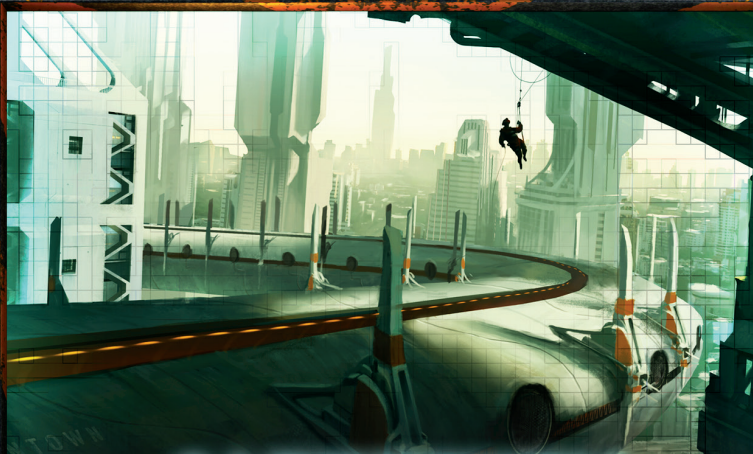# ALTERNITY®

SCIENCE FICTION ∞ ROLEPLAYING GAME

CORE RULEBOOK

BAKER • NOONAN • SCHUBERT

WHAT'S YOUR FUTURE?

ALTERNITY®
SCIENCE FICTION ⋈ ROLEPLAYING GAME

EXPLORE ALIEN WORLDS OR BATTLE AGAINST CYBORG OVERLORDS. WANDER THROUGH A POST-APOCALYPTIC WASTELAND OR VENTURE INTO ALTERNATE REALITIES. THE FUTURE IS WHATEVER YOU IMAGINE IT TO BE!

THIS CORE RULEBOOK PROVIDES EVERYTHING YOU NEED FOR YOUR MODERN-DAY TO FAR-FUTURE SCI-FI ROLEPLAYING ADVENTURE. INSIDE YOU'LL FIND:

- SIX SPECIES, SEVEN ARCHETYPES, SKILLS, AND SPECIAL TALENTS TO BUILD YOUR SCIENCE FICTION HERO
- A FAST-PACED COMBAT SYSTEM PERFECT FOR BRINGING CINEMATIC ACTION SCENES TO LIFE
- ALL THE HAZARDS, SET-PIECES, AND ADVERSARIES A GAME MASTER NEEDS TO CREATE AN UNLIMITED NUMBER OF SCI-FI ADVENTURES
- AND MUCH MORE!

SASQUATCH
game studio

ALTERNITY ®

SCIENCE FICTION ◁▷ ROLEPLAYING GAME

CORE RULEBOOK

Richard Baker ▪ David Noonan ▪ Stephen Schubert

SASQUATCH
game studio

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This game exists today because of 703 generous backers who supported our 2017 crowdfunding campaign. Thank you to each and every one of them!

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INTRODUCTION

"At its best, science fiction stimulates imagination and creativity. It gets reader and writer off the beaten track, off the narrow, narrow footpath of what 'everyone' is saying, doing, thinking — whoever 'everyone' happens to be this year."

—Octavia Butler

Welcome to tomorrow! You're holding in your hands (or perusing on your screen) a game engine you can use to build just about any science fiction roleplaying campaign you can think of. Scavenging for survival in a nuclear winter? Venturing to mysterious planets around distant stars? Rebelling against oppressive authorities in a dystopian future? Searching time portals in alternate Earths to hunt down alien invaders trying to steal our history? If you can imagine a sci-fi story, you can build an *ALTERNITY* game to explore it.

In an *ALTERNITY* game, one player takes on the role of **Gamemaster** (or **GM**), creating a challenging **adventure** or scenario for the other players to experience—for example, exploring a dangerous ruin on an alien planet or tracking down a killer android in a crowded asteroid city. The other players create **heroes** (sometimes called player characters or PCs) to participate in the GM's adventure: bold starship pilots, tough mercenaries, brilliant scientists and so on. What happens next depends on how the players decide their heroes meet the challenge.

Your first step is to collect a group of players and choose a GM. Being the GM means doing a little more work to prepare adventures, but you have the best part to play in the *ALTERNITY* game: You get to build universes for your friends to explore.

There are an infinite number of worlds: Choose your favorite, and get ready to have some fun!

ABOUT ROLEPLAYING GAMES

If you've never seen a game like *ALTERNITY* before, you've just discovered a new world of imagination and entertainment. In a computer or console game, you're limited to the scenarios the game's creators prepared, and you can do only things the developers programmed the game to do. A tabletop RPG offers you the chance to try anything you would try if you were actually in that story. Do you want to lure in the space pirates by feigning a distress call? Surrender to the hostile aliens, counting on a show of good faith to change their minds about humans? Steal your starship from the impound dock instead of paying a fine you owe? In a game like *ALTERNITY*, you can try all those things. They might work or they might not, but either way, the narrative's moving forward—and you're in control.

In a roleplaying game, you don't win or lose. Sometimes the character you're playing defeats a terrible alien monster and saves the day; sometimes the alien monster destroys your character, or maybe even all the characters. The point is participating in a story and exercising your imagination. It's a type of entertainment, but you get to make the decisions because your character is the hero of the story.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The *Core Rulebook* provides everything you need to create and play sci-fi adventures with the *ALTERNITY* Science Fiction Roleplaying Game. To get started, find a group of people to play with, and plan a good time and place to play. You'll want three to six people and a couple hours. Choose one player to be the Gamemaster.

For the Player: If you're a player, skim through Chapter 1: System Basics to get an overview of what goes into creating an *ALTERNITY* character and how the game system works. Then move on to Chapter 2: Hero Creation to create a character for your *ALTERNITY* game and follow the steps laid out there. You'll need to refer to skills and gear (Chapters 3 and 4) as you go, but you can pick up the finer points of the rules as you play.

For the Gamemaster: If you plan to be the GM, begin with Chapter 1: System Basics. This covers the core mechanic of the game—how to make a skill check. Everything else in the *ALTERNITY* game is based on that. Chapter 5: Combat and Challenges describes how heroes (and their opponents) take turns and interact, while Chapter 6: Running the Game covers the organization of an *ALTERNITY* adventure and how to present different types of scenes and challenges for the players to overcome.

Your First Adventure: If you're the GM, you also need to do a little preparation before your first game session—you'll need an adventure to run. We recommend downloading the *ALTERNITY Demo Packet* for your first adventure (see the sidebar on this page). After you're comfortable with the basics of the *ALTERNITY* game, you'll be ready to create your own *ALTERNITY* adventures. Chapter 7: Creating Adventures provides you with resources for building great *ALTERNITY* adventures, and Chapter 8: Aliens and Adversaries gives you a selection of ready-to-use monsters and bad guys to challenge the players.

NEW TO ROLEPLAYING GAMES?

If you're brand-new to roleplaying games, we recommend you begin by downloading the *ALTERNITY Demo Pack* at DriveThruRPG.com (just type *ALTERNITY* into the search bar; you'll find it). It's a free PDF download that covers the basics of the *ALTERNITY* game and provides a self-contained, ready-to-play game experience. Try out "The Institute" introductory adventure first, and then come back to this Core Rulebook. It's OK. We'll wait.

For quick reminders, see margin notes (like this one) throughout the book.

1: SYSTEM BASICS

"Science fiction, outside of poetry, is the only literary field which has no limits, no parameters whatsoever."

—Theodore Sturgeon

Like any roleplaying game, *ALTERNITY* is first and foremost a toolkit for telling stories. This rulebook provides you with a system for creating heroes suitable for taking on adventures in just about any kind of modern-day to far-future sci-fi setting you can imagine. What kind of hero you play and what kind of adventures you experience are up to you and your Gamemaster.

Let's begin with a few definitions:

Player: That's you. A player creates a heroic character to play in an *ALTERNITY* game.

GM (or Gamemaster): That might be you. A GM creates an adventure for the other players to experience through their hero characters. A GM runs the game, serves as referee and narrator, and controls the adversaries the heroes face.

Hero (or PC): A character the player creates to serve as his or her avatar in the game. Each player takes on the part of a hero and decides what that hero does in the game.

Team: A group or party of heroes who are engaged in the same adventure.

NPC: A non-player character. NPCs are the shopkeepers, informants, quest-givers, enemies and rivals the GM populates throughout the adventure for the heroes to interact with.

Adventure: The story or scenario the GM creates for the players' hero characters to explore, interact with or resolve. It could be anything from thwarting the plot of a cyber-terrorist group to a search-and-rescue mission on an uncharted planet.

Campaign: The ongoing story of a hero team. If you play the same team of characters in several adventures, those adventures and heroes form an ongoing campaign.

Scene: One discrete challenge or decision point in an adventure. It might be a battle against hungry aliens, a negotiation with an NPC or an obstacle or test the heroes must overcome.

Skill: A specific activity, trait, field of study or profession. Examples include *Athletics*, *Firearm*, *Computers*, *Mechanics* or *Willpower*. Your hero is basically a collection of skills. Some you're trained in, some you aren't.

Check: A test to see whether a character succeeds or fails at something. You make a skill check when failure is a real possibility.

d20: A 20-sided die. When you make a check, roll a d20 and compare it to the acting character's skill to find out whether he or she succeeds.

Got it? Good. We'll take a closer look at how the game works soon, but before we do, let's look at something even more important: What kind of sci-fi game do you want to play?

CHOOSING YOUR FUTURE

Science fiction is an amazingly broad genre: exploration, space opera, time travel, first contact, catastrophe, post-apocalypse, dystopia, cyberpunk, steampunk, military sci-fi, hard sci-fi … the list goes on and on. Your first challenge (and opportunity!) when you begin an *ALTERNITY* game is to decide what kind of science fiction story you want to explore.

In general, the GM is the person who decides on the story presented to the players. He or she picks the adventure, and by extension the universe in which that adventure takes place. However, it's a good idea for the GM to ask the players what kind of game they want to play and try to meet their expectations—they're your audience and your co-creators, after all!

PUBLISHED, HOMAGE, OR ORIGINAL?

The easiest way to start running an *ALTERNITY* game is to use adventures published for the *ALTERNITY* game. You can find ready-to-play adventures at online stores such as DriveThruRPG.com in PDF and print-on-demand format. (Some, like the *Demonstration Packet*, are free!)

If you'd prefer to create your own adventures, you can easily design an *ALTERNITY* campaign around your favorite sci-fi story. Are you a fan of E.E. Smith's Lensman stories? Run a Lensman campaign in homage to the setting you love. You'll need to decide which rules elements you'll need to incorporate or adopt to emulate the Lensman universe and which parts of the Lensman universe will need some house rules to work in an *ALTERNITY* game. (You'll probably want to use the Psionics and Ships appendices.) It's not hard to import your favorite alien race as a PC option, add to the skill list or build new adversaries based on those from the story that inspires your campaign.

If you're ambitious, you can create a science fiction setting of your own design. A lot of GMs find building worlds to be the most rewarding part of the job and devote a lot of time and attention to it, but you don't have to describe every detail ahead of time. It's perfectly fine to grow your setting organically by starting with just the pieces you need—a moon base, a pirate ship, an evil corporation, a mysterious alien artifact and so on.

MODERN-DAY OR FAR-FUTURE?

How far away is the future you're creating? Science fiction ranges from modern-day technothrillers or alien conspiracy stories to galaxy-spanning empires thousands of years in the future—or even "end of time" tales set on a nearly unrecognizable Earth billions of years from now. Setting stories in the modern day requires less world-building; you don't have to explain to your players what a McDonald's is or how a 9 mm pistol works. In fact, the juxtaposition of aliens or fantastic super-science with a world the players otherwise see around them every day can be a powerful storytelling tool. But there's no doubt voyaging across the stars to visit strange new worlds in each adventure makes for an awesome sci-fi game, too. It's just a matter of what appeals to you most.

TECH ERAS

The *ALTERNITY* game describes the range of future technology as "tech eras." We live in TE 6, the Modern Era. Your game might be set in TE 7 (Solar Era), TE 8 (Stellar Era) or TE 9 (the Galactic Era). You can find out more about technology eras in Chapter 4 and Chapter 7.

EARTH-BASED, SOLAR SYSTEM OR INTERSTELLAR?

How far does your future extend? Are the heroes of the story dealing with villains and threats on Earth, on Mars or on Altair IV? Naturally modern-day or near-future stories are likely to be more Earth-centric, but that's not necessarily the case—imagine running a 1960s campaign based on a secret science foundation using mysterious stargates hidden in Earth's ancient ruins to send explorers to other planets. A near-future "hard" science fiction campaign might present the other planets and moons in our solar system as lonely scientific outposts or grim industrial facilities, but in the far future, extensive terraforming might transform ice moons into water worlds or asteroids into inside-out bubble worlds. It's really a question of whether the heroes' next adventure is in the next city, the next planet or the next star.

Campaigns of truly interstellar scope naturally demand answers to a couple big questions: "How do the heroes travel between the stars?" and "Are humans alone in the universe?" "Realistic" interstellar travel probably involves decades or centuries of travel time, so are the heroes hibernating through those flights? Or are the heroes just minds stored in computers who download themselves to artificial bodies when they reach their destination? If there are aliens out there for us to meet, are they behind us in technology, or are they peers? Are they ahead of us or vastly ahead of us? If so, why do they care about us at all?

Want to test your improv skills? Let the players warp to any planet in the galaxy.

UNIQUE FLAVOR

Last but not least, what's the unique characteristic or "hook" in the future you're creating? What's the one thing about your *ALTERNITY* game that isn't true about all the other stories and TV shows and movies that tread on similar ground? Think about how elements such as the Prime Directive, the Force or the Three Laws of Robotics color the stories in which they appear. It's a characteristic that isn't simply a date, a technology level or a type of FTL travel that works—it's something that enables the kinds of stories the author or filmmaker wants to tell. To put it another way, what makes your future yours?

HOW THE GAME WORKS

In the *ALTERNITY* game, the GM presents a narrative that features a variety of mysterious, challenging or dangerous situations. You decide how your character interacts with the story the GM describes: Do you follow the drug lord's courier, or do you stay hidden and continue your stakeout? Do you try to sneak past the sentry bot, convince it you have the proper authorization to pass or simply blow it to bits with your plasma pistol?

In the *ALTERNITY* game (and most other roleplaying games), the action follows a simple narrative:

1. The GM describes the situation to the players: where their heroes are and the threats, challenges or opportunities apparent to them.
2. The players describe the actions their characters take.
3. If there's a possibility the heroes might not succeed, the GM decides how to see what happens. This might be a die roll to test a character's skill at a task, a die roll to see whether an adversary or villain resists what the characters are trying to do, or simply a request for the players to provide more explanation. If someone's rolling the dice, we call it a **check** to determine the outcome.
4. The GM then describes the results of the players' actions and decisions. The situation changes accordingly, and you start at the top again.

We start all our convention demos by teaching the three big concepts.

Science fiction is a high-concept genre, and *ALTERNITY* has three big concepts at its foundation: the **core mechanic**, the **turn order**, and the **wound system**. Once you understand these three concepts, the rest of the rules are straightforward. More importantly, when you teach *ALTERNITY* to new players, make sure they understand these three concepts and they'll be ready for adventure.

BIG CONCEPT: THE CORE MECHANIC

Sometimes the GM simply incorporates your decision into the narrative and then describes what happens next. In situations where failure and consequences are a real possibility—for example, failing to stop a ship from crashing or losing a gunfight—the narrative can't go forward until you find out whether a hero succeeds or fails in the scene by rolling dice and making a check.

The great majority of checks in an *ALTERNITY* game are **ability checks** or **skill checks**. Ability checks are a test of a character's raw natural aptitude or characteristics. Skill checks are much more common and test a character's overall competence at some task by combining natural ability with relevant training. (In fact, an ability check is just a skill check at a skill you don't happen to have any training in.)

To make a check, roll a **d20** (the **base die**) and compare it to your character's relevant **skill score**. If the result of your die roll is equal to or higher than your target for that task, you succeed. For example, if you're trying to shoot an enemy with a pistol, it's a test of your character's *Firearm* skill, so you're trying to equal or beat your *Firearm* skill score.

Factors that make a check easier or harder than normal are represented by adding a **difficulty die** to your roll (see The Difficulty Die, below). This is another polyhedral die. The *ALTERNITY* game uses the same polyhedral dice found in other RPGs: 4-sided (d4), 6-sided (d6), 8-sided (d8), 10-sided (d10),12-sided (d12) and 20-sided die (d20). An extra d20 of a different color is handy to have.

FIGURING YOUR SKILL SCORE

Your skill score measures how good you are at a particular task. The two components are your natural ability (as measured by your **ability score** in the key ability for that skill) and the amount of train-ing and practice you've had at that task (as measured by your **skill points**). Add your key ability score and your skill points together to get your total skill modifier. Your skill score for checks with that skill is equal to 20 minus your skill modifier (key ability + skill ranks).

Example: Your character has a Strength score of 5 and 4 skill points in Athletics. *Her* Athletics *skill modifier is (5 + 4), or 9, which means her* Athletics *skill score is (20 − 9), or 11. Whenever you make an* Athletics *check for your character, you're trying to roll an 11 or better to succeed.*

When you fill out a character sheet for your *ALTERNITY* character, you'll figure out the skill scores for your ability checks and the skills you're trained in (since those are the ones you're most likely to use). It helps the game run faster and smoother if you note your scores ahead of time.

High Rolls, Low Skill Scores
A highly skilled character has a low skill score—in other words, it's easy to pass the skill check. You want high rolls and low skill scores when you make checks!

DIFFICULTY STEPS DIE MODIFIER

Check

d4

d6

d8

d12

d20

Difficulty Die	Steps	Description
+2d20	+6	Nearly Automatic
+d20	+5	Piece of Cake
+d12	+4	Extremely Easy
+d8	+3	Very Easy
+d6	+2	Easy
+d4	+1	Moderately Easy
—	0	Ordinary
–d4	–1	Moderately Hard
–d6	–2	Hard
–d8	–3	Very Hard
–d12	–4	Extremely Hard
–d20	–5	Brutal
–2d20	–6	Nearly Impossible

THE DIFFICULTY DIE

Your skill scores are the same each time you test them—if your Strength is 4, your target for a simple Strength check is 16 whether you're trying to break down a wooden panel door, bust through a steel fire door, or kick open an armored hatch in a spaceship. Clearly some Strength checks are easier than others. To represent the difficulty of the specific check you're attempting, the GM assigns a **difficulty die** to your check.

Tests that are easier than normal allow you to add a difficulty bonus die to the result of the d20 you roll when you make a check. Tests that are harder than normal require you to subtract a difficulty die penalty from the result of the d20 you roll when you make a check.

The sum (or difference) of the d20 and your difficulty die is your **check result**. Compare this to the skill score for your check to see whether you succeed or fail.

Usually it's not worth rolling the dice on checks easier than +6 steps. If the task is that easy, the GM can just rule that you succeed at it (although you should still roll if the skill check is an attack of some kind). Likewise, checks harder than −6 steps almost always fail. If you need more than 6 steps, just add (or subtract) additional d20s for the difficulty die, one per step.

THE DIFFICULTY SCALE

Not every advantage or disadvantage is created the same. The difference between a specific difficulty level and the next is referred to as a **die step**. A minor complication might be worth only a −1 step penalty, but a major impediment to your intended action might deserve a −2 or −3 step penalty. You might also find that multiple small complications "add up" to make an otherwise straightforward skill check extremely hard or that the advantages and disadvantages offset (a +1 step bonus winds up being canceled out by a −1 step penalty).

You normally begin at an Ordinary level of difficulty (no bonus or penalty with a difficulty die). As the GM applies a bonus or a penalty for the circumstances of the check, you effectively move up or down the "scale." Deciding how much of a step bonus to award for a helpful circumstance or how much of a penalty to impose for a complicating factor is the GM's job, but as a general rule:

- A minor factor is worth a +1 step bonus (helpful) or −1 step penalty (unhelpful).
- A moderate factor is worth a +2 step bonus or −2 step penalty.
- A major factor is worth a +3 step bonus or −3 step penalty.

Example: *Nimon Zhan-Deneb is trying to set down a damaged aircar without completely wrecking it (a* Piloting *check). The aircar's damage is severe, so the GM assigns a −3 step penalty: The check moves from Ordinary (+0 steps) to Very Hard (−d8). Nimon is also fighting off the effects of a serious wound, which adds a −1 step penalty to anything he tries to do. The check moves from Very Hard to Extremely Hard (−d12).*

Thinking fast, the player asks whether there's any soft-looking terrain around that Nimon can use to cushion the landing. The GM informs the player there's a good-size lake nearby, so Nimon decides to ditch the aircar in the water. The GM decides a soft landing site is moderately helpful and adds a +2 step bonus to the player's check. That bonus moves the check back up the scale two steps from Extremely Hard to just Hard (−d6). When the player makes Nimon's Piloting *check, he rolls d20 minus d6 and hopes to roll well!*

Negotiating over step bonuses/penalties is the heart of the game, pure and simple.

SUCCESS LEVELS

When your check result exceeds your skill score by a wide margin, you not only succeed—you succeed with better than normal results.

- If your check result is lower than your skill score, your check is a **Failure**.
- If your check result is equal to or better than your skill score, you achieve an **Average** success.
- If your check result is at least 5 more than your skill score, you achieve an **Excellent** success.
- If your check result is at least 10 more than your skill score, you achieve a **Stellar** success.

The exact effects of Excellent and Stellar success vary with the skill you're using. If you're attacking, a better grade of success usually results in more damage. If you're working your way through some kind of challenge scene, a high success level might mean you make better progress in whatever it is you're trying to do.

BIG CONCEPT:
THE TURN ORDER

When the blaster bolts start flying, it's important to know who shoots first. *ALTERNITY* measures time using the **action round**, which lasts about 15 seconds. Eight **impulses** (about 2 seconds each) make up an action round. The best way to think of the action round and the impulses is like a clock; after you complete impulse 8 of one round, you begin impulse 1 of the next round.

Actions usually require 1 to 5 impulses. Chapter 5 gives you all the details, but here are the most common actions:

- 1 impulse: open a door, go prone, draw a weapon, reload.
- 2 impulses: Move 20 meters, depending on terrain.
- 3 impulses: Attack with a typical weapon or use a skill.
- 4 impulses: Attack with a fully automatic or heavy weapon.

If it's your turn on impulse 2 and you take a 3-impulse action to shoot your blaster, you resolve your shot and roll your dice right away. Then you get to take your next action in impulse 5. The "next action" wraps around the end of the round, so if you shoot that blaster in impulse 7, your next action is in impulse 2 of the next action round.

Your adversaries use the same impulse track you do, and you generally know when they act next. If it's your turn on impulse 5 and the bad guy acts on impulse 8, you know you've got time to run down the hallway (2 impulses) and still get another turn (during impulse 7) before the bad guy can shoot you.

As an additional wrinkle, you can voluntarily use **action modifiers** to make your action take longer for an additional benefit. The two most common action modifiers are aiming (your action costs one extra impulse, but you get a step bonus on your attack check) and evading (likewise costs an extra impulse, but enemies who attack you before your next turn suffer a step penalty).

We suggest putting an impulse track in the middle of your play area. Then you can use tokens to keep track of when each character or adversary gets his or her next action in the combat scene.

BIG CONCEPT: THE WOUND SYSTEM

ALTERNITY heroes don't have hit points. Instead, every hero or adversary can withstand some number of wounds. The number and severity of the wounds you can withstand before you're defeated make up your durability track.

A typical durability track looks like this:

severity	description	wounds
16+	Mortal wound (cannot act)	☐
13–15	Critical wound (–3 die steps)	☐
10–12	Serious wound (–2 die steps)	☐
7–9	Moderate wound (–1 die step)	☐
4–6	Light wound (no effect)	☐ ☐
1–3	Graze (no effect)	☐ ☐

When you take damage, mark off a box depending on how severe the wound is. If you take a 7-point laser blast, for example, you mark off a moderate wound box because the moderate wound row is 7–9. Then you suffer whatever penalty is listed for that row. In this case, you'll take a –1 step penalty on all checks. When you mark your highest wound box, you're defeated.

The wound system has two key wrinkles. First, if all the boxes on that row are already marked, you have to move up the track and mark the first open box of higher severity. Second, you only suffer the penalty for the highest (and worst) wound you have, even if the lower rows are full. Once you have a sucking chest wound, that sprained ankle isn't bothering you anymore.

Remember, "up" is more severe and "down" is less severe. Up bad, down good.

YOUR *ALTERNITY* CHARACTER

When you play in an *ALTERNITY* game, you take on the role of a heroic character in a science-fiction story. An *ALTERNITY* character is basically a collection of stats and abilities that describe what he or she is good at, combined with the story, motivations and personality you invent.

Name: You get to come up with a name for your character.

Level: Your level measures how much training and experience you have. Most *ALTERNITY* campaigns begin with level 1 heroes.

Species: *ALTERNITY* characters might belong to any number of unusual species—denizens of alien worlds, cyborgs, androids, mutants, vampires and so on. The choices available to you depend on what sort of setting your GM creates.

Archetype: The type of character you are. It's like a character class, but not as restrictive.

Abilities: Your character's natural strengths and weaknesses are described by six Ability ratings. These are Strength, Agility, Vitality, Intelligence, Focus and Personality. Scores range from 0 to 10, with a typical human having a score of 2 to 4 in each Ability.

Talents: These are the special tactics, edges, aptitudes or characteristics that set you apart. You might be a fast-draw specialist, skilled in making sneak attacks or capable of shrugging off injuries that would slow down other characters.

Skills: *ALTERNITY* characters are built around a list of about 35 discrete skills (depending on the campaign, there might be a few more available to your character).

Initiative Score: At the start of an action scene, you make an initiative check to determine when you can take your first action.

Durability: This describes how many injuries your character can withstand before he or she is defeated. Each time you take damage, you mark off one wound box corresponding to the damage inflicted by whatever hurt you. If you mark off your highest wound box, you're defeated. Depending on the campaign, you might be dead, dying or forced to regenerate a new body.

Gear: Are you carrying a shiv made from a sharpened spoon or a plasma rifle? Your GM will tell you what gear is available to your character.

Hero Points: A measure of extraordinary luck, resilience or perseverance. When the situation appears to be unwinnable, you can spend a hero point to modify the results of a die roll and influence the narrative just a little bit in your favor.

The bad guys want to know.

ALTERNITY
SCIENCE FICTION ROLEPLAYING GAME

Name: Nimon Zhan-Deneb

Archetype: Survivor

Level: 1   **Hero points:** 1   **Initiative:** 12/17/22 +1 step   **Speed:** 20m   **Encumbrance:** 14kg

STRENGTH 4   FOCUS 3
INTELLIGENCE 6   VITALITY 4
AGILITY 5   PERSONALITY 4

TALENTS
Commando
Elusive
Skirmisher
_____
_____

WEAPONS

weapon	range	speed	damage	special
Plasma Pistol	M	3	2d4/2d8	+1 step
Unarmed	o	3	d4+0/2	+1 step

SPECIES NOTES
Human
_____
_____
_____

ARMOR AND DAMAGE

Armor reduces **physical** by 3 , **energy** by 3

severity	description	wounds
16+	Mortal wound (cannot act)	☐
13–15	Critical wound (–3 die steps)	☐ ☐ ☐
10–12	Serious wound (–2 die steps)	☐ ☐ ☐
7–9	Moderate wound (–1 die step)	☐ ☐ ☐
4–6	Light wound (no effect)	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
1–3	Graze (no effect)	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Every PC has the black boxes. A high Vitality score and the Rugged talent constellation grant some or all of the gray boxes.

OTHER GEAR

gear	mass
Nanoweave Suit	__
Force Shield	__
Comm Patch	__
Vacuum Collar	__
Wound Gel	__

SKILLS

Academics (Int)	___/___/___	
Acrobatics (Agi) 3	12/17/22	
Armor Training (Str/Int)	___/___/___	
Athletics (Str)	___/___/___	
Awareness (Foc) 3	14/19/24	
Coercion (Per)	___/___/___	
Computer (Int)	___/___/___	
Culture (Per)	___/___/___	
Deception (Per)	___/___/___	
Driving (Agi)	___/___/___	
Dodge (Agi) 4	11/16/21	
Empathy (Foc/Per)	___/___/___	
Endurance (Vit)	___/___/___	
Energy Weapon (Agi/Foc) 5	10/15/20	
Engineering (Int) 4	10/15/20	
Extreme Sports (Agi/Vit)	___/___/___	
Firearm (Agi/Foc)	___/___/___	

Hand to Hand (Str/Agi) 3	12/17/22	
Heavy Weapon (Str/Int)	___/___/___	
Influence (Per) 4	12/17/22	
Mechanics (Int)	___/___/___	
Medicine (Int)	___/___/___	
Melee (Str/Agi)	___/___/___	
Misdirection (Per)	___/___/___	
Performance (Per)	___/___/___	
Piloting (Agi/Int) 5	10/15/20	
Primitive Wpn (Agi/Foc)	___/___/___	
Profession (any)	___/___/___	
Resilience (Vit)	___/___/___	
Science (Int)	___/___/___	
Security (Agi/Int)	___/___/___	
Stealth (Agi/Foc) 4	11/16/21	
Survival (Vit/Foc)	___/___/___	
Willpower (Foc)	___/___/___	

2: CHARACTER CREATION

"The thing about a hero, is even when it doesn't look like there's a light at the end of the tunnel, he's going to keep digging, he's going to keep trying to do right and make up for what's gone before, just because that's who he is."

— Joss Whedon

For everyone but the GM, your **hero** (also known as a player character, or PC) is the way you interact with the other players and the game as a whole. Fundamentally, it's who you're pretending to be. You might be a down-on-her-luck freighter captain, an alien curious about human society, or a maverick cop who doesn't play by the rules—and who you're pretending to be will change as the story advances. Your character grows in competence as you explore a science fiction setting and develop bonds with the other characters in the story—some of whom are in the hands of other players at your table. Your hero succeeds, fails, sets new goals, suffers setbacks and lives the complex life of a sci-fi protagonist.

Let's start, though, with practical matters. Creating an *ALTERNITY* character requires this book, a character sheet (go ahead and photocopy the one in the back) and about 30 minutes—much of which can be spent away from the book, mulling over the central question: "Who *is* my character, really?"

To create a hero, follow these steps:

1. Come up with a **concept** and some connections to the setting (page 20).
2. Determine your **ability scores** (page 23).
3. Choose a **species** if the setting offers nonhuman protagonists (page 26).
4. Pick an **archetype** or go **freeform** (page 39).
5. Select your **talents** (page 45).
6. Assign your **skill points** (page 46).
7. Get some **gear** (page 99).
8. Take care of **finishing touches** like **initiative** and **durability** (page 47).
9. Run it all past your GM, and you're ready for adventure!

If you want more detail, check online for fancier character sheets in PDF form.

YOUR CHARACTER CONCEPT

Most of the character-creation process is straight-up creative brain work. Imagine your character as he or she exists at the moment the adventure kicks into gear and ask yourself where your character came from. How did you become the hero you are? Where are you going?

FIRST, FOCUS ON THE PRESENT

One way to answer the "who are you, really?" question is to figure out what you care about and what you're good at the moment the adventure starts. Here are some ways to help you think through your character's adventure-start identity.

The Twitter Bio Approach. Think of the short, pithy bios people put on their social media profiles. What would your character's bio say? Maybe it's a job title like "University of Ceres exobiologist" or "Staff Sergeant, 3rd Orbital Ranger Battalion." Maybe it's less straightforward and speaks to your character's personality or the vibe you give off. "I drink and I know things," for example, is a great springboard for a character.

Likes and Dislikes. This one's the character-creation equivalent of a dating profile. List three or four things your character likes (life in orbit, vintage rockets, robotic animals, this hat I got from Old Earth) and three or four dislikes (empty ammo clips, waking up after hypersleep, cold instacaff, thought criminals). Shoot for a mix of

GMS, HELP YOUR PLAYERS OUT

Just because players can make up characters without guidance from the GM doesn't mean they *should.* As GM, you don't want to lead players by the nose, but some directional advice from you at the concept stage of character creation can create a better story for all. At a minimum, give the players the following guidance.

Elevator Pitch: Describe the setting in a sentence or two such as, "The Cold War erupted into nuclear Armageddon in 1984, and now mutant gangs wander the irradiated wasteland," or "On a tidally locked planet, the light side and dark side are entrenched in bitter war over the habitable periphery."

Organizing Principle: Who are the heroes collectively at the start of the adventure? For example: "You're crew members on the *Jeffty Five,* a space freighter one step ahead of the authorities and one month behind on its payments," or "You don't have much in common, other than being in the student union late one night when the particle accelerator overloaded, scrambling time-space beyond recognition."

As the GM, your guidance provides the frame—but leave the canvas for each player to paint.

big, important likes/dislikes and smaller personality-revealing likes/dislikes.

Dramatic Archetype. We'll get into the gameplay archetypes below, but think of how you'd summarize your character's place in an ensemble action drama. Are you the brains of the bunch? The muscle? The wild card?

Whatever technique you use, just get a sense of your character's present identity, then move on to your character's past and future. That's the thing about the present—it never lasts very long.

BACKGROUND: YOUR CHARACTER'S ROOTS

Your character's past is called "background" for a reason. Like the ground, it can be fertile soil that nourishes you as you grow.

You don't need to know your character's entire life story (in fact, it's often good to leave some gaps you can fill in mid-campaign), but you should give some thought to a few key moments that plant roots in the setting for you and the GM to tap throughout the ongoing story.

Your GM will be immensely helpful as you figure this out—each detail in your character's backstory is a plot hook your GM can use to motivate or entice you later. And you want that! When your character's past propels the story forward, that's a recipe for high drama.

As a starting point, consider the following:

- *Family/Friends:* This is often a good way to get at your character's childhood. Explore the family and friend relationships that grew in those years. Pick a few relatives—siblings, parents or more distant relations—and invent a relationship. Was it positive/negative? Did it change at some point, and why? Is the relative still alive and in contact? Do likewise with a childhood friend, army buddy, playground bully or other peer from childhood or adolescence.
- *Affiliations:* Does your character identify with a larger group, such as a clan, an ethnic group, a revolutionary cell, a nation, a military unit or a corporation? And again, is that relationship positive or negative … and has it changed over time?
- *Moments of Crisis:* When those relationships changed, what was the precipitating event? How did it change you, and how do you feel about it now? If your character was orphaned, think about the last moment you saw your parents. If you were selected to join the Star Corps, think about the moment the vid-invitation arrived.

You don't have to develop an entire family tree or write thousands of words on your character's coming-of-age moment, but filling in the details of key relationships and moments can bring your

Boil down a superhero origin story, and you'll see a strong background structure.

character to life. More importantly, it can echo through the ongoing story. Any avid reader of sci-fi novels knows the past doesn't always stay there—even if you don't have a time machine.

