts of mechanical systems in order to aid in diagnostics. As for their sense of smell, that is handled by their long snake-like tongue, which can discern scent so well that they can identify individuals by smell alone and can often tell which among them has recently been in a particular area.

Society: The Dallpen are matriarchal, using chemistry to ensure that some 99% of all births are female. The remaining males are kept solely for their breeding potential, and most of these are housed at facilities controlled by the Queen Mother. This queen descends by blood lineage from the original queen crowned during the time of the Emancipation when the males of the species were nearly all killed through targeted biological warfare. Although originally highly warlike, the Dallpen have since been bred to be more cooperative, a genetic conditioning program that the Hafaru have continued into the present day.

Interspecies Relations: The Hafaru claim the Dallpen are a free species and a close friend of the Hafaru race, yet the Dallpen are in reality, for all practical purposes, slaves of the Hafaru. Their genetic and psychological programming has conditioned them to defer to their Hafaru masters in all matters. Noting this fact, the Coalition Assembly has refused to offer them a seat, regarding them as merely an arm of the Hafaru. However, there are said to be some Dallpen who have somehow broken free of Hafaru control, although such members of the race are certainly a minuscule minority and likely live in fear of being discovered.

Needless to say, the Dallpen often serve on Hafaru starships as engineers, and they, of course, also build ships for the Hafaru fleet. Also, on a regular basis, they hold a tournament of starship design, where the best design will usually go into production. In this way, the Dallpen continue to stay focused on what they do best.



Afterthoughts

Obviously, I didn't touch on all the points of Rand's output. Likewise, the Huyghe book mentions their control over a species of small bugs. I'd imagine these bugs might be useful for making repairs in very tight areas. In any case, I think this gives enough material to make the alien usable while at the same time leaving loose strings for further expansion.

The main problem with these alien tables is that, just as with the UWP system for Traveller, they generate too many inconsistencies that either have to be fixed

or somehow explained. In this particular example, I was able to explain away the most obvious inconsistencies, but it's not always so easy. If I were to rewrite the tables, I'd try to do a better job, but as it currently stands, I think the program still has value as a brainstorming device. In any case, it can do more than just generate random aliens, so if you'd like a copy, download it and give it a whirl, however, beware that you will probably need to run it under DOSBox^[3]. If you have any questions, contact me via email or Facebook.^[4]

This essay was originally published in Alarums & Excursions^[5] #362. To see Jim's other contributions to A&E, see <https://mega.nz/folder/hGYliCKK#a0fr1dDhy3no6Ey5xNPukQ>.

[1] Rand actually has two separate sets of tables for this task. I'm using the first set, as the other one sometimes crashes the program for some reason.

[2] Generally speaking, small animals seem to need a greater brain-to-body ratio than large animals in order to be as smart (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encephalization_quotient), although there's a fairly small species of octopus which may end up overturning this theory.

[3] <https://www.dosbox.com/>

[4] <https://www.facebook.com/jim.vassilakos>

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alarums_and_Excursions



This fanzine and more can be downloaded from the official Cepheus Journal Website!





Other Folk's Gold

By Brett Kruger

In this article, which I hope will be the first of many, I'll be looking at the Netflix original series called Love Death and Robots to see what role-playing nuggets I can mine from it, hence the title. Season one was made up of eighteen episodes. In future articles I'm going to be mining the science fiction of tv shows, short films and movies for gaming goodness.

Fair warning, if you haven't seen this series yet and you want to, divert your eyes now, spoilers ahead! First up I'll touch on each episode in series one, give a brief outline and then some thoughts on its role-play possibility. Each episode is between six and seventeen minutes long, so they can pack in a lot. Another warning, several of the episodes are NSFW and one or two are downright explicit. Personally, none of my games have been adults only, but I know of gamers that do, so I'll mention those episodes in the brief.

After that I'll go in-depth for those episodes that I think have potential for use in a role-playing session, give a bit more overview of the episode and how I would use it in a game. If the episode is an absolute goldmine, I'll try and break it out into a separate article. Right then, let's get stuck in.

Episode Briefs

Episode one is called Sonnie's Edge. In London's underground world of "beastie" fights, where remotely controlled bio-engineered gladiator beasts battle each other, the fighter Sonnie is unbeatable as long as she keeps her edge. The fact is Sonnie's human body is only a front end and her consciousness is actually in the combat beast. Each time she goes into the ring she really is fighting for her life.

This episode is NSFW, having some nudity and graphic violence. The underground beast fights could add some colour to any game taking place in the underbelly of a future city. Players searching for information, a patron or leads could happen upon such an arena.

I really like the idea of remote-controlled beasts for gaming. Players could be roped into such a situation and must control such a beast. I think this concept could also be expanded and used in a dark future game, or even in a version of a Hostile setting. Instead of battle armour or mechs, players could send in their bio-beasts as their avatars, safe while the beastie gets in the thick of things.

Episode two is Three Robots. Long after the fall of humanity, three robots embark on a sightseeing tour of a post-apocalyptic city, learning human concepts and surmising what lead to their demise.

Pretty tame stuff with little to mine, except for one great twist. Genetically engineered cats that can speak and which hint they may explode if you stop petting them, otherwise could be used in a Cyber Punk style game. That's all, I'll leave that right there.

Episode three is called The Witness. After seeing a brutal murder, a woman flees from the killer through the streets of a surreal city. The woman kills the man, then realises the same man just saw her kill him.

Another NSFW episode with graphic nudity and some violence, about the only thing of interest is the apparent reality loop, the male and female switching roles





with each loop. It reminds me of another short series I recently watch on YouTube, which I hope to cover in a future article.

Episode four is called Suits. A community of farmers use their homemade mechs to defend their families from an alien invasion. When their defences fail, the farmers must flee to their underground shelters.

This is the first episode where I really thought "this could be used in a game". Then I thought of Zozer's Hostile setting, what a match made in heaven. There is the rare swear word in this episode. An alien invasion of a colony is right up Hostile's alley and would make a great adventure for a party of players. Help the farmers fight off the horde. The homemade mechs are really cool too.

Episode five is called Sucker of Souls. If you thought 'vampires' when you saw this title, well you'd be mostly right. Unleashed by an archaeological dig, a bloodthirsty demon (styled after Dracula) battles a team of mercenaries armed with... cats?

Well, sort of. The doctor in the group explains that Dracula fears and hates cats. The mercenaries have all the usual guns and explosives. The team manages the kill the Dracula demon, only to flee further into the caves and find themselves surrounded by more of the monsters.

This episode is your basic dungeon crawl filled with monsters. It could easily work in a Hostile setting with any number of xeno-beasts swapped for the vampire demons.

Episode six has the title When the Yogurt Took Over. The episode is exactly that, after scientists accidentally breed super-intelligent yogurt, it soon hungers for world domination.

The Yogurt offers to eradicate the US national debt, but in return they want the state of Ohio. Initially mocked, the

government changes its mind when the Yogurt goes to make the same offer to China. Despite being told not to deviate from the plan in the smallest detail, the American government can't help itself and within six months the global economy collapses, except for Ohio.

The government then lets the Yogurt take over completely and a decade later humans are prosperous under their dairy-based overlords. The Yogurt then decides to embark on space exploration, leaving mankind to their own devices. Nope, I got nothing on this one. Almost as silly as a silicon-based virus destroying the known universe.⁽¹⁾

Episode seven is called Beyond the Aquila Rift. Awakening after traveling light years off course, a ship's crew struggles to discover just how far they've come.

The captain, Thom, wakes from suspended animation (think low berths) to find an old girlfriend, Greta, on the space station where his ship is docked. She tells him they are thousands of light years from Earth, out past the Aquila Rift and hundreds of years has passed.

Thom is disbelieving of the situation and presses Greta for the truth, and reluctantly reveals the truth, that his ship is caught in a giant space web, his crew are dead, and that Greta is an alien arachnid creature that eases the crews of the marooned ships to their final rest. Thom loses his mind so 'Greta' returns him to the dream world where he presumably starts the cycle again.

This episode has got some good potential for a game session. This episode has nudity and a sex scene, so definitely NSFW. The giant space web acts as a 'catching point' for ships that mis-jump, ending up in an area of space that has little chance for escape, little but not none, a sort of Sargasso Sea in space.



Episode eight is called Good Hunting. The son of a spirit hunter forges a bond with a shape-shifting huli jing after his father kills its mother. The young Liang leaves home to become a train engineer and in Hong Kong encounters Yan, now stuck in human form as steampunk industrialization has removed the huli jing's magic.

After Yan is drugged and turned into a cyborg sex toy, she kills her tormentor and turns to Liang for help. Using his newly developed robotics skills Liang morphs Yan into a robotic huli jing. They then part and Yan becomes a vigilante, hunting those who abuse women.

Given that I just said 'cyborg sex toy' do I really need to say this episode is NSFW? This episode is very suitable for a cyberpunk or steampunk game, but I think the idea of a shape-shifting alien could be slotted into any sci-fi game. The alien could be being held captive and its family could approach the players to help, or the alien could be stuck on some world and approach the players for assistance to get off-world, all the while being chased by others who wish to do it harm.

Episode nine is called The Dump. Ugly Dave calls the garbage dump home, and he's not about to let some city-slicker take it away from him. After Dave's friend is eaten by a muck creature, he befriends the creature, and it becomes his pet. When an inspector arrives to evict Dave, his 'pet' eats the inspector.

Not much for role-play, but I do like the idea of a muck creature so look for it elsewhere in this issue.

Episode ten is called Shape-Shifters. Deep in Afghanistan, two Marines with supernatural powers face a threat from one of their own kind. Although despised by normal humans, the werewolves are nevertheless used by military forces for their unique senses.

That night the camp is attacked, and everyone is killed. Decker arrives back and rightly assumes the carnage was caused by another werewolf. Decker is ordered to find the enemy werewolf and bring him in alive.

Decker sneaks out of camp and meets an old man and a younger man he has encountered before. The pair morphs into werewolves and they fight. Although injured, Decker kills them both, before returning to camp and ends his service in disgust.

Just like episode eight, you can have a shape-shifting alien, though this time the alien is a member of your team, and you are hunting rebels or an enemy. Your team could be a small recon team, or a unit of a much larger force.

Episode eleven is called Helping Hand. Stranded in orbit, an astronaut must choose between life and limb before her oxygen runs out. Knocked away from the satellite she was repairing, Alex is faced with running out of air or removing her glove and using it to push her back towards the satellite and her ship.

She seals her suit and throws the glove away from her, which pushes her back toward the satellite, but she narrowly misses and starts to drift past her ship. Exposed to the vacuum of space, her left forearm is frozen, so she decides to break off the forearm in a last ditched effort to get back to the ship.

While not a great episode for a multi-player gaming session, this would make for an interesting session for a solo game in a near-future universe. It could even be a good way to introduce a new player, with the rest of the group arriving after a call for help from the solo player.





Episode twelve is called Fish Night. After their car breaks down in the desert, two salesmen take a dreamlike voyage to the dawn of time. The desert, once a sea floor teeming with life, is now the playground for the ghosts of prehistoric marine life.

The younger of the two salesmen decides to strip off and 'swim' with the ghosts. Despite warnings from the older man, he continues to swim, becoming a luminescent being who then is consumed by a primordial shark.

While not a regular sci-fi game situation, this scenario could be morphed into a cyberpunk game, with the desert environment being inside a computer with the players hunting something hidden in the primordial digital ocean.

Episode thirteen is called, funny enough, Lucky 13. After the drop-ship Lucky 13 lost two crews, no pilot would fly her... but rookies don't get a choice. Lt Colby manages to rack up twenty missions in what many consider a curse ship, but eventually her luck runs out. Lucky 13 crashes and is overrun by enemy troops. Watching from a trench, Colby sees 13 self-destructs, taking out the enemy and saving her and its troops.

The star of this episode really is the dropship 'Lucky 13', which you find out towards the end is semi-sentient, an AI computer that sacrifices itself to save its crew. This would make a great NPC in any game that supports AI characters.

Episode fourteen is called Zima Blue. The renowned artist Zima recounts his mysterious past and rise to fame before unveiling his final work. Many assume Zima is a cybernetically enhanced man, but in truth he began as an advanced android pool cleaning robot. He fascination with the colour blue stems from the fact that that was the first colour he saw in the pool.