One final factor to consider: Later on in the character creation process, you'll identify three contacts—useful NPCs your character has an established rapport with. Connect those contacts to your background, and the setting will be the richer for it.

THINK OF THE FUTURE: CHARACTER GOALS

It wouldn't be a science-fiction game if you didn't spend at least some time dwelling on the future, right? Now that you have a sense of your character's identity and background, consider what goals your character finds enticing.

Some sci-fi characters have burning desires that border on the monomaniacal (think of Gully Foyle's desire for revenge in *The Stars My Destination*). Others drift from one job to the next and develop motivating goals only as the narrative picks up pace (like Han Solo in *Star Wars*). You're doing your GM and your fellow players a service if you start with a goal or two somewhere in between—a goal that propels you forward but doesn't blind you to other possibilities.

Here are some techniques that can help you get started.

The Three-Goal Approach: This one's an old RPG standby because it works. Give your character three goals: a relatively minor one that can be accomplished with a modicum of effort, a major goal that would be the highlight of an ordinary person's career, and a huge goal that would transform the setting so utterly that it'd effectively end the campaign. For example, your fresh-from-the-academy Star Marine might have three goals: to earn a promotion to first lieutenant, to liberate the Dar-Syn system from alien oppression, and to lead humanity everywhere out of bondage, casting the alien slavers back through their stargates forever. Will any of them actually happen? That's for the table and the dice to collectively decide, but no matter the outcome, those goals provide motivation for the character and propulsion for the plot.

It's pronounced "FLUB-wuh."

FLBW: Some writers define the goals of their protagonist in terms of their FLBWs: fears, limitations, blocks or wounds. Give your character a FLBW, then a goal to confront it. The confrontation goal doesn't need to be the best plan (and it might be more interesting if it's a poor one), but it needs to force the character to face that flaw or weakness. If a character's weakness is that she's haunted by the many comrades who died in battle, her goal might be to avoid violence at all costs, or to avoid making personal connections with anyone in harm's way. In an action adventure, neither of those is a particularly effective goal, but the inevitable failure will be dramatically interesting, and it'll lead to character growth and change.

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU'RE COMPETENT!

A key conceit of most *Alternity* campaigns is that characters start the game with a high degree of competence. You aren't some wet-behind-the-ears farmer's child—or at least you aren't *just* that. You are decidedly above the human average, and you have the ability scores and skills to prime you for success in life. At least until the plot starts careening sideways, that is.

To put it in 21st-century terms, a 1st-level *Alternity* character is the equivalent of a college athlete, an elite academy footballer, a recent graduate of a military academy or a gifted grad student. You've faced adversity before, you have at least a measure of grit, and you're capable of great things. To extend the analogy, 10th-level *Alternity* characters are greatest-of-all-time Olympians, Nobel Prize winners, Medal of Honor recipients and the sorts of people who get cities and planets named after them. If future historians refer to the "[your character name] Dynasty," you're probably a 10th-level character.

Goals Arise from Identity and Background: You've already done work on your character's present-moment identity and prior backstory. Now leverage that by asking yourself what goals those aspects of your character suggest. At least in part, Luke Skywalker leaves Tatooine because he's an orphan who wants to know more about his parents—especially his father. Miles Vorkosigan's stunted body drives him to prove his doubters wrong.

Talk to the other players as you come up with goals. It's a recipe for great drama if your goals dovetail with each other—and occasionally conflict.

ABILITY SCORES

Now that you've defined who your character is in the dramatic sense, it's time to start defining that PC in the gameplay sense. Fundamental to every character in *Alternity* are six ability scores that represent the character's raw aptitude and natural ability in six categories.

- **Strength:** Raw physical power and basic athleticism. It's good for hand-to-hand combat as well as climbing, running, jumping and other physical challenges.
- **Agility:** Hand-eye (or manipulator limb-visual sensor) coordination, balance, reflexes and flexibility. Useful in ranged combat and anything where precise, not forceful, physicality is key. Also handy for getting out of the way when things start exploding around you.
- **Vitality:** Overall health, endurance and resistance to injury. Your Vitality score contributes to your overall durability and your ability to endure hazards such as toxins, atmospheric decompression and radiation.
- **Intelligence:** A blend of your raw reasoning ability and the education you've received before the start of your first

adventure. It's good for invention, research, computation and solving puzzles. The future doesn't belong to the dumb.

- **Focus:** Your awareness, determination and ability to concentrate on the task at hand despite distractions. A good Focus score helps with marksmanship, noticing threats around you and zeroing in on minute details.
- **Personality:** Natural persuasiveness, charisma and talent for leadership. It's the key ability score for interacting with NPCs, whether friendly, hostile or somewhere in between.

In each case, scores range from 0 to 10, but the vast majority of humans have ability scores between 1 and 5, with 3 being average. Olympians, Nobel Prize-winners and similar luminaries might have a 6 or a 7, and anything beyond that is the work of technology, aliens or both.

It's useful to think of the ability scores as the equivalent to a Star Academy entrance exam. They represent your character's natural gifts, which you'll hone with the specific skills and talents you've learned. But because they're inherent gifts, you can always count on them, even when you haven't received training in a specific skill for the task at hand.

Use Personality as a dump stat only at your peril. This ain't that kind of RPG.

If you're statistically minded, you can think of 3 as the mean on a bell curve, and each whole number up or down representing a standard deviation.

HOW TO ASSIGN ABILITY SCORES

The short answer: Ask your GM. Here are some options:

- *Old-School Rolling:* Roll 1d4 + 2 in order for Strength, Agility, Vitality, Intelligence, Focus and Personality. Warning: You may get nonviable or entirely-too-viable characters this way.
- *Old School, Configurable:* Roll 1d4 + 2 six times, then assign your results to whichever ability scores you like. This reduces but doesn't eliminate the risk of nonviable characters, and it makes the too-good characters even better.
- *Standard Array:* Take (6, 5, 4, 4, 4, 3) and assign them to whichever ability scores you like. This gives you a balanced character who's specialized enough to be interesting and broad-based enough to tackle a wide array of challenges.
- *Other Arrays:* If you don't like the standard array, pick one of the following and arrange as you see fit: (5, 5, 5, 5, 3, 3); (5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 4); (6, 6, 3, 3, 3, 3).
- *Point Buy:* You start with 12 points to spend and a score of 3 in all six ability scores. Upgrading an ability score to 4 costs 1 of your points. Upgrading to a 5 costs 3 points, and getting a 6 costs 6. If you reverse-engineer any of the arrays above, you'll see they work out to 12 points each.

- *Gonzo Point Buy:* As above, but you start with 15 points. Or hell, 18. This changes the *ALTERNITY* game from "assumed competence" to "assumed eliteness," but for the campaign you're envisioning, that might be OK. After all, it's not like the GM is going to run out of deathbots and void aliens to throw at you.

SEVENS AND TWOS

All the ability score techniques outlined in this section share one characteristic: They generate results between 3 (human average) and 6 (human elite) for each ability score. But what about a character who's a 7? Or a 2?

Ability Score 7: Our reluctance to start characters with an ability score of 7 is twofold. First, we want the character to have room to grow over the next nine levels. Second, in a point-buy system, that 7 can leave glaring weaknesses in other areas. If you and your GM are determined to try it, though, use the following array: (7, 4, 4, 3, 3, 3). In a point-buy setup, the 7 costs 10 points.

Ability Score 2: Our reluctance to allow starting ability scores of 2 is likewise twofold. First, we want to avoid sidelining players when their character's weakest ability score turns out to be crucial in an encounter. *ALTERNITY* adventures test characters in all sorts of ways, and we want characters to have baseline competence whether it's a furious firefight, a technological puzzle or a tense negotiation. Second, we don't like the implied causality of a below-average score in a point-buy situation: "I'm extra strong *because* I chose to be dumb as a brick."

That said, if you and your GM want to include characters with a starting score of 2, try the (6, 6, 4, 3, 3, 2) array. In a point-buy setup, each 2 you accept in your starting array gives you one extra point to spend elsewhere.

ABILITY RATINGS AS ROLEPLAYING HOOKS

Your ability ratings are just numbers on your character sheet; they influence but don't determine how you roleplay your character. If you want to portray yourself as the "smartest man alive," you don't need an Intelligence score of 7. You can play yourself as Int 7 in routine moments, but sometimes you overthink things in crises and that's why there's a 6 on your character sheet. Likewise, you can channel your inner Vorkosigan but play a sickly character. Act like you have Vitality 2, and when the chips are down, fate smiles and you find enough inner reserve to eke out something equivalent to the Vitality 3 written on your character sheet.

SPECIES

ALTERNITY aliens are more than just humans with animal heads or prosthetic ears. They have physiologies and outlooks that are, well, *alien*.

In some campaigns—including many modern-day, post-apocalyptic and solar-era settings—humans will be the only available species choice. In galactic-era *ALTERNITY* games, there might be dozens of species to choose from. Ask your GM for guidance, then choose a species for your character.

Regardless of your choice, *ALTERNITY* species are intentionally straightforward mechanically. You'll obtain a few species-specific advantages and disadvantages, and you may get access to a talent constellation unique to that species. If there are powerful species benefits, you'll make talent choices to unlock them (talents are explained later in this chapter).

Ability Requirements: As you look at the species descriptions below, take careful note of the ability score requirements. If you have your heart set on a nesh character, for example, make sure you've got a Focus score of at least 4.

Future *ALTERNITY* sourcebooks will introduce more species, and you can invent your own as well.

HUMAN

"We are humans from the planet Earth. We come in peace. No, really. Hey now, quit laughing. I'm serious!"

In many campaigns set in the present day or near future, this is the only species available. (To be fair, most of the players at your table are baseline humans.) If you're playing a baseline human, move on to the heroic archetypes section and start picking talents and skills. Humans are the baseline for a reason; the other species have advantages and disadvantages compared to the human standard.

Game Rules: Humans are the baseline character choice. You have no ability score requirements, special advantages or unusual vulnerabilities.

Human Variants: In more futuristic settings, humans have employed gene therapy, pharmaceuticals and other techniques to adapt themselves for low- and high-gravity environments. If you're running a game set in the Solar Era or later, consider the following two human variants in addition to baseline humans.

HUMAN (ELAPHROMORPH)

Adapted for microgravity environments, elaphromorphs (called "laphs" in slang) look like particularly tall, skinny humans. From before birth, they've received treatments to counter the pernicious

effects of microgravity on the human body, and now they're as comfortable in zero-g as baseline humans are on Earth.

Game Rules: Elaphromorphs function like other humans, with the following exceptions.

- **Ability Scores:** To play an elaphromorph, you must have an Agility score of at least 4. You cannot have a Strength score higher than 3.
- **Zero-G Familiarity:** You gain a +2 step bonus on *Acrobatics* checks in low-gravity environments.
- **Heavy-G Vulnerability:** All penalties in high- and extreme-gravity environments are –1 step worse for you.

Quirks: Growing up in a low-gravity environment changes your behaviors in some significant ways, including:

- You find it difficult to sleep in an old-fashioned bed or on the ground; tethered sleep-cocoons are more restful for you.
- Visual arts that can be viewed from multiple "up" perspectives are fascinating to you, and you're often craning your neck to get a different angle on something.
- A lifetime in microgravity has made you something of a neat freak, apt to secure loose objects and put things away when you're done with them.

HUMAN (BAROMORPH)

Referred to colloquially as "barrels," baromorphs are broad, stocky humans who've received therapy throughout their lives to enable them to withstand sustained exposure to heavy gravity. The high-gravity environments in the solar system are inhospitable for other reasons (temperature, pressure), so baromorphs exist mostly in Stellar Era and Galactic Era games that have reached out to nearby stars.

They aren't necessarily short, and they don't necessarily have beards.

Game Rules: Baromorphs function like other humans, with the following exceptions.

- **Ability Scores:** To play a baromorph character, you must have a Strength score of at least 4. You cannot have an Agility score higher than 3.
- **High-G Adaptation:** Baromorphs suffer no penalty from high-G environments and reduce the penalty for extreme-G environments by –2 steps.
- **Zero-G Clumsiness:** All penalties in zero- and low-gravity environments are –1 step worse for you.
- **Load-Bearing Frame:** A useful side effect of high-gravity adaptation is that your skeletomuscular system is well suited

to carrying heavy loads. The penalties for encumbrance are always one category lower for you.

Quirks: Growing up in a high-gravity environment changes your behaviors in some significant ways:

- You're used to every motion taking extra effort, so your body language has an economy of motion. When you sit still, you're almost entirely motionless.
- A fall of just a meter or two can be injurious or fatal where you come from. While you don't necessarily have a fear of heights, you're definitely wary on ledges and balconies.
- Even with your adaptations, living and working in high-G environments is stressful and exhausting. When you can, you work a nap or *siesta* into your daily routine.

ANDROID

"We are the machines you cannot stop tinkering with, the servants who anticipate your every need and the toys that endlessly amuse. We are the creation that supplants the creator, the never-living yet immortal and your descendants yet never your children.

"Whence came these paradoxes? Look in a mirror. Every contra-diction within us is an inheritance from you."

"Android" is a broad term, but in this context, it refers to realistic imi-tations of human life: nonbiological constructs that appear and act human, yet are constructed of electronics and carbon fiber, not flesh and bone. While they may have some biological systems, they're fundamentally robots ... with human appearances, human capabili-ties and human desires.

Created as workers and companions, androids nevertheless have independent legal status in most campaign settings. Some NPCs may distrust them in Solar Era campaigns, but by the Galactic Era, they're a routine part of daily life.

A campaign setting where some or all PCs are androids without legal rights is rich with drama, but it's absolutely a "talk to your table first" situation.

Description and Physiology: On the surface, you appear human—unless you're intentionally marking your android status with a visible tattoo, unusual skin coloration or other marker. Your innards are a mass of electronics, artificial organs and various lubricat-ing fluids.

While you aren't human, your artificial body does need to con-sume oxygen periodically, and your brain must reboot and perform routine maintenance (a process that takes you offline, much like biological sleep). You do not need to eat, though you must drink on occasion to replenish fluids. You excrete waste in such minute quantities that it's generally vaporized and exhaled.

Game Rules: Your artificial nature gives you significant advantages and disadvantages.

- **Ability Scores:** To play an android character, you must have a Vitality score of at least 4. You cannot have a Personality score higher than 4.
- **Disengage the Safeties:** As a 2-impulse action, you can grant yourself a +2 step bonus on checks that use Strength, Agility or Vitality (choose one each time you use this ability). You decide how long the bonus lasts; take one wound box of damage (in the lowest row available) per impulse you have the bonus active. You don't take damage during the impulses you spend disengaging the safeties, but you must maintain the bonus throughout the subsequent action. If you use the bonus to make a 3-impulse attack action, for example, you'll take three boxes of damage.
- **Reprogrammable:** When you assign your skills, choose 4 points of technical skills (spread out as you like) that you can reprogram to different technical skills as you wish. The new skills can't exceed the skill point maximum, and reprogramming yourself takes time and/or resources. Your GM will let you know what it takes to download a new technical skill. In general, the time/resource cost is a hurdle but not a barrier.
- **Ageless:** You do not age and will live indefinitely, although you're subject to accidents, violence and periodic component breakdowns as usual. In most *ALTERNITY* campaigns this won't have any direct game effect, but it may influence your attitude toward long-term planning and the aging and dying humans around you.
- **Artificial Life:** When you are wounded, traditional first aid is of only limited use because your insides are high-tech circuitry, not flesh and blood. *Medicine* checks to provide you with battlefield treatment take a −2 step penalty. On the plus side, you can also receive battlefield treatment from a successful use of the *Mechanics* skill (it works like *Medicine* for you, without the −2 step penalty). Instead of medical supplies, mechanical and electrical tools are relevant for your "doctor." Depending on their quality, they count as a medical kit, trauma kit or med pack.
- **Oblivious:** While your sensory apparatus functions fine, you lack millennia of instinct that hones your fight-or-flight decisions, and you have difficulty decoding body language. As a result, you cannot spend skill points in *Awareness* or *Empathy*.

Species Talents: Androids have exclusive access to the Artificial Systems talent constellation.

Technology: Androids use technology as humans do, though they tend to be more patient with recalcitrant machines and computers. It would be facile to say androids feel a profound kinship with machines, but many androids share code with early AIs designed as human-machine interfaces, and echoes of that inclination toward patient service remain.

Culture and Outlook: Androids don't generally have a culture of their own, but they're astute observers of culture and keenly aware of their place within a given social setting. In many androids, that desire to observe tugs against a desire to participate—to truly belong. In most places, androids are the minority, but they're programmed to contribute and inclined to prove themselves as worthwhile citizens, coworkers and friends.

Quirks: Some ideas to make your android character distinctive:

- Despite advanced programming and keen observation, many androids are uncomfortable expressing strong emotion. They worry it will seem inauthentic or inappropriate to the situation. You *feel* as strongly as an organic human, but you don't always make those feelings as obviously visible.
- No android can be programmed from the start with the depth and breadth of human experience, so you're wired to seek understanding of the people and cultures that surround you. Many androids have a childlike (though not childish) curiosity and ask frequent questions of their organic compatriots.
- A key aspect of your character is how you feel about humanity and your place within society. Do you wish you were human? Do you want to prove the worth of artificial life so that the biological and mechanical can live together in harmony? Or do you see organic humans as ancestors who are rapidly becoming obsolete?

It's one briith, two briith. Collectively, they're "the briith," and they have briith objects. How easy is that?

Sample Names: Mariya, Adam Fourteen, Shelley Navigator. Depending on the setting, androids may take on ordinary human names, have only a personal name or have a numeric or occupational designation instead of a surname.

BRIITH

"We have no interest in empty words. Deeds are the measure of the briith—do not talk, DO. Share our work and share our dangers if you want to call us your friends. We will do the same for you."

Hulking bipeds native to a high-G world, briith are strong, hardy creatures with a well-deserved reputation as brawlers and mercenaries. Briith like a challenge, especially a physical one, and rarely shrink from combat or other forms of danger. While many humans see briith as short-tempered and violent, that's an unfair interpretation of briith directness. Briith often demonstrate incredible patience and can be very deliberate in their decision-making. Most briith won't do anything until they know what the stakes are and how they're getting paid, but once a fair deal has been struck, they'll follow through on their part or die trying.
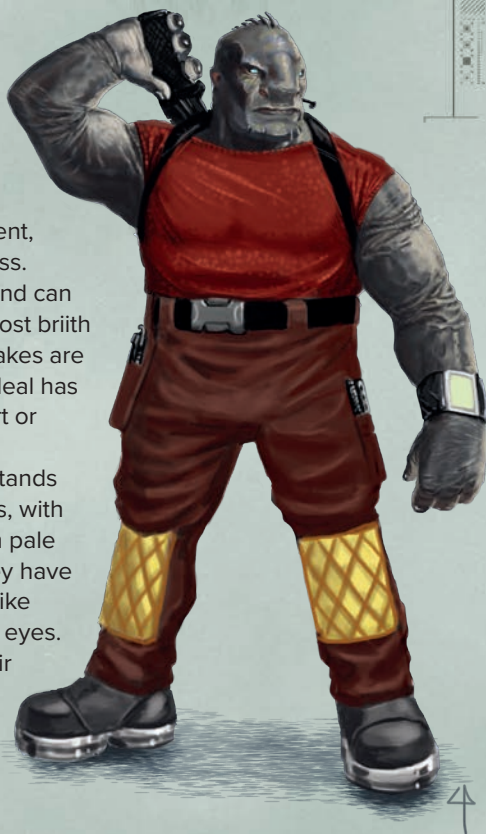
Physical Description: The average briith stands almost 2 meters tall and weighs over 120 kilos, with a tough, pebbly hide that ranges in color from pale blue or dark mustard to a mottled purple. They have four-fingered hands and four-toed feet, crag-like chins, heavy brows and small, deep-set black eyes. In place of hair, they have wiry tendrils on their heads; males often have tendrils around the jaw and cheekbones like human beards or sideburns, while females have longer, finer tendrils that cover more of their scalps.

Game Rules: Briith are strong and tough, but slow. They make excellent battlers and revel in close combat.

- **Ability Scores:** To play a briith, you must have a Strength score of at least 4. Your Agility can be no higher than 4, and your Intelligence no higher than 5.
- **Tough Hide:** Briith have a natural armor with a resistance of 1. You can add this to the value of any armor you wear.
- **Slow Reflexes:** Briith take a –1 step penalty on initiative checks; briith generally don't win fast-draw contests.
- **High-G Adaptation:** Briith suffer no penalty from high-G environments and reduce the penalty for extreme-G environments by 2 steps.

A briith is a good candidate for a 7 or 2 ability rating. See the sidebar earlier in this chapter.

Species Talents: Briith have exclusive access to the Powerful Build talent constellation.

Briith Technology: In starfaring settings, briith are nearly equal to humans in technological progress. They tend to be engineers rather than researchers and hard-minded traders instead of entrepreneurs—briith are slow to innovate new technologies but excel in building devices that are sturdy, functional and highly reliable. Briith warships tend to be heavily armored and well-armed, but somewhat

slower than the warships of other races. Briith power plants and pro-jectile weapons are especially well developed, and in some cases exceed the performance of similar human systems.

If the briith themselves do not have space travel, individual briith (or sometimes briith companies) often seek work as soldiers-for-hire, enforcers, deckhands or engineers on the ships of other races. Briith have no problem working for someone else, as long as it's a fair deal.

In non-starfaring settings, briith sometimes show up as geneti-cally engineered soldiers or laborers; their strength and hardiness make them well-suited for both heavy labor and war.

Culture and Outlook: Briith trace family relationships to dis-tant cousins several times removed. Families in turn hold gener-ations-old alliances or feuds with each other, competing to place their scions in the best trade guilds or companies. Briith society is highly egalitarian; some families are certainly wealthier and more influential than others, but the idea of aristocracy or royal houses is completely foreign to them.

Briith tend to be practical, focused and not terribly curious about things that don't immediately concern them. That doesn't mean they're stupid—it means they're single-minded in the pursuit of their chosen profession and regard anything else as a waste of their time. They are a direct and pragmatic race who tend to speak plainly and stand by their word once given. In return, briith expect people of other races to be forthcoming with them, and they are deeply annoyed by evasiveness or failure to follow through on commitments.

Quirks: Some ideas for making your briith character distinctive:

- Briith relish hand-me-down family stories and seem to have a family anecdote for every occasion. Make up a few ances-tors whose stories you tell over and over again.
- Briith have the best poker faces of all time.
- You often collect small gifts for family back home or make them with idle pastimes such as whittling or scrimshaw.
- Briith are very likely to go into the family business. If you do, you're proud of following many generations of family tradi-tion. If you don't, you have an epic story about why you don't fit in and which ancestor you actually take after.

Some Briith bestow use-names on non-Briith they consider friends.

Briith Names: Brambavol Thuu, Dheriimog Amma, Flaamodigo Hod, Jorjordeth Drinu, Kajador Vok, Miindravum Mathon. Like many human cultures, briith give their family names first, followed by a use-name. The use-names are almost always one syllable for male and two syllables for female and are usually descriptive in some way—for example, Thuu means "tower," and is commonly bestowed on a briith who looks like he'll be tall and strong.

NESH

"We greet you in the name of the All-Tree. Ever may it grow and nourish the motes of brilliance in the blackest of night. Though you lack rapport, like seeds that cannot germinate, we greet you as friends, fellow gardeners in the Endless Grove."

It's one nesh, two nesh. Collectively, they're "the nesh," and they have neshi objects.

The nesh are mystically minded aliens from a forest planet covered with a network of sentient trees, each large enough to cover a continent. The nesh are a caretaker species dedicated to tending the unimaginably old, largely inscrutable sentient plant, which they call the All-Tree. Over the last several centuries, the All-Tree has asked less and less of the nesh, which has freed them to develop an independent culture and explore nearby space. The symbiotic relationship between nesh and the All-Tree runs deep, though, and even the nesh who live among other species live rich interior lives, ever contemplating the peace and timeless wisdom of the All-Tree.

Description and Physiology: The nesh are gaunt bipeds about 1.5 to 1.8 meters in height, with large eyes and hairless skin humans regard as lizard-like. Their limbs and hands are likewise similar to those of humans, which caused much puzzlement among the nesh when they first contacted humans. The nesh believe the similarity cannot be a coincidence and most think humans are caretakers of the All-Tree who were somehow orphaned long ago (if the nesh are friendly) or have exiled themselves as renegades (if the nesh are hostile).

The nesh are not born so much as they're extruded from pods on the All-Tree and they adopt a gender only as it's convenient (such as when talking to humans in a gendered language). Nesh likewise understand childhood and aging only in the academic sense; they continue to live until injury renders them useless to the All-Tree or they're destroyed by some misfortune. They don't regard their own deaths as inevitable, though they have a strong self-preservation instinct rooted in the belief that the All-Tree needs the nesh to thrive.

To gain sustenance, nesh extend vine-like feeding tubes from their mouth. The tubes, which extend almost a meter, can break down plant matter and water into the nutrition and hydration a nesh needs to live.

Game Rules: Most of a nesh's special abilities are mental—the result of "rapport," their telepathic communion with the All-Tree.

- **Ability Scores:** To play a nesh, you must have a Focus score of at least 4. You cannot have a Strength score higher than 4.
- **Empathic Rapport:** While the nesh direct their telepathic abilities toward the All-Tree, they can pick up flashes of insight from nearby sentient creatures. You gain a +2 step bonus on *Empathy* checks to assess someone's mood. That rapport leaves the nesh's mind more open, however, and nesh suffer a −2 step penalty on *Willpower* checks to avoid mental manipulation.
- **Neshi Telepathy:** By tapping into the species-wide rapport, nesh can telepathically communicate with other willing nesh within 10 meters. The conversation proceeds at an extraordinarily slow pace—one-tenth the rate of verbal communication.
- **Nictitating Membranes:** Instead of eyelids, neshi eyes have multiple transparent lenses that cover the eyes to aid in vision. Irritants in the atmosphere such as dust, smoke or tear gas don't impede a nesh. Conversely, nesh cannot close their eyes, so they suffer an extra −1 step penalty from bright flashes of light.
- **Green Digit:** From the moment of its creation, every nesh possesses a deep racial knowledge of botany, granting them a +2 step bonus on all *Science (botany)* checks.
- **Guileless:** A nesh can lie, but they are loath to do so and are often unconvincing. A nesh cannot spend skill points in *Deception*.

Species Talents: Nesh have exclusive access to the Rapport talent constellation.

Technology: Neshi technology tends to be equivalent to that of humans, but much more of it is biological rather than mechanical. The nesh, superior botanists and geneticists, custom-grow non-sentient organisms that parallel human technological devices. The nesh understand human technologies, but they regard them with suspicion or pity, for they are "cold" and "incapable of union with the All-Tree."

Among the more controversial human technologies the nesh have observed is cyberware, which most nesh find appalling, but a minority are drawn to in a mildly transgressive way. Conversely, humans are keenly interested in how the neshi "rapport" connects them with each other and the All-Tree, even across interplanetary distances. Thus far the nesh have allowed only preliminary studies of the rapport phenomenon.

Culture and Outlook: The nesh strive to live according to the will of the All-Tree—but the All-Tree communicates on such a slow scale that the nesh have heard nothing coherent in centuries. And when the All-Tree provides new insights, it's not with a discrete broadcast, but with a slowly dawning telepathic awareness that all nesh share.

What are the mystic beliefs and practices of the nesh? That's up to the nesh player and the GM to decide—preferably over time. We imagine the nesh as contemplative warrior-monks who gently proselytize about the "wonders of the All-Tree" but see themselves more as scouts and ambassadors than as converters. It isn't difficult to imagine a more sinister All-Tree, however, keen on transplanting the nesh and their beliefs across the galaxy.

Quirks: Some notes to make your nesh character distinctive:

- While the nesh understand individuality, they think foremost in terms of their union with the All-Tree, and they've been known to mix up the "I" and "we" pronouns.
- When humans sleep, a nesh assumes they're meditating and might ask, "How insightful was your communing last night?"
- When they're not on a planet's surface (such as a starship or orbital station), nesh associate plants with comfort and luxury. Visit a nesh's stateroom, and you'll think you walked into a greenhouse.
- The nesh are fascinated with human death—especially the fact that humans know they'll die at some point yet carry on regardless. More academically minded nesh learn all they can about human art and customs that involve death; everything from heavy-metal skull motifs to Mozart's *Requiem* can be a source of wonderment and contemplation.

Sample Names: Saesha, Launaeth, Eanihri, Vouthahn, Whaem, Uhlan. Nesh receive a single name when the All-Tree releases them from a pod, and they retain that name as long as they live. Their names rarely have hard consonant sounds, and blended vowels are prominent.

XAYON

"You humans are proud of all you've made, and you should be. But just as your nations rose and fell, so too will your species. Oh, I'm sure you humans have plenty of life left in you, but nothing lasts forever. Someone smarter, faster and more aggressive will come along. And maybe... we already have."

Xayons are hybrids, a species created just decades ago when human explorers encountered an alien species with the propensity

It's one xayon, two xayons. Collectively, they're "xayons," and they have xayonic objects.

to steal other beings' genetic codes and adapt them to create new life that combined the advantages of both species.

In the Xayon system where this hybrid species emerged, no trace remains of either the human explorers or whatever creature served as the xayons' other "parent." The hybrids were isolated on the planet Xayon for almost two decades before a second human ship landed and discovered how the original explorers had been subsumed into a new life form. At first, the xayons were taken from their planet in captivity, but they demonstrated intellect, curiosity and self-awareness at least equal to their human captors. After inter-minable legal battles, they won their freedom, and now the xayons live as an oppressed, often misunderstood subculture wherever humans can be found.

Description and Physiology: Xayons are six-limbed creatures that show signs of their human heritage, but they are decidedly alien. Their limbs are arranged to look a bit like Earth's mythical cen-taurs, but the torso between the middle and hindmost legs is much shorter and more catlike than equestrian. The front-most limbs are used for manipulation, the hindmost limbs for locomotion and the middle limbs can be used for either. Xayons ordinarily walk on their hind limbs, but when they need to run, they can achieve great speeds by employing their middle limbs to sprint like quadrupeds. Xayonic limbs and joints are also uncommonly flexible with a wide range of motion and the ability to stretch in length—sometimes by 20 percent or more.

Most xayons have hair only at the extremities: top of head and forelimbs. They breed as humans do (though multiple births in "litters" are far more common), but external sex organs are difficult to discern at a distance. Most humans can't tell male and female xayons apart.

While some humans regard xayons as "gene-thieves" and freak-show abominations, the species breeds true and displays none of the adaptive genetics of whatever alien parent combined with their human ancestors.

Game Rules: Xayons are nimble, elusive and aggressive, though they aren't feral as human hate groups make them out to be.

Ordinary humans can't shake how "twisted," "protean" or "just plain creepy" xayons look.

- **Ability Scores:** To play a xayon, you must have an Agility score of at least 4. You cannot have a Focus higher than 4.
- **Flexibility:** Xayons' flexible, extensible limbs grant them a +1 step bonus on *Acrobatics* checks.
- **Instinctive Dodge:** When you use the evade action modifier (see Chapter 5), enemies attacking you suffer an additional −1 step penalty beyond whatever penalty they'd normally suffer for attacking a dodging target.

- **Quadruped Sprint:** As a 2-impulse action, you can drop into a quadruped stance, alter your middle knee joints and extend your middle limbs to make you a fast runner. If you do, you lose the use of those arms to hold or manipulate objects, but your speed increases to 30 meters per move action. It takes another 2-impulse action to return to a bipedal stance with four working "arms."
- **Limited Ambidexterity:** When in a bipedal stance, a xayon can use any of its four arms to hold and manipulate objects. Xayons have no inborn talent for multitasking, however, and can generally concentrate on the action of only two limbs at a time.
- **Nearsighted:** Xayons have poor depth perception and suffer a –1 step penalty on all ranged attacks and *Awareness* checks against targets more than 10 meters away.

Species Talents: Xayons have exclusive access to the Limb Articulation talent constellation.

Technology: Xayons were living in packs of hunter-gatherers when the humans encountered them, but the second generation of the species has grown up in human society and has had some access to human education and technology. Xayons tend to be pragmatic about the tech they use and adopt whatever is handy, except for garb. Human clothing and armor fits their six-limbed bodies only poorly, and it can be a struggle to find xayon-specific outfits.

Chairs and beds are likewise a challenge. Xayons tend to make nests of blankets on the floor and sleep there, and they fold their limbs together and sit double-cross-legged on chairs. It's as uncomfortable as it looks, and many xayons would rather pace around a room than sit down.

Culture and Outlook: Xayonic culture centers around the pack, usually a collection of a half-dozen related families. Acting for mutual welfare, the pack generally breeds within itself and deals with the larger human society only as it must. In many places, xayons are besieged by overt or subtle prejudice, which they naturally resent and resist in a vicious cycle. Even where xayons are treated better, they tend toward lower socioeconomic tiers.

As for outlook, most xayons are devoted to obtaining some semblance of equal rights and opportunity within human society. Some individual xayons do so by joining human institutions and attempting to excel and thus dispel prejudices humans have about the supposedly feral, "gene-thieving" xayons. Others are more hostile and actively rebel against human society, while a third ethos believes coexistence isn't possible and the xayons should find an untamed world somewhere away from humanity and settle there. (One particularly radical faction believes the planet Xayon, still under quarantine, should be that untamed world.)

Quirks: Some notes to make your xayon character distinctive:

- The xayons inherited the human capacity for language, but their vocal cords aren't always up to the task. Xayons can't sing, and they have gruff, growling voices.
- Every xayon knows a few tricks that rely on having four limbs, like an elaborate clapping sequence or a bit of impressive juggling.
- Xayons tend to become morose under conditions of enforced solitude. Their companions don't have to be other xayons, though—even human or alien companionship is better than being lonely.
- Many xayons wear eyeglasses, even though their depth perception problem lies deep in their brains, not in their eyes. In futures where eyeglasses are antiques, xayons wear them for aesthetic reasons; they think it makes them look more civilized.

Sample Names: Artem Gutless, Rhuvek Swift, Gharra Sulky, Dreufa Bald. Almost all xayon first names have an *r* sound somewhere in them. Their last names are intentional mockeries of human surnames. When a xayon reaches adolescence, the parents choose a last name for the teenager, often an adjective meant ironically.

A xayon PC confronting the alien who spawned the species in the first place? There's a recipe for drama.

HEROIC ARCHETYPES

With ability scores and species settled, it's time to get to the meat of character creation: deciding what your character knows how to do. You begin by selecting a heroic archetype, which provides the basic framework of knowledge and training your character possesses. When you choose an archetype, you're essentially saying, "In terms of gameplay, this is the *style* of character I want to be." In many ways, it's the gameplay parallel to the dramatic concept you came up with when you started this character.

This chapter presents five heroic archetypes: the battler, the expert, the leader, the striker, and the survivor. Your choice of archetype guides you in selecting the exact **skills** and **talents** that your character knows when you begin adventuring, and provides you with a couple of **archetype bonuses** that help you throughout your career.