Zima was upgraded each time he passed to a new owner, eventually becoming self-aware. Longing for meaning, Zima 'deconstructs' himself to become a simple pool cleaning robot once more.

Another cyberpunk suitable episode, the players could be tasked with helping an advanced AI return to its roots. A suitable twist could be the AI is a celebrity, or even some top-secret military AI.

Episode fifteen is called Blind Spot. A gang of cyborg thieves stage a high-speed heist of a heavily armoured convoy. Everything that can goes wrong, does, leaving only the new guy standing. The rookie retrieves the target of the heist, an advanced microchip, and while lamenting the loss of his teammates is told by the team's coordinator that their brains are backed up before every mission. The rookie is then greeted by holograms of his lost teammates.

This episode is basically a cyberpunk version of the classic train robbery scenario. It's great fun and could easily be run in a single game session. The whole 'back the brains up' situation does take most of the danger out of the scenario, so could be skipped, unless you really want to make games lethal to players.

Episode sixteen is called Ice Age. A young couple moves into an apartment and finds a lost civilization inside their antique freezer. There is a time dilation in the freezer and, as they watch, the civilization goes from Medieval era to Industrial Revolution then modern-day and tactical nuclear warfare. With time the civilization moves forward to advanced technology, then evolving into energy beings that vanish into a singularity.

Believing the mini people are gone, they unplug the refrigerator to clean it in the morning. The next day they find the freezer now has a prehistoric world, with primitive sapiens under attack by dinosaurs.



There are plenty of tropes with mini creatures, from the locker creatures of Men in Black to any number of fantasy films. Why not include some mini creatures in your game, just for fun or even as a plot twist?

The seventeenth episode is called Alternate Histories. Want to see Hitler die in a variety of comically fantastic ways? Now you can. Welcome to Multiversity! Six timelines not only show Hitler dying, but also the outcomes of his death at that particular point in time.

I've got to say, I love alternative histories and while this episode is restricted to Hitler (although timelines for Lincoln shoots first is hinted at) it gives food for thought for anyone who wants to take a standard game with a know history and twist it into something completely different.

The final episode is called The Secret War. Elite units of the Red Army fight an unholy evil deep in the ancient forests of Siberia. The Russians attempt to summon demons to fight for them, but it goes horribly wrong. A special force is sent in to destroy the demons, but it becomes a Russian version of Custers last stand.

Who doesn't love a good last stand? Well unless you're playing Paranoia, I'm guessing not your players. It does make for a really good session of Hostile though, you send the characters in to investigate a research station that's gone silent, only to discover that they've opened to proverbial gates of hell and the players are now in a desperate race to get out alive.

Expanded thoughts.

While there's lots in the first season that can be used in games, I'm going to focus on episodes four, seven and fifteen. I've ripped the episode descriptions in this section directly from the wiki page https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love_Death_%26_Robots

Episode Four. A small community of farmers pilot mech suits to defend their land from an invading swarm of insectoids which they call "DeeBees". When the defence field fails, DeeBees pour in faster than they can be repelled, so the community heads for underground shelters.

All arms are called in and one neighbour, Jake, sacrifices himself to kill a large portion of the swarm. A giant insectoid breaks through, but one of the farmers' wives destroys it with a well-aimed shot from a turret gun.

Come dawn, the barriers are back to normal and the town has returned to a sense of safety. The camera zooms out to show that DeeBees populate the whole planet, and the farmers are the invading force, having set up domed colonies across the planet.

The world looks like a garden world, until you get to the end of the episode and realise some terraforming has taken place. Some of the tech doesn't really fit in to most Cepheus games, such as the force-field domes, but you could substitute that for glass domes (Outland anyone?) or even some type of electromagnetic field fence.

Suits, there's not much published in Cepheus Engine to help out here in the way of mechs or giant power suits, something that hopefully some publisher will fix soon. The two I know of are Mongoose's "2300AD: Hard Suits, Combat Walkers and Battlesuits" and JBE's "Mech Tech 'n' bot: Mech Squadrons", although I've been told you can design mechs with the Vehicle Design Guide – something else to put on my to do list.

The domes act as a limiting factor for game play, half a dozen homesteads scattered throughout, with one or two





 locations with a hardened shelter to retreat to when things get really bad.





 Set the scene with one or two aliens breaking through the barrier and, just when the players think they're on top of things and the dome is back up, hit them with surge of creatures. You can have the mechs run out of ammo and have them retreat, breakdown and be overrun and have to be rescued, beat the tide back or fight a running battle back to their shelter.




 But once in the shelter how do they defeat the aliens? In the episode they kill the queen with a missile fired from the shelter's defences, or you could have the dome self-repair and have your team reload and go out and keep fighting the leftovers.




 Episode Seven. The Blue Goose spaceship's crew members, Thom, Suzy, and Ray, are returning home from a successful mission, but an error in the routing plot causes unexpected events to happen. Thom awakes from suspended animation and is greeted by Greta, an old flame.




 She tells him that he and his crew are hundreds of thousands of light-years from Earth, nearly beyond the Aquila Rift, and centuries have passed: there is no way for them to get home. They rekindle their relationship, but Thom is still in disbelief of the situation.




 He demands the truth from a tearful Greta, who tells him that his experiences are a simulation and that he is not ready to see reality, as she truly does care for him and all those who find their way there. He insists, so she reluctantly relents and awakens him.



 Thom is revealed to be an emaciated old man; their ship caught in an enormous web with countless others; his crew either dead or trapped in their own trances; and "Greta" an alien arachnid creature.

As a horrified Thom loses his mind from the encounter, "Greta" returns him to the dream world, minus his recent memories, just as she had with his crew and the others. She reawakens him and greets him all over again, a process that presumably repeats until Thom eventually dies.

The 'Greta' alien is benevolent, wanting to help the characters escape the reality of their situation. In the episode that 'help' comes in the form of a dream world to ease them into their afterlife, but in a Cepheus game that help could easily be in the form of helping the players scrounge the parts and fuel they need to get their ship jump-ready again.

All the marooned ships are connected by a web of strands, allowing movement between the ships. There may or may not be other survivors fighting for resources. The crew may even be attacked as soon as they come out of stasis, having to fight for their lives. The hunt for fuel in the Sargasso could even extend the scenario if all the trapped ships have empty tanks, or they have to figure out how to get the fuel from the other stranded ships.

Episode Fifteen. A cyborg crew - Hawk, Kali, Sui, and Rookie - attempt to rob a convoy for a heavily guarded microchip as it is in motion to a tunnel. As they plant explosives on the back car, Sui drops one of his when swerving to avoid a desert rat, alerting the guards.

Kali opens cover fire as Hawk moves in to deal with the turrets. Once in the tunnel, they have a limited window to get the microchip, but as Hawk readies, he is blindsided and destroyed by a massive defence bot. Using the distraction, Sui knocks it off the convoy, but it shifts into vehicle mode and gives chase, crushing Kali as it does.

Sui sacrifices himself to destroy the defence bot's CPU and the convoy.



Rookie survives and takes the targeted microchip, lamenting the loss of his team. He is greeted by Bob, the team's coordinator, who congratulates him and tells him that he copied all of their brains before the mission. The crew greets Rookie in hologram form, commending him for a job well done.

So, train job on wheels, with killer warbots as opponents. The copying of the team's brains reminds me very much of Netflix's series *Altered Carbon*, which I also enjoyed.

The team has to catch up to the convoy, take out the guard bots on wheels, break into the main truck, overcome the defences and then take out the boss bot. A couple of key points to this scenario, they have to get on board the truck before it hits the tunnel, and they have either stop the truck or steal the chip before the truck

before it gets to the end of the tunnel, where the journey ends at the corporation's very heavily guard compound.

While it doesn't happen in the episode (jamming maybe), you could have the convoy signal the compound at a certain point, bringing in more defenders if the team seems to be having too easy a time of it.

So there you have it, some of the gaming gold to be found in Netflix's original series *Love, Death and Robots*. If you have a favourite series you want reviewed, or want to add some of your thoughts for game ideas, just drop me a line on the *Cepheus Journal* Facebook or MeWe pages.

Till next time, keep gaming!

(1). This is a joke on my behalf, I really like that particular setting, despite how implausible it was. But hey, it's just a game!



Converting PCs from CE to CD

By Todd Bradley

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Converting PCs from Cepheus Engine to Cepheus Deluxe - Introduction

Cepheus Deluxe is a new rule set for space opera sci-fi RPG campaigns, published by Stellagama Publishing. It is similar to *Cepheus Engine* but changes a few things to simplify the game, improve playability, and add some extra depth in places.

One thing that is simplified is character creation. But for my campaign, all the players already had characters created under the *Cepheus Engine* rules. So, I wrote these conversion rules to apply to the existing characters to make them more compatible with *Cepheus Deluxe*.

Note to other referees: All these are "house rules" for my *These Stars Are Ours!* campaign. None of this should be considered canon. Maybe these conversion rules will work for your campaign, maybe not. You decide.

Page numbers are from *Cepheus Deluxe* Original Printing - September - October 2021. In some cases, I quote text from that rule book; literal quotes are set apart using indentation.

For brevity, I often use the acronym CE to mean *Cepheus Engine* and CD to mean *Cepheus Deluxe*.

Characteristics

Cepheus Deluxe uses the same traditional six characteristics (sometimes called "attributes" or "stats") as *Cepheus Engine* and *Traveller*. Nothing changes here.

Characteristic Modifiers stay the same, too.

Skills

General Rules

The skill list in CD is much shorter. Some skills have been combined.

CD doesn't have cascade skills. So, you no longer get a default zero-level skill in the other branches of the cascade tree that you didn't specialize in.

"Subsumes" below means that the skill existed in CE and includes that meaning of the skill plus it also includes the other listed skill(s).

"Replaces" below means the skill either didn't exist in CE or was a cascade skill and you no longer must choose a specialty.

If you had any of the skills in brackets (one of the subsumed or replaced skills), the skill level is now the maximum of the main skill and any that have been subsumed or replaced.

Example 1: If you had Gambling-1 but not Carousing, you now have Carousing-1.

Example 2: If you had Gambling-1 and Carousing-1, you still have Carousing-1.

Skill List

Below is the list of all 31 skills. In square brackets are notes about converting each one. Some of these notes come from the CD book, and some are things that just felt right to me when I compared the CE skill list to the CD skill list.



- Admin
- Aircraft [replaces Airship, Rotor Aircraft, and Winged Aircraft]
- Animals [replaces Farming, Riding, and Veterinary Medicine]
- Athletics [this is the only skill you can't use untrained]
- Carousing [subsumes Gambling]
- Computer [subsumes Comms and Prospecting]
- Deception
- Demolitions
- Driving [replaces Mole, Tracked Vehicle, and Wheeled Vehicle]
- Engineering
- Grav Vehicles
- Gun Combat [replaces Archery, Energy Pistol, Energy Rifle, Shotgun, Slug Pistol, and Slug Rifle]
- Gunnery [replaces Bay Weapons, Heavy Weapons, Screens, Spinal Mounts, and Turret Weapons]
- Heavy Weapons
- Investigation
- Jack Of All Trades
- Leadership
- Liaison [subsumes Bribery and Broker]
- Medicine
- Melee Combat [replaces Natural Weapons, Bludgeoning Weapons, Piercing Weapons, and Slashing Weapons]
- Piloting [subsumes Navigation]
- Recon
- Repair [replaces Electronics, Gravitics, and Mechanics]
- Science [replaces Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, and Space Sciences]
- Stealth
- Steward
- Streetwise
- Survival
- Tactics
- Watercraft [replaces Motorboats, Ocean Ships, Sailing Ships, and Submarine]
- Zero-G [subsumes Battle Dress]

The Unusual Case of Survival Skill

In *Cepheus Engine*, the Survival skill was a cascade skill off Animals. But in *Cepheus Deluxe*, it's now a separate skill and not subsumed by the CD Animals skill. To me, that makes much more sense.

How Not To Be Seen - Recon and Stealth

In *Cepheus Engine*, the Recon skill was used both to spot hidden things and to hide from people trying to spot you. *Cepheus Deluxe* has two separate skills for that. Recon is now for spotting hidden things, but Stealth is used to hide from others. If you had Recon in CE, choose one or the other skill in CD, but not both, unless you have a level of 2 or more in which case you can split the levels between the two.