- **Talents** are special edges that set you apart from everyone else. You choose three talents when you create your character. Talents are presented in groups called **constellations**; naturally, you must begin with the first talent in the constellation.
- **Skills** reflect your training and education. When you assign skill points to a skill, you improve your skill score, making it easier to succeed at checks against that skill. Skills fall into five broad types: attack, defense, technical, social and environmental.
- **Archetype bonuses** include minor advantages such as bonuses on initiative checks or bonuses on your checks with specific types of skills. They reinforce your archetype by making you better at the things you're supposed to be good at.

You'll find a list of skills and talent constellations later in this chapter; the full descriptions of each skill and talent are in Chapter 3. Archetype bonuses are described under each archetype.

Archetypes have a roleplaying function beyond their gameplay aspects, too. A battler and an expert may both have 5 skill points in *Hand to Hand*, but they might envision those skills differently. The battler tends to be more of a no-holds-barred alley brawler, while the expert can talk endlessly about the Descending Crane stance versus the Lion Rampant school.

Unlike classes, archetypes don't matter as you level up. Develop however you like!

Archetypes aren't character classes, and *ALTERNITY* doesn't rely on combined-arms strategy. In a tabletop fantasy game or MMORPG, it might be important to have a tank, a healer and three DPS characters in your group, but that isn't true in *ALTERNITY*. A group composition of battler/striker/leader isn't necessarily better or worse than survivor/survivor/survivor. The archetypes are so broad that the character sheets for those three survivors will likely look *very* different.

As you make up your character, though, this stage is the perfect time to check in with the other players at your table. You may find useful common ground ("Hey, you're into stealth? Me too! What if we were *all* stealthy...?") and can plug some gaps if necessary ("The GM hinted at a lot of hacking—who's spending skill points on *Computers*?").

THE BATTLER

Battlers dish out tons of damage in combat, and they don't mind receiving their fair share in return. In battle, they tend to opt for the straightforward and the brutal, but their tactics are no less effective for it. The battler suspects other archetypes complicate matters unnecessarily. What matters is you can stand long enough to unload a planet of hurt on the enemy.

Beyond the battlefield, battlers bring the same "prove you can stop me" attitude toward many challenges. There's nothing wrong with a brute-force approach to cryptography, for example, if it gets you into the database. What they call "elegant solutions," you call "wasted effort." To their friends, battlers are steadfast and reliable. To their rivals, battlers are stubborn and incapable of nuance.

When you choose the battler archetype, you gain:

- *Mandated Talent:* Choose Gunner, Melee Expert, Rugged or Trooper.
- *Discretionary Talents:* Choose two more talents. These two talents cannot be from the same constellation, but one of them *can* be from the same constellation as your mandated talent.

- *Mandated Skills:* Choose one skill in each of the following categories: attack, defense, technical, social and environmental. Assign 4 skill points to each skill you select.
- *Discretionary Skills:* You have 15 more skill points to spend on additional skills and improve your mandated skills. You can't begin play with a total of more than 5 skill points in any individual skill.
- *Defensive Skill Bonus:* You have a +1 step bonus on skill checks with defensive skills you are trained in (have at least 1 skill point assigned).
- *Extra Durability:* Treat your Vitality as 1 higher than your actual score when you determine how many wounds you can withstand (see Durability).

If *ALTERNITY* were an MMORPG, battlers would be the tanks. *ALTERNITY* has a lot more non-combat challenges than the typical video game, though.

THE EXPERT

Experts know what the right device for the job is, and they're adroit at manipulating that device—sometimes beyond its intended use. To an expert, a weapon is a tool like any other, and different tools suit different jobs. Whether it's a heavily customized assault rifle, a remote turret, a surveillance drone or a dune buggy with flame-throwers, the expert is the quintessential gun nut and gearhead.

Because they see the world in terms of tools and tasks, experts break down non-combat problems to a series of discrete tasks, then solve each one in turn. They can be capable hackers, pilots, mechanics or saboteurs—just give them the gear and they'll get right to work.

To their friends, experts are a font of knowledge and a source for borrowed equipment. To their rivals, experts drone on about pointless gear specs, and they're always trying to get machines to do the work for them.

If you want to be an expert, you gain the following:

The expert is *ALTERNITY*'s nod to skill-monkey classes in other game systems. They shoot a gun as well as anyone, mind you.

- *Mandated Talent:* Choose Drone Expert, Gearhead, Gunner or Medic.
- *Discretionary Talents:* Choose two more talents. These two talents cannot be from the same constellation, but one of them *can* be from the same constellation as your mandated talent.
- *Mandated Skills:* Choose one skill in each of the following categories: attack, defense, technical, social and environmental. Assign 4 skill points to each skill you select.
- *Discretionary Skills:* You have 15 more skill points to spend on additional skills and improve your mandated skills. You can't begin play with a total of more than 5 skill points in any individual skill.
- *Initiative Bonus:* You have a +1 step bonus on initiative checks.

- *Technical Skill Bonus:* You have a +1 step bonus on skill checks with technical skills you are trained in (have at least 1 skill point assigned).

THE LEADER

Leaders focus on the success of their team, and they're aren't satisfied until each team member is usefully contributing to the overall goal. They relish opportunities to make other people better, whether it's by suggesting tactics, performance coaching or doing the less glamorous tasks that enable others to shine.

A leader is a leader whether the bullets are flying or not. In a crisis, leaders gather suggestions from the group and synthesize them into a plan—and then they help the team get their various jobs done. A good leader is a "force multiplier" for a team, making them collectively more effective than they'd ever be individually.

To their friends, leaders have a listener's ear, a shoulder to weep on and a head for good advice. To their rivals, leaders are bossy fussbuckets who cling to their precious plans long after the situation's gone to hell.

When you decide to be a leader, gain the following:

In a tabletop RPG, *Enterprise* captains are good models for leader behavior. Watch how often they solicit input from their staff and how rarely they bark out direct orders.

- *Mandated Talent:* Choose Alertness, Closer, Commander or Gunslinger.
- *Discretionary Talents:* Choose two more talents. These two talents cannot be from the same constellation, but one of them *can* be from the same constellation as your mandated talent.
- *Mandated Skills:* Choose one skill in each of the following categories: attack, defense, technical, social and environmental. Assign 4 skill points to each skill you select.
- *Discretionary Skills:* You have 15 more skill points to spend on additional skills and improve your mandated skills. You can't begin play with a total of more than 5 skill points in any individual skill.
- *Initiative Bonus:* You have a +1 step bonus on initiative checks.
- *Social Skill Bonus:* You have a +1 step bonus on skill checks with social skills you are trained in (have at least 1 skill point assigned).

THE STRIKER

Strikers understand you don't control the battlefield until it's clear of enemies, so eliminating them with maximum speed and efficiency is the ultimate goal. To that end, there's no caliber too big and no barrel too long ... though magazine capacity sure could see some improvement.

Away from a fight, strikers maintain that "maximum impact in minimum time" attitude. Why build a network of informants within the sinister megacorp when you can just kidnap the board of directors and intimidate them into giving you the info you need?

To their friends, strikers are known for getting the job done, often in the nick of time. Their rivals think they're overly focused on their individual goals, though, losing sight of the big picture.

If you want to be a striker, you gain the following:

- *Mandated Talent:* Choose Commando, Elusive, Gunslinger or Striking Martial Arts.
- *Discretionary Talents:* Choose two more talents. These two talents cannot be from the same constellation, but one of them *can* be from the same constellation as your mandated talent.
- *Mandated Skills:* Choose one skill in each of the following categories: attack, defense, technical, social and environmental. Assign 4 skill points to each skill you select.
- *Discretionary Skills:* You have 15 more skill points to spend on additional skills and improve your mandated skills. You can't begin play with a total of more than 5 skill points in any individual skill.
- *Damage Bonus:* You gain a +1 bonus on your damage roll when you make a successful attack.
- *Initiative Bonus:* You have a +2 step bonus on initiative checks.

You guessed it. In a video game, these guys would be straight-up DPS.

THE SURVIVOR

Survivors persevere despite the longest odds, but unlike battlers, they do it in a low-observable sort of way. The sniper who's patiently downing enemy officers from a safe distance, the skirmisher who plants the grav-mines in the tree line and the messenger who summons the proverbial cavalry are all survivor archetypes. They care little for the glamour and prefer not to be noticed, preferring the silent self-satisfaction of a job well done.

That quiet subtlety extends to other aspects of the survivor's life as well. The leaders might like an efficient division of labor, but survivors prefer self-sufficiency. If we can all do a bit of everything, the survivor thinks, no one is irreplaceable, and the work always gets done. Survivors tend to be patient and favor the long-term solution.

The survivors' friends know the survivor will get the job done without complaint or requests for assistance. Their rivals tear their hair out when a survivor goes it alone for the umpteenth time in a row.

If you're contemplating a one-player game or have a player with spotty attendance, the survivor's self-sufficiency may be just what you're looking for.

When you choose the survivor archetype, you gain:

- *Mandated Talent:* Choose Alertness, Commando, Sniper, or Spy.
- *Discretionary Talents:* Choose two more talents. These two talents cannot be from the same constellation, but one of them *can* be from the same constellation as your mandated talent.
- *Mandated Skills:* Choose one skill in each of the following categories: attack, defense, technical, social and environmental. Assign 4 skill points to each skill you select.
- *Discretionary Skills:* You have 15 more skill points to spend on additional skills and improve your mandated skills. You can't begin play with a total of more than 5 skill points in any individual skill.
- *Environmental Skill Bonus:* You have a +1 step bonus on skill checks with environmental skills you are trained in (have at least 1 skill point assigned).
- *Initiative Bonus:* You have a +1 step bonus on initiative checks.

FREEFORM CHARACTERS

Some characters defy labels, and some players love tinkering with character build after character build. This freeform system is for them. It'll produce a character just as flexible and just as powerful as one made with one of the archetypes above, but your choices are almost entirely unconstrained.

If you want to go beyond archetypes and make something unique, a freeform character begins with the following:

- *Discretionary Talents:* Choose three talents, each from a different constellation.
- *Mandated Skills:* Choose one skill in each of the following categories: attack, defense, technical, social and environmental. Assign 4 skill points to each skill you select.
- *Discretionary Skills:* You have 15 more skill points to spend on additional skills and improve your mandated skills. You can't begin play with a total of more than 5 skill points in any individual skill.
- *Freeform Bonus:* Choose from the battler's extra durability, the expert's technical skill bonus, the leader's social skill bonus, the striker's damage bonus or the survivor's environmental skill bonus.
- *Initiative Bonus:* You have a +1 step bonus on initiative checks.

TALENTS

Talents are the unique tactics, tricks, or techniques you've mastered. Each talent is a way you can "break the rules" a bit, performing an action faster, better or more efficiently than other characters. Each time you gain a level, you can choose a new talent.

We've arranged talents in constellations: groups that indicate which introductory talents lead to more advanced talents later on. Constellations are referred to by the name of the first talent in the constellation, so the constellation beginning with the Gunslinger talent is referred to as the Gunslinger constellation.

Some constellations branch into multiple talent paths, too.

You can find the list of specific talents and their descriptions in Chapter 3. The constellations presented there include:

Alertness: You act before others even know there's a problem.
Closer: You're all about studying people and closing the deal, whatever it is.
Commander: You're an excellent tactical leader.
Commando: You're an expert infiltrator.
Dirty Fighting: You don't fight fair.
Drone Expert: You excel at controlling drones in combat.
Elusive: You've got a knack for getting out of the way.
Gearhead: There's nothing you can't fix or jury-rig.
Gunner: Heavy weapons are your specialty.
Gunslinger: You're a pistol expert.
Inventor: You're a master of experimental technology.
Martial Arts, Grappling: You're good at unarmed combat, especially throws and holds.
Martial Arts, Striking: You're good at unarmed combat, especially punches and kicks.
Medic: You're an expert in battlefield medicine.
Melee Expert: Close combat is your thing, whether it's with ancient swords or nega-glaives.
Rugged: You can take serious punishment and keep going.
Sniper: You're a crack shot with a rifle.
Spy: You have a false identity and excel at getting into places you shouldn't be.
Trooper: You're an expert in assault tactics.
Species-Specific Talents
Artificial Systems (android): Your artificial body provides special advantages.
Limb Articulation (xayon): You can get the most out of your six limbs.
Powerful Build (briith): You're as big and tough as they come.
Rapport (nesh): You have mastered your empathic link.
Advanced Talents
Self-Improvement (requires 2nd level): You improve your base abilities.

When you gain a new talent selection, you can either start a new constellation or advance along an in-progress constellation. A few talents have special requirements beyond the structure of the constellation—you'll find any such restrictions in the talent description.

SKILLS

Your skills are simply areas of study that could be relevant to your heroic career. The amount of training you have in a particular skill is measured by the number of skill points you assign to it. The more skill points you assign to a skill, the more training you have, and the easier it is for you to succeed on a skill check. As a beginning hero, you can assign up to 5 skill points to a skill. When you gain a level, you gain 5 more skill points, and the maximum number of skill points you can assign to a skill increases by 1 (to a maximum of 10).

If you have 0 skill points in a skill, you're untrained in it. However, you can often fall back on your natural aptitude and attempt a skill check based on your ability score alone. You might not have any special training in *Acrobatics*, but when you're trying to balance on top of a moving car you might have enough raw Agility to pull it off despite your lack of training.

Being untrained is extra motivation to seek out those step bonuses.

Skills are divided into five types:

- attack (attempts to harm another, often with a weapon)
- defensive (attempts to avoid or mitigate injury or harmful physical effects)
- technical (using specialized learning, vocational training and advanced technology)
- social (observing nuances and winning conflicts on the inter-personal, nonviolent level)
- environmental (traversing the environment, terrain and set-ting of a scene, especially if it's somehow hazardous)

You can find detailed descriptions of each skill in Chapter 3.

ALTERNITY assumes competence, so your hero begins with at least some proficiency in each type of challenge. Even a mono-syllabic space trooper can have an intimidating glare (that's the *Coercion* social skill), and a barbarian queen from a primitive world can display a knack for battlefield remedies (the *Medicine* techni-cal skill).

Attack	Defensive	Technical	Social	Environmental
Energy Weapon	Armor Training	Academics	Coercion	Acrobatics
Firearm	Dodge	Computer	Culture	Athletics
Hand to Hand	Endurance	Engineering	Deception	Awareness
Heavy Weapon	Resilience	Mechanics	Empathy	Driving
Melee	Willpower	Medicine	Influence	Extreme Sports
Primitive Weapon		Profession	Misdirection	Piloting
		Science	Performance	Security
				Stealth
				Survival

GEAR

What's a great sci-fi action hero without a trusty ray gun at her side? A paranormal investigator without recording gear? A star marine without powered armor? You aren't ready for adventure until you equip yourself with the arms, armor and high-tech tools you need for whatever mission the GM plans to send your way. Before you start picking out your favorite energy weapons, ask your GM about the tech era of the setting and whether you should pick out your own gear.

You can assume your character has mundane possessions that everybody in the setting would have. For example, in a modern-day setting you can assume you've got a variety of clothing from work-out gear to a nice suit, a shaving kit or cosmetics bag, a cell phone, an ordinary car, a credit card with a moderate limit, an apartment or modest house and so on.

If you don't know where else to start, assume you're in TE 7 (the Stellar Age) and choose one weapon, one armor, one tool and three "anything" picks for selecting extra weapons or tools you think you might need. You've also got $500 in your pocket.

Most *ALTERNITY* games are set at TE 6 to TE 8.

FINISHING TOUCHES

At this point, you're just a few game-isms away from a completed character.

INITIATIVE

Your initiative measures how quickly you can assess danger, spot opportunities and react when seconds count. Usually you make an initiative check at the beginning of an action scene to determine

when you get to take your first action—maybe you'll get the first shot off, or maybe your opponent will.

Your initiative score looks a lot like a skill score, and making an initiative check works a lot like making a skill check. However, you can't spend skill points to improve your initiative score. Instead, determine your initiative score as follows:

Your Initiative Score = 20 − (your Agility + your Focus)

For example, if your Agility is 4 and your Focus is 5, your initiative score is 11.

SPEED

Most heroes have a speed of 20 meters. However, if you wear bulky armor or carry a heavy load (see Encumbrance, below), your speed may be reduced.

DURABILITY

All heroes begin with one wound box each in the graze, light wound, moderate wound, serious wound, critical wound and mortal wound severity levels, as shown here:

Wound Severity	Wound Boxes	Bonus Wound Boxes
Mortal wound (16+)	☐	—
Critical wound (13 to 15)	☐	☐ (Vitality 5+) ☐ (Vitality 10)
Serious wound (10 to 12)	☐	☐ (Vitality 4+) ☐ (Vitality 9+)
Moderate wound (7 to 9)	☐	☐ (Vitality 3+) ☐ (Vitality 8+)
Light wound (4 to 6)	☐	☐ (Vitality 2+) ☐ (Vitality 7+)
Graze (1 to 3)	☐	☐ (Vitality 1+) ☐ (Vitality 6+)

In addition, you gain a number of bonus wound boxes equal to your Vitality score. Your bonus wound boxes are added to the durability track, one bonus box per severity level, beginning at the graze level and filling "up." For example, if you have Vitality 3, you have two wound boxes at the graze, light and moderate wound levels, and one box each at the higher levels.

Don't add a second wound box to the mortal wound level—if you have Vitality 6 or more, leave mortal at one box and add a third wound box to graze (and fill "up" from there if needed for additional wound boxes).

ENCUMBRANCE

Under planetary gravity conditions, there's a limit to how much you can carry—and in zero-g, the mass you carry with you affects your ability to move around. We want to limit bookkeeping, however, so we're keeping your carrying capacity simple.

Under Earth gravity, you can carry up to 10 kg (that's 22 pounds) without it slowing you down or hampering your ability to fight. Add an extra 2 kg for each point of Strength you have above 3 and each point of Vitality you have above 3. That mass value is your encumbrance value; write it down on your character sheet.

- If you're carrying mass between your encumbrance value and double your encumbrance, reduce your base speed by 5 m per move action.
- If you're carrying mass up to triple your encumbrance value, you also suffer a –1 step penalty on all attack, defense and environment skill checks.
- If you're carrying mass up to quadruple your encumbrance value, reduce your base speed by 10 m. You suffer a –2 step penalty on attack, defense and environment skill checks.
- Attempts to carry more than that are effectively powerlifting efforts; see the *Athletics* skill.

We assume you've got your gear reasonably strapped down and packed away when appropriate. If you're trying to carry 10 kg of full-to-brimming champagne flutes, that's going to slow you down! We also assume you have better things to do than add up the weight of ordinary clothing and personal items like wallets and datapads.

When you're adventuring in places that don't have Earthlike gravity, the weight of your gear will change, but your encumbrance value won't.

Likewise your mass doesn't change. We paid attention in physics class.

3: SKILLS AND TALENTS

"A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects."

—Robert A. Heinlein

Your character is basically a collection of skills and talents—the unique combination of things you know how to do, and special edges you possess.

CHOOSING SKILLS

The exact level of training or experience you have in any particular skill is measured by the number of **skill points** you assign to it. If you have at least 1 point in a skill, you're considered to be **trained** in that skill. As long as you're trained, you can handle any routine tasks associated with the skill. A character with 1 rank in *Piloting* isn't just barely able to fly; she can take off, navigate, deal with some rough weather and land without any drama at all. It's only when she's in a challenge scene dealing with a heroic problem that her relative lack of advanced training might become an issue.

At 1st level, you have 35 skill points to assign; your archetype description tells you how to assign your initial skill points. Each time you gain a level, you gain 5 skill points to increase the number of skill points assigned to your existing skills or begin training in new skills.

Maximum Skill Points: As a beginning hero, you can assign up to 5 points to a skill. The maximum number of skill points you can have in any one skill increases by 1 each time you gain a level, to a maximum of 10—at that point you know all a human can know about that skill.

CHOOSING TALENTS

Talents are more idiosyncratic than skills. Lots of people have some training in the *Firearms* skill, but true fast-draw experts or trick-shot artists are few and far between. Some talents make you better at using your skills, some let you do things with a skill check that other characters trained in that skill just can't do, and some provide special benefits that have nothing to do with skills at all. At 1st level, you choose 3 talents.

Talents are grouped into constellations, which are "trees" of related talents. Your archetype influences which talent constellations you start with—to begin a constellation, you must select the first talent in that constellation. Each time you gain a level you can select a new talent, advancing in a constellation you already know or starting a new constellation.

ANATOMY OF A SKILL CHECK

Skill checks are one of the fundamental systems in the *ALTERNITY* game. Almost every action your character takes, if perilous or uncertain, is a skill check. *ALTERNITY*'s skill system is simple: Roll a base d20 (always) and a difficulty die, add or subtract the two resulting rolls and compare to your skill total to see whether you've succeeded or failed. But it's worth breaking down each step in a skill check to examine what's actually going on.

1. **The GM decides whether a roll is necessary and considers what success and failure mean for the overall story.** Often this will be obvious; you don't need to attempt a check to do something ordinary in an ordinary situation, and you can't attempt a check to do something physically impossible.

2. **The GM and player negotiate to determine the overall difficulty.** Most checks begin at ordinary difficulty (d20 + d0). If there's something weighing in the hero's favor, it's a step bonus: the d0 becomes a d4, the d4 becomes a d6 and so on. If there's something impeding or resisting the hero's success, it's a step penalty: the difficulty die gets smaller, and if it gets smaller than a d0, it gets bigger but *subtracts* from the result on the d20.

   Do all the negotiating before anyone rolls the dice. Better drama that way.

3. **The player rolls two dice:** the base die (always a d20) and the difficulty die (which you just determined in step two).

4. **The player adds the base die and difficulty die together** (for an overall step bonus) **or subtracts** the difficulty die from the base die (for an overall step penalty).

5. **The player compares the total** to the hero's skill score for that task to determine the check result: Failure, Average success, Excellent success or Stellar success.

6. **The player reports the outcome** to the GM: "I failed" or "That's a Stellar!"

7. **The GM describes the effects** of the check as the hero experiences it, telling how the game world changed (in ways large or small) after that moment of peril and uncertainty.

The first step quickly becomes instinctive for an *ALTERNITY* GM, but the magic of the system lives in the second step. Step two is where the GM and player are engaged in conversation, and it's a conversation with a purpose. By talking about which step bonuses and penalties apply, they're collaboratively defining the game world, and they're setting the stakes for the die roll to come. Whether you're the player or the GM, don't short-change this moment!

- If you're the GM, think of aspects of the situation that impinge on the moment of the skill check, and apply step bonuses and penalties as appropriate. Tell the players at the table which factors are affecting the situation die, both positive and negative.
- If you're the player, advocate for step bonuses; they help you succeed! Ask questions about the environment and the circumstances, and try to convince the GM they're important enough to merit a step bonus. (Don't be a pain, of course, but a good *ALTERNITY* GM expects you to do some shilling on your own behalf.)

Steps three through six happen in a single moment. There isn't much arithmetic and no need to hem and haw over it. All the interesting stuff happened in the second step, and there's intentionally little time between the physical act of rolling the dice and the dramatic act of revealing the outcome.

The seventh step is where a great *ALTERNITY* GM shines, by describing the outcome in a way that fires the players' imaginations without slowing things down and losing story momentum.

As you learn *ALTERNITY*, you'll quickly see the seven steps as fractions of a moment, but remember to lavish some extra attention on steps two and seven. That's where the fun of tabletop role-playing lives.

FINDING BONUSES AND PENALTIES

Looking for step bonuses and penalties that might apply to your skill check? Here are three places to start. In step two of the skill check, the GM and player have a brief back-and-forth where they'll examine these three categories and agree on which step modifiers apply.

Built-In Step Modifiers: You'll generally find these on your character sheet. They're step modifiers (usually bonuses) a hero gets because of skill, talent and gear choices.

Set-Building in the Scene: These modifiers are built into the scene at the design stage, and you'll find them in the GM notes or in the published adventure. The scene designer defines some challenges (or opportunities) to add drama and realism to the scene.

Circumstances: These bonuses can come from the GM, but they're often suggested by the player. A particularly clever ruse, inspired use of the setting, effective teamwork among PCs ... all the crazy stuff players invent on the spot falls into this category.

SKILL CHECKS FOR THE GM

Before you ask the player to attempt a straight pass-fail skill check, ask yourself whether you really want the consequences of a failure. It's fine if an attack misses; heroes can just shoot at the enemy on their next action. It's not OK if the adventure comes to a full stop because the heroes missed the one critical check they needed to continue. When a task falls into the gray area between the routine and the dramatic, you want to ensure the narrative moves forward even if the players' dice run cold.

Fortunately, you have the power to decide what constitutes success or failure in a particular skill check. A result such as, "It works, but it takes longer than you thought it would," or similar tactics of failing "up" give just a pinch of consequence but let the players feel like their skill checks matter.

DEFINING FAILURE AND SUCCESS

If you decide a skill check is warranted, think of the possible outcomes as a bracket with Failure on one end, Average and Excellent successes in the middle, and Stellar success at the far end. Before the roll—and before you get deep into a discussion of step modifiers—decide what the different parts of that bracket look like. Because *ALTERNITY* assumes competency on the part of the PCs, often "failure" doesn't mean the attempted task ends in disaster—just that it was inefficient, costly, aggravating or otherwise suboptimal.

For example, say you have a master hacker PC at your table, and she wants to hack into a corporate appointment calendar to set up a meeting with an executive. As the GM, you want this to happen: You anticipate that confrontation in the conference room as a major scene in the ongoing story. But what if the hero botches the *Computers* roll? Before you call for the roll, you could mentally bracket success and failure accordingly:

Failure—You can hack the executive's personal calendar, but you can't get it to book a meeting room. You'll have to meet in the very public coffee shop in the building lobby.

Average Success—You get a meeting on the day you want in a private conference room.

Excellent Success—As an Average success, plus you're able to surreptitiously cancel the executive's other meetings that day. If the confrontation goes poorly, the executive won't be missed...

Stellar Success—As above, plus you're able to set up a back door in the login software that gives you a +2 step bonus on future attempts to hack this system.

Some frustrations—like scheduling software—are universal, no matter the sci-fi setting.

FAIL FORWARD, BUT MAKE IT STING

It's easy to define most failed skill checks as "the thing you tried didn't work," but often there's a more entertaining sort of failure that advances the narrative rather than stopping it cold. Look for opportunities to define failure so the story still advances—even though it's clearly heading downhill.

For example, say the heroes are trying to intimidate the starport administrator into lifting the quarantine on their ship so they can depart. They fail the *Coercion* check. Rather than saying, "The administrator brushes off your threats and shows you the door," try this:

As you threaten him, the administrator starts sweating and stammering, turning visibly pale. He stands up from his desk, lurches for the door, then faints dead away. Just after his unconscious body hits the floor, two guards open the door from the lobby. "Sir? Wait ... what did you do to him?"

In one respect, the PCs' attempt to intimidate the bureaucrat worked, but it worked *too* well; they frightened him so badly that he keeled over. Yet it sure doesn't feel like a success to the players. The ship is still in quarantine, and now the PCs must deal with some *very* suspicious guards. When possible, define failures as moments that twist and complicate the narrative, not moments that negate plans and bring a halt to the action. Above all, though, make sure those failures hurt or aggravate the heroes ... and/or the players! Like most RPGs, *ALTERNITY* is all about consequences.

A surprising number of sci-fi plots involve arguing with customs officials or starport traffic control.

SKILL DESCRIPTIONS

This section presents skills as they relate to the typical RPG challenge or encounter. It's not really feasible to describe *everything* a hero can do with one of these skills, so don't treat these descriptions as complete and exclusive—characters often use skills in unexpected ways. (That's where common sense and GM discretion come into play.)

Skills share some common terminology.

Key Ability: The ability your skill score is based on. If two are listed, you can use whichever is better to determine your skill score. For example, if you have Agility 4 and Focus 5, you can use your 5 as the basis for a *Firearm* check.

Type: The skill's category (see Chapter 2). Type is important when selecting your mandatory skills during character creation. In addition, some heroic archetypes provide a bonus to using certain types of skills.

Notes: Other useful information about skills.

TABLE 3-1: SKILLS

Skill	Page	Key Ability	Type	Notes
Academics	57	Int	technical	cascades
Acrobatics	58	Agi	environmental	
Armor Training	58	Str/Int	defensive	enabler
Athletics	59	Str	environmental	
Awareness	62	Foc	environmental	
Coercion	62	Per	social	
Computer	63	Int	technical	
Culture	64	Per	social	cascades
Deception	65	Per	social	
Dodge	65	Agi	defensive	enabler, passive
Driving	66	Agi	environmental	
Empathy	66	Foc/Per	social	
Endurance	67	Vit	defensive	passive
Energy Weapon	67	Agi/Foc	attack	specializes
Engineering	68	Int	technical	cascades
Extreme Sports	69	Agi/Vit	environmental	
Firearm	69	Agi/Foc	attack	specializes
Hand to Hand	69	Str/Agi	attack	specializes
Heavy Weapon	70	Str/Int	attack	specializes
Influence	70	Per	social	
Mechanics	71	Int	technical	cascades
Medicine	71	Int	technical	cascades
Melee	73	Str/Agi	attack	specializes
Misdirection	74	Per	social	
Performance	74	Per	social	cascades
Piloting	75	Agi/Int	environmental	
Primitive Weapon	76	Agi/Foc	attack	specializes
Profession	76	any	technical	
Resilience	77	Vit	defensive	
Science	78	Int	technical	cascades
Security	79	Agi/Int	environmental	
Stealth	79	Agi/Foc	environmental	
Survival	80	Vit/Foc	environmental	
Willpower	80	Foc	defensive	passive

Cascading skills add a new specialization each time you assign an odd-numbered skill point. For example, if you have 1 point in *Academics*, you can choose one academic discipline (such as history) as your field of expertise, and you get a +1 step bonus on *Academics* checks pertaining to history. When you assign a third skill point to *Academics*, you can choose a second field of expertise (say, economics). You get a +1 step bonus on *Academics* checks pertaining to either history or economics.

Enabler skills reduce penalties or offer benefits based on how many skill points you assign. You rarely need to make an *Armor Training* check, but you may find it useful to invest in the skill if you expect to wear heavy armor.

Passive skills are not usually under your control; you use them reactively when someone else (or something else) is acting on you.

Skills that *specialize* offer you the opportunity to pick a specific type or category within that skill; you get a +1 step bonus when you make a skill check that uses your specialization. Most combat skills allow you to specialize; for example, you can specialize with pistols when you assign skill points to the *Firearm* skill. Unlike cascading skills, investing additional skill points doesn't get you more specializations automatically. However, when you level up you can spend 2 skill points to choose an additional specialization instead of improving your skill score. Skill points you spend on extra specializations don't improve your skill score and don't count against your maximum skill points for a skill.

Most skills that specialize have room for you to invent new specializations if you like.

ACADEMICS

Intelligence; Technical; cascades
Social sciences such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, history, archeology, economics, law, management, political science and linguistics are all part of this catch-all skill. (The natural sciences and mathematics are covered by the *Science* skill below, and most liberal-arts fields are part of *Culture*.) In far-future settings, it also covers fictional sciences like Asimov's psychohistory, which combines statistics, history and sociology to predict future cultural and political trends.

This skill cascades. For every odd skill point you spend in *Academics*, choose a specific academic discipline. You have particular training—equivalent to an advanced degree—in that discipline and gain a +1 step bonus when that field is relevant to your skill check. If you want to be hyper-focused, you can choose the same academic discipline twice and get doctoral-level training and a +2 step bonus in that field.

You can: Surmise an NPC's motivations after observing behavior, anticipate market trends to find high-demand interplanetary trade routes, identify a culture by the ruins it left behind, identify the root

causes of civil unrest on the planet you're visiting and defend yourself in a court of law.

Typical modifiers: Aliens are involved (–1 to –3 steps), unfamiliar society or planet (–1 step), access to an academic library or equivalent (+1 step), plenty of time to study and calculate (+1 step), access to colleagues or expert AI systems (+2 steps or more).

ACROBATICS

Agility; Environmental

This skill broadly covers precise, graceful body movements that place a premium on balance and flexibility. It includes performing arts and sports such as gymnastics, tightropes and trapeze work, plus gentler practices such as yoga and stunt movements like parkour.

In many far-future settings, *Acrobatics* is also the general-purpose skill to check when making difficult maneuvers in light- or zero-gravity environments. Otherwise, the trickier the feat you're attempting, the higher the difficulty:

Ordinary (+d0): Rolls and somersaults, rope/trapeze/bar swings, traversal and round-off vaults.

Hard (–d6): Handsprings on ground or vault, full-rotation trapeze/bar swings, rope-to-rope traversals, "sticking the landing."

Extremely Hard (–d12): Aerial flips and saltos, rope/trapeze flips, entry vaults, bar release/flight moves, adding twists/flips to dismounts.

You can: Vault over a fence, swing on a chandelier, run along the ceiling of the derelict space station and slide underneath the hangar door just before it closes.

Typical modifiers: Fluctuating gravity (–2 steps), slippery surfaces (–1 step), good running start (+1 step), grip patches or other good surfaces (+1 step), chance to practice beforehand (+2 steps), assister jets (+2 steps).

Someday, Olympic gymnastics will assess degree of difficulty using step penalties.

ARMOR TRAINING (STR OR INT)

Strength or Intelligence; Defensive; enabler

You're trained in the use (and occasional abuse) of heavy armor, plus its maintenance and repair when the battle's done. Armor—even high-tech power suits—impedes your overall movement and some gross motor skills, but after enough practice in heavy armor, you've learned to compensate for the armor's bulk and mass.

The more skill points you spend in *Armor Training*, the less armor encumbers you and the more you get out of other armor systems, as shown here:

Skill Pts.	Check Penalty Reduction	Movement Penalty Reduction	Other
1	–1 step		
2		–2 meters	
3			Cover 1
4	–2 steps		
5		–4 meters	
6			Improved Coverage 1
7	–3 steps		
8		–6 meters	
9			Cover 2
10			Improved Coverage 2

Check Penalty Reduction: Reduce your armor's check penalty by this amount.

Speed Penalty Reduction: Reduce your armor's speed penalty by this amount.

Cover #: Improve the cover benefit provided by your armor by the number of steps given. (Usually this means improving the cover provided by a shield or similar device.)

Improved Coverage #: Reduce the poor coverage value of your armor by the given amount if your armor has the poor coverage drawback.

For example, if you have 4 points in *Armor Training*, you reduce your armor's check penalty by 1 step and its movement penalty by 2 meters. If you're wearing vacuum armor, normally a –2 step skill penalty and a –4 meter penalty to your speed, you reduce those penalties to –1 step and –2 meters.

You can't reduce an armor penalty to the point where it becomes a bonus.

This skill is an enabler. This means you don't usually use it to make checks. Instead, the skill points you place in this skill directly enable a game function you wouldn't otherwise be entitled to (in this case, the reduction in armor penalties).

You can: Climb a rock face in your tactical armor, keep your best protection in the line of fire and keep up with those full-of-themselves recon scouts who claim to not "need" heavy armor.

Typical modifiers: None, because it's an enabler skill.

Nice try, though.

ATHLETICS

Strength; Environmental

You're adept at running, climbing, jumping, swimming, throwing and generally applying bodily force to your environment. *Athletics* covers many of the events you'd see at the modern-day Olympics, plus situations that come up in action scenes like holding a powered door open, hanging onto the helicopter's landing gear, and

leaping from the hover-cycle to the maglev train. This skill also covers organized sports common to far-future cultures unless another skill (probably *Acrobatics* or *Extreme Sports*) more obviously applies.

Unlike other environment skills, *Athletics* includes an attack component. It's the relevant skill for thrown weapons—everything from bolas to javelins to grenades.

You can: Run for speed, swim through the sapient goo-oceans of Rachos IV, throw a drone-erang and infiltrate the building by climbing through the HVAC ducts.

Typical modifiers: Oppressive gravity (–2 steps), bad weather (–1 step), specialized attire or equipment (+1 step), chance to train beforehand (+1 step), effective coaching/scouting staff (+1 step), performance-enhancing drugs or cyberware (+2 steps).

JUMPING

Jumping, Swimming, and so on are all part of the *Athletics* skill, not separate skills themselves.

How well you jump depends primarily on your Strength and your *Athletics* check.

Standing Long Jump: You can jump 1 meter, no check needed. On an Av/Ex/St check result, you can increase that to 1.5 m/2 m/2.5 m. Add 0.5 m if you're willing to land prone, and add 0.25 m for each point of Strength you have above 3.

Running Long Jump: You can jump 2 meters, no check needed. On an Av/Ex/St check result, you can jump 3 m/4 m/5 m. Add 1 m if you're willing to land prone, and add 0.5 m for each point of Strength you have above 3.

Running High Vault: You can clear 1 meter, no check needed. On an Av/Ex/St check result, you jump over or atop an obstacle 1.3 m/1.6 m/1.9 m high. Add 0.2 m if you're willing to land prone, and add 0.1 m for each point of Strength you have above 3. Subtract 0.2 m if you don't want to touch what you're vaulting over (like a laser beam or other security apparatus).

Running Reach Jump: You can reach 2.4 meters, no check needed. On an Av/Ex/St check result, you jump up with arms overhead to grasp a ledge or object 2.6 m/2.8 m/3 m high. Add 0.2 m for each point of Strength you have above 3.

SWIMMING

How fast you swim over short distances (less than 400 meters) is likewise a function of Strength and *Athletics*. You can swim 4 meters in a move action, no check needed. On an Av/Ex/St check result, you swim 5 m/6 m/7 m with each move action. Add 1 m of distance for each point of Strength you have above 3. You take a –2 step penalty on the *Athletics* check in choppy water.

Distance Swimming: Depends on your Vitality and *Athletics* check. You can swim 1600 meters (about a mile) in 35 minutes, no check needed. On an Av/Ex/St check result, it takes you 30/25/20 minutes to swim that distance. Subtract 2 minutes for each point of Vitality you have above 3. You take a −2 step penalty on the *Athletics* check in choppy water.

SPRINTING

Your base speed covers running under ordinary circumstances; even in street clothes, zigzagging between obstacles, you can manage a 20-second time in the 100 meters. Under the right conditions (straight path, good running surface) you can go faster with an *Athletics* check when you take use the move action. On an Av/Ex/St check result, add 3 m/6 m/9 m to your base move. Increase your bonus by 3 m for each point of Strength you have above 3.

Sprinting tires you out: After you sprint, you're weakened (see Status Effects in Chapter 5) until the end of your next action.

Distance Running: If you're running more than a kilometer under controlled conditions, your speed is a function of Vitality and an *Athletics* check. You can run 1 kilometer in 6 minutes, no check needed. On an Av/Ex/St check result, reduce that time to 5.5/5/4.5 minutes. Subtract 30 seconds for each point of Vitality you have above 3, and impose an appropriate step penalty for hills or other tough terrain.

CLIMBING

Climbing is likewise a function of Strength and *Athletics*, though unlike jumping, swimming and running, it's possible to make no progress in a given action. On an Av/Ex/St *Athletics* check result, you ascend 2 m/4 m/6 m using a 2-impulse move action. Add +1 m to the move for each point of Strength you have above 3, but only if you succeed (a Failure still means no progress). You may have a significant step bonus or penalty depending on the availability of handholds.

Real-life rock climbers have an entire point system that boils down to a list of step penalties.

POWERLIFTING

This is almost entirely a function of raw Strength, but form matters, too. You can deadlift (ground to hips) 125 kg plus an additional 60 kg for each point of Strength over 3. Under controlled conditions (a gym with proper equipment), you can eke out a little extra weight (5/10/15 kg) with an *Athletics* check. You can snatch (ground to overhead) half as much as you can deadlift.

AWARENESS

Focus; Environment; usually passive

This skill covers your ability to perceive and assess the environment around you. It can be used both passively (when you're just going about your business and the GM asks you for an *Awareness* check) or actively (when you suspect there may be a threat or something of interest in your immediate environs).

One key thing *Awareness* doesn't cover: the ability to perceive and assess the behaviors, emotional state and motivations of NPCs. That's covered by the *Empathy* skill, described below.

You can: Notice the trench-coat-clad agent who has been following you, spot the false floor in the cargo hold and discern which of two bridges seems sturdier.

Typical modifiers: Overwhelming distractions (−2 steps), effective camouflage (−1 step), extra time to observe (+1 step), infrared goggles or other high-tech gear (+2 steps).

COERCION

Personality; Social

This skill is the mean older cousin of the *Influence* skill; it covers getting what you want in a social setting by inciting anger or fear in your target. *Coercion* covers basic "gun to the head" intimidation, but it also covers intimidation that isn't based on violence or physical threats, such as "Do it or I'll tell the board of directors" and "Do it or I'll release the videotape."

Naturally, there's overlap between *Coercion* and *Influence*. Many a negotiation includes nods to both carrot and stick. Work with your GM and adjust your roleplaying to emphasize carrot (*Influence*) or stick (*Coercion*), then make the check accordingly. If an attempt to coerce is based largely on false pretenses (the gun isn't loaded or the videotape doesn't exist), it's a *Deception* check.

Negotiations of all sorts are covered in Chapter 6. When you're using *Coercion*, you'll flip the risk part of the equation on its head, using the same modifiers. The guard might be fired for letting you in (−3 step penalty), but you've got a gun to his head (+5 step bonus), so that's a 2-step swing in your favor.

You can: Convince the mysterious stranger to hand over the briefcase, get the HR-fearing security guards to let you pass, make the alley thug back down and taunt your grav-ball rival into making a key mistake.

Typical modifiers: Target has heard it all before (−2 steps), no visual evidence of threat (−1 step), threat tailored to the target (+1 step), prior demonstration of threat (+2 steps).

COMPUTER

Intelligence; Technical

With this skill, you can obtain information from whatever computer networks you have access to—including information the network administrators would rather keep from you. Furthermore, you can write code to change and extend what a given computer is capable of and encrypt or decrypt the data stored on computers you have access to.

Computers have become central to sci-fi in the last forty years, but what you can accomplish—and how you interact with the computers in question—depends on what the computers in your particular setting are capable of.

- For example, in a modern-day setting, you can steal information and plant false data from the anonymity of a *PC bang* in Seoul.
- In a dystopian cyberfuture, you may be jacked into the Matrix, adopting a virtual persona to invade corporate datahubs and fight AI countermeasures.
- In a far-future exploration setting, you may be speaking to the disembodied voice of your ship's supercomputer, helping it race against time to develop a countermeasure for an alien planet-buster weapon.

In most campaign settings that *ALTERNITY* models, one skill suffices for the breadth of computer use. In a cyberpunk campaign with heavy use of virtual reality and hacking, however, we recommend splitting this skill into several subcategories.

The *Computer* skill doesn't cover on-the-spot bypassing of electronic locks, alarms or cameras. That's a matter for the *Security* skill. You *can* use the *Computer* skill to quash an alarm that goes across the bases' computer network, however, or hack into the keycard database to make your ID card "legitimate" for opening the door.

TECH ERAS AND TECHNICAL SKILLS

Charles Babbage arguably invented the computer, but he'd struggle mightily to code modern-day applications, let alone program the supercomputers central to many far-future settings. Likewise, a far-future cyberninja might effortlessly bypass electronic locks but be stymied by a wheel-and-tumbler safe from the mid-20th century.

To put that issue in game terms, technical skills are fully effective in the tech era they were learned. But if you're dealing with tech more advanced than what you learned with (as with Babbage and the modern-day computer), you suffer a –2 step penalty per tech era of difference.

Going "down" a tech era is easier, but those old-timers had different tools, different nomenclature ... different everything. If you're dealing with tech from a less advanced era (like the cyberninja in the example above), you suffer a –1 step penalty per tech era of difference—though the GM should suspend the penalty in cases where the fundamental technical truths are obvious, no matter how primitive the surrounding society.

Virtual reality and Gibson-style hacking? Stay tuned for a sourcebook on *that*.

You can: Break into the corporate calendar software to book a meeting with the CEO, break the encryption on the plans for a revolutionary warp engine and hack the missile's friend-or-foe sensors so they target their own launchers.

Typical modifiers: Cybersecurity agents are watching you (–2 steps), system is on alert (–1 step), you have someone on the inside (+1 step), you had time to custom-code a solution (+2 steps).

SOME WORDS ABOUT LANGUAGE

Science fiction is replete with evocative takes on alien languages—everything from the thought-provoking (Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life") to the merely colorful (Chewbacca and R2-D2 in *Star Wars*, who are always understood by other characters, but not the audience). In science fiction films and novels, the struggle to communicate is rich with drama.

That richness is a prelude to disaster at the game table, though, for one simple reason. Tabletop roleplaying games are a sort of collaborative oral storytelling, and the "oral" part quickly falls apart when the heroes literally aren't speaking the same language. By all means, use the *Culture* skill to help a player feel confident and competent about dealing with a particular group. But think twice before you build a campaign world where meaningful language barriers exist—it often sounds better in theory than it works in around-the-table reality.

CULTURE

Personality; Social; cascades
You have a deep knowledge in the language, customs, art, leisure and social norms of a particular living culture. This skill cascades; for every odd skill point you spend in *Culture*, choose a specific culture (generally a nation in modern-day settings and a planet in future settings). You speak their language fluently, and your understanding of their culture provides a +1 step bonus when it's relevant to your skill check. If you want to be hyper-focused, you can spend a skill point to choose a subculture within a culture you've already picked, such as "Sicilian organized-crime families" or "Blyrinian priestly orders." You get a +2 step bonus when you're making a check relevant to that subculture.

Extinct cultures or linguistic riddles are covered under the *Academics* skill.

You can: Look suave at the Admiral's ball, speak fluent Cantonese, determine whether disturbing old ruins would provoke mild disapproval or frothing rage, join the chant at a Haraadasite funeral, match a Dorexian drink for drink.

Typical modifiers: Culture is profoundly alien (–2 steps), you've already committed a cultural taboo (–1 step), you have a native guide (+1 steps), this is a ceremony you've encountered before (+2 steps).

DECEPTION

Personality; Social

Lies, bluffing, impersonation, disguise—all these comprise the *Deception* skill. If you're trying to convince someone of something fundamentally untrue or obscuring the truth in favor of a fiction convenient to you, you're engaged in *Deception*. This skill is essentially the "black sheep" in the family of social interaction skills, with *Coercion* and *Influence* as its upstanding siblings. In many cases, any of the three skills will get you what you want from an NPC, but they have different modifiers depending on circumstance and different consequences for failure.

One thing the *Deception* skill doesn't cover: attempts to disguise oneself or remain unobtrusive. That's the purview of the *Misdirection* skill, described below.

During interaction scenes you can use the *Deception* skill in place of either *Influence* or *Coercion* if you're essentially lying about something. Holding an unloaded blaster to the alien's cranium is *Deception*, not *Coercion*. Promising a flight off the prison planet when you're stranded there yourself is *Deception*, not *Influence*. Other than the specific skill you're using, negotiations work the same way regardless of how you're going about them (see Interaction in Chapter 6).

You can: Win a hand of Tethys Hold 'Em, make the pirate captain believe the torpedoes are armed and convince a guard these aren't the androids she's looking for.

Typical modifiers: You've already been caught in a lie (–2 steps), you're asking someone to violate an important rule (–1 step), you have convincing paperwork (+1 step), you've plied the target with intoxicants to get his guard down (+2 steps).

While the same rules apply, the long-term consequences of those lies may be quite different.

DODGE

Agility; Defensive; passive, enabler

Dodge represents your ability to get out of harm's way with quick, almost instinctive movement. It's a passive skill that determines whether you're able to avoid the many dangers exploding near you, falling atop you or careening in your direction.

Dodge also has a second function; it's an enabler that improves a game function everyone has a lesser version of. In this case, it provides bigger penalties to enemy attacks when you use the evade action modifier. You don't make a check with the *Dodge* skill when you evade. Your enemies just suffer a penalty on attempts to attack you, as shown below:

For more on action modifiers and evading, see Chapter 5.

Skill Points	Enemy Attack Penalty
0–4	1 step
5–9	2 steps
10+	3 steps

The two uses—passively reacting to Bad Stuff happening to you and actively dodging by using the evade action modifier—are two different game mechanics that happen to use the same skill. The passive "make a *Dodge* check" moments don't affect your next action, and the active "I dodge while moving across the room" moments don't require a skill check.

You can: Dive across the hallway to avoid a hail of laser fire, take a quick step back to avoid the biker's cricket bat, and roll behind the bulkhead before the grenade detonates.

Typical modifiers: You're wrestling with an enemy (–2 steps), the incoming attack is silent or hard to observe (–1 step), you're on the periphery of an area attack (+1 step), your helmet has threat-assessment HUD software (+2 steps).

DRIVING

Agility; Environmental
The skill is called *Driving* for simplicity's sake, but it covers all conveyances that operate primarily on the ground: cars, motorcycles, hovercraft, tanks and dune buggies with saw blades attached. It even covers riding animals, whether they're Earth horses or exotic alien beasts.

Driving is a skill where the GM will often "bracket" success and failure, as described in this chapter's introduction. Routine driving around the megalopolis shouldn't even require a check—and if you do make the check, it's because failure means you're stuck in traffic for 10 minutes, not that you wrecked the car somehow.

You can: Use that conveniently parked car-carrier trailer as a ramp, lose your pursuers in rush-hour traffic and evade the artillery shells as your tank traverses no-man's-land.

Just for fun … if the car is red: +1 step.

Typical modifiers: Vehicle is badly damaged (–2 steps), you're also firing a gun out the window (–1 step), a hacker ally is manipulating traffic signals on your behalf (+1 step), you're driving an [insert name of your favorite drool-worthy sports car here] (+2 steps).

EMPATHY

Personality or Focus; Social; sometimes passive
Empathy is the social equivalent of the *Awareness* skill. You're attuned to body language, facial micro-expressions, eye movement and dozens of other subtle cues that suggest someone else's emotional and mental state. If someone is trying to mask an emotion or pretend to be someone they are not, your *Empathy* may be able to unmask them. It also provides insights into behavior and motivation that can earn you bonuses on future *Influence*, *Coercion* or *Deception* checks, because you have some sense of what makes your target "tick" and what will overcome their social defenses.

If you take time to interact with an NPC before substantive conversations begin, you can use *Empathy* to pick up social cues to make other skill checks easier during an ensuing interaction scene. On an Av/Ex/St *Empathy* check result, you pick up tips worth a +1/+2/+3 step bonus on the subsequent *Influence*, *Coercion* or *Deception* check.

You can: Know the police officer saw more than he's saying, notice the ship captain keeps glancing at the starboard cargo hold and discern that an appeal to the Skralavian ambassador's pride will make him putty in your hands.

Typical modifiers: You're trying to get a read on an android (−2 steps), target is already agitated or wounded (−1 step), target is someone you've known for some time (+1 step), you're able to observe the target's psychic aura (+2 steps).

ENDURANCE

Vitality; Defensive; passive

The ability to persevere under brutal conditions and function at the limits of exhaustion is at the heart of the *Endurance* skill. Like *Dodge* and *Willpower*, *Endurance* is a rarely used skill in the active sense. You'll most often encounter it when your GM says, "You're going to keep going? OK, make an *Endurance* check."

This is a good skill to have when life support is running low...

Marathon running, distance swimming and sustained physical labor are all part of this skill, but it also covers surviving hazardous weather and challenging environmental conditions. If there's something persistent in your surroundings that you're just trying to physically withstand, *Endurance* is probably the governing skill.

You can: Win the Valles Marineris triathlon, shake off the effects of tear gas and make a (brief!) EVA without a functioning space suit.

Typical modifiers: Heavy gravity (−2 steps), cumbersome/inadequate clothing (−1 step), plentiful healthy food/water (+1 step), blood doping or other pharmaceutical aid (+2 steps).

ENERGY WEAPON

Agility or Focus; Attack; specialized

This skill covers high-tech personal ranged weapons: laser pistols, blasters, ray guns and other staples of the science fiction genre. The exact weapons available depend on the tech era of your *ALTERNITY* campaign; the weapon chart in Chapter 4 shows typical weapons available in each era. While it's primarily an attack skill, *Energy Weapon* includes the ability to maintain and repair personal weapons.

Admit it; you skipped ahead to this one.

ONE GUN SKILL?

So what's the difference between *Energy Weapon* and *Firearm*? After all, you're pointing a tube at the bad guys and pulling a trigger in both cases. The answer is energy weapons project a beam or pulse of energy—and that beam/pulse behaves like energy, not like a ballistic bullet. That means it doesn't drop over range, and that means it doesn't have recoil to mess up your aim. The internal workings of the weapon are completely different, too.

If that really troubles you, ask your GM if you can treat all energy weapons and firearms as "Guns" and just buy one *Gun* skill to cover personal ranged weapons. (Heavy weapons remain a separate skill.) You still specialize in pistols, rifles, or assault weapons.

This skill can be specialized. When you assign your first skill point to *Energy Weapon,* choose pistols, rifles or assault weapons. You gain a +1 step bonus when you use a weapon of that type. You can buy additional specializations for 2 skill points each when you level up; these skill points don't improve your skill score.

You can: Set your phase pistol to stun, shoot the bounty hunter first, and watch your c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate.
Typical modifiers: See Attacks in Chapter 5.

ENGINEERING

Intelligence; Technical

Engineering is all about applied technology, especially the configuration, operation and modification of complex systems. This skill cascades—for every skill point you spend in *Engineering*, choose a specific specialty such as cybernetics, electronics, infrastructure, life support, manufacturing, mining, power systems, propulsion or robotics. You gain a +1 step bonus when that field is relevant to your skill check. If you want to be hyper-focused, you can choose the same specialty twice and get doctoral-level training and a +2 step bonus in that field.

Engineering shares some tasks with *Mechanics*, which is focused more on repair and maintenance. That's intentional—in many cases, it's a better story if the university-trained engineer and the grizzled mechanic are both adept at a particular job.

You can: Reverse the polarity on the ship's disruptor beams, set the reactor to melt down in

one hour, and configure the particle accelerator to send you back to your home timeline.

Typical modifiers: System has been intentionally sabotaged (–2 steps), instructions and labels are in alien script (–1 step), you have access to the schematics (+1 step), it's a system you invented (+2 steps).

EXTREME SPORTS

Agility or Vitality; Environmental
You're an athlete in a particularly death-defying sport such as double-diamond snowboarding/skiing, hang gliding, big-wave surfing, BASE jumping, wingsuits or their futuristic equivalents. This also covers stunt work and daredevil performances, because the skill set (balance, strength, body-position awareness and risk assessment) applies there, too.

You can: Jump off Olympus Mons, grav-pogo through the canyons of Carahn IV, paraglide to the top of the Empire State Building.

Typical step modifiers: Jury-rigged equipment (–2 steps), you're being shot at (–1 step), scouting the terrain ahead of time (+1 step), expert coaching and support staff (+2 steps).

FIREARM

Agility or Focus; Attack; specialized
This skill covers weapons that fire ballistic projectiles—anything that uses bullets or similar ammunition. Any gun from roughly the 19th century to the 21st is functionally a firearm, whether it's shooting low-tech silver bullets or high-tech flechette rounds.

This skill can be specialized. When you assign your first skill point to *Firearm*, choose pistols, rifles or assault weapons (submachine guns and shotguns, basically). You gain a +1 step bonus when you use a firearm of that type. You can buy additional specializations for 2 skill points each when you level up; these skill points don't improve your skill score.

You can: Blow past dozens of computer-generated guards in an office lobby, gun down a desperado in a graveyard or out-snipe a sniper in the ruins of Neuville.

Typical modifiers: See Attacks in Chapter 5.

Other skills that specialize include *Hand to Hand*, *Heavy Weapons*, *Energy Weapons* and *Medicine*.

HAND TO HAND

Strength or Agility; Attack; specialized
You can fight unarmed at close quarters using fists, feet, elbows, knees and whatever other striking surfaces you've got. Combat techniques employing small hand-held weapons (knives, brass

knuckles, power gauntlets) are similar and use this skill as well, although the *Melee* skill covers swords, axes and larger weapons.

This skill can be specialized. When you assign your first skill point in *Hand to Hand*, choose brawling, knives or grappling. You gain a +1 step bonus when you use that style in an attack. You can buy additional specializations for 2 skill points each when you level up; these skill points don't improve your skill score.

You can: Demonstrate the "Dim Mak" death-touch technique, throw haymakers at Nazi airmen, and deck an alien while saying, "Welcome to Earth."

Typical modifiers: See Attacks in Chapter 5.

HEAVY WEAPON

Strength or Intelligence; Attack; specialized
This skill covers the rocket launchers, machine guns, mortars and other high-tech BFGs of the battlefield—a disparate set of weapons united by their unwieldy nature and destructive power. *Heavy Weapon* always covers the big guns you carry around (with difficulty) and similar weapons emplaced within fortifications. In a campaign where vehicle and starship combat is relatively rare, it covers the vehicle-mounted equivalents as well.

This skill can be specialized. When you assign your first skill point in *Heavy Weapon*, choose heavy energy, heavy ballistic or indirect fire weapons. You gain a +1 step bonus when you use that sort of weapon in an attack. You can buy additional specializations for 2 skill points each when you level up; these skill points don't improve your skill score.

You can: Blast xenomorphs with your harness-mounted neutron cannon, launch mini-nukes from your shoulder and electrify the enemy with your shock rifle.

Typical modifiers: See Attacks in Chapter 5.

If your *ALTERNITY* campaign has a heavy emphasis on starship travel, other skills cover shipboard weapons. See the *Shipyard* sourcebook for details.

INFLUENCE

Personality; Social
With the *Influence* skill, you can convince others to see things your way—whether you're facing them in the boardroom, courtroom or bedroom. It's not *Coercion* (which plays on anger and fear) nor *Deception* (which relies on lies). *Influence* is a combination of savvy negotiation, personal charisma and an understanding of what motivates others' behavior.

See Interaction in Chapter 6 for more information on how *Influence* can improve the attitudes of the NPCs you meet. *Influence* tends to emphasize the reward part of the equation, making even minor or vague rewards seem more prominent in the NPC's mind.

You can: Act as your own attorney before the orbital magistrate, talk two alien empires into a peace treaty and get a discount on a black-market warp core.

Typical modifiers: The other party believes you can't be trusted (−2 steps), you've committed a cultural taboo (−1 step), you're spreading around some bribes (+1 step), other powerful NPCs are vouching for you (+2 steps).

MECHANICS

Intelligence; Technical; cascades
Maintenance, repair and construction of devices ranging from simple machines to vehicle engines and the moving parts of structures are all under the umbrella of the *Mechanics* skill. In higher-tech eras (anything modern-day or beyond), the *Mechanics* skill includes some basic knowledge of chemistry and electronics as well, because those talents are necessary to work on devices of those eras.

Mechanics is a cascading skill. For every odd skill point you spend in *Mechanics*, choose a specialty such as demolition, electrical systems, environmental systems, repair, vehicles or salvage. You gain a +1 step bonus when that field is relevant to your skill check. If you want to be hyper-focused, you can choose the same specialty twice and get doctoral-level training and a +2 step bonus in that field.

Mechanics is also the go-to skill when you're building something from scratch, jury-rigging a device to serve another purpose or improvising something out of spare parts MacGyver-style.

You can: Build a nitrous injection system into your getaway car, sabotage a power conduit so it electrifies your enemies, and fashion a primitive blunderbuss out of bamboo and mineral deposits.

Typical modifiers: Only random junk to work with (−2 steps), poor tools (−1 step), a working machine shop (+1 step), a far-future fabrication chamber (+2 steps).

MEDICINE

Intelligence; Technical; cascades
This skill covers your ability to assess the cause of injury and disease, then treat it to return the subject to wellness. It includes both a diagnostic/investigative component (what caused this?) and a therapeutic aspect (how do I make it better?). What's possible with the *Medicine* skill, given the right tools and supplies, varies greatly by tech era. Radiation exposure that would be fatal in the Modern Era can be treated with an ongoing pharmaceutical regimen in the Solar Era or eliminated with a one-time retrovirus cure in the Galactic Era.

This is a cascading skill. Whenever you assign an odd skill point in *Medicine*, choose an area of emphasis: first aid, forensics, pathology, surgery, treatment, cybermedicine or pharmaceuticals. (First aid

and treatment both apply when you use battlefield medicine; first aid helps you stabilize mortally wounded characters, while treatment helps you treat their wounds.) You gain a +1 step bonus on skill checks relevant to that aspect of *Medicine*.

You can: Keep a comrade from bleeding out, determine what killed the Pratakian ambassador, figure out what's causing the outbreak of Venusian shake-flu.

Typical modifiers: Contagion-ridden or toxic environment (–2 steps), medkit supplies depleted (–1 step), treating your own wound (–1 step), access to labs/diagnostic assistance (+1 step), full hospital care (+2 steps).

BATTLEFIELD MEDICINE

You can make a *Medicine* check as a 3-impulse action to quickly treat a wounded creature or stabilize a dying creature, staving off death. Usually you'll need to be adjacent to the creature you're treating, and neither of you can move away until you finish. The creature receiving the treatment is distracted and slowed (assuming it's not just incapacitated by a mortal wound).

Treat Wound: Battlefield treatment is a complex skill check (see Chapter 5) that allows you to uncheck a wound box when you succeed. Each time you make a *Medicine* check, you tally 1/2/3 successes on an Av/Ex/St result; the number of successes you need to clear the wound box depends on your medical gear and the severity of the wound you're treating (see the table below). For example, if you have a med pack and you attempt to treat a serious wound, you need 3 successes to clear the wound box.

Before you begin treatment, decide which wound box you're trying to clear. The more severe the wound, the more time-consuming and difficult the treatment.

At normal lethality, mortally wounded characters die if they don't tally 3 successes on *Resilience* checks before failing three times.

If you fail on a *Medicine* check to treat a wound, you fail to make progress. You can try again later in the scene, but if you accumulate 3 failures before you succeed in the skill challenge, you "fail out"—you can't treat that specific injury with the tools you have at hand. (You may be able to help by performing surgery after the combat scene ends, though.)

Stabilize: If a creature is mortally wounded, the *Medicine* skill is literally a matter of life and death. Make a *Medicine* (first aid) check; on an Av/Ex/St check result, you grant the injured creature 1/2/3 successes on its *Resilience* check to avoid death.

SURGERY

If you aren't in the middle of a battle, you can perform surgery to remove all an injured creature's wounds at once, or at least reduce their severity. Surgery is a complex skill check (see Chapter 5); you make one *Medicine* check per hour, earning 1/2/3 successes on an

MEDICAL GEAR AND BATTLEFIELD MEDICINE

Treat Wound Success Goals and Modifier

Gear	Graze/Light Wound	Moderate Wound	Serious Wound	Critical Wound	Stabilize Mortal Wound Modifier
No supplies	1	—	—	—	–2 steps
Medical Kit	1	2	—	—	+0 step
Trauma Kit	1 (+2 steps)	2	3 (–2 steps)	—	+1 step
Med Pack	1 (+2 steps)	2 (+2 steps)	3	6 (–2 steps)	+2 steps
Automed Sled	1	2	3	6 (–2 steps)	Automatic
Wound Gel	1 (auto)	1 (auto)	(reduce)	(reduce)	Automatic
Caduceus Ray	1 (+3 steps)	2 (+3 steps)	3 (+3 steps)	6	+3 steps

Av/Ex/St check result. Your success goal for the complex skill check is 1 per moderate wound, 2 per serious wound and 3 per critical wound. For example, a patient with two serious wounds and a critical wound requires 7 successes for a complete surgery. Emergency surgery requires only 10 minutes per check, but you take a -2 step penalty on your *Medicine* checks.

The surgery ends when all the patient's wound boxes are clear, or you've failed three times. If you aren't in a facility with specialized trauma equipment, failing three times kills a patient who had a critical wound. Otherwise the patient isn't fully healed, and must recover the remaining wound boxes through rehabilitation (described below).

When the surgery ends successfully, give the patient a single wound one level less severe than the worst wound you treated; that represents general post-treatment weakness that'll have to be cleared through rehabilitation.

MEDICAL REHAB

Natural healing is mostly the province of the *Resilience* skill, but the *Medicine* skill can speed the process along. If you're helping yourself or someone else to recover from a wound, make a *Medicine* check at the end of the rehab period. Add a bonus of +1/+2/+3 steps to the patient's *Resilience* check on an Av/Ex/St check result.

MELEE

Strength or Agility; Attack; specialized
High-tech laser rifles are great, sure, but sometimes the bad guys just need to be clonked in the noggin. That's where the *Melee* skill comes in. If you're swinging or thrusting with a handheld weapon bigger than a knife, you're using *Melee* for that attack roll, whether it's a riot truncheon, a vibro-blade or a saber made of coalesced energy.

Grazes naturally heal at the end of a scene, and light wounds at the end of the day.

This skill can be specialized. When you assign your first skill point in *Melee*, choose a category of weapon: bladed, blunt or energized weapon. You gain a +1 step bonus on skill checks made with that sort of weapon. You can buy additional specializations for 2 skill points each when you level up; these skill points don't improve your skill score.

You can: Carve up enemies with a chainsaw bayonet, win an energy-sword duel, brandish a cricket bat studded with rusty nails.

Typical modifiers: See Attacks in Chapter 5.

MISDIRECTION

Personality; Social; sometimes passive

If you want to fit in with the crowd, blend into the background, and avoid detection in social settings, *Misdirection* is the skill for you. You can quickly observe and imitate the social cues around you to give off the demeanor of an utterly ordinary subject on at utterly routine errand.

Misdirection has a second use—technically unrelated, but they're fun to play with together. With the *Misdirection* skill, you can employ sleight of hand and other techniques of stage magic. By directing someone's attention away from your hand (or sleeve), you can make small objects appear and disappear from pockets or other hiding places. Roll high enough, and those pockets might not even be *your* pockets, making this the relevant skill for would-be pickpockets.

It's important to keep a solid boundary between the *Misdirection* skill and its cousin, *Deception*. *Misdirection* is essentially "social stealth": your ability to avoid notice and remain unobtrusive. *Deception* covers active attempts to lie, bluff and disguise yourself as someone you're not.

You can: Hide a flechette pistol up your sleeve, blend into the mob outside the embassy walls, and observe starport security without being noticed.

Typical modifiers: Everyone else is an alien (–2 steps), observers have your description (–1 step), you have confederates covering for you (+1 step), you had time to alter your looks or clothing (+2 steps).

Hey bards! Here's your skill...

PERFORMANCE

Personality; Social; cascades

This skill covers the performing arts: singing, acting, dancing, oration, puppetry, oral storytelling, open-mic-night poetry and playing a musical instrument.

This is a cascading skill. Whenever you assign an odd skill point in *Performance*, choose a style of performance: cantina jazz, visi-sonor, orbital ballet, Shakespearean acting, theremin, speed-metal guitar or Imperial baliset, for example. You gain a +1 step bonus on skill checks relevant to that sort of performance.

You can: Compose spoken-word verse to convince the aliens you aren't a threat, get a job on a starliner as part of the comic-acting troupe, and sing the "Lament for Station Alpha" so well that the admiral tears up.

Typical modifiers: Crowd is predisposed to be hostile (–2 steps), long drum solo (–1 step), performing a tried-and-true crowd favorite (+1 step), ace rhythm section (+2 steps).

PILOTING

Agility or Intelligence; Environmental

If it moves in three dimensions, be it airplane, rocket, grav-sled, jet-bike or ornithopter, *Piloting* is the skill that governs its use. Routine flights are, well, routine, and thus the GM won't even ask you to make a check. But when you're chasing someone, being shot at or setting your controls for the eye of the hurricane, your *Piloting* skill is what separates you from a crater on the planet's surface.

Piloting includes basic navigation and an understanding of a vehicle's propulsion, sensor, communications and defense systems. In an *ALTERNITY* campaign where the PCs are rarely in peril while flying from place to place, *Piloting* is the skill for flying a starship—though in many cases, the ship's computer is doing the bulk of the work.

You can: Steer in the grav-wake of a rogue asteroid to avoid detection, evade the homing missiles launched by the enemy interceptors, and fly your starship so fast they measure it in parsecs.

Typical modifiers: Enemy boarders have seized Engineering (–2 steps), unfamiliar controls (–1 step), computer-assisted navigation/evasion (+1 step), ship possesses components from a higher tech era (+2 steps).

See the *Shipyard* sourcebook for new skills that supplant *Piloting* in a campaign where starship operation is the focus.

PRIMITIVE WEAPON

Agility or Focus; Attack; specialized

This skill covers ranged weapons used prior to the advent of gunpowder, such as the bow, sling or crossbow. Fair warning: in most campaigns, this skill is rarely used because the weapons just aren't as good as their bullet-firing and laser-emitting counterparts in higher tech eras. But when you're marooned on an undiscovered planet, that improvised javelin might be what turns a dangerous predator like the raigath into a tasty meal.

This skill can be specialized. When you assign your first skill point in *Primitive Weapon*, choose a specific weapon: bola, bow, crossbow or sling. You gain a +1 step bonus on skill checks made to attack with that weapon. You can buy additional specializations for 2 skill points each when you level up; these skill points don't improve your skill score.

You can: Shoot an apple off your son's head, kill a giant with a slingshot, hit a flying lizard with a black arrow.

Typical modifiers: See Attacks in Chapter 5.

PROFESSION

Varies; Technical

Profession is a catch-all skill for a specialized livelihood that exists in the campaign setting but comes up so rarely it doesn't merit a dedicated line on the character sheet. If you want your character to be an accountant, contract attorney, insurance agent, interstellar trader, plumber or used-rocket salesman, put some skill points in *Profession* and collaborate with the GM on what the key ability score should be (Intelligence for an accountant, for example, and Personality for the rocket salesman).