Languages

CD characters know a number of languages equal to 1 + EDU modifier (minimum 1). There is no longer a Linguistics skill. If you had Linguistics in CE, you now simply know that many more languages.

Homeworld Skills

Throw out any Homeworld Skills from *Cepheus Engine* that are still at level 0. Refer to the *Cepheus Deluxe* Homeworld Skills on p. 19. You get one skill relevant to your homeworld, at level 1. For the purposes of converting existing characters, this only applies to skills you don't already have at level 1 or greater.

Contacts

Cepheus Deluxe doesn't have Allies and Enemies in the same way that *Cepheus Engine* does. Instead, there are Contacts (p. 36). Normally, you start the game with a number of Contacts equal to your SOC DM, and can gain more through the course of your career.

For the purposes of converting existing CE characters to CD, just take any Allies you already have, and start calling them





 Contacts instead. If your number of Allies is less than your SOC DM, make up enough new Contacts to fill in the gaps.



Stamina and Lifeblood

Cepheus Deluxe bucks the old *Traveller* tradition of using the 3 physical characteristics for "hit points". Instead, it has 2 other characteristics. From p. 39:

The character's Stamina represents their toughness, and their ability to take a hit and shrug it off. Stamina is equal to the sum of character's END Characteristic + Athletics skill. For example, a character with END 7 and Athletics 1 will have Stamina 8.

The character's Lifeblood represents their resistance to injury. It is equal to twice their Stamina.

If the character lacks the Athletics skill, their Stamina simply equals their END score, and their Lifeblood simply equals twice their END score.

Speaking of Athletics, here's some funny trivia. Athletics is the one skill in *Cepheus Deluxe* that you can't use untrained (not counting Jack Of All Trades, of course).

Traits

Traits are a new concept in *Cepheus Deluxe*, and there's a whole chapter devoted to them, starting on p. 41.

Read the wonderful list and choose one Trait for every two career terms you completed, with a minimum of one.

Equipment

Keep your existing equipment. CD has some new equipment and changes some details of old equipment. But for simplicity and continuity, nothing in my campaign will immediately change regarding old equipment.

Other Notes for My Players

Here is a list of other things to point out to my gaming group in converting from *Cepheus Engine* to *Cepheus Deluxe*.

Collaboration

The CD Collaboration rule (p. 11) replaces the CE Aiding Another rule.

In some cases, characters may work together on a task throw. The character with the highest combined skill and characteristic DMs make the main skill throw. Any assistant can make a skill throw at the same difficulty as well; if they succeed, add DM+1 to the primary character's throw; if they fail, the primary character suffers no penalty. There can only be one assistant to the main skill throw. However, the Referee is encouraged to allow other characters to assist the assistant. Each throw has the same difficulty as the original skill throw. Note that characters who are assisting in the throw do not necessarily have to use the same skill. If the player and Referee agree, a related skill task throw can assist. For example, a ship's engineer might throw Engineering to assist the Pilot's skill throw. Teamwork!

Hero Points

We'll use the optional Individual Hero Points rule in the Terran Borderlands campaign. See p. 12 for the Hero Points rules.

You'll get two individual Hero Points at the start of each session; use 'em or lose 'em. But we won't use group Hero Points.

Experience Points

Unlike *Cepheus Engine*, *Cepheus Deluxe* has an experience point (XP) system. In *Cepheus Deluxe*, you learn new skills (and languages and Traits) by spending XP for them.

To convert a CE PC into CD, take the number of weeks you have been studying a new skill and just use that as the number of unspent XP you have.

So, if you've been on a training program and have accumulated 4 weeks toward Piloting and 8 weeks toward Gun Combat, you now have 12 unspent XP. You can spend those immediately on skill advancement or hold on to them and use them later.

By the way, don't make the mistake of thinking that just because the game uses XP now, there are levels or ranks. There aren't. XP is simply earned for adventuring, and then spent to improve your character, one thing at a time.



Dump Demons

By Brett Kruger

The Dump Demon is not actually an individual entity but, just like coral reefs, is a colony of creatures that act together as a single semi-sentient creature. Like a reverse hermit crab, as the colony grows it collects objects from its surroundings to build its form. Dump Demons grow by consuming objects and incorporating them into their mass, and especially love the discarded rubbish locations of sentient creatures.

Dump Demons do not like environments where they can't consume waste to grow. Dump Demons spawn when a piece of at least one kilogram of the colony is broken off from its host colony. This never happens naturally and is always the result of violence.

At this size the natural instinct of the mass is to run and hide. Dump Demon spawn grow at the rate of one kilogram a week, reaching the next stage of their life after ten weeks.

At ten weeks the colony will have grown enough, and added enough extra mass, to have gained their semi-sentience. It is this juvenile form that can imprint onto another sentient being, thus forming a permanent bond. If this bond is not formed by the time the juvenile reaches 20 weeks and 200 kilograms, then the Dump Demon can no longer bond.

Bonding takes a week of close contact and interaction. Wild Dump Demons are exceptionally dangerous and are often hunted, but bonded ones make excellent guards beasts - as long as the environment contains enough waste for them to consume. Where this becomes the case the Dump Demon will lose one kilogram a

week until they expire. When they get below 100 kilograms they will revert to being wild if they had previously bonded.

Dump Demons reach maturity once they reach 1500 kilograms, after roughly three years. While Spawn Dump Demons are quite easy to kill, if you can find them, Juvenile and Mature Dump Demons are a whole different matter.

Projectile weapons only do quarter damage and are mostly absorbed into the mass of the creature. Poisons and toxins have no effect on them. Only energy and flame weapons do normal damage to these creatures.

Dump Demons cannot be knocked out, and will keep fighting if cornered, or will flee if given the opportunity. Dump Demons have the natural trait of Ghost, giving them Stealth 1 in their natural surroundings, as well as +2 to initiative.

If the sentient a Dump Demon has bonded with is under attack the Dump Demon will attack until either the threat is eliminated, or the Dump Demon is killed.

Cepheus Deluxe Stats

Spawn Dump Demon

Size: 1

Weight: 1Kg

Stamina: 1

Lifeblood: 4

DM: -2D

Weapons: Claws and Teeth -/-

Aarmor: 0

Speed (Min/Max): 10/30

Reactions: Flees if surprised

Juvenile Dump Demon

Size: 7

Weight: 100Kg

Stamina: 7

Lifeblood: 18

DM: -

Weapons: Claws and Teeth 2D/2D

Armor: 1

Speed (Min/Max): 10/30

Reactions: Attacks 11+, flee 6-

Mature Dump Demon

Size: 11

Weight: 1500Kg

Stamina: 18

Lifeblood: 45

DM: +4D

Weapons: Claws and Teeth 2D/2D

Armor: 3

Speed (Min/Max): 10/30

Reactions: Attacks if it has surprise
otherwise 8+, flee 3-



Dump Demon caught with night vision. Note they are more reflective than un-absorbed materials.



Chatting with... Omer Golan-Joel

Interview with Omer Golan-Joel of
Stellagama
By Brett Kruger (CJ Editor)

CJ - First up, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to answer some questions for our readers. Could you tell us when did you first get into roleplaying games, what was your first and what was your favourite?

OG - I began with AD&D 2E, which was the primary game available in Israel in the mid-1990's. I soon moved to Shadowrun when it was available, and then to Classic Traveller - I got the books-0-8-in-one-volume Traveller reprint at a discount when I purchased several Shadowrun 3E sourcebooks. Nowadays I run Old School Essentials (an old-school D&D-type game) and Cepheus Deluxe, and I play in a Savage Worlds game. Classic Traveller was my all-time favorite since I found it, eclipsing any d20 game or Shadworun.

CJ - Your bio says you are a freelance translator as well as an RPG publisher, how do you balance the two and what do you like to do in your downtime?

OG - If I could, I would have devoted myself full-time to tabletop role-playing game writing and publishing. As I still require additional income, I spend approximately 20 hours a week doing freelance translation work, and approximately 20-25 hours doing my role-playing game work. In my downtime, I spend a lot of time cooking; I also play video games, though I play them far less often nowadays than even a decade ago. My hope is that Cepheus Deluxe's Second Printing Kickstarter will catapult my game design career far enough that I will be able to devote my entire work time to Stellagama Publishing.



CJ - How did you get into writing roleplaying games and what do you enjoy most about it? What inspiration do you draw from?

OG - I began creating fan material for Classic Traveller early in this century; I ended up publishing an official third-party Traveller setting, Outer Veil, under the old logo license, though Spica Publishing. Later, I founded my own company, Stellagama Publishing, to publish open-content and open-source role-playing game material. I enjoy creating new rules for people to enjoy at the table, and, more than that, building interesting and deep settings. I draw game-design inspiration from the many great game designers who came before me, and science-fiction inspiration both from older novels (such as stories by Niven and Pournelle) and from newer sci-fi media (such as Babylon 5 or Mass Effect).

CJ - Stellagama, how did that name come about?

OG - I am an amateur herpetologist; I love lizards with a passion, and my favorite lizard is the rough-tail rock agama,



Stellagama stellio, a very common lizard where I live (Israel). Its name also means "Star Agama" or "Star Lizard", which is appropriate for a sci-fi game publishing company.

CJ – Stellagama has four other members on the team, Richard Hazlewood, Josh Peters, Robert L. S. Weaver and Hannah Saunders. When and how did they join Stellagama and what unique qualities do they bring?

OG – Richard Hazlewood was my founding partner in Stellagama Publishing; together we began work on our projects, most notably These Stars Are Ours!; soon after, in 2016, Josh Peters joined us in the same project, and Robert Weaver the next year, first as an indexing expert, and then as a writer. Around the same time, Hannah Saunders joined us as an illustrator, who eventually published her own products through our company. Last but not least, Ivan Cantero Muñoz joined us approximately a year ago as an expert translator into Spanish, and as a writer of sword & sorcery adventures and settings.

CJ – Stellagama was founded in 2016, what was your first product, which is your best-selling product and which product are you most proud of?

OG – Our first product was Scum and Villainy, a rogue supplement for the White Star d20-based sci-fi RPG. Our best-selling product, which is also our joy and pride, is Cepheus Deluxe - a Mithral Best Seller on DriveThruRPG and an excellent sci-fi ruleset combining a classic spirit with modernized mechanics.

CJ – Stellagama has a range of settings/rules, Cepheus Light/Deluxe, The sword of Cepheus, These Stars are Ours and Near Space, as well as quirky titles like Cauldrons & Casseroles. Was there a plan for how these titles came out, or just an organic growth, or maybe something else?

OG – Our initial plan was to publish These Stars Are Ours, our space-opera setting. Other titles came organically, based on our ongoing brainstorming process, as we strive to offer a diverse and interesting selection of science-fiction and sword-and-sorcery books for our audience to enjoy.

CJ – What attracted you to the Cepheus Engine? Which of your titles was the most fun to write?

OG – I love the simplicity and straightforwardness of the 2d6 skill-based mechanics, as introduced by Traveller and propagated by the Cepheus Engine. You can do almost anything you want with these rules, from the original science fiction to fantasy and even further. There are over 700 Cepheus Engine titles on DriveThruRPG right now, by a variety of authors and publishing companies, attesting to the system's versatility and ease of use. Writing Cepheus Deluxe was a great joy - a challenge to improve on the already-awesome existing 2d6 Cepheus mechanics and make them more accessible to newer audiences.

CJ – What are you working on now? Any plans for future titles you would like to share with our readers?

OG – On July 1st, 2022, we will launch a Kickstarter campaign for Cepheus Deluxe Enhanced, a version of the same best-selling Cepheus Deluxe rules repackaged in much better layout and with much more full-color art. Alongside this campaign, we will also publish Terra Arisen, a concise and action-packed retelling of These Stars Are Ours, in the coming month. Beyond that - we have many plans for the future - a second edition of The Sword of Cepheus sword & sorcery rules, more adventures set in the Terra Arisen universe - and more!





CJ – Besides DriveThruRPG, what other avenues are available for purchasing your books? Any other web presences (blogs, Facebook, etc.) you'd like to promote for Stellagama?

OG – Some of our books are available in print from Lulu and from Amazon. We also have a semi-official blog (my own personal blog) and a Facebook page:

<https://spacecockroach.blogspot.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/StellagamaPublishing>

CJ – Do you, or Stellagama, ever make it to any conventions, at least before Covid? Do you get to interact much with fans?

OG – We had no official convention presence so far, but we intend to use the newly-available post-pandemic freedom to make ourselves available for various conventions in the future.

CJ – One final question, your bio says you have two pet cats as well as an entourage of house geckos. Given that the Stellagama logo is a gecko, which would you say is your favourite pet?

OG – My favorite pet is Saki, my old cat, who has turned 15 this year. The geckos and agamas are wild animals living in our home and backyard... My other cat, Chicha, passed away in 2021.

CJ – Again, thank you for your time, Omer.



STELLAGAMA
PUBLISHING



Four Aliens

By Jon Zeigler

Four Aliens for the *Human Destiny* Setting
As I announced in issue #10, I'm currently working on a space-opera setting of my own, called the *Human Destiny* universe. This the setting for some of my original fiction, and I'm (slowly) working on a series of tabletop game sourcebooks under the *Cepheus Engine*.

The premise is that in the mid-21st century, Earth and humanity are "annexed" (conquered) by a vast interstellar empire, the *Khedai Hegemony*. The Hegemony doesn't seem interested in exploiting us for its own benefit. Instead, as has happened with many other pre-interstellar cultures, we were on the verge of self-destruction; the aliens wanted to rescue us and guide us into mature membership in interstellar civilization.

The "present day" of the setting is in the late 23rd century, a time when more and more humans are getting the opportunity to move to colony worlds and serve aboard Hegemony spaceships. *Human Destiny* characters are those exceptional humans who are striving to earn a place for themselves in a universe that doesn't belong to us.

As a taste of the growing *Human Destiny* setting, this article describes four non-human species that are often encountered by human characters.

A Note on Character Design

The *Human Destiny* setting is about humans finding ways to survive in an interstellar culture far larger and older than anything we have dealt with in our past. Non-humans are conceived as almost always being non-player characters. At this point, full character design rules for non-human characters have yet to be constructed.

One detail that may be of interest regards the way Social Standing (SOC) works in the setting. The *Cepheus Engine* game is being designed around human characters, who have SOC scores no higher than 15 (F) as expected. SOC 15 represents the very elite of conquered humanity, one-in-a-million individuals who carry a "red card" indicating full trusted citizenship in the Khedai Hegemony. Average SOC scores indicate a "white card" that carries no specific privileges.

Non-human characters, even those in ordinary professions, are likely to hold high Social Standing in human terms. Non-humans with SOC lower than 9 are rare, and senior non-human officials of the Hegemony will have SOC of 12 or higher.

Khedai

Khedai are big bipedal creatures, standing about 2.0 meters tall and averaging about 100 kilograms in mass. They vaguely resemble small bears, although their heads have a distinctive shape and (in males) are topped by heavy spiraling horns like those of mouflon sheep. They are covered with dense, dark-colored fur. Their faces are dominated by a cluster of four large eyes and a heavy jaw full of strong teeth. Their voices tend to be very deep and rumbling. In their natural environment, they prefer shade and dark places, and they are not fond of direct sunlight or bright lights in general.

The *khedai* evolved into tool-using intelligence a little more than three million years ago, on a planet circling a cool K5V class star. Their home world was slightly smaller than Earth. Lacking any large natural satellite to stabilize its rotational





axis, the planet exhibited large shifts in axial orientation, causing occasional drastic changes in planetary climate. The *khedai* natural environment was a cold boreal forest, which covered over half the land surface of their home world. The proto-*khedai* were hunter-browser omnivores, who developed intelligence to survive periods of rapid climatic change.

The *khedai* rise to high-technology civilization was somewhat smoother than most. They never got into the habit of fighting massively destructive wars among themselves, and they did relatively little damage to their home world's ecology. After annexation, their patrons found them to be very promising subjects, intelligent and well-disciplined. The *khedai* do not speak of how they became the leading species of the proto-Hegemony, but the process seems to have taken place with minimal upheaval.

Today the *khedai* remain in undisputed command of the Hegemony. They are careful and competent rulers, although after millions of years they have become rather hidebound. It has been a very long time since *khedai* civilization went through a significant period of artistic or technical innovation. Some of their subjects quietly speculate that they may be long overdue for "retirement."

The *khedai* only occupy about 2,000 habitable worlds of their own, selecting only those which are particularly congenial for their species and can support large wilderness reserves. A *khedai* colony usually has only a low population, averaging about 50 million or so individuals. Close to half of the population lives as "expatriates" on cosmopolitan worlds, or on worlds assigned to other member cultures of the Hegemony.

Khedai have a reproductive life cycle which humans find rather unusual. All

khedai are born female. They grow quickly, reaching physical maturity at the equivalent of 8-10 years of age. However, at this point they are still only bright animals, not yet capable of participating in a complex high-technology society. By tradition, young female *khedai* are sent out into a wilderness reserve, to survive as best they can without tools or protection. Many female *khedai* die in the wilderness, their life cycle coming to a premature end.

A female *kheda* advances to the next stage of her life cycle when she encounters a male during the mating season. In their natural habitat, this usually occurs in the early to middle spring. A female *kheda* will become pregnant only once in her life, bearing a litter of four to six cubs. The hormonal changes that take place during and after her pregnancy cause her to grow and take on mass. They also stimulate rapid growth and increased connectivity in her brain. After giving birth, she changes gender completely and becomes an adult, fully sapient male.

A newly male *kheda* has his closest personal relationship, not with his biological parents, but with the older male who mated with him and sired his cubs. He joins his once-mate's clan-association as a junior member, and receives an education, social contacts, and employment from them.

As an adult, a male *kheda* spends most of the year cool and rational, effectively asexual. Only during the mating season is he likely to display emotional turmoil, becoming bad-tempered and distracted. When a clan-association sees the need to replenish its numbers, it selects a few of its members to travel to the wilderness reserves and locate promising females for mating and later recruitment. This is regarded as a great honor for the chosen males, a reward for devoted service to the association and to the Hegemony.



Khedai males organize themselves into clan-associations, which work a little like extended families among humans. Members of a clan-association are not expected to exercise nepotism toward one another; indeed, that would be a grave violation of *khedai* ethical standards. On the other hand, clan-associates do socialize on a regular basis, have their own private rituals and traditions, and provide one another with emotional and other appropriate forms of support.

Most clan-associations specialize in certain roles within *khedai* society. For example, the *Rámetai* association, based on the long-established colony world of *Vidaruun*, has overseen exploration in the rimward sectors of the Hegemony for the past several thousand years. Many *Rámetai* came to Earth to serve as provincial or regional governors after the Conquest.

Female *khedai* do not have names or spoken language. Male *khedai* carry two names, an "association name" which identifies their clan, and a "face name" which identifies the individual. Most name-words are two or three syllables in length. Thus, the Intendant (provincial governor) *Rámetai Khatta* is the one named *Khatta* from the *Rámetai* association.

It is estimated that there may be no more than 2000-2500 *khedai* in the Human Protectorate, most of them on Earth. Humans rarely encounter *khedai*, who usually remain isolated inside their residences on Earth or other human worlds. Humans with gold-card or red-card privileges have the right to petition *khedai* officials for an audience on an occasional basis.

Sarvasha

Sarvasha are bipedal, about the same height as humans, although they are much lighter in build. They stand about 1.75 meters tall and have an average mass

around 55 kilograms. They are covered with very short fur, which becomes a ruff or mane around the shoulders and the back of the head. Fur colors tend to range from golden to orange to a dull crimson, with dark stripes and countershading. Many humans think *sarvasha* resemble big cats, although their cranial structure and faces are only vaguely feline. They have a biochemical dependency on arsenic, in amounts that would be quite toxic to humans. Arsenic compounds play an important role in *sarvasha* metabolism and reproduction.

Sarvasha evolved on the large habitable moon of a gas giant planet, circling an F6V class star. In their natural environment, they were herder carnivores, living in loose packs on open grasslands, cooperating to prey on large herbivores. They became sentient as the result of an evolutionary "arms race," developing empathy, language, and tool use to compete with other smart predators.

The ancestral *sarvasha* were aggressive and rather violent. They nearly ruined their home world's ecosystem through over-predation, and then fought among themselves in a series of devastating wars. They were annexed by the Hegemony about 200,000 years ago. They remained under direct *khedai* supervision for an unusually long time, close to 40,000 years, before being released from client-species status. During that time, they were thoroughly "tamed," losing much of their aggression and replacing it with a strong sense of discipline.

Today the *sarvasha* are very good citizens of the Hegemony, thoroughly committed to the Praxis. They provide many soldiers, starship crew, military officers, and bureaucrats. Among themselves, *sarvasha* like to live in close-knit communities that share social, professional, and sexual bonds. Their worlds are normally governed





by representative democracies, with officials advancing on merit according to the Praxis.

Sarvasha, like most higher animals on their home world, are hermaphroditic. All of them are capable of bearing or siring offspring, although the details of their reproductive mechanism mean that it is very difficult for a *sarvasha* to impregnate itself. *Sarvasha* tend to engage in short-term sexual partnerships, many of which involve more than two individuals. Offspring spend several months in their parent's pouch after birth, after which they receive attention from the entire community.

Sarvasha carry three names: a personal name, the personal name of their birth parent prefixed by *na-*, and the name of the province where they were born prefixed by *raj-*. Names usually have between one and three syllables. Thus, *Ajeras na-Vattheer raj-Shestani* is *Ajeras*, child of *Vattheer*, born in *Shestani* province. The given name takes precedence when addressing a *sarvasha* by its title.

Several million *sarvasha* in the Human Protectorate. Since the *khedai* are so reclusive, *sarvasha* are the non-humans most likely to be encountered when dealing with senior Hegemony officials. They are rather chauvinistic, often looking down on other species (especially humans) as savage upstarts. In private, they sometimes express puzzlement at the rapid pace of human integration into the Hegemony.

Azuri

Azuri are bipedal creatures, somewhat shorter than humans but rather sturdy of build. They stand about 1.6 meters tall and have an average mass around 70 kilograms. Females tend to be slightly taller and more robust than males. They

resemble chimpanzees or bonobos in many respects, although they have four arms rather than two. They are effectively naked, with little or no body hair, although males normally sport a strip of thick fur from the back of their heads down the full length of their spines. Skin colors range from ruddy brown, through dark brown, to deep black.

Azuri faces are surprisingly human-like, although they have four eyes rather than two, usually a deep orange or reddish color. Their voices have extraordinary range and flexibility, stretching far into what humans would consider the subsonic range. Many humans call the *azuri* "spider-apes."

The *azuri* are recent arrivals on the galactic stage, the last species to be brought into the *Khedai* Hegemony before the discovery of humanity. Their home world is an Earthlike planet, circling a yellow G8V class star. Thirty thousand years ago, they had just developed a global industrial civilization and begun exploring their home star system, when they were contacted and conquered by the Hegemony.

The conquest almost certainly saved the *azuri* species from extinction. The *azuri* natural environment is temperate forest, but while developing a high-technology society they destroyed most of their home world's primeval woodlands. Damage to the ecology led to widespread climate change, desertification, famine, and outbreaks of disease, which in turn triggered a series of devastating wars over the remaining habitable territory.

The *azuri* remain clients of the Hegemony to this day, although the *khedai* have hinted that they may be released to semi-independent status sometime in the next few thousand years. They are very good subjects, hard-working and loyal, although the *khedai* often consider them too inquisitive and playful.



Like humans, *azuri* have two sexes and a very active sexual drive. They exhibit a range of sexual behaviors very like those of humans, including romantic attraction and frequent casual sex. Females tend to be slightly dominant in *azuri* society, taking the initiative in romantic matters and tending to gravitate toward leadership roles. *Azuri* give live birth and care for their helpless young much as humans do. They remain in contact with their parents, especially their mothers, well into adulthood.

The *azuri* have a limited amount of self-government on their own worlds. They tend toward a free-wheeling open democracy, remaining in strict obedience to the Praxis, but settling discretionary matters through a web of "town meetings," network forums, and consensus-building exercises.

Azuri follow the same naming convention as many humans. The first name is a family name, inherited from the individual's mother. This family name normally has two or three syllables. The second name is a given name, and almost invariably has only one syllable. Thus, Hûzati Ren is the son of Hûzati Marr.