It's worth noting that many white-collar and technical professions are covered by other skills: *Academics, Science, Engineering, Computers, Culture* and *Performance*, for example. You'll need *Profession* only for something off the beaten path in terms of heroic backgrounds.

You can: Launder the proceeds from your space smuggling, fix the clogged commodes on Level Fourteen, and get that middle manager into a low-parsec rocket that'll make the orbital commute a breeze.

Typical modifiers: You don't have the tools or reference materials handy (–2 steps), time pressure (–1 step), able assistants (+1 step), prior successes at this exact task (+2 steps).

RESILIENCE

Vitality; Defensive

Resilience has a narrow but critical purpose: keeping you functional despite the pain and shock of injury. You can use *Resilience* as an action in a combat scene to reduce the severity of a wound and thus the penalty to your other skill checks while you're suffering from it. (See Damage and Wounds in Chapter 5 for details.) In a nutshell, the greater your success with *Resilience*, the less a given injury hampers your ability to make subsequent skill checks.

Resilience is no substitute for *Medicine*, which actually treats the injury, but it keeps you functioning in moments of peril when you can't drop everything and get out your medkit.

You can: Ignore the bullet in your shoulder, the cuts on your feet from broken glass, and the fact that a laser-sword just chopped off your hand.

Typical modifiers: Depends on the severity of the wound you're trying to lessen; see Damage and Wounds in Chapter 5.

In playtests, this skill saved a lot of PC lives. Just sayin'...

IGNORING PAIN

With a successful 3-impulse *Resilience* check, you can reduce the penalty for a wound you've suffered. You reduce the penalty by 1/2/3 rows on an Av/Ex/St result; for example, if you're suffering a serious wound and you get an Excellent success on your *Resilience* check, you can treat it like a light wound for purposes of dealing with the wound penalty. You don't get to clear the wound box (that's what *Medicine* is for), but you can lessen the penalty for the rest of the scene. If you're wounded again, the normal penalties apply for those injuries.

You can succeed at a *Resilience* check to ignore pain only once per scene (but if you fail your check, you can keep trying until you succeed.)

SELF-STABILIZING

When you suffer a mortal wound, your *Resilience* check (and perhaps the *Medicine* skill of your friends) is the only thing between you and death. Even though you're unconscious, you make a *Resilience* check every 3 impulses. You collect 1/2/3 successes toward stabilizing on an Av/Ex/St check result. If someone is using the *Medicine* skill to help you, you get a bonus on your *Resilience* checks (see the *Medicine* skill for details).

After you achieve 1 success, you need only make a *Resilience* check once per minute. After you've tallied 3 successes, make a *Resilience* check every hour, and after you've tallied 5 successes, you'll check every day. Keep making the *Resilience* checks until one of three things happens:

- A high-tech device such as an automed sled stabilizes you. You're unconscious, but you won't die. Your mortal wound becomes a critical wound, which can be treated normally.
- You collect 6 successes on *Resilience* checks. You're stable and unconscious, and you won't die. Your mortal wound likewise becomes a critical wound.
- You fail on three *Resilience* checks. At the moment of the third failure, you die. (Depending on the tech era you're in, that might not be the end for you.)

RECOVERY

While the *Medicine* skill can treat wounds, you naturally heal over time, too. Your recovery speed depends on the severity of the wound; at the end of the specified time interval, make a *Resilience* check to reduce a wound by one severity level. You can recover from multiple wounds at the same time.

Light activity (walking, desk work) counts as rest, but interrupted sleep or participation in any action means you didn't rest that day; it counts as only half a day for rehab timing.

Wound Severity	Recovery
Graze	End of scene, no check needed
Light	End of day, no check needed
Moderate	1 day of rest; successful check reduces to light wound
Serious	3 days of rest; successful check reduces to moderate wound
Critical	10 days of rest; successful check reduces to serious wound

SCIENCE

Intelligence; Technical; cascades
This skill covers the hard sciences: physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy and planetology (a combination of geology, meteorology and environmental science), plus mathematics and fictional sciences such as chronogy (the study of timeline manipulation).

This skill cascades. For every odd skill point you spend in *Science*, choose a specific field of study from among those listed above or ones relevant to your campaign. You have particular training—equivalent to an advanced degree—in that discipline and gain a +1 step bonus when that field is relevant to your skill check. If you want to be hyper-specialized, you can choose the same field of study twice and get doctoral-level training and a +2 step bonus in that field.

You can: Predict the course of the rogue comet, record the anomalous energy readings from the monolith, or determine how the aliens are communicating with the mother ship.

The hardest part of chronogy is getting the verb tenses correct.

Typical modifiers: Previously undreamt-of phenomenon (–2 steps), available data is incomplete (–1 step), phenomenon fits prior theories (+1 step), AI assistance in research (+2 steps).

SECURITY

Agility or Intelligence; Environmental

The *Security* skill covers operating and bypassing physical and electronic locks, alarms, cameras and other surveillance systems. (Players being players, it's generally used more for bypassing than operating.) There's some overlap with *Computers*, which covers the alarm signal, keypad combination or security-cam footage away from the site of the security device. *Security* is what matters when the lock, camera or alarm is right in front of you.

You can: Disable the lasers that crisscross the hallway, crack open the briefcase without destroying the plans inside, and vandalize the security camera's gimbal so it doesn't cover the leftmost door.

Typical modifiers: Installation is already on alert (–2 steps), improvised tools (–1 step), schematic of the security network (+1 step), confederate on the enemy security team (+2 steps).

STEALTH

Agility or Focus; Environmental

You can remain unseen, employing low-observable techniques including camouflage and silent movement to traverse an area without drawing attention to yourself. This skill also includes training in the strengths and vulnerabilities of high-tech surveillance gear,

including how to evade or spoof them. Modern-era tech relies on soft soles and a camo outfit, but Solar- and Galactic-era stealth incorporates electronic scramblers, holographic cloaking, infrared smoothing and other technological solutions to one of the world's oldest games: winning at hide and seek.

Sneaking Around Between Scenes: If you're moving through an area where others might detect you—and you'd rather they didn't—make a *Stealth* check as described in the Starting Positions section of Contact, in Chapter 6. If you succeed, you can get closer to the would-be spotters, avoid the encounter entirely or get into a position with good cover or concealment.

Hiding During Combat: If you want to hide and you're within the spotting range set by the scene, you must a) have some semblance of a hiding place or equivalent high-tech gear, and b) avoid actions that make your presence obvious. The latter category depends on the specifics of the scene, but in general, most attacks and movement beyond your hiding place reveal you automatically.

You can: Evade the patrols in no-man's-land, sneak up behind the rooftop sniper, and pretend to be a larch.

Typical modifiers: Spotters have high-tech assistance (–2 steps), you're carrying cumbersome equipment (–1 step), camouflage clothing (+1 step), high-intensity distractions (+2 steps).

> When you attack an enemy unaware of you, you gain a +2 step bonus on the attack.

SURVIVAL

Vitality or Focus; Environmental
You know how to survive in the wild, whether it's Earth's backcountry or an untamed frontier world. Building shelter, acquiring food and water, and avoiding the environmental hazards of terrain and atmosphere are all key tasks that use this skill.

Physical privation in the narrow sense is the purview of the *Endurance* skill; *Survival* is relevant when you're employing knowledge and instinct before the point where you're hungry, thirsty, cold or slowly asphyxiating in the alien atmosphere.

You can: Build moisture wells to obtain water on a desert world, track a roving pack of symbiont wolf-creatures, recognize the early signs of hypoxia and seek out more breathable air.

Typical modifiers: World's dominant biology isn't carbon-based (–2 steps), inclement weather (–1 step), quality backcountry gear (+1 step), regimen of tailored pharmaceuticals (+2 steps).

WILLPOWER

Focus; Defensive; passive
The third of the passive "saving throw" skills (along with *Dodge* and *Endurance*), *Willpower* represents your mental fortitude and resistance to mind manipulation. When something is trying to

dominate your thoughts or force you to behave a certain way, the GM often asks you to make a *Willpower* check to avoid or ameliorate the effect.

Willpower also governs your distractibility, especially when faced with high-tech holograms, neurotoxins and psychotropic effects that render you confused or insensate.

You can: Gaze at the Red-Eyed Man without being hypnotized, resist the Soviet doctor's dose of sodium pentathol and continue to exclaim that there are four lights.

Typical step modifiers: Your senses are overwhelmed (–2 steps), attack is "magic" or "psionic" or some other power beyond your ken (–1 step), your battle-suit has automatic sensory dampeners (+1 step), you've received specific defenses against mental attack (+2 steps).

Old-schoolers know this, but "saving throw" is RPG for a roll of the dice that lets you avoid harm—often a lethal "gotcha" moment.

TALENT DESCRIPTIONS

Talent descriptions are much terser than skill descriptions because they are intended to be specific and exclusive—in general, you can only use a talent for exactly what it says it does.

Talent constellations are organized under their entry talents (marked with ★). You must choose the entry talent as your first pick when you begin a talent constellation. You cannot select a talent marked with a right arrow (↪) unless you already have the talent immediately preceding it.

TABLE 3–2: TALENTS

★Alertness
Hit the Dirt
Keen Senses
Prepared Action
↪Snapshot
Reactive Shout

★Closer
Character Study
↪Seductive
Chameleon
↪Cultural Sponge

★Commander
Combat Leader
↪Skills Coach
↪Inspiration to All
Flexible Tactics
↪Rapid Reassessment
Taunt
↪Group Taunt
↪Crucial Taunt

★Commando
Dash
↪Serpentine
Grenadier
Overwatch
Skirmisher
Silent Death
Trained Spotter

★Dirty Fighting
Bum Rush
Distracting Blow
↪Blinding Blow
Make 'Em Hurt
↪Make 'Em Bleed

★Drone Expert
Overclocking
Rapid Scripting
↪Conditional Logic

★Elusive
Combat Crouch
Evasive Footwork
↪Instinctive Evasion
Lucky Miss

★Gearhead
Built These Myself
↪One of a Kind
Fast Work
↪Hit It Again
Saboteur
↪Improvised Trap
Street Mod

★Gunner
Cover Destruction
Dakka Dakka
Forward Observer
↪Shockwave
↪Blast Shaping
Suppressive Fire
↪Unleash Hell
Strap It Down

★Gunslinger
Disarming Shot
Double Tap
Dramatic Reload
↪Free Reload
Dual Pistols
↪Dual Targeting
↪Dual Deathdealer
Gun-Fu
Steady Hand
↪Distance Shot
↪Deadeye Shot

★Inventor
The Best Teacher
↪Not That One!
Miraculous Invention
Improvisation
Resourcefulness

★Martial Arts, Grappling
Disarming Lock
↪Submission Lock
Judo Throw
↪Defensive Flip
↪Bodyslam
Takedown
↪Ground and Pound
Tight Clinch

★Martial Arts, Striking
Combo Strike
↪ Whirlwind Combo
Defensive Stance
↪Roll With the Punch
Hands of Stone
Haymaker
↪Knockout Blow

★Medic
Don't You Quit on Me
First Responder
↪Emergency Treatment
I've Seen Worse
Physician, Heal Thyself

★Melee Expert
Lunge
↪Overwhelming Lunge
Melee Combo
↪Melee Whirlwind
Parry
↪Riposte
↪Disarming Riposte

★Rugged
Extra-Rugged I
↪Extra-Rugged II
↪Extra-Rugged III
Roll With It
↪Take It on the Armor
Shake It Off
↪Inured to Pain
↪Suck It Up

★Sniper
Controlled Breathing
↪Precise Sniper
↪Deadeye Sniper
Extreme Range
↪Thousand-Meter Stare
Low Observables
↪Induce Panic
Sighting In

★Spy
Access
Black Bag Specialist
↪Safecracker
Brush Pass
Expert Tail
Vanish

★Trooper
Controlled Burst
↪Focused Bursts
Deadly Reply
Imposing Threat
Over the Top
Spray and Pray
↪Covering Fire
Stopping Power
↪Rock Steady

★Artificial Systems
(android)
Hardened Systems
Redundant Components
↪Overdrive
Social Programming

★Powerful Build
(briith)
Big Hitter
Bulldozer
↪Trample
↪Unstoppable
Oversized Weapons
Thick Hide

★Rapport
(nesh)
Branching Network
Propagating Network
Rapid Communion
↪Euphoric Communion
↪Forceful Communion

★Limb Articulation
(xayon)
Ambiloader
↪Dual Weapons
↪Triple Weapons
Feral Wrestler
Flurry of Blows
↪Feral Flurry
Swift Quadruped

★Self-Improvement
(2nd level)
Improved Strength
Improved Agility
Improved Vitality
Improved Intelligence
Improved Focus
Improved Personality

Many talents refer to specific combat situations or actions. See Chapter 5 for more information on how combat scenes and skill challenges work in the *ALTERNITY* game.

★**Alertness:** You gain a +2 step bonus on initiative checks.

> **Hit the Dirt:** You can go prone as a reaction to the GM declaring an attack against you.

> **Keen Senses:** You gain a +2 step bonus on *Awareness* and *Empathy* checks made at the start of a scene.

> **Prepared Action:** Your first action in an encounter takes 1 fewer impulse. If that reduces it to zero impulses, perform that action and act again immediately.

>> ↪**Snapshot:** You gain a +1 step bonus on attacks and checks made against enemies who haven't acted yet in a scene.

> **Reactive Shout:** As a reaction to an enemy declaring an attack, you can shout a warning to an ally who can hear and understand you. If you do, that attack suffers a –1 step penalty. Tell the GM you're using Reactive Shout after the attack has been announced but before it has been resolved.

★**Closer:** You have a natural instinct for sealing the deal, gaining a +1 step bonus on *Coercion* and *Influence* checks when you're interacting with someone who is untrained in *Coercion* or *Influence* (whichever one you're using). A NPC is considered to be trained in a skill if it appears in a Skill entry in the adversary stats or if the NPC description includes the skill.

It's ABC.
A: Always.
B: Be.
C: Closing.

> **Character Study:** You gain a +1 step bonus on *Empathy* checks if you're interacting with an NPC you've met previously, either in a prior interaction scene or in a conversation lasting at least 30 minutes.

>> ↪**Seductive:** You gain a +2 step bonus on *Influence* checks to attract the romantic attention of someone inclined to be interested in your species, gender and other factors (as applicable; the universe is a big place). Degrees of success are highly situation-dependent, but as a general guideline, an Average success yields only a brief romantic interlude, and an Excellent success lays the groundwork for an ongoing relationship. A Stellar success sets up a "contact with benefits" arrangement (as described in the Contacts section of Chapter 6; the quality of the contact depends on whom you seduced).

> **Chameleon:** When you adopt an identity other than your own (such as a disguise or cover story), you gain a +1 bonus on *Deception* and *Misdirection* checks if you had a model to

observe beforehand. To pretend to be a Haravorian Tech-no-Priest, for example, you have to have seen how they behave first.

↪**Cultural Sponge:** Once you've spent a day living with a given culture, you can change one of your cascade choices for the *Culture* skill to include that culture. If you've spent five days, you can do likewise with a subculture.

★**Commander:** You gain a +1 step bonus on *Coercion* or *Influence* checks made during combat.

Combat Leader: As a 3-impulse action, make an *Influence* check to spur your allies on to greater effectiveness. If you succeed, designate an enemy. Your allies each gain a +1 step bonus on their next attack against that enemy in this scene. Allies who can't communicate with you don't get the step bonus.

↪**Skills Coach**: Your *Influence* check can help your allies make other kinds of skill checks, too. If you succeed, choose a technical or environmental category skill you are trained in. Your allies gain a +1 step bonus on their next use of that skill in this scene. Allies who can't communicate with you don't get the bonus.

↪**Inspiration to All:** Your *Influence* checks grant a +2 step bonus if successful.

Flexible Tactics: As a 4-impulse action, you enable an ally to take a 2- or 3-impulse action even though it isn't their turn. That ally's next action is delayed by 1 impulse. You must be able to quickly communicate the sort of action you want your ally to take (move, attack and so on). Allies who gain an action via Flexible Tactics can't gain a second action or use a reaction until they've acted normally.

↪**Rapid Reassessment:** Flexible Tactics is only a 3-impulse action for you.

Taunt: As a 3-impulse action, make a *Coercion* check to demoralize an enemy you choose. On a success, that enemy must succeed at a *Willpower* check or suffer a −2 step penalty on all skill checks until your next action. Enemies who can't understand you (due to language barrier or deafness, for example) don't suffer the penalty.

↪**Group Taunt:** You can taunt a group of similar enemies in the scene—all the security guards or all the marzogs, for example. They collectively make one *Willpower* check (if they don't have the same *Willpower* score, they aren't sufficiently similar). If that *Willpower* check fails,

Trained skills are ones you spent at least 1 point in.

they all suffer a –2 step penalty on all checks until your next action.

> ↪**Crucial Taunt:** When you taunt an enemy, the penalty is increased with each degree of success. An Excellent *Coercion* check result imposes a –3 step penalty, and a Stellar check result imposes a –4 step penalty.

★**Commando:** You gain an additional +1 step bonus to attacks and skill checks against enemies who are unaware of you.

> **Dash:** Increase your base speed by 5 meters.
>
> > ↪**Serpentine:** When you use the evade action modifier while moving, enemies suffer an extra –1 step penalty to hit you.
>
> **Grenadier:** You gain a +1 step bonus to attack when throwing grenades.
>
> **Overwatch:** When you ready an action to make an attack, you gain a +2 step bonus to your attack roll when you resolve the readied action.
>
> **Skirmisher:** If you're evading when an enemy misses you with an attack, you gain a +1 step bonus on any attack you make against that enemy with your next action.
>
> **Silent Death:** If you kill or disable an enemy with an Excellent or Stellar success, nearby enemies suffer a –3 step penalty on *Awareness* checks to notice that attack (however, no one needs to make a check to notice a loud or obvious attack).
>
> **Trained Spotter:** You have a +2 step bonus to notice enemies at the beginning of a scene.

The *Athletics* skill governs thrown grenades.

★**Dirty Fighting:** Gain +3 damage when you successfully attack a distracted or surprised target.

> **Bum Rush:** You can maintain a grapple while moving at normal speed if the target you're grappling is medium size or smaller. If you move at least 5 meters and end the grapple, you can make a free unarmed attack on the formerly grappled target, and the target falls prone if your attack succeeds.
>
> **Distracting Blow:** Add 1 impulse to your attack to attempt a distracting blow with a hand-to-hand or melee attack. If you achieve an Excellent or Stellar success, your target must succeed at a *Willpower* check or be distracted until the end of your next action in addition to the attack's normal effects.
>
> > ↪**Blinding Blow:** Add 1 impulse to your attack to attempt a blinding blow with a hand-to-hand or melee attack. If you achieve an Excellent or Stellar success, your target must succeed at a *Dodge* check or be blinded until the

end of your next action in addition to the attack's normal effects. Opponents who don't rely on sight (some aliens, for example) are immune to this effect.

Make 'Em Hurt: Add 1 impulse to your attack to soften up a target with a hand-to-hand or melee attack. If you achieve an Excellent or Stellar success, you and your allies gain a +2 step bonus on *Coercion* checks against the target made during this combat (or in its immediate aftermath) in addition to the attack's normal effects.

↪**Make 'Em Bleed:** Add 1 impulse to your attack to add bleeding to your hand-to-hand or melee attack. If you achieve an Excellent or Stellar success, your target suffers bleeding damage over time in addition to the attack's normal effects. Bleeding ends when the target successfully resists with an *Endurance* check or receives treatment from a *Medicine* check. Some opponents (robots, for example) are immune to bleeding.

And with "blood," we include ichor, acidic fluid, glowing goo, and other things aliens prefer to keep inside themselves.

★**Drone Expert:** When you issue a command to a drone, it's a 2-impulse action.

Overclocking: When you issue an attack command to a drone, you can grant a +3 step bonus to its attack, but it takes 1 box of damage (lowest available wound band) after the attack is resolved.

Rapid Scripting: You can issue two commands to a drone with a single action, which it executes sequentially.

↪**Conditional Logic:** You can issue one command to a drone, then two possible second commands along with the criteria for choosing between them.

★**Elusive:** Ranged attacks against you that originate from medium range (20 m) or longer suffer an additional −1 step penalty.

Combat Crouch: You gain additional benefit from cover. Attackers take an additional −1 step penalty when they attack you as long as you have at least 25 percent cover.

Evasive Footwork: When you're evading and an enemy misses you, you can immediately move 2 meters.

↪**Instinctive Evasion:** You may evade while attacking without spending the extra impulse to use the action modifier. When you do, enemies suffer a −1 step penalty on attacks against you even if your *Dodge* skill is high enough to impose a higher step penalty. You may also evade normally, trading the impulse cost for the normal penalty if you wish.

Lucky Miss: Once per combat scene, you can use a reaction to make an attack that hits miss instead.

★Gearhead: You gain a +1 step bonus on any technical skill check you make to maintain or repair a machine, vehicle, ship or installation you've worked on before.

Built These Myself: When you take this talent, you can give yourself two free weapon, armor or tool upgrades. Each upgrade must be applied to a different weapon, armor or tool.

↳**One of a Kind**: Gain an additional upgrade for one of the items you improved with Built These Myself.

Fast Work: During a complex skill challenge based on a technical skill you are trained in, your successful skill checks are worth 1 more success than normal (2/3/4 successes on Av/Ex/St check results).

↳**Hit It Again**: If you fail an *Engineering* or *Mechanics* check, on your next action you can spend 1 impulse to hit it again; reroll your check.

Saboteur: You're especially good at setting up things to break. You gain a +2 step bonus to technical skill checks to sabotage devices and machinery.

↳**Improvised Trap:** As a 3-impulse action, you can attempt a *Mechanics* check to create the trap equivalent of a smoke grenade, concussion grenade or thermal grenade. You need access to power, flammable materials or a small amount of explosive (an actual grenade will do). Your trap goes off on the condition you specify (when a creature enters the area, when a creature takes an action like starting a motor or opening a door, or after a set amount of time). Creatures about to trigger your trap are allowed an *Awareness* check (opposed by your *Mechanics* check) to spot it before they set it off, although unintelligent creatures may not recognize the danger.

Street Mod: As a 3-impulse action, make an *Engineering* or *Mechanics* check to modify a piece of equipment to exceed its normal performance for the duration of a scene. Increase performance (speed, duration or capacity) by 10/25/50 percent on an Av/Ex/St check result. If your check fails, you fail to boost performance and damage the equipment; all checks using that equipment take a –1 step penalty until it is repaired.

★**Gunner:** When you use the aim action modifier with a heavy weapon, you do not add a 1-impulse delay to your next action. When you use the full auto action with a heavy weapon, delay your next action by 1 impulse, not 2.

> **Cover Destruction:** When you attack a target behind cover, you can choose to reduce the value of the target's cover by 2 steps for this attack. If you do, reduce the damage of the attack by 3.

> **Dakka Dakka:** You take no penalty for using full auto on your first autofire attack. Subsequent attacks still have a −2 penalty.

> **Forward Observer:** You gain a +1 step bonus when making an indirect fire attack.

> > ↪**Shockwave:** Pinpoint accuracy and precise timing make your explosions more effective. When you fire a heavy weapon with a blast radius, creatures that take damage are also knocked back away from the blast origin a distance equal to the blast's primary blast radius unless an intervening object like a wall prevents further movement.

> > ↪**Blast Shaping:** When you shoot a heavy weapon with a blast radius, you can angle and target it so it deals only half damage within a 1-meter square you designate inside the affected area.

This talent preserves a lot of friendships.

> **Suppressive Fire:** Make an improved autofire attack action and roll damage for an Average hit. Enemies at medium range or closer within a 45-degree arc whose armor is lower than your damage roll automatically take a 1-point wound unless they are prone or behind cover. Whether they're hit or not, enemies within the affected area take 1 extra impulse for their next action if they act before your next action.

> > ↪**Unleash Hell:** Your suppressive fire attacks automatically deal damage equal to your damage roll to targets not prone or behind cover. Enemies avoid damage completely if they're someplace where it's completely ludicrous that a round would reach them.

> **Strap It Down:** When you're carrying a heavy weapon, only half its mass (including ammunition/power supply) counts for encumbrance purposes.

★**Gunslinger:** You can draw one or more pistols as a free action when you attack with a pistol.

> **Disarming Shot:** On an Excellent or better hit, you can choose to reduce damage to 1 and disarm an enemy holding a weapon or object in one hand.

Double Tap: On an Excellent or better hit, you gain an immediate follow-up attack at a –1 step penalty on the same target as a free action.

Dramatic Reload: You gain a +1 step bonus on the next attack you make after you reload your weapon.

> ↪**Free Reload:** You can reload your pistol as a free action immediately after you take an action to attack.

Dual Pistols: If you are armed with two pistols, you can fire them both together at the same target as one action when you attack. Your attack has a –2 step penalty. If you hit, both weapons hit. Roll damage separately.

> ↪**Dual Targeting:** You can attack two different targets with dual pistols. Resolve each attack separately. Your attacks take a –2 step penalty.

> ↪**Dual Deathdealer:** Your penalty for using Dual Pistols or Dual Targeting is reduced to –1 step.

Gun-Fu: You gain a +1 step bonus to your attack when you fire a pistol at someone you're in melee with.

Steady Hand: If you aim with a pistol, you gain a +2 step bonus instead of +1 step.

> ↪**Distance Shot:** Ignore range penalties for pistol attacks (max range still applies).

> ↪**Deadeye Shot:** When you aim with a pistol attack, you gain AP 3 (reduce target armor by 3) in addition to the normal benefits for aiming.

★**Inventor:** You're something of a mad scientist. When you select gear, you can choose one item from a Tech Era one higher than the campaign's Tech Era as part of your starting gear. The item is unreliable, and if you allow someone else to use it, there is a 50 percent chance it breaks at the end of the scene. You can replace a lost or broken invention in 1 week (or choose a new item of the same class).

The Best Teacher: When you fail at a technical skill check in a complex skill challenge, gain a +2 step bonus on the next technical skill check you make in this scene.

> ↪**Not That One!:** The first time in a scene that you fail an environmental or technical skill check that would cause a

complex skill challenge to fail out, ignore the result. You neither succeed nor fail.

Improvisation: You can rebuild any piece of personal gear into a different but related piece of gear of equal or lower class. For example, you could make a sonic viewer into a sonic bore, a flamethrower into a cutting torch, or just about anything with a power cell into a thermal grenade. Your repurposed item works for one scene (or one use, in the case of a consumable) at a –1 step penalty, and is then ruined. Rebuilding an item is a *Mechanics* (repair) skill challenge requiring 3 successes for an easy conversion or 6 successes for an improbable one; you can make one check per minute. The GM can rule that a particular improvisation is just not possible, or requires extra components.

Miraculous Invention: The item you choose with your Inventor talent can be two Tech Eras ahead of the campaign's Tech Era.

Resourcefulness: You have a +2 step bonus on any skill check to interact with a terrain feature or trigger its special effect.

★**Martial Arts, Grappling:** You gain a +1 step bonus on *Hand to Hand* checks made to start a grapple.

Disarming Lock: If you take the grab object action against an enemy you are grappling, you gain an additional +2 step bonus on the opposed check.

↪**Submission Hold:** If you succeed at an unarmed attack against a living enemy you are grappling, the enemy becomes dazed until it loses the grappled condition or it successfully resists with an *Endurance* check. If you succeed at an unarmed attack against an enemy who is both grappled and dazed, in addition to taking damage that enemy must succeed at an *Endurance* check or become incapacitated for five minutes. Enemies wearing tough armor are immune to submission holds.

Judo Throw: When you win an opposed check to start a grapple, you can choose to make your enemy prone 2 m away from you rather than imposing the grappled condition on that enemy.

↪**Defensive Flip:** When an enemy moves adjacent to you, you can use a reaction to attempt a grapple and judo throw.

↪**Bodyslam:** When you succeed at a judo throw, you can use a free action to make an immediate unarmed attack against the thrown enemy.

Takedown: In addition to the normal +2 step bonus for tackling, you gain an additional +1 step bonus on attempts to tackle an enemy.

> ↪**Ground and Pound:** If your enemy is prone and you are grappling it, you gain an additional +1 step bonus on unarmed attacks against that enemy.

Tight Clinch: You gain a +2 step bonus on *Hand to Hand* checks made when enemies take the resist action to escape a grapple with you.

★**Martial Arts, Striking:** Your unarmed damage improves to 1d6 + 0/4 physical. You can make an unarmed strike as a 2-impulse attack action.

Combo Strike: When you achieve an Excellent or Stellar success on an unarmed attack, you may make a free unarmed attack with a –1 step penalty against the same target after you've resolved the first attack. The follow-up attack doesn't trigger additional combo strikes.

> ↪**Whirlwind Combo:** Your Combo Strike follow-up attacks do trigger additional combo strikes if you achieve an Excellent or Stellar success, and follow-up attacks can target other enemies if you like. The penalty to your follow-up attacks increases by –1 step for each subsequent attack.

Defensive Stance: Enemies attacking you with unarmed or melee attacks suffer a –1 step penalty, or –2 steps if you have at least one hand free.

> ↪**Roll With the Punch:** When you are hit with an unarmed or melee attack, you can use a reaction to reduce the damage by 3 or immediately move 2 meters.

Hands of Stone: Your unarmed damage improves to 1d6 + 2/6 physical.

Haymaker: When you achieve an Excellent or Stellar success with an unarmed attack, your target must make a *Resilience* check or be knocked back 2 meters and fall prone.

> ↪**Knockout Blow:** When you achieve a Stellar success with an unarmed attack, your target must succeed at a *Resilience* check or be stunned 3 impulses. If you stun your target, you can immediately make a free unarmed attack on the stunned target. If the follow-up attack hits, the target must make another *Resilience* check or be knocked unconscious for five minutes.

Knockbacks are often more dramatic in zero-G. Remind your GM...

★**Medic:** You gain a +1 step bonus on *Medicine* checks made during combat.

> **Don't You Quit on Me:** Your successful *Medicine* checks to stabilize someone count as an additional success (2/3/4 successes on Av/Ex/St check results).

> **First Responder:** As a 3-impulse action, you can move 10 meters and make a *Medicine* check.

>> ↳**Emergency Treatment:** Your attempts to treat a wound in combat take 2 impulses each.

> **I've Seen Worse:** As a 1-impulse action, you can use *Coercion* or *Influence* as if it were *Resilience* on an ally's behalf to reduce your ally's wound penalty. You can help each ally this way only once per combat and only if your ally has not successfully used *Resilience* on a wound in this scene.

> **Physician, Heal Thyself:** When you attempt to treat your own wounds, you don't suffer the step penalties for being wounded.

★**Melee Expert:** You gain a +1 step attack bonus when you use the charge action modifier to attack with a melee weapon.

> **Lunge:** You can make melee attacks against enemies 4 meters away from you.

>> ↳**Overwhelming Lunge:** When you charge an enemy, you can make a shove attempt (which the enemy can block or sidestep) immediately after you resolve the melee attack. If the attack hits and the enemy either sidesteps or loses the opposed check to block, you can continue moving up to the usual limit of 15 meters.

> **Melee Combo:** When you achieve an Excellent or Stellar success with a melee attack, you may make a free melee attack with a –1 step penalty against the same target after you've resolved the first attack. That follow-up attack doesn't trigger additional combo strikes.

>> ↳**Melee Whirlwind:** Your follow-up attacks do trigger additional melee combo attacks if you achieve an Excellent or Stellar success, and follow-up attacks can target other enemies if you like. Your attack penalty increases by –1 step with each subsequent follow-up attack.

> **Parry:** When you're armed with a melee weapon, and an enemy makes an unarmed or melee attack against you, you can use a reaction to parry. Make a *Melee* check as an opposed check against your attacker's result to counter the attack success. If you've already taken a reaction to parry, you can't make another parry until you act again.

↪**Riposte:** When you're armed with a melee weapon and an enemy makes an unarmed or melee attack against you, you can use a reaction to make a free attack against your attacker immediately after the attack against you is resolved. If you've already used a reaction to riposte, you can't make another riposte until you act again. You can't parry and riposte against the same attack.

↪**Disarming Riposte:** If your riposte attack is an Excellent or better success, you can voluntarily reduce it to no damage and instead disarm any object held in your enemy's hands, causing it to fall to the ground (or float slowly away in zero-g).

★**Rugged:** Gain bonus wound boxes on the graze and light wound rows of your durability table.

Extra-Rugged I: Gain a bonus moderate wound box.

↪**Extra-Rugged II:** Gain a bonus serious wound box.

↪**Extra-Rugged III:** Gain a bonus critical wound box.

Roll With It: Once per scene, you can use a reaction to reduce a wound you suffer by one severity level, to a minimum of Graze.

↪**Take It on the Armor:** You can use Roll With It twice in a scene. You can reduce a wound by two severity levels when you Roll With It, but if you do, your armor becomes damaged. Its resistance is reduced by 3 until it can be repaired. You can Take It on the Armor only if you are wearing armor that provides resistance against the damage from the attack in the first place.

Shake It Off: You can make *Resilience* checks to reduce a wound's penalty as a 1-impulse action instead of a 3-impulse action.

↪**Inured to Pain:** You can reduce wound penalties with *Resilience* checks twice per scene, not just once.

↪**Suck It Up:** When you are wounded, you can add +1 to +3 impulses to any action you take. If you do, reduce the step penalty for being wounded by the same number of impulses you added. Step penalties from other sources cannot be reduced this way—just step penalties from wounds.

★**Sniper:** If you aim with a rifle, you gain a +2 step bonus to your attack instead of a +1 step bonus.

Controlled Breathing: If you take 2 impulses to aim, your attack bonus improves to +3 steps.

↪**Precise Sniper:** If you aim, ignore the target's cover (if any) in addition to the normal attack bonus. You still require a line of sight to attack.

↪**Deadeye Sniper:** When you aim with a rifle attack, you gain AP 3 (reduce target armor by 3) in addition to the normal benefits for aiming.

Extreme Range: Any rifle you shoot can reach targets at extreme range, even if its listed range is very long.

↪**Thousand-Meter Stare:** Reduce all range penalties by 1 step when you attack with a rifle.

Low Observables: When you attack from long range or farther, your enemies must succeed at an opposed check (their *Awareness* versus your *Stealth*) to tell where the shot came from.

↪ **Induce Panic:** If you deal 10 or more damage and no enemy knows where you are, living creatures must succeed at *Willpower* or choose to go prone or move toward cover with their next action.

Sighting In: If you miss a target with a rifle attack, you gain a cumulative +1 step bonus for each subsequent attack against that target until you hit. You lose the bonus if you switch targets, but not if you do something other than shoot.

★**Spy:** You have a false identity—a "legend," as it's known in the business. Examples include aristocrat, businessperson, journalist, or minor criminal. Your true identity comes to light only under rigorous background checking that usually requires several days (although most NPCs accept the identity you claim). A false identity comes with one Average-level contact who believes your legend. You can "burn" your identity to stymie an effort to locate you or take you into custody. If you have to burn your false identity, you can create a new one in 10 days.