Many millions of *azuri* live in the Human Protectorate, the non-humans most likely to be encountered by ordinary citizens. They get along quite well with humans, who usually find them the most congenial of the Hegemony's subject species. *Azuri* are almost completely lacking in species prejudice; they are very good at striking up personal or professional friendships, and they have active and very human-like senses of humor.

Qerrach

Qerrach are among the smallest sentient beings known to the Hegemony. They are about 1 meter in length, with an average mass around 20 kilograms. They are bipedal, but with a semi-upright posture that permits them to run on their knuckles and feet for extra speed. They have a short

but strong tail ending in a large gripping claw like that of a sloth, which helps them maneuver on the ground and gives them extra agility when climbing. They are covered in short fur, which tends to be white to golden in color. Their eyes are very large and generally brightly colored.

The *qerrach* are unusual in that they no longer have a home world, and in fact it isn't clear whether they originally evolved within the boundaries of the Khedai Hegemony at all. The *khedai* claim that the little creatures migrated into our region of the galaxy over a million years ago, and accepted citizenship in the Hegemony without going through the usual period of client-species indenture. They have adapted to life in space, preferring to live on board spaceships and space stations. They can deal with any environment in which humans are comfortable.

Qerrach are very gregarious creatures, living in enormous extended-family clans of at least forty or fifty individuals. Most of the members of a given clan are effectively neuter at any given time, anatomically male or female but uninterested in sex. Only the highest-status male in the clan, and three or four of the highest-status females, are actively sexual at any given time.

Qerrach are egg-laying, each female producing a clutch of five to seven eggs per mating cycle. In their natural environment, *qerrach* were low on the food chain, so they produced very large numbers of offspring to survive. Civilized *qerrach* use various medical techniques to avoid unplanned reproduction. Clan leaders still engage in sexual activity on a regular basis; this behavior causes the release of social pheromones, which reduce tension and encourage solidarity among the rest of the clan.





Clans usually make decisions through a process of consensus-building, with every member given the opportunity to contribute. The leaders of the clan do receive deference, but their authority is constrained by the Praxis, long-standing traditions, and the preferences of the entire membership. If a clan finds itself amid an intractable dispute or without a clear leader, the males will go through a period of irritable status displays and social competition, during which one male will emerge as the new leader. He will then select several females to become his sexual partners and co-leaders of the clan. This process can be adapted to take over an existing clan, divide an existing clan after a serious dispute, or organize several unattached qerrach into a new clan.

Young *qerrach* grow up quickly, cared for and educated by the entire clan. Upon reaching adulthood, they usually spend several years as neuters in their original clan, developing useful technical skills and building a reputation. Adult *qerrach* are always free to join a new clan, and in fact clans often trade neuter members to avoid inbreeding.

Qerrach are not terribly creative or imaginative, but they tend to have a clear talent for mechanics and engineering. Many large spaceships and space stations within the Hegemony host one or more

clans as part of their crew. Much of the Hegemony's merchant shipping is also managed by *qerrach* clans.

Qerrach have single names, which are usually no more than two syllables long. Their names have no meaning and are chosen simply for their pleasant sound. If necessary, a *qerrach* will augment his given name with the name of his clan's current leader.

There are usually tens of thousands of *qerrach* living in the Human Protectorate at any given time, although they tend to remain aboard Hegemony ships and space stations, and Earth-bound humans rarely encounter them. Humans who have become spaceship crew or who have joined the Interstellar Service are much more likely to meet *qerrach*, and usually find them rather weird, but easy to get along with on a strictly professional level.

For More Information

Anyone interested in the *Human Destiny* project is invited to follow my writer's blog (<https://wordpress.sharrukinspalace.com>). My patrons (<https://www.patreon.com/Sharrukin>) also get occasional updates for game material in development.



THE ALIEN'S PICNIC
By Jo Jaquita

If you go down to the docks today, you're in for a big surprise.
If you go down to the docs today, you'll never believe your eyes.
For every greeble who ever there was,
Will gather there for certain because,
Today's the day the alien's have their picnic!

Chorus:
Picnic time for B.E.M.s!
The aliens are having a lovely time today.
See them writhe their tentacles!
And see them picnic on the harborway.



Almost Alien

By Jo Jaquinta

Aliens are a great way in science fiction role playing to bring a touch of the unknown and unexpected to the game play. The challenge with super-exotic aliens is that they can be so unknown and unexpected that the players have problems building empathy with them. Although that can be desirable for many plots, what we present here is something that is both alien, and also close to home.

The concept of "uplift" - transforming a species of animal into a more intelligent variety, was started in Science Fiction as far back as H.G.Wells, but was most popularized by a series of David Brin's novels. The essence is that the particular genes or traits that code for intelligence are determined, and these are spliced into existing creatures to create intelligent forms of them. This is a handy tool that a referee can use to create any number of interesting entities to add to their games. Rather than dwell on that, this article will focus on one example and look at it in terms of not just physical stats, but a broader social aspect.

In modern society we are on the cusp of being able to bring back extinct species. We have already had limited success bringing back species that have gone extinct in the modern era, and there are research projects actively working on cloning animals from tens of thousands of years ago. We're a long way from Jurassic park, but we are far enough along to see that this is something that we can do. That has engendered much discussion around the question of if we should do it or not.

Beyond the scaremongering of creation being "only god's purview", there are important ethical questions. A species is not just a self replicating strand of DNA. It is a

group of creatures, whose life is steered by both instinctual nature, but also the social nurture of its fellow creatures, and the environment around it. We can bring back a physical creature, but we can't bring back the social and environmental context it lived in. A mammoth born and raised by an elephant may be wooly, but all of its learned behaviors will be from an alien. Where it lives is not what its biology evolved for. Will it ever truly be home?

Taking this discussion back to uplifted "almost aliens", the same questions are applicable. When used in a game, if such creatures have not already been created, it can be posed as a moral and ethical subject for pondering by the players. If they are already in existence, who are they? How do they see themselves? What is their place in the greater culture? That is the direction we will look at in the scenario we present here.

Lava Surfing on Las Solus

The world of Las Solus is an old world, but not currently an important one. It was settled in mankind's first great diaspora, but changes in technology, other discoveries, and the fashion of trade goods have shifted the major trade routes in other directions. It is part of the interstellar economy, but not to the degree its lineage would suggest.

It does have a minor tourist trade. There are examples of architecture from all of humanity's history in this region. None are particularly stunning, but that they are all in one place makes it an economical place for the historically curious.

This tangential reference to past glory won it a place on the list of things to see for the region's local nobility to visit on their





The lava is extraordinarily hot, and veteran instructors pick up extra tips by cooking kebabs for their patrons on it. However, the suits are extremely well insulated. They will be taught to demonstrate this to their patrons by, literally, lying down in the lava. The only real thing they are cautioned about is to keep them away from any lava falls. It is remotely possible they could get trapped under one of those and actually immersed. Other than that, it is impossible to sink, since it's many times denser than your body.

The job mostly involves getting a patron standing on their board on a moving river of lava, keeping them upright for the twenty minutes or so it takes to run the course, and to see them safely out at the end, while keeping their hors d'oeuvres warm and their champagne cold.

When the novelty of the job is beginning to wear thin, and the players start wondering if the high turnover is because of boredom, you may bring it to their attention that at the end of several runs they've noted that there are often two hovercraft flying about the place at the end of the stream, where the lava reaches the sea. If necessary, a treasured surfboard of one patron may not have been secured properly, and the players have to run it down before it gets to the sea.

The hovercraft appear to be local high-end models painted in garish colors. One is predominantly red, the other blue. Makeshift water cannons have been attached to the sides and they can be seen blasting at the pooling lava and, occasionally, each other. There are several near collisions as they jockey for position. The drivers occasionally lean out of the window and hurl objects down at the lava, and hurl abuse at each other.

At one point the red hovercraft will zip out over the ocean, lower a hose, and begin



to refill its water tanks. The blue one zips erratically about, surveying the landscape. It then appears to notice the players and zooms over.

A loudspeaker comes up and the driver calls to them. "Hey, you! Number one big banana if you come! Promise. Come now! Big reward!" The accent and diction are very unusual but understandable. Urgency gets in the way of clear instructions but the gist appears to be that the driver wants the players to go and smash all of the red car's markers on the cooling lava and that it's prepared to pay well over their weekly wage if they can do so.

It turns out to be a little more complicated than that. Each car is throwing down electronic balls onto areas of the lava that have become sluggish and nearly solid. They are trying to maximize the area their makers cover. The markers can be moved, crushed, or blasted away until the lava underneath reaches a certain temperature. At that point an anchor embeds itself into the rock underneath, an antenna comes out, and they start blinking. The drivers appear to consider them "off limits" after this.

The other driver will not be pleased if the players aid the blue car. It will roll down its window and scream incoherently at them. It will make several passes at them, and even shoot them with its water cannon. Even a modicum of strategy will thwart its attempts, though. Neither are very strategic thinkers, are easily distracted, and seem more interested in getting one over on their adversary than actually accomplishing whatever task marking the lava forms.

Eventually they will run out of small electronic balls, and after an extended screaming match, the red car will depart in the direction of the main city.

The blue car's driver will laugh and chortle over the loudspeakers and praise the players highly. He promises to give them what he offered, plus a big tip, and since they are his new best friends, a celebratory dinner in a great restaurant in the city. He makes them promise to be there at 8pm and to ask for Dunston. He then zooms off.

Meeting Dunston

The restaurant they are directed to is one of the best in the city. The chauffeurs at the resort are all familiar with it. They think it might be challenging for the players to meet the dress code though.

Only the other lava surfing instructors know anything about the dueling hovercraft. And they don't know much. They never come to the resort and just fly around insanely wherever the lava reaches the ocean. They are impressed (and a bit resentful) by the payout the players have been promised.

The restaurant is, indeed, very high end, with reservations only and no walk-ins (unless you know the right people). They will be highly skeptical of the players, no matter how they are dressed, until they mention they are there at Dunston's invitation. Then they will sigh, roll their eyes, and with artificial politeness, escort them to his private room.

They are brought to an elegant room with a large central table with intricate presentations of sculpted fruit. The centerpiece is in the shape of an enormous banana.

"Big banana, as I promised!" booms a voice at them. "Come my chum friends!" It is certainly the voice from the car, but what comes knuckling over the carpet is a chimpanzee, grinning and shaking its head. He'll throw his big (and very strong) arms around each of them in turn, praising





them, as he did on the lava fields. He invites them all to sit and eat.

At each place is also an envelope with a bank note in it made out to the amount he promised them.

He will continue to praise their actions, encourage them to eat, and denigrate the other driver, who is named "Chuckles" and is another chimpanzee.

Apparently the point of it all is that as the lava solidifies into new land, it is unowned, and open to be claimed by anyone. When the temperature drops to a value mandated by local law, it is considered up for grabs. The device goes off, documents and broadcasts their claim to the local government office. The two of them compete in gaining the most new land they can.

"Chimpanzees are territorial", he'll explain. "It is in our nature."

When the conversation comes around to it, Dunston will give them some details on his own history. If they do not already know what a chimpanzee is, he will explain that it is another creature from the same origin world as humanity. They came with the original settlers to the stars, but it is unclear if they were raised to intelligence either before or after that time period.

What he does know is that there have been Chimpanzees on Las Solas for as long as there have been humans here. They are mentioned in the laws and statues going back to the founding. They have never really thrived, though. Not as well as the humans.

He will become somewhat maudlin at this point. He's not resentful towards humans, although he will imply that some, like Chuckles are. He's just so sad that their numbers have dwindled down to the level they are at. There's probably no more than 30 or so of them left. And that leads him to his proposal.

Dunson's Proposal

With the numbers so low, it makes things that are simple for humans, like marriage and breeding, much more complicated. They have to be very careful about who carries the children of whom, to make sure the bloodline isn't compromised any more than it already is.

But, fortunately, there is one excellent choice for him. A perfect specimen, who is not only genetically well suited, she is also kind, sweet, and has the most perfect posterior he's ever seen. (He will brush it off as a "chimpanzee thing".) He is totally, irrecoverably, and absolutely in love with her.

Her name is Sandra.

He says the name almost distastefully. He will explain that "Sandra" is not a traditional chimpanzee name. Bubbles or Muffin would be better, but that's the problem. He is a traditional chimpanzee, keeping to the cultural traditions and practices brought from Earth. He'll freely admit that the record is fairly sparse. It's unclear what are genuine chimpanzee practices, and what are human depictions of practices, but that it's more a matter of what's in the heart. He wants to be true to the unique lineage of his people. It doesn't matter if it is a genetic





disposition or a comedic caricature, it's what he has.

He wants to enlist the player's aid in wooing Sandra. Any proposals from him have been rejected out of hand. She says she doesn't like bananas, isn't interested in his territorial conquests, and finds his views outdated.

He's hoping that they will have some unique human insight that can help change her mind. She's trying hard to be a human, so that may speak to her. He's happy to fund anything they want, but they are both "old money" for this planet, as their families go back to the founding. She's not going to be impressed by expensive trinkets.

Sandra Brown

If the players take up Dunston's offer, they won't find it hard to track down Sandra. Although chimpanzees only legally have a single name, she has taken up the last name of "Brown" (the color of her fur). She lives in a trendy apartment complex in the central district of the city. She has a fairly regular routine, taking a cab from her apartment to the real estate office she works in. She has a small circle of friends and usually has dinner or goes out with one or other of them when she's not working late.

She has a bevy of assistants to run interference for her. She's a senior partner at the firm (and is, in fact, a majority shareholder) and doesn't want to be hassled by various people with various deals. Proper business contacts need to go through her office and be vetted by her staff.

If the players are inventive and manage to get through her security, or are persistent enough and it eventually becomes apparent that they're working for Dunston, she will, with great annoyance, grant them one meeting, for one hour, to finally put this matter to rest.

She will quite firmly say that she is not interested in Duston, not interested in the chimpanzees of Los Santos, or their history or so-called culture. Her diction and bearing are very much in line with the local culture. She dresses much like everyone else. (Duston only wore fancy watches, sunglasses and hats.)

From her point of view, intelligent chimpanzees are an abhorrental quirk. They were some weird experiment, and no one should care if the experiment comes to an end. She is not the last scion of some noble and important lineage, she is Sandra, a real estate developer from Los Santos. She may very well marry if she meets the right person (heavily implying it will be a human), may very well adopt children, who will carry on the family business. What is important is the connections, values, and personality of who she is, not what her genetics happen to be.

She'll turn this all back on him and tell them if they could convince Dunston of that, and get him to abandon this bizarre notion of following a made up legacy, then he'd be a happier person.

Conclusion

And that's where we'll leave it. There is no right ending, or wrong ending. Science Fiction is alluring because it allows us to examine the human condition through hypotheticals. Through an uplifted "alien", a referee provides their players a thought provoking scenario that provides them with a good bit of fun, great chances to role play, and also a bit of pondering about what makes us who we are.

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Raider's Lament Part 5

By Jo Jaquinta

Chapter 7

"Entering station zone" said Seldon. "Idle speed." Station broadcast guidewires were superimposed on the screen giving them passage through the busy lanes of Port Newark station. "Navigation. You may rotate off bridge to prepare for docking. Notify gunnery to join you."

"Thank you, sir" said Heleni. "Will we be getting leave here?"

"If we can conclude our business in short order, I think I would be so inclined. Are there sights to see?"

"Not much. Most of the orbitals are new cheap pre-fabs; leaky and dodgy. But some are from the Old Empire. Historical but not stunning architecture. I have a distant relative who lives on one. I thought I might visit."

"We're on station data link" said Elise. "You can connect to the local network from your cabin now."

"Great! I'll get prepped now and look them up when I'm done."

Seldon steered the ship in the wide sweeping turns that station gave them for their approach. "Any leads for the next contract?" he asked Elise.

"It's a busy port. I did a quick check and the job roster has a number of entries."

"But?"

"I also checked and there is no listing for a Valio Eskola in the user directory."

"Hmm. Complications. I take it you checked surface and orbitals?"

"Station, orbitals, surface, hospitals and deceased" she replied.

"You are nothing if not thorough." He piloted a bit further in silence. "Have you placed any active inquiries?"

"No sir. I can only think of a few reasons that someone would not have a listed name."

"And none of them would take too kindly to having an active search done for them. I see. We do have an address."

"Yes" said Elise. "It's the other side of the extrality line. On the Acter Col orbital."

Seldon concentrated briefly as a large container ship slipped past them on its own trajectory. "Tell the Chief, Juanita and Vikhagen to make sure their passports are in order. They're going to have to make a house call."

* * *

"Did you check those against the weapon regulations fact sheet from Elise?" asked the Chief. Vikhagen and Juanita stood on the cargo deck at the ship's armory. They were tossing back and forth a variety of heavy blades.

"Sure" said Juanita. "Pretty rough end regulations. Blades for self-defense are fine, single edged only. No projectiles, of course."

"Well, duh" said Vikhagen. "It's an orbital? They don't want some lunatic to punch a hole in the side of it and let all the air out."

"But they have no problem with lunatics like us skewering each other?" asked the



Chief. Juanita tossed him the long straight sword he favored. He looked at it dubiously. "Not that subtle, is it?"

"We've got a back scabbard for it. Under a Greatcoat no one will be the wiser", replied Juanita. She thought for a moment. "Well, customs will. But Elise has run the papers so we should be all right there."

"Head's up", said Vikhagen.

Ritva was crossing the deck towards them, followed by Seldon. "Come to wish us good luck" asked the Chief.

"I'm coming with you", said Ritva. The Chief looked to Seldon.

"Now, my lady Ritva," said Seldon smoothly. "As I've explained, finding your uncle may not be quite as straightforward as we had hoped. My crew is quite capable of checking things out and seeing what the situation is. If it's a simple misunderstanding, we invite him around for tea and to take our delivery. If it's something more... complicated, well, it's just safer this way."

"I am here to find my uncle. I have to go with them", she insisted.

Seldon smiled patiently. "I know he is very dear to you. But putting aside the fact he is unlisted, and the possible danger to yourself, we are still left with the fact that the one address we have is outside the port." She looked annoyed and frustrated. "We're a registered star ship, traveling from main port to main port. We have no concern ourselves with your world of origin, the contents of your cargo, and any number of personal details. Within The 40 Worlds all space is extra-territorial. If you dock at a local port or leave a star class port you cross into local space then you have customs, import duty, and local law to consider."

He let that sink in. "We've only taken you on as a passenger, not as a consignment. I cannot stop you leaving the ship. If you have a valid passport you can march right out to customs. But I think that I would highly recommend that you wait here, and we will endeavor to bring your uncle to you."

Ritva weighed this for some moments. She then sighed deeply. "I understand."

"Back in your cabin we have the latest in monitoring equipment" he said, leading her off. "We keep quite close tabs on our crew. We can patch you into bridge ops and you can track everything that's going on." The hatch shut behind them.

"I never thought I'd be thankful for customs", said Vikhagen. Juanita and the Chief laughed.

"For a high-class brat, her uncle sure lives in a dump" said Vikhagen. The transport had left them on a fairly run-down looking level. The air was warm, humid, and badly filtered. A number of lights were out and more flickered.

"Reminds me a bit of home", said Juanita. "Other than this queasy feeling in my stomach."

"Something is shot in the gravity generators" said the Chief. "Feels like a 5% oscillation. That can happen when they start to go. They probably don't send maintenance around here that often."

They walked down past several doors and corridors. After a few wrong turns and suspicious stares from passers by they reached a door. The Chief leaned on the buzzer. After the third try footsteps approached and the door slid open a few inches. "Yeah, yeah," came a tired





voice. The figure in the shadows on the other side wore some sort of dark baggy garment. "How much do you want?"

The Chief smiled amiably. "We're looking for Valio. We've got something for him."

The man paused for a few moments and leaned left and right to see who else was out there. "Valio eh? You can leave it here."

"I think we really need to give it to him personally", said the Chief, still smiling.

The voice grunted "You wait right there then," and slid the door closed.

They looked at each other and Vikhagen shrugged. The Chief nodded to her and she turned around, giving cover to the door. Juanita slid something out of her pocket and pressed it to the door. She concentrated for a moment. "Not much movement. I hear cycling. Something fell over. They aren't happy about it. Footsteps again, going away." She then shook her head. "It's gone silent now."

"Hey" shouted Vikhagen, who had been keeping watch. Two figures had come out a door a little way down the corridor. They started at her shout, and started to run. She took off after them followed by Juanita and the Chief.

They rounded a corner and ran down a wide ramp. When it made a turn around a courtyard, they jumped the parapet and sailed through the air, in much slower motion than made sense. "Grav chutes?" asked Juanita.

"No", said the Chief. "Coriolis force. It's an old orbital. It rotates."

"Good enough for me" said Vikhagen and launched herself into the air after them.

The Chief and Juanita watched her leap and looked at each other. "I'm not that mad" said Juanita, and double timed it down the stairs. The Chief followed.

The two had run down an alley leading off from the courtyard. Vikhagen was not that far behind and was keeping pace with them. They scurried up some girders and into the hanging support structure getting lost from sight quickly amongst the turns. Vikhagen slid to a stop at one junction and dropped to the ground. She flicked on a wrist light and saw smudges in the greasy surface indicating someone took a sharp turn. She jumped up and headed in that direction.

After a few more turns it dead ended with one broken door open. She jumped through and barely had time to duck as one of them swung for her head. She back-pedaled across the room, throwing back her coat and drawing her saber. The two stepped in front of the entryway with their own short blades out.

"OK lady. You've cost us plenty today. Who the hell are you?"

Vikhagen checked her footing left and right. "We're just selling kitchen appliances door to door. We wanted to make a delivery."

They advanced a bit towards her, blades waving. "Yeah, right. Narc? Vice? Allison's gang? Sing bitch, or we'll gut you."

"Oh, wait, I know one", said Vikhagen, moving the tip of her saber in small circles. "What do you call a helluva big apartment?"

"What are you talking about?" said the second one.

"An Astronomical Unit!" Vikhagen lunged and their blades clashed briefly.

"A wiseass, eh?" He jumped in but



Vikhagen had the longer blade and drove him back.

"Did you hear about the new diner they opened on one of the asteroids?" Vikhagen continued, lightly. The two split and began to approach from different sides. "Nice food but the place lacked atmosphere!" They both slashed at her. She fainted at one, swung for the other and backed into the corner.

"You better start giving us some straight answers. We've got you pinned down and alone. You're fast, but your friends aren't and there's no way they're going to find their way here to help you."

"Unless of course they have a homing beacon" said the Chief from the doorway. The two of them spun around to confront the Chief and Juanita, both with blades drawn.

"Yeeeeaaaahhhh!" shouted Vikhagen and shoulder charged one of the attackers. He went down in a heap and the Chief and Juanita closed on the remaining one. After a few exchanges he was backed into the same corner that Vikhagen had been backed into.

"Drop it" said the Chief. The ruffian hesitated and glanced at his companion. But Vikhagen was sitting on top of him, firmly pinning him to the ground. Juanita tapped his blade with hers and the Chief pressed in closer. "Last chance", he warned. With resignation the local dropped it and put his hands on his head. "That's more like it." Juanita slid the blade away, then moved to where the other had been trying to get leverage to slash at Vikhagen. A touch of her blade to his wrist and he gave up. Vikhagen dragged him up and threw him roughly into the corner with the first.

"Good work crew" said the Chief. "Now Juanita, watch the door so they can't pull the same stunt on us." She nodded and did

so. Vikhagen straightened out her coat and grinned madly at them.

"OK, folks. Now let's be nice and friendly like. We're not the police. We're not the government. We're not even from around here", said The Chief. They looked puzzled. "And we'll be gone right quick once we've found what we're looking for."

"We dumped the stash" started the first one. The Chief held up his hand.

"I don't care two neutrons for your stash. I just want to know where Valio Eskola is. I really do have something for him."

They looked at each other and looked kind of nervous. "He's not here anymore. He's gone."

"Nothing is simple", muttered the Chief. "Where did he go?"

"He's gone. His goons roughed up the wrong person and he's gone."

"What" asked Vikhagen, "dead?"

"No way", said the other. "He's too well connected for that. They just took him out of circulation for a while."

"They?" asked the Chief.

"The bosses. Finley and his crowd. Golden handshake. Retirement. You know. They moved him somewhere safe."

"And where would that be?" One shrugged. Then the other.