> In higher tech eras, you might have automated software that keeps your "legend" active with routine transactions and correspondence.

Access: The contact you gain with your false identity is Excellent, not Average.

Black Bag Specialist: You have a +1 step bonus on *Athletics* checks to climb and *Security* checks to open locks.

↪**Safecracker:** When you make a *Security* check to open a lock, it's a 2-impulse action. You can't fail out of a skill challenge to open a lock.

Brush Pass: You have a +2 step bonus on Misdirection checks to pick pockets or plant small objects on a target. When you use Misdirection to pick a pocket, you can immediately plant the object you remove on any other creature within 2 meters as part of the same action.

Expert Tail: You have a +2 step bonus on Awareness checks to tail a target and Misdirection checks to avoid being spotted. You automatically spot anyone tailing you.

Vanish: You have a knack for avoiding notice. You gain a +2 step bonus on *Misdirection* checks to blend into crowds and a +2 step bonus on *Stealth* checks to sneak between scenes.

★**Trooper:** You can attack with ranged weapons when you use the charge action modifier. You take a –1 step penalty to ranged attacks while charging.

The charge action modifier is covered in Chapter 5.

Controlled Burst: Gain a +1 step bonus when you make an attack using burst autofire.

↳**Focused Bursts:** Subsequent bursts against the same target gain an additional +1 step bonus. The bonus expires if you or the target moves.

Deadly Reply: When an enemy hits you, you gain a +2 step bonus on your next attack against that enemy.

Imposing Threat: When you attack an enemy in melee or at close range, that enemy has –2 step penalty on their next attack unless it's against you.

Over the Top: You can use the charge and evade action modifiers at the same time (delay your next action by 1 impulse, not 2).

Spray and Pray: Gain a +1 step bonus when making full auto autofire attacks.

↳**Covering Fire:** Make a full auto autofire attack. Enemies at medium range or closer within a 45-degree arc you designate must make *Willpower* checks; those that fail cannot attack until after your next action. Those that succeed can attack, but it takes 1 extra impulse to do so.

Stopping Power: When you deal 10 or more damage with an attack, the target must make a *Resilience* check or be knocked back 2 meters and fall prone.

↳**Rock Steady:** Requires Strength 5+. You treat pistols or assault weapons with a Speed of 4 as if they were Speed 3.

RESTRICTED TALENTS

You can't select species talents or advanced talents unless you meet the requirements.

★Artificial Systems (Android): You can disengage your safeties as a 1-impulse action.

> **Hardened Systems:** You gain a +1 step bonus when you make a check as part of the resist action.

> **Redundant Components:** When you disengage your safeties, take one box of damage per 2 impulses of bonus, rounded up.
> > ↪**Overdrive:** When you disengage the safeties, grant yourself a +3 step bonus, not a +2 step bonus.

> **Social Programming:** You can reprogram 4 skill points of social skills, spread out as you like, with the same limitations as your technical skills.

★Limb Articulation (Xayon): You can change into or out of quadruped stance as a 1-impulse action.

After a while, telling the GM what stance you're in will be second nature.

> **Ambiloader:** When you're in bipedal stance, you can draw and reload pistols and assault weapons without taking an action to do so—that's what your extra hands are doing.
> > ↪**Dual Weapons:** You can wield two weapons at the same time and attack with both in the same action. Resolve each attack separately. Each attack takes a −2 step penalty. Your next action is determined by the speed of the slowest weapon +1 impulse.
> > ↪**Triple Weapons:** You can wield three one-handed weapons at once, as described in Dual Weapons. You can make three attacks and each attack takes a −2 step penalty. Your next action is determined by the speed of the slowest weapon, +2 impulses.

> **Feral Wrestler:** You gain a +1 step bonus on *Hand to Hand* checks to start or escape a grapple.

> **Flurry of Blows:** You can use all six limbs to defend yourself. As a 4-impulse unarmed attack, you can attack twice, with both attacks suffering a −1 step penalty.
> > ↪**Feral Flurry:** When you make a 4-impulse unarmed attack, you attack twice at no step penalty.

> **Swift Quadruped:** When you're in quadruped stance, your base speed is 40 meters.

★Powerful Build (Briith): You gain a +1 step bonus to *Hand to Hand* and *Melee* attacks.

> **Big Hitter:** When you achieve an Excellent or Stellar success with a melee attack, your target must make a *Resilience* check or be knocked back 2 meters and fall prone.

Bulldozer: You gain a +2 step bonus to checks to resolve shove attempts (stacks with the usual size advantage).

    ↪**Trample:** If you knock an adversary down during a shove attempt, you can make an unarmed attack against the target as a free action, then continue your move action.

    ↪**Unstoppable:** You can make shove attempts while using the charge action modifier.

Oversized Weapon: You can wield oversized versions of melee weapons. An oversized weapon gains a +1 bonus to damage rolls (and weighs 50 percent more than normal).

Thick Hide: Increase the value of your physical armor by +1.

★**Rapport (Nesh):** Your superior neshi telepathy allows you to communicate with any sentient creature with an Intelligence of 2 or higher, not just other nesh.

Branching Network: You can communicate telepathically with up to five other creatures at once.

Propagating Network: You can communicate telepathically within a 1 km range.

Rapid Communion: You can communicate telepathically at the same speed you can speak.

    ↪**Euphoric Communion:** You can make *Influence* checks while communicating telepathically. You gain a +2 step bonus for such checks.

    ↪**Forceful Communion:** You can make *Coercion* checks while communicating telepathically. You gain a +2 step bonus for such checks.

★**Self-Improvement (2nd Level+):** Increase an ability score of your choice by +1.

If you want a human-only constellation, Self-Improvement is a good choice.

Improved Strength: You must be level 6 or higher to select this talent. Increase your Strength by +1.

Improved Agility: You must be level 6 or higher to select this talent. Increase your Agility by +1.

Improved Vitality: You must be level 6 or higher to select this talent. Increase your Vitality by +1.

Improved Intelligence: You must be level 6 or higher to select this talent. Increase your Intelligence by +1.

Improved Focus: You must be level 6 or higher to select this talent. Increase your Focus by +1.

Improved Personality: You must be level 6 or higher to select this talent. Increase your Personality by +1.

4: GEAR

"A weapon is a device for making your enemy change his mind."

—Lois McMaster Bujold

Laser pistols? Personal force fields? Handheld analyzers, powered armor or recon drones? Advanced tools and armament are staples of the science fiction genre, especially in the sort of action-focused stories that make up the majority of *ALTERNITY* campaigns. On the other hand, a modern-day setting might limit you to a 9 mm pistol, a cell phone and a bulletproof vest—the same sort of gear any plainclothes police officer carries—while a hero in a primitive, post-apocalyptic setting might have to make do with a crossbow and a leather jacket.

Gear consists of weapons (melee, ranged and heavy), armor and tools. In each category, gear is further defined by tech era, class and restriction level.

- **Tech Era** (TE) is the technology level at which an item becomes available. You can't select equipment from a higher TE than the era you're playing in.
- **Class** represents the quality and expense of an item. The higher the class, the rarer and more expensive the item. Class corresponds to price as follows:

Class 1	$100
Class 2	$500
Class 3	$2,500
Class 4	$10,000
Class 5	$50,000

- **Restriction Level** describes how tightly the item is controlled by whatever authorities exist. Grenades are cheap, so their equipment class is low, but they're really illegal, so they have a high restriction level.

STARTING GEAR

To equip your character, ask your GM which tech era the game is set in, whether any item restrictions apply and which method of choosing starting gear he or she prefers: Quick and Easy, Pay as You Go, Standard Issue or some other house rule.

Everyday Stuff: You need to purchase or select only combat gear and special tools. You can assume you have anything else a typical person would have: several changes of clothing, an overnight bag or suitcase, an apartment or small house, personal transportation (a car or motorcycle), a cell phone or its equivalent and so on. If you're currently living aboard a spaceship, your apartment's back on your base planet and your car's in storage.

Your Ship: Your GM may put a ship of some kind at your team's disposal. You and your fellow heroes might be the crew of a ship owned by some corporate or government master, or the ship might be the collective property of the team or registered under the name of one specific hero in the party. Regardless of the details, you don't buy a ship—the GM assigns you one if it's important for the campaign.

QUICK AND EASY

You begin with one weapon, one suit of armor or defensive gear, one tool and three "anything" picks (handy for picking up extra weapons or tools you think you might need). One of your items is Class 3, two are Class 2 and the rest are Class 1. You've got $500 in your pocket.

Gear Upgrades: You might find it useful to choose a Class 2 item with a +1 gear upgrade instead of a Class 3 item—for example, if you'd rather have an exceptionally good pistol instead of a rifle. See Rewards in Chapter 7 for more information on gear upgrades.

CURRENCY

For the purpose of convenience, we're using US dollar signs when we talk about money. Naturally, the common currency depends greatly on the setting. Prices for item class could be in pounds sterling, euros, credits, gold pieces, liters of water, iridium weight units—we don't care. For that matter, a "Class 1" price might be $5 in the 1880s or $50 in the 1980s; relative buying power is what's important here. Ask your GM what the setting currency is; go with "credits" or "dollars" until the GM tells you otherwise.

PAY AS YOU GO

The GM assigns you a starting budget, and you purchase the items you want piecemeal. A good standard is $4,000, but your GM may set a different budget based on the campaign she has in mind.

Realistically, you could probably run up your credit cards or take out a loan and get more buying power, but we're going to ignore that for now. No one wants to play a game where you're worried about your monthly credit card statement (although if you have a major loan on something like a starship, figuring out how to keep your head above water can certainly serve as motivation to find lucrative opportunities). Pay for your gear when you buy it, and assume this is what you can spend with due consideration of your personal financial situation.

STANDARD ISSUE

In some scenarios your personal funds aren't important—what's important is what the Star Marine Quartermaster Corps chooses to issue to you. Usually this includes one weapon of Class 3 or 4, one armor of Class 3 or 4 and three anything picks of Class 1 or 2. You can't take the Class 3 or 4 stuff with you when you're off-duty, but the Class 1 and 2 stuff is yours (or easy to take with you, anyway). You also have $500 in your pocket.

RESTRICTION LEVELS

Having $100,000 in the bank doesn't mean you can easily buy a shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missile. Weapons like Stingers and 9K32 Strelas are kept under strict military control in all but the most lawless and chaotic situations. When you're equipping your *ALTERNITY* character, check with your GM before selecting any item with the following access levels:

G (General): If an item doesn't have a restriction level noted in its price, it's generally available and can be purchased without restriction. There might be some local licensing or regulatory controls for items such as handguns or drones, but you can jump through those hoops or ignore them without too much trouble.

R (Restricted): These items are not widely available for civilians. To get your hands on a restricted item, you need to secure expensive special licensing, be equipped by some sponsoring organization allowed to use the gear (such as a corporation or a government agency), or wantonly break the law by purchasing the item from an illegal provider. Even if you're willing to buy the special license or break the law, there's no guarantee the item you want is available for purchase at any price—check with your GM before you equip your hero with a restricted-grade item.

> ## PISTOLS OK, RIFLES PROBLEMATIC
>
> For most *ALTERNITY* campaigns, it's safe to assume the heroes can carry pistols or melee weapons without too much trouble. Either the permits aren't hard to come by, or the setting is rough-and-tumble enough that it's not unusual for people to be armed. In some places (like airports or courthouses) weapons might not be allowed, but otherwise you can go about your business armed.
>
> Rifles and SMGs are a different animal. Walking around with long arms or automatic weapons is obvious and provokes alarm in civilized areas—the police investigate, criminals assume they're about to be attacked, bystanders get out of the area or close up shop. You'll need to decide if the extra firepower is worth the trouble.

M (Military): These items are illegal for private citizens. You can't just apply for a special license—you can acquire these items only through a sponsoring organization such as a government agency or a corporation powerful enough to make its own rules. You *might* be able to buy military-level gear from a highly illegal source, but anyone who sees you with that item knows immediately you're breaking many laws. Of course, in a lawless area, that might not matter much. Check with your GM before choosing a military-grade item.

X (Experimental): These items are not generally available for *anybody*, not even corporate problem-solvers or government agents. You just can't buy an X-grade item, but you might acquire one as a reward during an adventure or be assigned one for a specific mission.

TECHNOLOGY ERA

Does your hero carry a 9 mm pistol, a laser pistol or a disintegrator ray? It depends on the technology era he or she comes from. It's quite possible for different planets or areas within a campaign to possess different levels of technology—heroes on a starship might carry laser pistols but find themselves on a planet whose primitive natives attack them using spears and swords. Tech eras are a little "fuzzy"; the Tommy gun came into use in the 1920s (TE 5), but we call submachine guns TE 6 weapons.

Tech eras are described in more detail in Chapter 7, but here's a quick summary:

TE 1 (Prehistoric Era): Welcome to the Stone Age. Weapons are made from bone, wood or stone; only the most primitive tools are available.

TE 2 (Ancient Era): This era reflects the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, roughly from the rise of Sumer to the fall of Rome; weapons, armor and tools are made from bronze or iron. Simple machines such as wheels come into use.

TE 3 (Medieval Era): This era extends from the Dark Ages through the late Middle Ages, ending with the widespread adoption of gunpowder. It's the age of plate armor, with iron or steel weaponry.

TE 4 (Enlightenment Era): Roughly 1500 to 1860 in our history. Guns make plate armor mostly obsolete. Muzzle-loading, single-shot firearms are the dominant weapons of the era.

TE 5 (Industrial Era): This era stretches from the mid-19th century up to the dawn of the Information Age. Repeating firearms and then automatic firearms are state of the art.

TE 6 (Modern Era): Today, more or less. Firearms are still pretty similar to the weapons of the WW2 era, but computers and communications and the Internet transform the world.

TE 7 (Solar Era): The Solar Era begins with humankind's establishment of colonies elsewhere in the solar system. Lasers come into general use as personal weapons, while projectile weapons shift away from chemical explosives to magnetic acceleration (rail guns).

TE 8 (Stellar Era): Humankind begins settling worlds around other stars. Powerful directed-energy weapons are the norm; practical personal shield devices are developed. Artificial gravity comes into use.

TE 9 (Galactic Era): Humankind is spread across tens of thousands of worlds throughout the Milky Way. Weaponry typically exploits advanced forces such as gravity or quantum properties of matter; energized armors and nanoengineered materials provide amazingly tough defense against attack.

TE 10 (Universal Era): Space and time no longer constrain us. Technology is capable of things that would seem magical to us now. This is "over the top" for the *ALTERNITY* game, so we don't include any gear from TE 10 in this chapter.

They aren't perfect matches, but the *Expanse* novels would be TE 7, *Star Wars* is TE 8, and *Star Trek* is TE 9.

OBSOLETE AND EXPERIMENTAL TECH

In general, technology "lingers" for a while after newer items become available. You can buy items 1 TE behind the era of your campaign at normal cost. Items 2 or more TE behind the campaign era are harder to find—they're now antiques. Increase the cost of antique items by 1 class.

Conversely, some devices may be available a little before their proper tech era. Usually the cost is increased by 2 classes (or doubled, if that exceeds class 5), and the item has X restriction level. Check with your GM before you choose an item over your TE.

Firefly is an example of a TE 7 setting, but the guns are mostly TE 6 and the ships have TE 8 artificial gravity inside.

TECH SUPERIORITY

Armor and weapons from lower technology levels are less effective against armor and weapons from higher technology levels. This is represented by tech superiority.

- If you attack a target wearing armor from a tech era lower than the tech era of your weapon, **reduce** the target's armor resistance value by **3**.
- If you attack a target wearing armor that has the "tough" special ability using a weapon from a lower tech era, **increase** the target's armor resistance value by **3**.
- If both weapon and armor are from the same tech era, neither side has tech superiority.

For example, FBI agent Erica Bell steps through a time portal and finds herself in the Middle Ages. When a knight in TE 3 plate armor charges her, Agent Bell shoots the knight with her TE 6 light pistol. Normally plate armor has resistance 6 to physical damage, but the difference in tech means the plate armor's resistance value is reduced by 3, to an effective 3. It turns out plate armor isn't great against bullets.

WEAPONS

It's a dangerous universe out there. Combat is a common occurrence in the sort of action-based stories that the *ALTERNITY* game is designed to portray, and every *ALTERNITY* hero begins play with at least a few basic weapon skills. Even if you hope you never need to use it, you should carry a sidearm or a small melee weapon for personal protection.

Weapons are divided into five groups that correspond with the key combat skills: melee and hand-to-hand weapons, primitive ranged weapons, firearms, energy weapons and heavy weapons.

When you're choosing your weapon, start with the table that corresponds to your best combat skill.

READING THE WEAPON TABLES

The weapon tables present all kinds of stats for how each weapon works in the game. Here's how to make sense of the entries.

Class/Restriction: The weapon's "level," which also serves as its price. If the weapon's availability is restricted (R), military (M) or experimental (X), it's noted here.

Type: Most combat skills allow you to select a specialization when you buy 1 or more points in the skill. This column identifies the exact group the weapon falls in.

Range: The weapon's maximum effective range. Under some circumstances, it may be possible to hit a stationary target at a longer range; for example, projectiles can carry quite a distance in low gravity and zero atmosphere.

Speed: The number of impulses required to make an attack with the weapon.

Damage: The amount of damage the weapon inflicts. The number or range to the left of the slash ("/") is the damage for an Average hit, while the number to the right is the damage for an Excellent or Stellar hit. In addition, Stellar hits deal an extra wound box of damage. If a weapon's damage is given in a format such as *1d8 + 2/7*, its damage is 1d8 + 2 for an Average hit and 1d8 + 7 for an Excellent or Stellar hit.

Blast weapons give damage for the primary blast area (secondary blast area). If a blast weapon's damage is given in a format such as 1d8 +7 (3), its damage is 1d8 + 7 in the primary blast and 1d8 + 3 in the secondary blast.

Special: Most weapons have one or more special properties. Some are helpful, and some are significant drawbacks. See the ability descriptions below.

WEAPON SPECIAL ABILITIES

Most weapons have one or more special traits.

Accurate: This weapon gains a +1 step bonus to attacks.

Ammo Loadout: This weapon fires grenades or missiles with grenade warheads. You must keep track of which grenades are loaded and how many shots you take.

AP # (armor piercing): This weapon has exceptional firepower, which gives it the ability to deal with large and heavily armored targets. Reduce the target's armor resistance value by the number given. For example, AP 3 means you reduce the target's armor resistance by 3.

Autofire: This weapon can fire several shots in quick succession, allowing you to use the autofire action with this weapon. Using autofire consumes a lot of ammunition (or power charge) in a hurry; a burst requires 3 rounds at once, and full-auto requires 10 rounds per attack.

Autofire, Improved: You use the autofire action with this weapon and can attack up to five targets within 10 meters of each other.

Blast # (#): This is an area-effect weapon that creates a blast at a target point. The first number is the radius of the primary blast area in meters, and the second number is the radius of the secondary blast area. Damage for blast weapons is given for the primary blast first, then the secondary blast area. For example, a concussion grenade's damage is 2d6 (1d8) energy, and its special ability is blast 3 (6). Anything within 3 m of the blast's target point takes 2d6 energy damage, and anything from 3 m to 6 m away takes 1d8 energy. Creatures in a blast area can usually attempt *Dodge* checks to avoid some or all of the effects.

WEAPON RANGES

Personal weapons have the following ranges:

- Adjacent (2 meters or less)
- Close (3 to 20 meters)
- Medium (21 to 50 meters)
- Long (51 to 200 meters)
- Very Long (201 to 500 meters)
- Extreme (501 to 2000 meters)

Blast, Minor (#): The weapon has a minor blast effect. Its primary effect is normal damage against one target, but anything within the blast distance (in meters) is subject to a blast. The damage of the secondary blast is given in the weapon description.

Bleed: A creature hit by this weapon's attack must make a *Resilience* check or suffer a bleeding wound, which begins damage over time (bleeding).

Brutal: A brutal weapon is even more deadly at close range. When you hit a target within close range, increase the damage roll by 3.

Ignite: A creature hit by this weapon's attack must make a *Dodge* check or begin taking damage over time (fire).

Irradiate: A creature hit by this weapon's attack must make an *Endurance* check or begin taking damage over time (radiation).

Mag #: Most modern weapons have a 10-round clip or power cell—you can make ten attacks before you run out of bullets or use up the charge and must reload. Weapons that vary from this standard have a special Magazine rating that indicates the number of attacks you can make before you're out of ammunition.

If your weapon is capable of burst fire and you use a burst, mark off 3 rounds instead of 1. If you fire on full auto, mark off 10 rounds instead of 1.

Reloading a weapon with an empty magazine or replacing a power cell requires a 1-impulse action (and a full magazine or power cell somewhere handy).

Nonlethal: If a creature loses its last wound box to a nonlethal attack, it's knocked unconscious for 1d6 × 10 minutes instead of suffering a mortal injury. At the end of the scene, wounds inflicted by nonlethal weapons are automatically reduced one level in severity before healing and recovery begins (although an unconscious creature may remain unconscious for a while after the scene ends).

Reload #: This weapon fires only one shot at a time and then must be reloaded. The number given is the number of impulses you must spend reloading before the weapon is ready to fire again. For example, after you fire a weapon with reload 4, you must spend a 4-impulse action to reload it.

Spread: You can use this weapon to attack two targets at the same time if they're adjacent to each other.

Stun: When you hit with a weapon that has this trait, make an opposed check (your attack success against the target's *Endurance* check). If the target fails to counter your success, it's stunned 3 impulses. If your success level is Stellar and the target fails to counter it, the target instead falls unconscious for 1d10 minutes.

Two-Handed: The melee weapon requires two hands (or similar appendages) to wield. Note that only melee weapons have this trait. Assault weapons, rifles and heavy weapons also require two hands for ranged attacks.

MELEE AND HAND-TO-HAND WEAPONS

While guns generally outperform melee weapons in most tactical situations, melee weapons remain relevant for a variety of reasons: They're usually less strictly controlled, they offer more nonlethal options and they might be all that's available.

TE	Weapon	Class	Skill	Type	Spd	Damage	Special
*	Unarmed	—	HTH	brawl	3	1d4+0/2 physical	nonlethal
1	Club	1	Melee	blunt	3	1d4+0/3 physical	nonlethal, +1 dmg if two-handed
1	Spear	1	Melee	bladed	3	1d6+1/5 physical	two-handed
2	Knife	1	HTH	bladed	3	1d4+1/4 physical	
2	Short Sword	2	Melee	bladed	3	1d6+1/5 physical	
3	Polearm	1	Melee	bladed	4	1d6+1/5 physical	two-handed, AP 1
3	Long Sword	2	Melee	bladed	3	1d6+1/5 physical	+1 dmg if two-handed
3	Mace	1	Melee	blunt	4	1d6+0/4 physical	+1 dmg if two-handed
4	Bayonet	1	Melee	bladed	4	1d6+1/5 physical	two-handed
5	Combat Knife	1	HTH	bladed	3	1d6+1/5 physical	
5	Tactical Baton	1	Melee	blunt	3	1d4+0/4 physical	nonlethal
6	Stun Gun	2	Melee	powered	3	1d6+0/2 energy	stun, nonlethal
7	Shock Glove	2	HTH	brawl	4	1d6+2/3 energy	stun, nonlethal
7	Vibroblade	2	Melee	bladed	3	1d6+1/5 physical	AP 2, +1 dmg if two-handed
7	Chainsaw bayonet	2	Melee	powered	4	1d6+2/7 physical	bleed, two-handed
8	Forcespike bayonet	2	Melee	powered	3	1d6+2/7 physical	AP 1, two-handed
8	Diskos	3	Melee	powered	4	1d8+3/9 physical	AP 3, two-handed
8	Power Gauntlet	3	HTH	brawl	3	1d8+1/5 physical	+1 step when grappling
8	Force Hammer	3	Melee	powered	4	1d8+2/7 physical	minor blast 3 (except you); two-handed
9	Nega-glaive	3	Melee	powered	4	1d12+3/9 energy	irradiate, two-handed
9	Star Sword	4	Melee	powered	3	1d10+3/9 energy	+1 dmg if two-handed

CUSTOMIZING MELEE WEAPONS

Not all knives are created equal. Minute differences in sharpness, length and blade shape make a difference in the real world, but we aren't modeling sci-fi action in such excruciating detail. If you want to make your melee weapon distinctive, give it one of the features below. Melee weapons with custom features don't cost more than their more ordinary counterparts, but you can have only one custom feature per melee weapon.

Concealable: A combination of thinness, retractability and (in higher tech eras) scan-resistant materials make this weapon hard for security guards and other nosy lifeforms to spot. One-handed weapons gain a +2 step bonus on *Misdirection* checks, and two-handed weapons gain a +1 step bonus.

Intimidating: Spikes and serrations on your weapon don't add meaningfully to the damage, but they *do* get the attention of whomever you're threatening. Your weapon looks fearsome enough to

grant a +1 step bonus on *Coercion* checks when you're brandishing it and (directly or indirectly) threatening violence.

Throwable: You can throw this weapon at an enemy within close range (up to 20 m), making an *Athletics* check to hit. Other than the spear (which comes with this feature already), two-handed weapons can't ordinarily have this feature.

High-Penetration: This weapon is extra sharp, shaped to pierce armor or otherwise designed to maximize penetration. Reduce the target's armor resistance by –1. Weapons that already have the AP feature can't stack it with this one.

Electro-Pulse (TE 7+): This weapon can deliver an electric pulse on a hit. When used against robots, drones or other construct enemies, it has the stun feature. It takes one impulse to turn this feature on or off.

Energy Emitter (TE 8+): You can energize the striking surface of an otherwise low-tech weapon (TE 5 or earlier) to deal energy damage instead of physical damage. It takes one impulse to turn this feature on or off.

Returning (TE 8+): The high-tech replacement for the throwable feature, this weapon returns to its thrower during the final impulse of the attack using a grav impeller and simple navigation AI. It works only with melee weapons from the industrial tech era or lower, but the assist from the grav impeller also means you can throw two-handed weapons.

Field Disruption (TE 9+): This weapon emits a variable-phase energy field that disrupts force fields and other high-tech shielding, granting you AP 1 against enemies with armor that shields against energy attacks.

In some settings, the ability to disrupt force fields is the main reason melee weapons still exist.

PRIMITIVE RANGED WEAPONS

Most *ALTERNITY* campaigns are set in the modern day or the far future, which means that ancient weapons such as slings or bows are usually museum pieces. However, hero teams have a way of finding themselves in the middle of survival situations or up against tribes that time forgot.

TE	Weapon	Class	Type	Rng	Spd	Damage	Special
1	Bolas	1	Bolas	C	4	1d4+0/3 physical	
1	Javelin	1	Javelin	M	3	1d6+1/4 physical	
1	Sling	1	Sling	L	4	1d4+0/4 physical	Reload 1
2	Bow	2	Bow	L	3	1d6+0/3 physical	Reload 1
3	Crossbow	2	Bow	L	3	1d6+0/4 physical	Reload 3, AP 3

FIREARMS

Guns of various types are the weapons of choice in most tactical situations. Bullets hit harder than almost any muscle-powered weapon around, and the development of magnetically accelerated projectile weapons in the Solar Era and beyond ensures that firearms remain competitive far into the future.

TE	Weapon	Class	Type	Rng	Spd	Damage	Special
4	Musket, Flintlock	3	Rifle	M	4	1d10+0/4 physical	Reload 5
4	Pistol, Flintlock	2	Pistol	C	4	1d8+0/4 physical	Reload 3
5	Revolver	2	Pistol	M	3	1d6+1/6 physical	Mag 6
5	Rifle, Bolt-action	3	Rifle	VL	4	1d8+2/6 physical	Mag 5
5	Shotgun	2	Assault	M	4	1d8+0/5 physical	Mag 5, Brutal
6	Pistol, Light	2	Pistol	M	3	1d6+1/5 physical	
6	Pistol, Heavy	2	Pistol	M	4	1d8+1/6 physical	
6	Rifle, Assault	3 (R)	Rifle	VL	3	1d8+2/8 physical	Mag 30, Autofire
6	Rifle, Sniper	3	Rifle	VL	4	1d8+2/9 physical	Accurate
6	SMG	3 (R)	Assault	L	3	1d6+1/5 physical	Mag 20, Autofire
7	Flechette Pistol	2	Pistol	C	3	1d6+1/5 physical	Brutal
7	Flechette Gun	3 (R)	Assault	M	3	1d6+1/5 physical	Mag 30, Autofire, Brutal
8	Razor Pistol	2	Pistol	L	3	1d10+0/4 physical	Bleed, Mag 20

ENERGY WEAPONS

The development of various directed energy weapons in the Solar Era and beyond increases the already frightening lethality of the pistol and rifle.

TE	Weapon	Class	Type	Rng	Spd	Damage	Special
6	Taser	2	Pistol	C	3	1d4+0/1 energy	Reload 2, Nonlethal, Stun
7	Laser Pistol	2	Pistol	L	3	1d6+0/6 energy	Accurate
7	Laser Rifle	3	Rifle	VL	4	1d6+1/8 energy	Accurate, Mag 20
7	Sonic Bore	2	Assault	C	4	1d8+0/5 energy	Spread, Stun
8	Plasma Pistol	2	Pistol	M	3	2d4/2d8 energy	
8	Plasma Rifle	3 (R)	Rifle	VL	4	2d6/2d12 energy	
9	Phase Pistol	2	Pistol	M	3	1d6+2/7 energy	Accurate, Ignite
9	Phase Rifle	3	Rifle	Ex	3	1d6+4/9 energy	Accurate, Ignite, Mag 20
9	Disintegrator	4 (X)	Assault	L	3	1d10+0/6 energy	AP 3, Irradiate

HEAVY WEAPONS AND GRENADES

Highly restricted in all but the most lawless societies, heavy weapons are meant to equip frontline infantry squads as fire-support weapons or special assault groups that need exceptional firepower. Authorities in any settlement or district take a dim view of anyone walking around with this sort of excessive armament, but heroes traveling to uncharted worlds or taking on overpowering foes might need heavy weapons to deal with the threat.

TE	Weapon	Class	Type	Rng	Spd	Damage	Special
5	Light MG	4 (M)	Firearm	VL	4	1d8+2/7 physical	Improved Auto, Mag 100
5	Flamethrower	4 (M)	Energy	C	4	2d8 (1d8) energy	Blast 2(4), Ignite, Mag 5
5	Grenade, Frag	1(M)			4	2d6 (1d8) physical	Blast 4(8)
5	Grenade, Smoke	1				—	Area 4m
6	Grenade Launcher	3 (R)	Indirect	L	4	by grenade	Ammo Loadout
6	Grenade, Concussion	1 (R)			4	1d8+4(0) energy	Blast 3(6)
6	Rocket, Antitank	3 (M)	Guided	VL	5	1d10+1/6 energy	AP 3, minor blast 2, reload 3
7	Gauss Rifle	4 (M)	Firearm	VL	3	1d6+4/8 physical	Improved Auto, Mag 100
7	Grenade, EMP	1			4	2d8 (1d10) energy	Blast 4(8), EMP
7	Grenade, Thermal	1 (R)			4	1d8+6(2) energy	Blast 3(6), Ignite
7	Laser Minigun	4 (X)	Energy	Ex	3	1d6+3/7 energy	Accurate, Improved Auto, Mag 50
7	Rail Rifle	3 (R)	Firearm	Ex	5	1d8+4/8 physical	AP 3, Mag 20
7	Z-Missile Launcher	4 (M)	Indirect	VL	3	by grenade	Ammo Loadout
8	Neutron Cannon	4 (M)	Energy	L	5	2d6/2d10 energy	AP 6, Mag 20
8	Grenade, Swarm	2 (R)			4	2d8 (1d10) physical	Blast 5(10)
8	Plasma Hurler	4 (X)	Indirect	VL	4	1d8+7(3) energy	Blast 3(6), Reload 1
8	Razor Gun	3 (M)	Firearm	Ex	4	1d10+2/6 physical	Bleed, Improved Auto, Mag 50
9	Matter Beam	4 (R)	Energy	VL	4	2d6/2d12 energy	AP 6, Mag 20
9	Gravity Render	4 (X)	Indirect	Ex	3	1d6+5/10 energy	Improved Auto, Mag 50
9	Grenade, Null	2 (M)			4	2d10 (2d10) energy	Blast 5(10), Irradiate
9	Shock Rifle	3	Energy	Ex	4	1d10+3/7 energy	Accurate, minor blast 2

CUSTOMIZING GUNS

As every gun enthusiast knows, buying the gun is only the first step. Next comes the accessorizing. In general, pistols and assault weapons can have one of the following custom features, while rifles and heavy weapons can have two. These custom features don't add to the gun's cost.

Concealable: Scan-resistant materials, retractable stocks and a low-profile design give you a +1 step bonus on *Misdirection* checks to avoid your gun drawing undue attention.

Some custom features may strain credulity when combined with specific guns (a modern-era silenced shotgun, for example). Don't use them if it troubles your sense of realism.

High Capacity: Your weapon has a mag rating 50 percent higher than it'd otherwise be.

Intimidating: Who says aesthetics don't matter? This gun looks particularly menacing and grants a +1 step bonus on *Coercion* checks when brandished.

Magnification Scope: When aiming, you can also reduce the range penalty by one step.

Silencer (TE 5+): Enemies suffer a −2 step penalty when trying to identify the source of a shot from this gun—unless it's patently obvious.

Biometric Lock (TE 6+): The gun can be fired only by its owner. Cracking the biometric lock requires a *Security* check, and takes 1 hour/1 minute/3 impulses on an Av/Ex/St result.

Grenade Launcher (TE 6+): Rifles only; you add an under-barrel grenade launcher that functions like the heavy weapon except that it holds only one grenade at a time and is Reload 2.

Laser Sight (TE 6+): Grants a +1 step bonus against targets at close range unless they're actively dodging.

Anyone who's watched action movies knows that the red dot of a laser sight grants a step bonus to *Coercion* checks, too.

WEAPON DESCRIPTIONS

Refer to the weapon tables for tech era, stats and special traits of each weapon.

Assault Rifle: A modern-day military rifle such as a FN FAL, M4A1 or AK-74M, capable of burst fire or full auto fire. Civilian versions are not capable of autofire, but are otherwise similar. A magazine typically holds 30 rounds. *Mass:* 3.5 kg.

Bayonet: A long knife designed to be fixed to a musket or rifle, converting the weapon into an effective spear for close-quarters combat. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Bayonet, Chainsaw: Originally a brush-clearing tool for recon soldiers, a chainsaw mounted under the barrel is unwieldy but delivers grievous wounds. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Bayonet, Forcespike: Bayonets famously make aiming more difficult by adding weight to the far end of the rifle. The high-tech solution? Generate a short blade of kinetic force only at the moment the bayonet is needed. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Bolas: A simple weapon consisting of two or three weights linked by a short length of tough cord, the bolas are only effective when thrown. When you hit a medium or smaller target with bolas, the target must make an opposed check (*Dodge* to counter your attack success). If you win the check, the target falls prone and can't stand until it succeeds on an *Acrobatics* or *Athletics* check to free itself. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Bolt-action Rifle: A repeating rifle such as a Springfield Model 1903 or a Mauser Gewehr 98. Lever-action rifles such as the Winchester Model 1873 are essentially the same (if a little more difficult to use in a prone position). A 5-round magazine is typical. *Mass:* 4 kg.

Most rifles and some heavy weapons function as clubs in a pinch.

Bow: This is a simple bow of medium size, not a modern compound bow or a longbow. It comes with a quiver and 12 arrows. *Mass:* 1 kg (full quiver 1 kg).

Club: The oldest weapon in the book. Improvised weapons such as baseball bats, wrenches or lead pipes use the same stats. *Mass:* 1.5 kg.

Combat Knife: A good-sized fighting knife such as a Bowie knife or Ka-Bar. More esoteric one-handed blades such as combat hatchets and kukris use these stats but require the *Melee* skill, not *Hand to Hand*. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Crossbow: This is a foot-stirrup hand-drawn weapon, not a cranked model. Its rate of fire is terrible compared to a bow, but it hits harder. The crossbow comes with 12 bolts in a small quiver. *Mass:* 2 kg (full quiver 1 kg).

Disintegrator: This horrible weapon projects a beam of null-energy that causes the target's atomic bonds to break down. A grazing hit leaves an ugly but shallow abrasion; a solid hit can burn a hole the size of a basketball in the target. A creature that loses its last wound box to a disintegrator hit (or the continuing irradiation damage) is, well, disintegrated. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Diskos: This weapon consists of a hyper-sharp disk spun by magnets to a tremendous velocity, wielded with a 1-meter handle. Its magazine is a power cell; if it runs out of charge, you can change the power cell like you'd change a magazine. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Flamethrower: The flamethrower pumps a stream of burning liquid fuel up to 50 meters away. The weapon creates a 4 m blast at the target point, which must be the first creature or object in the line of fire—you can't shoot past or over a target to attack a more distant one. *Mass:* 20 kg (magazine 10 kg).

Flechette Pistol: The Solar Era version of the shotgun, a flechette pistol uses an electrical charge to hurl a tightly-packed bundle of small darts at the target instead of a cartridge full of pellets. The clip holds 8 rounds. *Mass:* 1.5 kg.

Flechette Gun: A larger, full-automatic version of the flechette pistol, the flechette gun can fill the air with an awesome number of flechettes in a very short time. It's the best close-quarters assault weapon available. The magazine holds 30 rounds. *Mass:* 2.5 kg.

Flintlock Musket: Notoriously slow to reload and inaccurate, the musket excels at one thing: putting holes in medieval armor. Early versions such as the matchlock or later versions such as the percussion-cap musket are similar enough to use the same stats. The price includes a powder horn and a pouch with 20 bullets. *Mass:* 5 kg.

Flintlock Pistol: Like the musket, the flintlock pistol is inaccurate and hard to reload, but it makes short work of medieval armor. It comes with a powder horn and a pouch with 20 bullets. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Force Hammer: A massive maul with gyroscopic stabilizers to help manage its great mass. On impact, it generates a shockwave of kinetic energy in all directions except back toward its wielder. *Mass:* 7 kg.

Gauss Rifle: The gauss rifle is a magnetic slug-thrower that fires a veritable rain of small, needle-like projectiles at a very high rate of fire. It can be used only in autofire mode (full auto). The magazine is a sturdy, side-mounted plastic hopper holding 100 rounds. The weapon also requires a power cell. *Mass:* 8 kg (magazine 2 kg).

Gravity Render: The render generates rapid gravitational pulses that shake apart the target. Its magazine is a power cell usually good for 50 shots or so. *Mass:* 6 kg.

Grenade Launcher: This weapon stores 5 grenades in a rotating cylinder. The effect of its attack depends entirely on what kind of grenades are loaded (usually frag grenades in battlefield situations). The price includes a box of 10 grenades of your choice, as appropriate for your tech era. *Mass:* 5 kg (magazine 1 kg).

Grenade, Concussion: A weapon that relies on the concussive power of its charge instead of deadly shrapnel, the concussion grenade is favored in situations where it's important to contain collateral damage. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Grenade, EMP: This grenade produces a powerful electromagnetic burst. Living creatures take no damage from an EMP—it damages only mechanisms (machine creatures such as robots) and vulnerable equipment. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Grenade, Frag: The fragmentation grenade causes injury by producing a deadly shower of shrapnel. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Grenade, Null: The null grenade creates an instantaneous flash of energy that breaks down atomic bonds, releasing a great amount of energy (and generally disintegrating anything small or lightly built). *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Grenade, Smoke: This device produces a dense cloud of smoke in a 4-meter radius from its origin. Visibility in the smoke is very poor (see Visibility in Chapter 5), and the smoke blocks line of sight through the cloud. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Grenade, Swarm: This smart grenade divides into dozens of submunitions to attack every target in a wide area. Swarm grenades can be programmed to avoid attacking creatures wearing or carrying a special "safe" signal device; any safe creatures in the blast area ignore the blast. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Grenade, Thermal: The thermal grenade produces an especially energetic blast that can easily ignite anything flammable in the area (and a few things that aren't especially flammable). *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

ANY WEAPON CAN BE LETHAL

According to the weapon table, a knife inflicts a maximum wound of 8 points, but it takes a 16-point wound to kill the typical hero. So why aren't knives more deadly? First off, most people aren't heroes. They have only one or two wound boxes, with lower damage thresholds than a hero's wound track; knives are plenty dangerous to them. Second, most weapons can be used to execute a helpless creature, checking off a mortal wound box regardless of the damage roll. If a villain's holding a knife to your throat or a gun to your head, don't assume that you can just soak up the hit and walk away.

Heavy Pistol: A large-caliber revolver or semi-automatic pistol chambered for a heavy round with plenty of stopping power—say, a .357, .44 or .45. The revolver version has the Mag 6 weapon trait. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Javelin: A light spear intended to be thrown. You can use it as a melee weapon (it counts as a spear), but you take a –1 step penalty to your attack. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Knife: A small blade intended for combat, not cutlery. The difference between this weapon and a combat knife is the quality of steel and excellent balance in the modern weapon. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Laser Minigun: Consisting of six rapidly spinning lasing elements in a Gatling gun-like arrangement, the laser minigun is designed to unleash a hail of laser bolts without overheating. The weapon's magazine is a large power cell. *Mass:* 7 kg (power cell 2 kg).

Laser Pistol: A small but powerful pulsed laser weapon that can burn a hole through light steel, the laser pistol has exceptional range and accuracy for a pistol-sized weapon. Its magazine is a power cell about the size of a clip for a modern pistol. *Mass:* 1 kg.

As much as we'd like to tell you that the laser fires a bright red or blue beam of light, the laser beam itself is pretty much invisible.

Laser Rifle: Like the laser pistol, the laser rifle fires a pulsed beam that delivers a great deal of heat energy to one small point, burning through or flash-vaporizing anything unlucky enough to be in the way. The magazine is a power cell. *Mass:* 3 kg.

Light MG: A fully automatic weapon designed for firing from a rest or from the shoulder, the light machine gun can be fired only in autofire mode (burst or full auto). The magazine is a soft drum holding a 100-round belt. *Mass*: 7 kg (magazine 2 kg).

Light Pistol: A semi-automatic pistol of caliber 9 mm or lower, easy to carry and conceal. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Mace: A medieval club with a flanged metal head or any weighted metal stick with more heft than a club. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Matter Beam: The matter beam generates a thin "needle" of incandescent metal atoms (usually lithium or beryllium) that hits like a truck, dumping an amazing amount of heat energy into the target. The weapon's magazine is a power cell. *Mass:* 5 kg (magazine 1 kg).

Nega-Glaive: Utilizing the same principles as the null grenade, this high-tech polearm irradiates what it doesn't immediately disintegrate. *Mass:* 5 kg.

Neutron Cannon: This heavy energy rifle fires a beam of neutralized particles that can slice through armor like a hot knife through butter. The magazine is a power cell. *Mass:* 6 kg (magazine 1 kg).

Phase Pistol: The phase pistol fires a blast of electromagnetic energy in several different wavelengths at once to achieve extremely powerful constructive interference. It burns holes through targets even more efficiently than a laser. The magazine is a power cell. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Phase Rifle: The phase pistol's big brother, the phase rifle, includes a holographic sight for extreme distance attacks. Its power cell is usually good for about 20 shots. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Plasma Hurler: The plasma hurler generates a white-hot ball of plasma confined in short-lived magnetic fields and lobs it down-range. When it hits, the magnetic fields fail, creating a spectacular plasma explosion. *Mass:* 7 kg.

Plasma Pistol: The iconic weapon of the Stellar Era, the plasma pistol fires a bolt of densely compressed incandescent plasma encased in a magnetic field. It hits faster and harder than a bullet and adds a severe burn to the impact energy. The magazine is a clip of cartridges, each containing the cool plasma mixture and a tiny power cell to generate the bolt. *Mass:* 1.5 kg.

Plasma Rifle: The plasma rifle uses a larger cartridge than the pistol, generating a hotter bolt with a longer lifespan. The magazine holds 20 plasma cartridges. *Mass:* 3.5 kg.

Polearm: Combining the useful features of a spear and a two-handed axe, the polearm often serves as a ceremonial weapon long after its battlefield utility ends. *Mass:* 4 kg.

Power Gauntlet: Often included as part of high-tech powered armor, this metal glove includes servomotors to assist its wearer's gripping and punching strength. *Mass:* 4 kg.

Rail Rifle: This massive weapon uses an electromagnetic charge to throw a quarter-kilo tungsten slug downrange at ridiculous velocity. The magazine holds 20 rounds, and the weapon also includes a heavy-duty power cell. *Mass:* 15 kg (magazine 3 kg).

Razor Gun: The razor gun fires a stream of small, spinning, hyper-sharp disks. The razor disks often cause wounds that inflict the bleed condition. The razor gun needs both a magazine (holding 50 rounds) and a power cell. *Mass:* 4 kg (magazine 2 kg).

Razor Pistol: A razor pistol is the personal, non-autofire version of the razor gun. It requires a power cell and a magazine, which holds 20 rounds. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Revolver: A medium-sized repeating pistol such as a .32, .38 or .40, a revolver usually has six rounds in the cylinder (although in some models you should load only five for safety). Reloading a revolver can be tedious—you load only 1 round per 1-impulse action spent reloading, although if you have a speed loader (a small frame-like device that holds six cartridges) you can reload all six with a single reload action. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Rocket, Antitank: A light, one-shot weapon intended for use against vehicles or bunkers, the AT rocket creates a minor blast in a 2 m area around the primary target. The blast deals 1d8 energy damage (the primary target isn't affected by the blast). A tough plastic crate with four additional rockets is included in the price. *Mass:* 7 kg (rocket 3 kg).

Shock Glove: This gauntlet delivers a powerful electric jolt that can stun the target. The glove has a small power cell that serves as its magazine. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Be careful with those post-battle high fives.

Shock Rifle: This weapon fires a low-powered ionizing laser that paves the way for a powerful electron stream—basically, it hurls a bolt of lightning. The bolt shocks anything near the primary target, creating a minor blast in a 2 m area that deals 1d10 energy damage (the primary target isn't affected by the blast). It does not function in vacuum. Its magazine is a power cell that weighs 1 kg and supplies 20 shots. *Mass:* 5 kg.

Shotgun: This is a police model pump-action 12-gauge firing buckshot cartridges. When you reload the shotgun, you can reload only 1 shell per reloading action. *Mass:* 2.5 kg.

Sling: Simple to make but hard to master, the sling dates back thousands of years. If you run out of lead or clay sling bullets, small stones work almost as well. *Mass:* —.

SMG: The earliest submachine guns appeared at the end of World War I, but this weapon is a modern-day compact or "mini" SMG designed to spray a lot of bullets at close range. The magazine usually holds 20 rounds. *Mass:* 2.5 kg.

Sniper Rifle: A bolt-action or semi-automatic 7.62 mm (.30 cal) rifle such as a Dragunov or an M-14, the sniper rifle includes a telescopic scope for long-range engagements. The magazine holds 10 rounds. *Mass:* 5 kg.

Sonic Bore: A powerful, short-ranged infrasonic device, the sonic bore induces destructive resonance in a cone-shaped blast from its bulbous muzzle. It can injure multiple targets at once and produces significant disorientation and pain. It does not function in vacuum. The weapon uses no ammunition but requires a power cell instead. *Mass:* 4 kg.

An unusual weapon. "Destructive resonance" is rarely boring.

Spear: The earliest versions of the spear are tipped with stone points; bronze, iron and steel follow in ensuring tech eras. You can throw a spear (range C) or keep it for melee combat. *Mass:* 3 kg.

Star Sword: This is an elegant weapon for a more civilized age. *Mass:* 1.5 kg.

Stun Gun: This isn't actually a gun—it's a device that delivers a strong shock by contact. You put the pronged end against the target and pull the trigger; the battery is usually good for ten jolts. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Sword, Short: A thrusting weapon 50 cm to 70 cm long. Includes dirks, gladiuses, wakizashis and anything bigger than a knife but smaller than a full-fledged sword. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Sword, Long: A heavy blade about 80 cm to 110 cm in length, designed for both slashing and stabbing. Sabers, rapiers, katanas and pulp-novel broadswords all count as long swords. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Tactical Baton: A light side-handle baton or truncheon carried by security guards and police. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Taser: The taser fires a pair of darts linked by wires to a powerful battery, then zaps the target with a stunning jolt of electricity. If the darts fail to penetrate the target's armor (in other words, don't cause at least 1 damage), the stunning jolt is ineffective. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Vibroblade: A power cell within the grip makes the blade on this sword vibrate several hundred times per second, adding to its cutting power. *Mass:* 3 kg.

Z-Missile Launcher: The Z-missile is a lightweight, semi-autonomous weapon not much larger than a grenade. Warheads for Z-missiles include any available grenade type; the launcher holds 10 Z-missiles at a time, and you can choose which missile to launch if you mix-and-match the types you load. The price includes a box of 10 Z-missile grenades of your choice, as appropriate for your tech era. *Mass:* 4 kg (magazine 1 kg).

ARMOR AND DEFENSIVE GEAR

For thousands of years, humans have engaged in the race to develop weapons and defenses against those weapons. Modern armaments are powerful enough to make true bulletproof armor impractical, but even so, the US Army's Improved Outer Tactical Vest can stop a 7.62 mm bullet … if the bullet strikes one of the armor inserts. In future eras, the race continues with armor systems designed to dissipate directed energy weapons and active defenses that surround the wearer with various sorts of defensive fields.

READING THE ARMOR TABLE

Armor and defensive systems are described below. You can wear only one suit of armor at a time. Some devices such as screens or shields don't count as armor suits.

TE: The tech era at which this armor becomes available.

Class/Restriction: The armor's "level," which also serves as its price. Some armor and defense systems have restricted (R), military (M) or experimental (X) availability.

Move: Heavy armor penalizes the wearer's speed. Reduce your speed by this amount when you wear this armor (unless you are sufficiently skilled in *Armor Training* to ignore some or all of the penalty).

Penalty: Some types of armor are big and bulky enough to interfere with your ability to perform physically challenging tasks. Apply this penalty to *Acrobatics*, *Athletics*, *Dodge*, *Endurance*, *Extreme Sports* and *Stealth* checks (unless your *Armor Training* skill allows you to reduce the penalty).

Physical: The armor's resistance value against physical attacks.

Energy: The armor's resistance value against energy attacks.

Special: The armor's special traits or abilities (see below).

Armor Training is an enabling skill, discussed in chapter 3.

TE	Armor	Class	Move	Penalty	Physical	Energy	Special
1	Hide Armor	2	–2m	–1 step	2	0	
2	Bronze Cuirass	4	–6m	–2 steps	4	0	Tough
2	Shield	1	–2m	–1 step			Cover 2 (limited)
3	Chain Mail	3	–6m	–3 steps	4	0	
3	Plate Mail	4	–6m	–2 steps	6	1	Tough
4	Breastplate	3	–4m	–2 steps	4	0	Poor Coverage 3
5	Flak Jacket	2	–2m	–1 step	2	0	Poor Coverage 4
6	Police Vest	2	—	—	3	0	Poor Coverage 4
6	Riot Shield	2	—	–1 step			Cover 2 (limited)
6	Tactical Armor	3(R)	–4m	–2 steps	5	1	Poor Coverage 3
7	Carbon Fiber Plate	3	–4m	–2 steps	6	3	Ablative, Tough
7	Decelerator Belt	4(X)	—	—	+3	+1	Bonus Resistance, Screen
7	DuraWeb Coat	2	—	—	1	3	
7	Exoskeleton	4 (R)	–2m	–3 steps	5	4	Powered, Tough
7	Hardmesh Uniform	2	—	—	2	2	
7	Polymer Mail	2	–4m	–2 steps	4	2	
7	Stealthsuit	4 (M)	—	—	3	3	Life Support
7	Vacuum Armor	3	–4m	–2 steps	4	3	Life Support, Tough
8	Battlesuit, Assault	5(M)	–4m	–3 steps	9	9	Life Support, Powered, Tough
8	Battlesuit, Raider	4(M)	–2m	–3 steps	7	7	Life Support, Powered, Tough
8	Force Shield	3	—	—			Screen
8	Grav Deflector	2	—	—-			Deflect 2/1, Screen
8	Isihlangu	3	—	—			Cover 3 (all), Screen
8	Nanoweave Suit	2	—	—	3	3	
9	Adamant Mesh	2	—	—	4	4	Tough
9	Aegis Field	3	—	—	+2	+3	Screen, Bonus Resistance
9	Displacer Unit	2(R)	—	—			Screen
9	Warsuit, Hussar	4(M)	–4m	–2 steps	10	10	Life Support, Powered, Tough

ARMOR SPECIAL ABILITIES

Many types of armor and defensive devices possess one or more special properties.

Ablative: Each time an attack dealing 10 or more damage hits this armor, reduce the armor's resistance value by 1 after applying the previous resistance value to the damage.

Bonus Resistance: You can add the resistance values of this defense to the resistance value of your armor.

Cover # (limited/all): Instead of adding to your resistance value, this device makes you harder to hit by providing you with cover. Enemies attacking you "across" your cover take a step penalty equal to your cover value on their attack roll. (Usually, cover devices work only against attacks originating in front of you.) If the cover value is limited, it works only against hand-to-hand, melee and primitive ranged attacks. Otherwise, the penalty applies to any attack against you. Cover devices don't stack with terrain cover—just use the best cover value available to you.

Cover devices require one arm, so most humanoids are limited to pistols or one-handed melee weapons while using a cover device.

Deflect #: Like cover, the device penalizes your enemy's attack roll when he or she targets you. The attacker takes a step penalty equal to your deflect value. Deflect devices don't care about the direction of the attack and do stack with other forms of cover.

Life Support: This armor has its own air supply and protection against extremes of cold and heat. You can wear it comfortably in a vacuum.

Poor Coverage #: The armor system mostly protects the center of mass and not the extremities, which means that many attacks that hit the wearer encounter no armor at all. When you're hit by an attack, roll a d10 and compare the result to your armor's Poor Coverage rating. If your d10 roll is equal to or less than the Poor Coverage value, the attack misses your armor entirely, and your armor's resistance value is 0 against this hit.
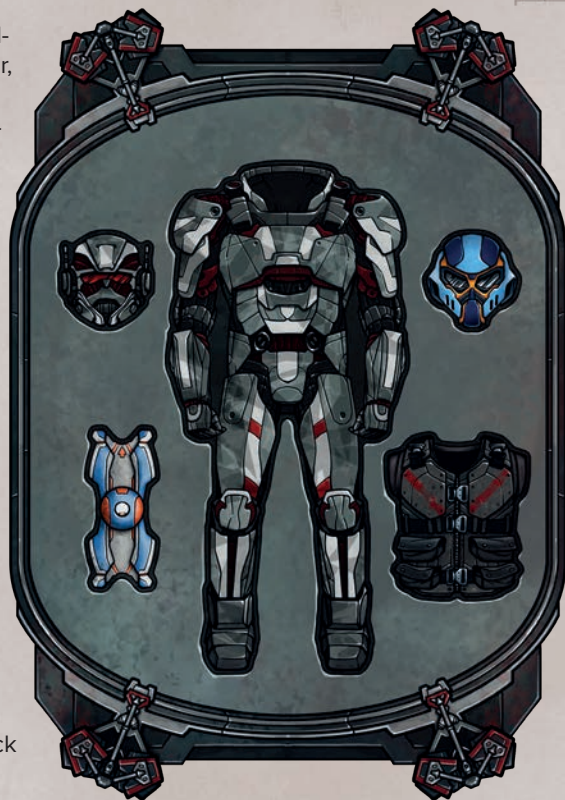
Powered: The armor augments the wearer's strength with mechanical actuators. This allows you to move around and fight in a suit that weighs fifty or a hundred kilos, and it provides an effectively superhuman Strength score for purposes of lifting, carrying, breaking or moving things. If you use a Strength-based skill while wearing powered armor, your skill check is **not** modified—powered armor doesn't make you a better brawler, but it does mean that the consequences of landing a punch may be much more serious. (See specific armor descriptions for details.)

Screen: This device creates an energy field around the wearer. You can use only one screen device at a time; if you activate a second, it fails to function.

Tough: This armor is considered to have tech superiority over unarmed and natural attacks. Increase the resistance value by 3 against these types of attacks.

ARMOR AND DEFENSE SYSTEM DESCRIPTIONS

See the armor table for tech era, stats and special traits of these items.

Adamant Mesh: Light, flexible clothing made from artificial diamond fiber, adamant mesh can stop bullets or dissipate laser beams with amazing ease. Even better, it's available in styles visually indistinguishable from normal clothing. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Aegis Field: The aegis field is generated by a small belt-worn device. It absorbs energy from fast-moving objects and directed beams, reducing their power and therefore increasing the effectiveness of whatever armor you wear. The power cell is good for 24 hours. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Battlesuit, Assault: The best powered armor generally available in the Stellar Era, the assault battlesuit provides several subsystems and benefits:

If you build a campaign around power-armored PCs, use this battlesuit as the basis for your own custom designs.

- Your effective Strength score is 11 for encumbrance, lifting or breaking things.
- Your unarmed damage increases to 2d4 + 1/5 physical; you gain a +3 damage bonus if you wield a melee weapon.
- The suit self-seals after being breached by damage, preventing decompression in a vacuum when you're wounded.
- The sensor suite provides night vision, thermal vision and radar (30 km range).
- The suit has an integrated comm system equal to a comm patch (see Tools).
- A thruster pack lets you fly at a speed of 100 m in microgravity or zero-g, or jump up to 100 m horizontally or 40 m vertically in low or standard gravity.
- Five weapon storage points allow you to carry multiple weapons; you can stow the weapon you're holding and draw a new one as a 1-impulse action.

- The power supply can maintain any defensive screen you wear—as long as the suit has power—or recharge small devices or tools as needed.

The on-board power cell and life support systems have an endurance of 48 hours. *Mass:* 200 kg.

Battlesuit, Raider: A lighter (and cheaper) version of the assault battlesuit, the raider battlesuit offers the same benefits with the following exceptions: Your effective Strength is 10, your unarmed damage is 2d4 + 0/4 physical, you have 3 weapon storage points and your suit's endurance is 24 hours. *Mass:* 120 kg.

Breastplate: A steel cuirass and helmet that covers the wearer's torso and head. *Mass:* 10 kg.

Bronze Cuirass: Ancient armor consisting of a breastplate, helmet, greaves and a skirt of studded leather, such as that worn by Greek hoplites or Roman legionaries. *Mass:* 30 kg.

Carbon Fiber Plate: This heavy Solar Era armor is designed to dissipate impact through fracturing. Powerful hits degrade its value, to a minimum 3 physical/0 energy. *Mass:* 12 kg.

Chain Mail: A medieval armor made from interlocked rings of iron, bronze or steel. *Mass:* 25 kg.

Decelerator Belt: This experimental device generates a kinetic transfer field that slows down projectiles and particles before they strike the wearer. Its power cell is good for two hours of use. *Mass:* 2 kg.

The decelerator belt is kin to the Holtzman generators used in the *Dune* novels.

Displacer Unit: This small unit clips to your belt or slips into a pocket. When activated, it surrounds you in a spatial distortion field. The first time an enemy targets you with an attack in a combat scene, the attack automatically misses by 2d4 meters in a random direction (like a miss with a blast attack). Subsequent attacks targeting you take a −2 step penalty. The power cell is good for four hours of use.

DuraWeb Coat: A long coat of sturdy synthetic material, the DuraWeb's flexible internal circuits redistribute energy over the whole body in order to prevent a burn-through at the point of contact. It's available in a variety of styles and doesn't have to look like armor. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Exoskeleton: The first practical version of powered armor, the exoskeleton combines sturdy alloy plates with magnetic actuators and a powerful on-board battery cell with an endurance of eight hours. It increases your effective Strength to 9. Your unarmed damage increases to 1d8 + 0/3 physical, and you gain a +2 bonus to damage if you wield a melee weapon (your attack skill is still based on your normal, unimproved Strength score, though). *Mass:* 80 kg.

Flak Jacket: More of a vest than a jacket, this consists of tough synthetic fibers with small manganese steel plates. It can stop a low-velocity bullet or shell fragment, but isn't much help against a high-velocity bullet. *Mass:* 5 kg.

Force Shield: This is a powerful personal deflector shield generated by a belt-and-power pack unit you can disguise under normal clothing. All energy and physical attacks that hit you hit the force shield instead. The force shield has armor 5 and 4 wound boxes: *(1–6)* □; *(7–9)* □; *(10–12)* □; *(13+)* □. When the force shield loses its last wound box, it fails. (Any extra wounds "bleed through" to you and are subject to the resistance of any other armor you wear.) Once a force shield is destroyed, all subsequent attacks in the scene ignore it. The force shield has an endurance of two hours.

Grav Deflector: This device generates a gravitational gradient a half-meter or so from your body, bending the trajectory of objects passing near you. The gradient is severe enough to "lens" directed energy attacks away from you too, but not as effectively. Physical attacks against you take a –2 step penalty, and energy attacks take a –1 step penalty. The deflector's power cell has an endurance of two hours. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Hardmesh Uniform: Made from a dense weave of light but strong synthetic materials, the hardmesh uniform is comfortable and available in any number of styles; you can get a perfectly fine business suit in hardmesh if you want. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Hide Armor: This primitive armor consists of tough animal hides or heavy furs. *Mass:* 8 kg.

Isihlangu: Named after the famous Zulu war shield, the isihlangu is the Stellar Era version of an ancient form of protection. A heavy vambrace on your left arm generates a 1.5-meter disk of impenetrable, translucent force, which provides excellent cover from any attack originating in front of you. The power cell has an endurance of eight hours. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Nanoweave Suit: An improvement on the hardmesh of the Solar Era, nanoweave is a cloth with a thin "sandwich" layer of gel containing simple nanobots that mass to resist impact or link to dissipate energy as needed. It can pass for "civilian clothes" at need. *Mass:* 3 kg.

Plate Mail: The knight's armor. The weight is better distributed than in chain mail, making it easier to move around in than you might think. *Mass:* 30 kg.

Police Vest: A modern-day bulletproof vest worn over your clothing. You can get a version designed to be worn under a shirt or coat, but that's a Class 1 upgrade. *Mass:* 3 kg.

Polymer Mail: Derived from the "liquid armor" tech of the early 21st century, polymer mail consists of tiny gel-filled tubes woven together in a mail-like pattern. The polymer actually gets harder the harder you hit it, offering excellent impact resistance. *Mass:* 8 kg.

Riot Shield: A modern police shield, suitable for use in crowd control situations. It works against hand-to-hand, melee and primitive ranged attacks (including Molotov cocktails) as long as the attacks originate from in front of you. *Mass:* 5 kg.

The word means "to brush aside" in the Xhosa language.

Shield: This is the ancient warrior's defense: a personal bulwark of wood, metal or thick hide. You can deflect hand-to-hand, melee and primitive ranged attacks as long as they originate from in front of you. *Mass:* 8 kg.

Stealthsuit: A tough, tight-fitting bodysuit equipped with adaptive camouflage panels, a stealthsuit allows you to become effectively invisible against static backgrounds. The more you move and the more things move around you, the less effective the camouflage. In addition to its armor and environmental systems, the stealth-suit makes you invisible to normal vision at any range if you're not moving, or invisible at medium and longer range if you are moving. Otherwise, it provides a +4 step bonus to your *Stealth* checks. The suit has an endurance of eight hours. *Mass:* 15 kg.

Tactical Armor: Heavy body armor intended for military use, this armor includes metal or ceramic plate inserts sandwiched in a tough synthetic fiber and covers a much larger area than the standard bulletproof vest. *Mass:* 15 kg.

Vacuum Armor: Designed specifically for combat in space, vacuum armor includes a self-sealing inner liner that prevents the suit from being holed by routine combat injuries; you still suffer the wound, but you won't have to worry about decompression. The suit's boots are magnetized (see Tools), and its built-in thrusters allow you to fly at a speed of 20 m in zero-g or microgravity. Life support endurance is 24 hours. *Mass:* 30 kg.

Most military starships have extra suits of vacuum armor stowed near airlocks and turbolifts.

Warsuit, Hussar: Like the legendary knights for whom it's named, the Hussar warsuit features wings of striking appearance. These, however, are functional: They deploy (or stow) with a 1-impulse action, providing powered flight at a speed of 200 meters per move action. The suit is otherwise similar to an assault battlesuit and includes similar systems and capabilities. *Mass:* 100 kg.

TOOLS AND PROFESSIONAL KITS

Not all challenges in an *ALTERNITY* game are combat scenes. Heroes living in futuristic eras may find that access to advanced tools, professional gear, vehicles or services are even more important to the success of an adventure than a deadly laser pistol or a trusty suit of vac-armor.

You can assume that ordinary household tools aren't hard to come by—any home, office, place of business or shipboard utility locker has wrenches, screwdrivers, pliers, duct table, a can of paint, assorted screws and nails, bolts and what-have-you. Items listed here are especially useful to heroes doing heroic things.

TE: The item's tech era.

Class: The cost of the item (and any restrictions on its availability).

Key Skill: Tools usually just work; they do what you expect them to. If you're not sure whether you would know how to use it, however, or if you need to repair it or push its capabilities, this is the skill that applies.

TE	Item	Class	Key Skill
5	Bolt Cutters	1	*Mechanics*
5	Concealed Holster	1	*Firearm* or *Energy*
5	Flare Pistol	1	*Survival*
5	Medical Kit	2	*Medicine*
5	Padlock	1	*Security*
5	Portable Generator	2	*Mechanics*
5	Survival Knife	1	*Survival*
5	Walkie-Talkie	1	*Mechanics*
6	Comm Headset	1	*Computer*
6	Computer, Laptop	3	*Computer*
6	Goggles, Starlight	3	*Awareness*
6	Rope, Synthetic	1	*Athletics*
6	Satellite Comm Kit	4	*Computer*
6	Torch, Acetylene	2	*Mechanics*
6	Trauma Kit	2	*Medicine*
7	Analgesic Spray	1	*Medicine*
7	Antirad	2	*Medicine*
7	Boots, Magnetic	1	*Engineering*
7	Comm Link	1	*Computer*
7	Portable Fabricator	3	*Mechanics*
7	Grapnel Gun	2	*Extreme Sports*
7	Loader Harness	4	*Mechanics*
7	Med Pack	3	*Medicine*
7	Power Unit	3	*Mechanics*
7	Sonic Viewer	3(R)	*Security*
7	Vacuum Collar	1	*Mechanics*
7	Virtual Tablet	2	*Computer*
8	Analyzer	2	*Science*
8	Automed Sled	4(R)	*Medicine*
8	Comm Patch	1	*Computer*
8	Sentry Gun	4(M)	*Security*
8	Thruster Belt	3	*Extreme Sports*
8	Wound Gel	1	*Medicine*
9	Caduceus Ray	3	*Medicine*
9	Excursion Field	1	*Survival*
9	Mass Negater	2	*Mechanics*
9	Resurrection Pod	5(X)	*Medicine*

TOOL DESCRIPTIONS

Most of the tools described here come in a wide variety of models from many different manufacturers; if you want a special feature or design, it's probably available somewhere at a modest increase in price.

Analgesic Spray: A potent painkiller, analgesic spray comes in a small can containing 3 doses. It's simple enough that anyone can use it regardless of medical training. A dose of analgesic spray reduces the subject's penalty for being wounded by 1 step. You can't "double up" to reduce penalties by more than one step. Applying the spray requires a 3-impulse action, and a dose lasts for four hours. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Analyzer: This handheld sensor unit includes electromagnetic and radiation detectors, a chemical sniffer and a spectroanalysis unit. If you need to sweep an area to find a source of a particular phenomenon or study an object to determine its composition, the analyzer is the first tool you reach for. Its onboard sensors have extreme range for EM phenomena, medium range for chemical detection and close range for determining object composition or fine details. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Antirad: This inhalant delivers radiation-resistant nanobots to the bloodstream, helping to fight off the effects of radiation exposure. After you inhale a dose of antirad (a 3-impulse action), you gain a +3 step bonus on *Endurance* checks to resist radiation damage and hazards for the next eight hours. Antirad comes in a small blister pack containing three doses. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Automed Sled: This is essentially an automated emergency room in the form of an anti-grav stretcher. Get an injured person onto the sled, and the automated stabilization and treatment routines take over. The sled has a *Medicine* skill score of 10/15/20. It automatically stabilizes a creature with a mortal wound. It can treat wounds of up to serious severity at no penalty, or critical wounds with a –2 step penalty (see Healing in Chapter 5). Treating a patient depletes the onboard supplies, so treatment checks on each patient after the first suffer a cumulative –1 step penalty until the supplies are replenished (which takes 10 minutes and access to advanced pharmaceuticals).

The sled's grav repulsors allow it to float along at a walking pace, and it can be set to follow an individual on foot (or easily be pushed along by someone walking beside it). The sled is 2 meters long, 80 cm wide, 20 cm deep and includes a transparent plastic "cover" to protect the patient once inside. *Mass:* 100 kg (when unpowered).

Bolt Cutters: These are handy for removing locks or snipping chains. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Boots, Magnetic: These sturdy boots feature smart, magnetized soles that automatically grip and release with your normal walking motion. They allow you to walk on most metallic surfaces in or on a ship in zero-g. *Mass:* 2 kg (pair).

Caduceus Ray: This staff-like device projects a healing matrix of bio-energy in the form of a golden ray, guided by the wielder's medical knowledge. You can make a *Medicine* check on any wounded character within close range. You gain a +3 bonus on checks to stabilize mortally wounded characters. You can treat grazes and light, moderate or serious wounds with a +3 step bonus. You can treat critical wounds at no penalty. *Mass:* 4 kg.