"Nice blade" said Vikhagen, picking up one of the dropped swords and making a show of examining it closely. "Mind if I keep it." Some choice words sprang to the first one's mouth, but the Chief waved his sword and they didn't get further. "Looks like it's worth, oh, at least 500 talents."





"More than that!" he said, unable to resist.

"Yeah, look at this engraving here. It's what, a supernova or something? Real radical." She moved it about, feeling its balance point. "See, my boss here needs this information. You don't have it. That makes him sad. I don't like having a sad boss. But right now, you're there, I'm here, and I've got your blade. It's a nice blade, but it's not really my style. I could sell it, but I'd probably only get 200 for it. Seems like it's worth a lot more to you."

"What's your point?" he asked sullenly.

"You want your blade, we want information. If you can find that information out for us, we'll be happy. So happy, we'll give you both your blades back, dust you off, buy you a drink and then vanish from your lives." She waved her hands dramatically. "Think you can make that deal?"

They muttered back and forth for a while. "OK. Let me make a call."

The three of them cycled back through the airlock on the Raider's Lament. Vikhagen was busy mimicking some details of the action to Juanita who was laughing through parts of it. The Chief dragged his coat off and threw it on a hook. He glared at Seldon and Elise, who were waiting there. "He's not here."

"How unfortunate," said Seldon. "But I take it there is a further complication?"

The Chief pulled off the sword harness, tossed it to Juanita over by the armory and sat on a nearby crate. "We squeezed some of the local boys till they squealed. He was running some sort of protection racket here that got hot and so they shipped him out to Polhishe."

Elise looked into the middle distance briefly. "I'm not seeing it."

"Check the Tomsk system" said the Chief.

"Oh," she said, reading invisible script. "It's not a mainworld port. Oh. I see. It's not even in The 40 Worlds."

"Not technically" said the Chief. "The system is, but the world is independent." "Been there?" asked Seldon.

"Once, during the Jana campaigns. I was in a corvette that ran some Jane patrol boats to ground there. It's a bitch of a world. Covered in ice but for a few hot spots deep down. The ice melts and gasses out these long tunnels. Phols. At the right depth there is a reasonable air pressure. They are too deep for bombardment and impossible to storm so they've escaped absorption so far. They're mostly full of criminals and malcontents. They spend too much time fighting one another for Polhishe to be a problem that anyone wants to deal with anytime soon."

"Sounds most unpleasant", said Elise. "Are you sure he's there?"

"Unfortunately, yes" said the Chief. "The local criminal establishment seems to have good relations with them. They told us which Pohl he's in and which lord he's under the protection of."

"Too good a lead to abandon the consignment with a clear conscience" said Seldon.

"It's outside The 40 Worlds", said Elise. "Give me time and I'm sure I can find a loophole."

"Elise, Elise, Elise. Business is not always the letter of the law. Sometimes we have to hold to the spirit."

"I was afraid you were going to say that" said the Chief.





Beast From Beyond The Stars

An alien invader for Barbaric! and Sword of Cepheus
By Norton Glover

The Beast, an alien being of immense power, travels the universe in its vast Dark Fortress, invading defenseless worlds with its armies of Slayers. It drains each world of life and treasure, before moving on to the next. The Beast and its minions are directly inspired by the 1983 movie Krull.

The Beast

The exact origins of the Beast are unknown. Some scholars claim that the Beast was a god that grew corrupt and fell from divinity. Others hold that it is a demon that battled its way out of some extraplanar Hell-dimension. Still others believe the Beast was once a mortal sorcerer who transformed himself into a creature of pure power and malevolence. Whatever its origins, it has existed for countless eons, extending its unnatural existence by draining life from innocent worlds.

The few souls who have seen the Beast and survived to tell the tale, all report that it appears as a large (10m) humanoid creature with dark gray skin. It has cat-like red eyes, and a savage-looking maw, riddled with fangs.

It is a highly intelligent creature, capable of strategy and guile. The Beast is an accomplished sorcerer, and will have many powerful spells ready for use. If the Beast requires the cooperation of a creature, it is willing to bargain, but will always negotiate dishonestly, and is full of trickery.

The Beast dwells in the heart of the Dark Fortress, from where it gains its power. The walls of the Dark Fortress serve as a foci for the Beast's spells.

The Beast primarily uses its Slayers to defend the Dark Fortress and enslave the worlds it conquers. In addition, the Beast has collected strange alien servants from across the galaxy that also serve its ends, such as the shape-shifting Changelings.

The Beast (Sword of Cepheus)

15000kg Outsider, MDMCCC

#App: 1

Treasure: Hoard

Athletics-2, Melee Combat-5, Recon-1, Survival-1

Bite (5D), Claws (3D); armor 8; speed 20m/action

Chaotic

Can only be harmed with magical weapons. Knows 3D spells.

The Beast (Barbaric!)

30/60, Move 20m/round, Armor 8, Bite and Claws (melee, 5D and 3D damage, respectively, claws are slashing, teeth are piercing). Physical 4, Combat 5, Sorcery 4. Knows 3D spells. Can only be harmed with magical weapons

The Dark Fortress

A vast fortress of alien stone, the size of a mountain. It is capable of traveling across the void between worlds. It has traveled for millennia across the universe, invading world after world, draining them of life and treasure. Once it lands on a new world, the fortress roots itself deep into the earth, where it leeches power and life from the surrounding countryside. Slayers, mounted on their black Destriers, ride forth to terrorize the populace and destroy any opposition.

Every morning at sunrise, the powerful thaumaturgical engines of the fortress teleport it to a new location on the



planet, selected at random. This makes it difficult for the armies of any given world to mount an effective counterattack.

The interior of the Dark Fortress is of strange, alien design, seemingly more organic than constructed. The fortress is maze-like, and patrolled by an army of Slayers. Here's some of the terrible wonders you might find within:

- Bridges without railings over bottomless chasms
- Shifting walls and secret passages
- Nutrient pools where the Slayer larva dwell.
- Hoards of gold, gems, and magical items from across the galaxy.
- Vermin and parasites from a multitude of worlds lurk in unused corners of the fortress. Some of them are dangerous.
- Scrying pools to monitor what is happening elsewhere on the planet.
- In the Slayer armory, mindless servitor beetles endlessly construct and repair Slayer armor and weaponry.
- Deadly traps designed to toy with their victims for the Beast's amusement.
- A menagerie of curious alien creatures.

The Slayers

The Slayers are the feared soldiers that make up the bulk of the Beast's forces. They appear as humanoid figures in their chitinous black armor, though their true form is quite different. They are relentless fighters who will always attack unless hopelessly outnumbered. Slayers are absolutely loyal to the Beast. They can communicate with each other, but have no known language. Any form of magical communication will fail, as their minds are too alien for humanoids to comprehend.

The armor they wear is closer to a spacesuit than ordinary armor. It provides all of their biological needs, including air. In their armor, Slayers can travel underwater and are immune to any gas attacks.

When their humanoid form is slain, Slayers emit a high-pitched inhuman cry, and the true larva-like form of the slayer emerges from the armor. It will burrow into the earth for safety, or scuttle into the nearest crack or crevice. In their larval form, Slayers are quite vulnerable, and will usually hide until the other Slayers can retrieve them. If not returned to the Dark Fortress within a day, the larva will die.

The Slayer's primary weapon is the alien necroblade. A necroblade can fire one bolt of necronic energy from the hilt, and thereafter can only be used as a long sword. The necroblades can only be recharged within the Dark Fortress itself.

When the Dark Fortress arrives in a new location, the slayers ride forth on black alien destriers to pillage the surrounding land, and destroy any opposition.

Slayer - Humanoid Form (Sword of Cepheus)

100kg Humanoid, B9A770

#App: 2D

Treasure: None

Archery-2, Athletics-0, Melee Combat-2, Recon-1, Riding-1, Stealth-1, Survival-0, Tactics-0

Attacks on sight, or when ordered to.

Necroblade (5D/3D); armor 5; walks 10m/action

Chaotic; Morale DM+2

Slayer - Larval Form (Sword of Cepheus)

10kg Beast, 555770

#App: 1

Treasure: None

Athletics-2, Stealth-2

Flees and hides. Will only attack in self-defense.

Bite (1D); armor 1; scuttles 20m/action, burrows 5m /action

Chaotic; Morale DM-4





 **Slayer - Humanoid Form (Barbaric!)**
10/20 Move 10m/round, Armor 5, Necroblade (melee 3D damage; slashing, bolt 5D; piercing) Physical 2, Combat 2, Stealth 1.




Slayer - Larval Form (Barbaric!)
5/10 Move 20m/round, Armor 1, Bite (1D damage; piercing) Physical 0, Combat 0, Stealth 2

 **Necroblade**
Wgt: 5kg
Range: 30/60
RoF: 1
Damage: 5D bolt / 3D blade
Aspects: AV 1D (bolt only), Bulky, Two Handed
Can only wielded by Slayers. Can fire one bolt of energy.

 **Destriers**
These are the black alien mounts ridden by the Slayers. They appear similar to large horses but for their dead black eyes, and they are all eerily silent. They are loyal servants of the Beast and cannot be tamed or ridden by non-Slayers.




 **Destrier (Sword of Cepheus)**
800kg Beast (Grazer), plains walker, G9L09A
#App: one per Slayer
Treasure: None
Athletics-3, Melee Combat-1, Recon-1, Survival-2
Attacks when ordered.
 Trample (3D); armor 1; speed 40m/action
Chaotic; Morale DM+2

 **Destrier (Barbaric!)**
16/24, Move 40m/round, Armor 1, Trample (melee 3D damage, crushing). Physical 3, Combat 1.




Changelings
Agents of the Beast, these humanoid creatures can take any form. They are used to collect intelligence and to assassinate any powerful figures that might oppose the

Beast's plans. They are considerably more intelligent than the Slayers, and can be communicated with.

Changelings (Sword of Cepheus)
100kg Humanoid, A9A990
#App: 1
Treasure: None
Athletics-0, Deception-2, Melee Combat-1, Recon-1, Stealth-2, Survival-0
Behaves as an NPC at the Referee's discretion
Claws (3D) or by weapon; armor 0 or as worn; speed 10m/action
Chaotic; Morale DM+2
Can change shape into another creature within 1D rounds. Requires an INT 10+ throw to detect.

Changelings (Barbaric!)
10/22
Move 10m/round, Armor 1, Bite (1D damage; piercing)
Physical 2, Combat 2, Social 2, Stealth 3,
Can change shape into another creature within 1D rounds. Requires a Formidable (10+) Social roll throw to detect.

Campaigns
The Beast and the Dark Fortress were designed to shake up an existing fantasy world, and provide an alien invasion scenario. The players may witness the initial landing of the Dark Fortress on their world, or may just hear rumors of its arrival. Gradually, the Slayers will assault someplace close to the players, and they'll need to take action.

Players who wish to take on the Beast will have to accomplish two things: Find the Black Fortress, and defeat the Beast itself. Both of these can make up an entire campaign.

Finding the Dark Fortress
To determine the current or future location of the Dark Fortress will inevitably require sorcery of some kind. Powerful oracles and seers may have a chance to locate the

Defeating the Beast

The Beast is an incredibly powerful being, and has an army of minions to defend itself. It will require either an army to assault the fortress directly, or a small stealthy band to infiltrate the Dark Fortress and attack the Beast directly.

The GM may wish to introduce a powerful, mythical weapon or artifact to the game that the players could seek that would give them an advantage when opposing the Beast.

If the Beast is slain, the Dark Fortress will crumble. Only the Beast's powers keep most of its minions alive, so the Slayers themselves will soon perish. The ruins of the fortress might contain any number of great treasures, or surviving creatures.

If the Beast isn't defeated, it will eventually enslave the entire planet, gradually draining it of all life, and will then depart, leaving a dead husk of world behind.



Down and Out in Low Orbit

By Jo Jaquinta

"Are there sights to see?"

"Not much. Most of the orbitals are new cheap pre-fabs; leaky and dodgy."

Many of our sci-fi adventures take place in rougher areas. Places that would be deemed "the wrong side of the railroad tracks". Evocative though that phrase is, it doesn't sit right in a typical space based setting.

Anyone who has lived through college is probably fairly familiar with cheap accommodation, and all the shortcomings and calamities it can entail. But how do you portray this if it is, for example, on a space station? I give here a few suggestions that can be used in a space station to convey the same "mildewed peeling wallpaper" feel, but with a space edge to it.

Environmentals

The transport had left them on a fairly run-down looking level. The air was warm, humid, and badly filtered. A number of lights were out and more flickered.

A space station is an artificial environment. It has to be carefully maintained to be livable. But livable is a broad definition. Certainly, the higher rent districts will be perfect, but when budgets are tight, corners can be cut. If only the disenfranchised are disadvantaged, it may not come to official notice. Especially if those officials are bribed by people skimming off the maintenance budget.

Air quality is going to be the first to suffer. A tin can in space has to be actively cooled to keep it from overheating. People constantly exhale water vapor and carbon dioxide, which has to be scrubbed from

the air. Poorly maintained systems will be hot, humid, and short of oxygen. Locals may be used to it, like high altitude villages on Earth. But visitors without supplemental oxygen respirators may find themselves quickly out of breath.

Gravity

"Something is shot in the gravity generators" said the Chief. "Feels like a 5% oscillation. That can happen when they start to go."

Low tech space stations may have centrifugal gravity. But the strength of the gravity depends on the radius of rotation. Cheaper accommodation may drift from standard gravity.

Higher tech stations may have artificial gravity. But that takes energy and maintenance. Areas overdue on their rent may have their gravity cut off, reduced, or rationed. Badly maintained equipment may have varying gravity fields. It may be stronger when close to a node, and weaker away from it. Or it may vary over time, either slowly or rapidly.

Hybrid orbitals may supplement rotational gravity with artificial gravity. They may have been sold an upgrade that mostly works, but with weird or exaggerated coriolis effects in certain areas.

Infestations

You should move beyond the normal, mice, pantry moths, or crickets, when describing infections in low class areas of space stations. Say that there's a local hybrid of broccoli and slime molds, engineered to grow quickly in food vats. However, some has escaped, grown feral, and now flourishes with the high humidity and carbon dioxide levels of the slums. Out of any cracks, crannies, or anywhere



that doesn't get regularly cleaned grows lovely green bunches of broccoli. In an adaptive dash to reproduce as fast as possible, and shrug off the disinfectant and herbicide the local municipality occasionally puts down, it has lost a lot of its nutritional content. It's edible, but not that nutritious, and the locals are very very very tired of eating it.

Radiation

Space is a harsh environment. Most planets do not have natural magnetospheres. So artificial ones, or shields, need to be there to protect against harmful stellar radiation. Cheap areas may not have as much, it may be degraded, or someone may have stripped it for illicit resale.

The locals in this area may be unexpectedly tan, as the melanin in their skin reacts to the higher ambient radiation levels. They may have a higher incidence of skin cancer, and general health problems.

Apartments near any water reservoirs may be highly desirable, as it provides shielding from some directions. Lacking adequate shielding for the areas they live in, they may wrap themselves (or their oldest and youngest) in whatever they have that can (or they think will) shield them from the cumulative effects.

Weather

Although the environments are designed to control the air of a space station, certain areas or factors may not have

been considered. Large areas can have air currents of their own. And where you have rising humid air you can get convection, and with that condensation or even precipitation. Some walls may just always have water running down on them, or other areas may be constantly dripping.



As the space station revolves on its axis, and rotates around what it is orbiting, it may come in and out of the shadow. Certain surfaces may heat up or cool down and local systems may not be able to deal with it, or may be too stressed to deal with it. Moisture in the air may directly freeze shaded areas and form ice slicks, or blocks. When heat returns they may suddenly become loose and produce further hazards.

Sound

In noir films the low rent districts are always near noisy train lines. There are any variety of transport systems, of people, solids, liquids or air, that may be similarly noisy and drive rent prices down.

But, as with weather, moving in and out of bright sunlight and shadow can cause heat effects. Not just to the air, but to the metal of the hull itself. Expanding or contracting metal will ping and click, sometimes loudly, based on the size and heat difference. Depending on the frequency of passing through shadow, that could make regular sleep difficult.

Or it may just be that there are certain resonant frequencies a station is susceptible to. Ships docking and undocking may cause shudders and booms. These may get amplified and focused in certain areas. It may not threaten the structure, but it may make life unpleasant for those who live there.





Pressure

Being airtight is one of the primary functions of a space habitat. But within a station, there may still be pressure differentials. Artificial gravity (and varying heat) may have an affect on air density in different locations.

Most stations will have section seals, to protect against unexpected breaches. When closed, the above ambient effects may lead to different pressure in different sections. When opened, pressure will normalize. On a broad scale, this isn't likely to have a great effect. But the shape of the internals of the station may make this more pronounced in some areas rather than others.

Bandwidth

If our current obsession with "how many bars" our cellphones have is projected into the future, being constantly connected to a computer network will be an important part of our functioning future life.

Deprived areas of stations may be less serviced the better areas. Rates may be different, or lower cost providers used that aren't supported by your player's connectivity plan.

Alternatively, there may be criminal activity



that consumes a lot of the bandwidth in deprived areas, that the authorities can't, or can't be bothered to track down. Locals might have a much harder time accessing high tech services in such areas.

And there you have it

You are all set now with several ideas to give your orbital slums some color. Surprise and challenge your players with unexpected limitations to their activities. Or give an empathetic background to factors or patrons asking them for favors.





Imko and Flertvad

By P-O Bergstedt

The Imko

The Imko are a reptiloid sophont race that can be found in only one sector of the Interstellar Empire.

History:

Long ago, the Imko first used sub-light ships and later the help of other races with jump drives. They spread to many worlds in the sector. Unfortunately for the Imko, a hostile race called the Gebbebem (from CJ #003) attacked the sector and destroyed their homeworld, Imkoban. A small number of Imko survived in hiding on five garden worlds.

The Interstellar Empire and others fought a war with the Gebbebem and, after about 100 years, they were driven out of the sector. The Imko could now come out of their hiding.

The Imko are very grateful to the Interstellar Empire and can often be found working for them. They prefer working as diplomat

and scouts. There are now billions of Imko in the sector, but on their old homeworld, there are only about 10000 Imko working there to eventually restore the planet.

Appearance:

The Imko is a small reptiloid race. They are about 150 cm tall. They have green and white skin, usually white in their face and on their chest, while everything else is green. They have two legs and two arms.

In the game:

Roll them up with the standard rules but add -3 to Strength and -1 to Intelligence. The Imko grow up faster than humans and start their career when they are 10 years old. They also age faster and aging starts when they are 18 years old. If they are NPCs, they are most likely diplomats or scouts. The Imko can speak the language that is most common in the region, but among themselves they speak their own language. They can see in ultraviolet.





The Flertvad

The Flertvad are a very old race. They can be found anywhere in the galaxy.

History:

It is not known how old the Flertvad race is. Some scholars say that they may be older than 100 million years. The Flertvad themselves say that this is correct. They say that they are the third race. They also say that the first race has ascended, and the second race was destroyed in a war which destroyed their homeworld.

They consider themselves the guardians of the galaxy and say that they will stop any evil empire trying to take over the galaxy, but historical records show that the Flertvad hasn't been in a war in at least 10,000 years.

Appearance:

The Flertvad are tall, about 250 cm. Humans might call them catlike. They are carnivores and they usually don't eat vegetables. Their fur is gray, and they usually don't wear clothes. They have two legs and two arms.

In the game:

The Flertvad are too powerful and have too many secrets to be a playable race. Roll them up using the standard rules but double all skills. Also, raise Intelligence to at least 10. Don't use aging. The Flertvad can see infrared.

It is not common to meet a Flertvad. They can be encountered in a starport or on a luxury space cruise. If they travel in their own ships, these are built at the highest tech level available. All Flertvad seem to have unlimited resources and can buy anything they like. They don't use their resources to control corporations or the economy. They travel alone or in small groups.

Flertvad worlds are garden worlds that are located at least 5 pc from any other system. These worlds usually have a population of 5 or 6 (100,000 – 9,999,999) and seem to have a tech level of about 10. Flertvad worlds can exist within or outside any Interstellar Empire. Within an empire, the Flertvad agree to some things that the Empire impose but are mostly independent. There is not a lot of trade between the Flertvad worlds and other worlds. All visiting ships must dock and trade at a high-port. No foreigners are allowed on the planet. All invasion attempts against Flertvad worlds have failed, so far with no survivors. This could mean that there are ultra-high-tech weapons hidden somewhere, or that psionics have been used.

The Flertvad seem like a very peaceful race and are never seen angry or upset. They don't carry anything that looks like a weapon. But, in a fight, they may use lasers implanted in their fingers. However, they rarely get into a fight since they may use psionic powers to calm things down.





What's New

By Brett Kruger

The following products were released during the months of April and May. Quite a few, and varied, titles with Michael Brown putting out the most publications, more than the next four combined. Mind you, his titles tend to be only a couple pages each, but are still good value.

Michael Brown

Cry of the Forsaken
Port of Call: Malkadunia
Port of Call: Asherah
Hazard: Tropical Cyclone!
Hazard: Wildfire!
Burst Transmissions, vol. 8
2D6 SF Adventures, vol. 13 [BUNDLE]
2D6 SF Adventures, vol. 14 [BUNDLE]
A Starship's Story
The Jester's Colors
On Every Golden Scale
And the Deep Blue Sea

Old School Role Playing

Engine Trouble
The Frontiers of Space II
A Beacon in the Night
Signs of Life

CyborgPrime Publishing

Herald Class Starships Complete
Edition [BUNDLE]
Starship Deck Plans For VTT: Herald-
Class Yacht
Classic Starship Deck Plans For VTT
[BUNDLE]

Felbrigg Herriot

Fantasy Scenario Generator
Cepheus Scenario Generator

Monachus Press

Starship Engineer's Course
Pilot's Course

Moon Toad Publishing

Scout Base 947 Adventure
Quick Ship File: Rokke Class Research
Vessel

Chaosium

Shape-Shifting Horrors

Earl of Fife Games

Fear Factory V - Adventure for
Cepheus RPG

FSpace Publications

Far Encounters paper character
flats 1

Independence Games

Pleiades-class Light Freighter

Long Shadows Press

1520:HRE 2D6 Adventure in the Holy
Roman Empire

Menagerie Press

Westlands 2D6 System Role-Playing
Game

Nuther World

Deadlocked at Endora Station

Surreal Estate Games

Aliens & Entanglements

Wild Bee Publishing

SPOTS AD [BUNDLE]

Zozer Games

Prelude to Freedom



100 Ton Ships

By Ricardo Emilio

Courier Long Range

Component	Size/Number	Type	Tonnage	Cost Mcr
Hull Armor	100	Standard		10
Maneuver Drive	1		0.9	2.25
Power Plant	4		5	12.5
Jump Drive	4	TL 13	8.1	20.25
Fuel		One Jump 4	40	
Bridge Electronics	Model/3adv	DM +1	10 3	0.5 7.5
Armament	1	Single Turret Double Turret Triple Turret Missile Rack Sandcaster Mining Laser Beam Laser Plasma Beam Fusion Beam	2 0 0	2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Other Components				
Fuel processors		5 tons/day p	0	0
Escape pods			0	0
Accommodation	1	Stateroom(s)	4	0.5
		Low Berths	0	0
	1	Emergency Cryotubes	1	0.1
Cargo			26	
Crew: 1	Pilot			
Total before Discount			Mcr	55.5
Total after Discount			Mcr	49.95



Frontier Trader

Component	Size/Number	Type	Tonnage	Cost Mcr
Hull Armor	100	Streamlined		11
Maneuver Drive	1		0.9	2.25
Power Plant	1		1.5	3.75
Jump Drive	1		3	7.5
Fuel			10	
Bridge Electronics	Model/1	DM -2	10 1	0.5 1
Armament	1	Single Turret 0 Double Turret Triple Turret Missile Rack Sandcaster Mining Laser Beam Laser Plasma Beam Fusion Beam	0 3 0	3 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Other Components	1	Fuel processors per 5 tons/day Escape pods	1 0	0.1 0
Accommodation 2 15	Staterooms Low Berths Emergency Cryotubes	8 7.5 0 54.1	1 0.75 0	
Cargo				
Crew: 1 (or 2) Pilot/Captain Optionally, add Gunner/ Medic				
Total before Discount			Mcr	30.85
Total after Discount			Mcr	27.765

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