Comm Headset: This is a hands-free personal radio for two-way communication, rugged enough for use in tactical operations. The range is about 5 km, although performance degrades indoors. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Comm Link: A powerful personal radio for two-way communications, the unit is about the size of your thumb. The range is 50 km in good terrain, or up to 1,000 km for an unobstructed line-of-sight transmission (say, from the ground to an orbiting starship on the right side of the planet). The comm link also can operate in encrypted mode. *Mass:* —.

Comm Patch: A comm link miniaturized to the size of a dime. The range is 1,000 km on a planetary surface or 1 AU in space (interplanetary, so long as the planets are relatively close). *Mass:* —.

Computer, Laptop: Includes Wi-Fi capability. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Concealed Holster: This holster is designed to let you conceal a sidearm under a suit jacket or windbreaker, or hide one above your ankle in your pants leg. You can carry any sort of pistol in the holster, but it slows down your draw—it takes 2 impulses to draw a pistol from a concealed holster instead of the normal 1. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Excursion Field: This small belt-worn generator produces a snug-fitting, faintly golden energy field that surrounds the wearer at a distance of about 10 cm. The field enables the wearer to comfortably tolerate temperatures from extreme cold to extreme heat, atmospheres from none to dense and areas with dangerous radiation. The unit includes a compact oxygen recycler that provides breathable air. The field does not interfere with the passage of physical objects or directed energy, so it provides no armor, but it quickly seals itself after being pierced. The field's endurance is eight hours in mild conditions, four hours in severe conditions, or two hours in extreme conditions. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Unless the setting has FTL communication, there's an 8-minute lag when talking to someone 1 AU away.

Flare Pistol: This pistol launches a bright red flare about 300 m into the air. The flare burns brightly as it drifts down beneath a small parachute, remaining visible for about 30 seconds. It can be seen as far as 40 km away under ideal conditions (a clear night on flat terrain). If you shoot someone with it, treat it as a *Firearm* (pistol) attack with a −2 step penalty for accuracy; the flare deals 1d6 + 0/3 energy damage. The pistol comes with three flares. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Goggles, Starlight: Military-grade night-vision gear drastically amplifies available light. When you wear starlight goggles, you can see in darkness as though it were daylight, as long as there is at least some small amount of ambient light. You can't see quite as well as normal, so you take a −1 step penalty to *Awareness* checks while wearing the goggles. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Grapnel Gun: This device consists of a rocket-propelled grappling hook, 100 meters of tough wire that can support 200 kg in a dead hang, and a small but strong motorized reel that can lift 100 kg at 5 meters per impulse. The grapnel's hooks can snag branches, pipes, low curbs and so on, or its point can pierce 10 cm of brick, wood or soft stone. A magnetic head for use on metal hulls or surfaces is included in the kit. *Mass:* 3 kg.

Loader Harness: A heavy, powered exoskeleton that turns you into a walking forklift. The harness gives you an effective Strength of 12, allowing you to pick up and carry objects weighing as much as 2 metric tons. Your speed in the harness is reduced to 6 meters, and you are now a large creature. If you want to punch or grab someone with the loader harness, you can do so by making a *Hand to Hand* (brawl) attack at a −5 step penalty (it is not remotely fast). You deal 1d8 + 2/7 physical damage, armor piercing 3. The harness power cell lasts for 10 hours of heavy labor. Versions optimized for excavation, construction and building demolition might also be available. *Mass:* 500 kg.

Mass Negater: Attach this disk-shaped device to an object of up to 10 metric tons and activate it, and you render the attached object weightless. You can lift or push the neutralized object with a bit of effort, or you might find more creative uses—for example, turning a wrecked car into a sailboat or a concrete slab into an elevator. The negater's power cell has an endurance of 10 hours. *Mass:* 2 kg.

Med Pack: A computer-assisted Solar Era medical kit. You gain a +2 bonus on checks to stabilize mortally wounded characters. You can treat grazes, light wounds and moderate wounds with a +2 step bonus, you can treat serious wounds at no penalty, and you can treat critical wounds with a −2 step penalty. If you are not trained in *Medicine*, the med pack allows you to make untrained skill checks with the same bonuses. See Healing and Recovery in Chapter 5. *Mass:* 3 kg.

Medical Kit: Basically, a corpsman's pack or well-stocked doctor's bag of WW2 vintage. You can attempt to stabilize mortally wounded characters at no penalty. You can treat grazes and light wounds at

Most starships, military bases and public buildings have wall-mounted med packs in high-traffic locations.

no penalty, and you can treat moderate wounds with a –2 step penalty. See Healing and Recovery in Chapter 5. *Mass:* 5 kg.

Padlock: A high-grade heavy-duty padlock with a key. You can pick a padlock with a *Security* check (–2 step penalty) or smash it open with a heavy tool like a sledgehammer or crowbar and a successful *Athletics* check (–4 step penalty).

Portable Fabricator: Descended from the 3D printers of the early 21st century, the portable fabricator can produce a variety of machine parts, simple tools or even relatively complex instruments or weapons, provided a fabrication plan is available. It can produce single parts or objects weighing up to 10 kg and requires one hour per kg (or half that time for simple or low-quality objects). You must supply it with a dense liquid metal-polymer mix equal in weight to the size of the object you're fabricating. The fabricator comes with 20 kg of mix; each 10 kg of additional mix is a Class 1 purchase. *Mass:* 30 kg (not including the mix).

No, the fabricator can't fabricate a copy of itself.

Portable Generator: Need to run your power tools or computer equipment when you're off the grid? The portable generator is a small, gasoline-powered unit that runs for eight hours on 4 liters (about 1 gallon) of gas. The unit's tank holds 8 liters. *Mass:* 20 kg.

Power Unit: About the size of a small waste bin, this device contains a compact, fail-safe, cold-running fusion generator. It produces enough power to run a small machine shop or recharge a couple groundcars after a day of routine use, and not even an idiot could make it explode. The power unit runs for 30 days on 1 liter of a special fuel mixture; the price includes 4 liters (an additional liter of fuel is a Class 1 item). *Mass:* 15 kg.

Resurrection Pod: The ultimate in life-saving technology, the pod is a coffin-sized automated medical device. Living creatures in the pod heal 1 wound box per hour, beginning with their least severe injury. A dead creature placed in the pod is restored to life in 24 hours with all its injuries repaired. The subject must not have been dead for more than seven days. If the brain was severely damaged or destroyed before the subject could be treated, the subject wakes up as an amnesiac with no more than dreams or feelings about her prior identity, skills and talents (a new 1st level hero, in other words). *Mass:* 200 kg.

Rope, Synthetic: A high-quality climbing rope, 100 meters long, capable of holding 1 metric ton in a sudden impact or 2 tons in a static hang. Mass: 5 kg.

Satellite Com Kit: Need to get on the Internet from anywhere on the globe? This portable transceiver can get you online. Be warned: The data rate is highway robbery. *Mass:* 10 kg.

Sentry Gun: This system consists of a central control pylon and a number of small gun drones (see Chapter 7 for details). It comes with a command bracelet and 10 additional "safe" bracelets. As long as you're wearing the command bracelet, you can verbally program the sentry gun to fire on specific types of creatures, creatures that

enter a specific area, anything that moves and so on. *Mass:* 25 kg (case with control pylon and 12 gun drones).

Sonic Viewer: This device is a fist-sized transducer that you place against a wall or object. It produces an inaudible sonic pulse that reveals what's in or behind the exterior, which you can view on any linked tablet or smartphone. Basically, it turns your tablet into an X-ray viewing screen. The pulse reveals anything within 10 m of the surface, but all you really see is density and rough outline—you can tell how many humans are in a room and whether they have guns, but you have no idea who they are. Some sensitive sensors can pick up the transducer's pulse, which might warn enemies in the area you're viewing. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Survival Knife: A medium-sized utility knife with a magnetic compass in the pommel and a hollow hilt containing 10 matches, a fishhook, and 50 meters of fishing line. It also serves as an effective knife in a fight. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Thruster Belt: This consists of two hip-mounted thrust units and a sturdy, stabilized harness and control unit. The thruster belt allows you to fly up to 60 meters as a 2-impulse move, but you fall if you don't finish your flight on solid ground at the end of the move. In microgravity or zero-g, the thruster belt allows you to fly with a speed of 60 meters. The belt's power cells have an endurance of 20 impulses of thrust. *Mass:* 4 kg.

Torch, Acetylene: The torch kit includes a two-tank backpack carrier, an oxygen tank, an acetylene tank, a short hose, a cutting head and a welding head, thick working gloves and welder's goggles. The torch is good for both cutting through a few centimeters of most metals and routine welding work. Dealing with heavy armor requires a much bigger cart-mounted torch. *Mass:* 20 kg (with full tanks).

Trauma Kit: A modern-day EMT kit. You gain a +1 bonus on checks to stabilize mortally wounded characters. You can treat grazes and light wounds with a +2 step bonus, moderate wounds at no penalty and serious wounds with a −2 step penalty. See Healing and Recovery in Chapter 5. *Mass:* 5 kg.

Vacuum Collar: This soft, rolled tube is worn around the neck like a neck gaiter or neck warmer. If you suddenly find yourself in vacuum, you can pull it over your head into a soft hood and mask and plug it into a belt-worn oxygen supply that will keep you alive for about an hour. In combination with a typical shipboard jumpsuit or crew uniform, the vacuum collar serves as a reasonable emergency spacesuit. *Mass*: 1 kg.

This device is the real reason that future fashion favors ridiculous collars and headgear.

Virtual Tablet: This is a Solar Era portable computer. You use it for the same sort of things you'd use a laptop or a tablet for today, but you wear the device on your sleeve or in your clothing, and it produces a holographic screen that serves as your display and interface. Set it for privacy mode and you're the only one who can see or hear it (although you'll need to wear a light headset with an optic piece for that). *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

Walkie-Talkie: The earliest practical hand-held radio communication device, the walkie-talkie ranges from the brick-like radios of WW2 to the belt-worn units with clip-on mics many police officers wear today. The radio's range is about 5 km, although it degrades sharply if you go indoors. *Mass:* 1 kg.

Wound Gel: A tube of gel filled with smart, self-guiding, medical nanobots designed for use by non-medical personnel. An application of wound gel counts as 1 automatic success when attempting to stabilize a mortally wounded character. You can also use it to treat less serious wounds; wound gel immediately heals a graze, light wound or moderate wound, or reduces the severity of a serious or critical wound by one step. A tube contains 1 application. *Mass:* 0.5 kg.

DRONES

Drone operation is described in chapter 5. Here are some commonly available drones, but they just scratch the surface of what PCs can build, buy or "acquire" themselves.

Duration is how long a drone can remain active. Once a drone uses up its energy supply, it generally takes half its duration to charge it back up again.

HELICOPTER DRONE

Tech Era 6; **Gear Class** 2
Range 5 km; **Duration** 1 hr.
Senses video, audio
Speed fly 40 m
Commands Observe, Patrol
Defense small (–1 step to attack); **Durability** (*1+ dmg*): ☐ destroyed
Attack none

WHEELED DRONE

Tech Era 6; **Gear Class** 2
Range 2 km; **Duration** 4 hr.
Senses video, audio
Speed 20 m
Commands Observe, Patrol, Fetch
Defense small (–1 step to attack); **Durability** (*1+ dmg*): ☐ destroyed
Attack none
Other Manipulator arms are effective Strength 1.

POLICE SWAT DRONE

Tech Era 6; **Gear Class** 3(R)
Range 2 km; **Duration** 4 hr.
Senses video, audio, chemical sniffer
Speed 15 m
Commands Observe, Patrol, Fetch, Attack, Communicate
Taser 5 impulses; *Close* 1 target; *Attack* 15/20/25; *Damage* 1d4 + 0/1 energy (nonlethal, stun)

Defense armor 2 physical, 1 energy; **Durability** (*1 to 3 dmg*): ☐ cosmetic damage; (*4 to 6 dmg*): ☐ weapons and video out; (*7+ dmg*) ☐ destroyed
Other Manipulator arms are effective Strength 1.

AERIAL PREDATOR

Tech Era 7; **Gear Class** 3(M)
Range: 10 km
Duration: 2 hr.
Senses video, low-light, thermal, audio
Speed fly 40 m
Commands Observe, Patrol, Attack, Track, Evade
Laser 4 impulses; *Long* 1 target; *Attack* 14/19/24; *Damage* 1d6 + 0/6 energy (accurate)
Defense armor 2 physical, 1 energy; **Durability** (*1 to 3 dmg*): ☐ cosmetic damage; (*4 to 6 dmg*): ☐ weapons and video out; (*7+ dmg*) ☐ destroyed

STATION SECURITY DRONE

Tech Era 7; **Gear Class** 3(R)
Range 2 km; **Duration** 4 hr.
Senses video, audio, 2-meter x-ray
Speed 20 m
Commands Observe, Patrol, Attack, Communicate, Track
Sonic Beam 4 impulses; *Close* 2 targets; *Attack* 14/19/24; *Damage* 1d8 + 0/5 energy (spread, stun)
Shocker 5 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 14/19/24; Damage 1d6 + 2/3 energy (nonlethal, stun)
Defense armor 3 physical, 1 energy; **Durability** (*1 to 3 dmg*): ☐ flashing lights/sirens; (*4 to 6 dmg*): ☐ sonic beam out; (*7 to 9 dmg*) ☐ shocker and comms out; (*10+ dmg*) ☐ destroyed

SPY DRONE

Tech Era 7; **Gear Class** 4(M)
Range 15 km; **Duration** 4 hr.
Senses video, low-light, thermal, audio
Speed fly 40 m, "whisper mode" fly 20 m with *Stealth* 13/18/23
Commands Observe, Patrol, Attack, Communicate, Track, Evade, Link
Flechettes 4 impulses; *Medium* autofire; *Attack* 13/18/23; *Damage* 1d6 + 1/5 physical (Brutal)
Defense small (−1 step to attack); armor 2 physical, 1 energy; **Durability** (*1 to 3 dmg*): ☐ cosmetic damage; (*4 to 6 dmg*): ☐ weapons and video out; (*7+ dmg*) ☐ destroyed
Other The drone has internal ammo capacity sufficient for only one autofire attack.

5: COMBAT AND CHALLENGES

"I don't think ... I've ever been more than three minutes away from some really astonishing act of violence."

—Samuel R. Delany

Just like an episode of a TV show, an *ALTERNITY* adventure is organized into some number of **scenes**. Some scenes are heavy on action—car chases and shootouts, for example—while other scenes advance the story of the adventure through character interactions or revelations of previously hidden information. This chapter explains how to resolve the various dangers and challenges the heroes encounter during the course of an adventure.

Not all obstacles demand "full" treatment as combat scenes or challenge scenes. For example, if the heroes decide to suddenly jump an unsuspecting ordinary citizen—say, to steal an identification card—there's no need to come up with combat stats for the unfortunate subject. Even 1st-level heroes are competent enough to quickly subdue the average person, so if no one's around to intervene, the GM can just say, "OK, you got the guy. Now what?"

Scenes of all kinds are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, but action scenes fall into two broad categories: combat and challenges.

- Combat scenes occur when someone or something is trying to physically overcome the heroes, or vice versa.
- Challenge scenes involve danger or important consequences, but don't have active adversaries. Surviving an ion storm in a damaged ship or performing a delicate operation to save an NPC's life are challenge scenes.

SCENES AND ACTION ROUNDS

When seconds matter in a scene, it's important to know what each hero does moment by moment. To figure out what happens in these sorts of life-or-death situations, combat scenes (and some challenge scenes) switch to **action rounds**.

Action rounds are simply a system for taking turns when heroes and their opponents are all trying to do different things at the same time. Much of this chapter is devoted to explaining exactly what a hero (or an adversary) can do in an action round and how you figure out who beat who (see The Action Round, later in this chapter).

SKILLS AND SKILL CHALLENGES

The core mechanic of the *ALTERNITY* game is the skill check. When a PC faces a challenge of some kind—repairing an engine, persuading the planetary governor to release sealed records, hitting an enemy in combat or surviving for hours in freezing temperatures—he or she makes a skill check to determine whether the effort is successful or not.

MAKING A SKILL CHECK

To make a skill check, tell the GM which skill you're using, what you're trying to accomplish, what gear you're using and any bonuses or penalties to the check you're aware of. For example: "I'm shooting that first robot with my assault rifle—I've got +1 step with rifles, but –2 steps because I'm badly wounded," or "I'm using my *Mechanics* skill and this laser torch to get that hatch open." If you're not sure which skill applies, just tell the GM what you're trying to do, and she'll decide what kind of skill check is called for.

If the final difficulty makes a skill check seem daunting, look to the environment and your allies for step bonuses.

The GM decides whether the situation calls for additional bonuses or penalties to your check and tells you what the final difficulty of the check is. Then you roll your dice: a base d20 +/– a difficulty die (which might be 0, or another d20). If your check result is equal to or higher than your target number for the check, you succeed.

For a more in-depth look, check out the Anatomy of a Skill Check section at the beginning of Chapter 3.

AUTOMATIC SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Some skill uses don't need to be resolved with a die roll. A hero can get into a groundcar and tune the entertainment system to his favorite music without making a *Driving* check—it's so routine that success is automatic. Likewise, some things are just impossible. No matter what dice you roll, you can't make a radio work if you don't have a battery or power source. The GM can stipulate automatic success or failure for a check at her discretion.

Checks that are nearly automatic or nearly impossible but still carry a small chance of an unexpected result "extend" the difficulty scale by an additional d20 for each step past +d20 or –d20. Usually this isn't necessary—if a check is truly that easy or that hard, the GM can simply declare an automatic result. But if it's important to know whether a super-easy check resulted in Excellent or Stellar success, the GM might have you roll anyway.

As the GM, knowing when to ask for a skill check and when to just stipulate success is more art than science, but when in doubt, err on the side of the automatic success for routine events. *ALTERNITY* characters are competent, and competent people routinely succeed at routine things. (That's why they're called "routine"!)

TAKING TURNS

In tactical situations such as combat or fast-moving challenges, you generally must wait until it's your action to use your skill (see The Action Round, later in this chapter). However, if the GM isn't running the current scene in action rounds, it's fine to just take turns with other players. The GM describes the situation and then asks each player one at a time what he or she is doing in response. Go around the table or pick one at a time—as long as each player gets the same opportunity to make decisions and do things, it's fine.

AIDING OTHER HEROES

If you decide to help someone else do something, you don't make a skill check. Instead, you grant the other character a bonus on their skill check: +1 step if you're untrained in the skill the other character is using, or +2 steps if you have at least 1 skill point in the skill. Aiding another hero generally means you're not taking an action of your own at the same time—you're giving up your turn to help your ally. If you have to take the same action the other character is taking (for example, you're trying to help a poor swimmer stay afloat while you're both in the water), take a –1 step penalty on your own skill check.

COMPLEX SKILL CHECKS

Many skill uses can't be completely resolved by a single use of a skill; for example, if you're engaged in a months-long effort to research a cure for an alien disease, your test is really a cumulative effort of many *Medicine* checks, not just one. A complex skill check models this kind of ongoing effort by assigning a **success goal**—the number of times the hero (or heroes) must succeed to complete the task—and a **time interval**, representing how often characters can attempt the check.

Excellent and Stellar Success: Usually, an Excellent check result counts as 2 successes in a complex skill check, and a Stellar check result counts as 3 successes.

Success	Goal
3	Mildly complex (a process of several steps)
6	Moderately complex (a process of many steps)
10	Highly complex (a process with steps and obstacles you can't foresee when you start)
20	Extremely complex (a process of complex processes you can't foresee when you start)

TIME INTERVAL

1 action	A task you can fail or finish within a minute
1 minute	A task you can fail or finish within 10 minutes
10 minutes	A task you can fail or finish within an hour
1 hour	A task you can fail or finish within a day
1 day	A task you can fail or finish within a week
(more)	Tasks that require months or years

A normal working pace also allows for interruptions in the form of wandering aliens, meteor storms, etc.

Short-term checks require more or less constant effort to make progress; if you take a few actions off from climbing the cliff, you're not going up during those actions. Depending on the task, failing to continue to work on it might spell automatic failure. During longer challenges, you can assume you're working at a normal working pace with brief breaks to eat meals, answer email, sleep eight hours and so on.

Example: *The heroes are stranded on a desert island, but they find an old wreck on the beach. They decide to try to make it seaworthy to escape. The GM decides that repairing the hull and fashioning a mast and sail is a pretty complex* Mechanics *skill challenge, and might take a few days—the heroes are going to need to improvise ropes, glue and canvas as well as patching the holes. She decides the heroes need to achieve 10 successes and assigns a time interval of one day per check.*

FAILING OUT

In some complex skill checks, failing one check simply means a lack of progress during that time interval—you were searching the jungle for the crash site, and you just didn't find it. In others, failing one check might be catastrophic; you cut the wrong wire when defusing the bomb. When the GM sets up a complex skill challenge, she'll usually include a "fail out" condition that describes what failing means for this check.

One fatal slip ruins everything: You fail the complex skill check if you fail a single skill check before you accumulate the successes you need. This is good for delicate work with no second chances, like gem cutting or defusing a bomb.

Failure is possible, but one misstep isn't fatal: You fail the complex skill check if you fail 3 skill checks before you accumulate the successes you need. A difficult repair job or arguing a tough court case would be a good use of this type of failure.

You can keep trying as long as you like: You can't fail out of the complex skill check—a failed check just means that you failed to make progress during that time interval. This model is best for races against the clock, like getting a vault open before the security systems come back online.

Cost of Failure: Sometimes a failed skill check is important only for determining the overall success or failure of the complex skill check, but sometimes each accumulated failure comes with a cost: a tool breaks, the system resets, a target for diplomacy becomes suspicious. If a single failure can make things worse without causing the entire complex check to fail, the GM can assign a penalty: All future checks in this skill challenge now take a –1 step penalty or the entire task advances to a higher complexity, requiring additional successes to complete.

MULTIPLE SKILLS

Some complex skill challenges represent the repetitive use of one specific skill—if you're climbing an epic cliff, you're going to make a lot of *Athletics* checks—but sometimes a few different skills might be useful for a particular obstacle. For example, crossing an alien desert might involve *Survival* checks to find your way and find water, *Science* checks to identify edible plants and *Mechanics* checks to keep a jury-rigged engine running. If you can make a good case for how a particular skill can meet a particular challenge, your GM can allow checks against your secondary skills to contribute to the complex skill challenge.

OPEN-ENDED CHECKS

Finally, some complex skill checks aren't about completing a task—they're about measuring how much progress you make in the time you've got. In an open-ended check, you don't have a specific success goal; you just want to see how many successes you can accumulate by devoting effort to the task. Make a check for each time interval you spend engaged in the complex skill check, and keep track of the number of successes you accumulate.

"The xenos come out at night—we better fortify until then" situations are perfect for open-ended checks.

Successes	Result
1	Minimally successful; it works, but at a penalty
3	A satisfactory effort; you get what you expected
6	An excellent effort; you get more than you needed or a small bonus
10	A stellar effort; you get a lot more than you needed or a large bonus

Example: *A hero has only four hours to build a rocket-sled out of discarded junk in a disused workshop. The GM asks for an open-ended* Mechanics *check to see how good of a rocket-sled he can build, allowing him 1 check per hour of work. The hero's check results are Average, Failure, Failure and Excellent, totaling 3 successes (1 + 0 + 0 + 2). It's not pretty, but it'll work!*

TAKING YOUR TIME

If you don't care when you finish a task, you can slow down and proceed with extra care. Generally, taking your time grants you a +2 step bonus to your skill check, but increases the time that check requires by 50 percent. If you can take all the time in the world, you gain a +4 step bonus, but the amount of time required increases by an additional 200 percent (tripling its original time).

Taking your time doesn't apply for skill checks you make during an action round; if you want to slow down and work more carefully, use the aim or concentrate action modifiers. Taking your time is also not applicable in open-ended skill challenges; the amount of time you commit to the task is already reflected by how many skill checks you get to make during the challenge.

GROUP SKILL CHECKS

In some challenge scenes, all heroes on the team have to make the same check at the same time—for example, if they're about to walk into an ambush or are climbing a highly technical cliff together. In these challenges, the GM might call for a group skill check instead of several individual checks. After all, if six characters each roll a check, odds are good someone's going to get a lucky roll and spot the lurking alien predator ... and odds are good someone's going to get a crummy roll and fall off the cliff. A group skill check is a good way to balance the outcomes of a challenge when a few heroes are great at something and others are terrible at it.

To make a group skill check, all heroes on the team make a check against the key skill for that challenge. If at least half the heroes succeed at their individual skill checks, the group as a whole is considered to succeed at the check. Otherwise, the group as a whole fails.

Example: A five-hero team is trying to sneak past a dozing security guard without waking him up. The GM decides that a group Stealth *check is the best way to see whether the group makes too much noise or not. Each hero makes a* Stealth *check; three succeed and two fail. The GM rules that the group as a whole succeeds, even though a couple klutzy heroes nearly blew it for the team.*

OPPOSED CHECKS

Some skill challenges create a direct contest between one character who's trying to do something and an adversary who's trying to resist that action or affect the target at the same time. The classic example is when two characters engage in a tug-of-war or struggle for control of a gun, but an opposed check might involve something like two characters issuing conflicting commands to a crewman or trying to outdo each other in a rap battle.

Opposed checks fall into two categories: contesting checks and countering checks.

Contesting a Check: Both participants make their skill checks at the same time. Whoever achieves the highest level of success (Average, Excellent, Stellar) with the check wins the contest. If both participants achieve the same success level, the struggle is undecided for the current action or time period, and continues to the next opportunity for the participants to act.

Countering a Check: After the character initiating the action makes his or her skill check, the character opposing the action attempts to reduce the initiating character's check by making a counter-check. The countering character reduces the initiating character's success by 1, 2 or 3 levels for an Average, Excellent or Stellar result on the counter-check. In other words, if both characters achieve the same level of success, the "defender" negates the initiator's success.

THE ACTION ROUND

When you find yourself in a dangerous situation, it's important to figure out which character—hero, villain or alien—acts in which order. Combat scenes (and some hazardous skill challenges) are therefore organized into action rounds to help you determine who takes their turn next, and what you can do in a turn.

INITIATIVE

At the beginning of a combat scene (or a challenge scene where seconds matter), the GM asks all players in the scene to make an **initiative check**. (The GM makes one check for each separate group of NPCs or adversaries that are also in the scene.)

Your initiative score is equal to 20 minus (Agility + Focus). It's like a skill score, but it uses two ability ratings and you can't spend skill points to improve it. Rolling initiative works just like making a skill check—you roll a base d20, and add or subtract the appropriate difficulty die (if any). This provides you with a Stellar, Excellent, Average or Failure result for your initiative roll.

If you succeed at your initiative check, you can take your first action of the scene in impulse 1. Characters and adversaries act in order of initiative success on impulse 1 (so a Stellar result goes first, then an Excellent result, and then Average results). In subsequent impulses, take your turn as described below. If you fail on your initiative check, take your first action for the scene in impulse 2.

It's not unusual for multiple characters from either side in the scene to have an action available in the same impulse. When this happens, characters take turns as follows:

- When two combatants have the same level of success on their initiative checks and both are taking their first action in the scene, the highest actual die result goes first.
- In later impulses, use a "First-In, First-Out" priority. In other words, the first character whose prior action places him in impulse 5 (for instance) gets to act in impulse 5 before the second character whose prior action placed her in impulse 5 and so on.
- Combatants who have not acted yet in the scene are considered "First-In" and act before combatants taking their second action of the scene.

If there are any environmental effects or timed effects in play (for example, a radiation field slowly killing everything in the compartment), those effects are resolved at the end of impulse 8, after all heroes and adversaries who act in that impulse have resolved their actions.

INITIATIVE TRACKER

START HERE! 1	2	3	4	5	6
ROUND ENDS 8	Initiative begins in Impulse 1 in order of success level (Stellar, then Excellent, then Average). Combatants that fail their initiative checks first act in Impulse 2.				7
7	Each action requires a number of impulses, moving your next action that many spaces clockwise around the track. End of round effects occur after Impulse 8.			ROUND ENDS 8	
6	5	4	3	2	1

ACTIONS

So what can you do when you take your turn? Anything you think a hero in your position might try to do—shoot at an enemy, run for cover, enter a course in the nav computer or shut down a runaway reactor. Actions typically fall into one of seven broad **action types**: attack, interact, move, reposition, resist, total defense, or use a skill. In addition, you can ready an action or add an **action modifier** to aim, dodge or combine an attack with some movement.

If you want to do something that seems to fall completely outside those action types, the GM assigns a cost in impulses (3 is a good standard) and decides what effect your action has on the combat or challenge scene.

Some actions don't take any time and don't cost any impulses. You can drop an item, release an opponent or speak any time you feel like doing so. Shouting a warning to your comrades, calling for a retreat or pointing out which foe you want everybody to attack doesn't take any time. However, attempts to use skills (for example, *Misdirection* or *Influence*) belong in the use a skill action.

ATTACK (2–5 IMPULSES)

Use a combat skill to attack a target. The impulse cost of making an attack depends on your weapon's speed—you can shoot more rapidly with an automatic pistol than you can with a grenade launcher. If you don't have a weapon, you can make an unarmed attack. See Attacks in the next section for more detail.

When you use the attack action, you can move up to 2 meters before or after you attack (shooting and ducking behind cover, or perhaps taking a step to get to a foe just out of reach).

INTERACT (1 IMPULSE)

Quickly interact with an object or area. Some examples of things you can do with an interact action include:

- Open an unlocked door
- Draw a weapon
- Change a clip or magazine
- Enter a few numbers on a keypad
- Visually scan a room (and make an *Awareness* check)

TACTICAL SURPRISE

If you begin a combat scene by attacking an enemy who doesn't know you're there, you gain tactical surprise (see Contact in Chapter 6). Surprised creatures automatically fail their initiative roll with a check result of 0—in other words, they get their first action of the fight on impulse 2 after all non-surprised creatures act. If there are multiple surprised creatures in the scene, they then act in order of initiative skill score, best (lowest) to worst.

If your interaction requires more than a couple seconds, you might need to interact with the object multiple times or default to the using a skill or tool action instead. Normally you can't attempt a skill check with an interact action, but *Awareness* checks are an exception.

MOVE (2 IMPULSES)

Move up to your speed (20 meters for a typical human hero). See Movement later in this chapter for more details on moving. This action refers to moving on foot; if you're driving a vehicle or riding a mount, some different rules apply.

Usually you can't move and make skill checks at the same time, but if some obstacle or situation complicates your movement, you may need to make a skill check to get where you want to go. *Acrobatics*, *Athletics*, *Extreme Sport*, *Stealth* and *Survival* can sometimes be used while you're moving.

READY AN ACTION (1 IMPULSE)

Ready some other action instead of resolving it immediately. For example, you might ready an attack against an enemy so that you're threatening her instead of shooting her immediately, or you might point your gun at a doorway and wait to shoot the first robot that enters the room. You must specify to the GM what you're getting ready to do and what obvious action or development will cause you to do it.

Once you ready an action, simply delay your next action by 1 each impulse until the situation you're waiting for occurs or you decide to stop waiting and take a different action. Your readied action is a reaction (see Reactions, below) that interrupts the triggering action you described. After resolving your readied action, pay the normal impulse cost to determine when you get your next action (with the 1-impulse delay for using a reaction).

Unlike most other actions, you can't use action modifiers like aim or evade while you ready an action.

REPOSITION (1 IMPULSE)

Adjust your position in some way. Choose one of the following: move up to 2 meters; drop to a prone position; stand up from a prone position; get into or behind some nearby bit of cover.

RESIST (1 IMPULSE)

Attempt to fight off or break free of some condition affecting you. For example, you can use the resist action to pull free of an enemy grabbing you, recover your senses when you've been stunned by a shock glove or recover your stability when knocked off-balance in zero-g. The exact type of check you need to successfully resist depends on the condition. Sometimes you need multiple successful checks to resist a tough-to-shake condition.

TOTAL DEFENSE (3 IMPULSES)

You can go on "total defense" if you don't have a condition you're trying to recover from. Until your next action, any enemy attacking you takes a –2 step penalty to attack you, and you gain a +2 step bonus to any check you make to resist an attack (for example, a *Dodge* check to avoid blast damage). You can't use the evade action modifier (see below) while you're on total defense—you're already trying not to avoid being hit.

Often the evade action modifier is more useful than total defense, because you can do other things at the same time.

USE A SKILL OR TOOL (3 IMPULSES)

Use a non-combat skill suitable for a combat scene or challenge scene. Common examples include treating wounded characters with *Medicine*, working to activate or turn off something in the area using *Computers* or *Mechanics* or using *Misdirection* on characters nearby. See the skill descriptions in Chapter 3 for more information on using specific skills during action scenes.

When you use this action, you can move up to 2 meters before or after you use the skill or tool you're trying to use.

DO NOTHING (1 IMPULSE)

You don't have to act when your next action comes up. You can always do nothing—just delay your next action 1 impulse. When your turn comes up again, you can decide to act or continue delaying.

ACTION MODIFIERS

Some special actions modify other actions you're taking—for example, aim, charge and evade. These provide you with some extra tactical flexibility at a small time cost. You can use only one action modifier at a time.

- **Aim:** Take careful aim when you make an attack. Gain a +1 step bonus on your attack roll, but add a 1-impulse delay to your next action.
- **Autofire:** If your weapon is capable of full automatic fire, you can make a burst or full-auto attack (see Autofire, under attacks). You delay your next action by 1 or 2 impulses (and use up a lot of ammo).
- **Charge:** Move up to half your speed and make an attack with a hand-to-hand or melee weapon. Charging adds a 1-impulse delay to your next action.
- **Concentrate:** Focus on a non-attack skill check. Gain a +1 step bonus on your skill check by adding a 1-impulse delay to your next action, or a +2 step bonus by adding a 3-impulse delay to your next action.

Your charge speed is affected by armor and encumbrance, just like regular movement is.

• **Evade:** You duck and dodge to avoid getting hit while you're performing any other action. Enemies attacking you suffer a –1 step penalty on their attack roll (or more, if you're highly trained in *Dodge*), but you delay your next action by 1 impulse.

REACTIONS

Some character talents or situations give you the ability to react to the actions of other characters. Most reactions are resolved *after* the triggering action takes effect. If you have a talent that says you can react to being hit by attacking the creature that hit you and the attacking creature actually knocked you out with its attack, sorry—you're already unconscious, and you can't use your reaction. However, some reactions actually **interrupt** the triggering action, and might in fact reduce or cancel its effects.

When you use a reaction, delay your next action by 1 impulse.

ATTACKS

When you try to punch, stab or shoot an adversary, you're making an attack. An attack is basically a skill check using the skill appropriate for your weapon. Making a *Firearm* check (or other relevant weapon skill) is often referred to as "making an attack roll."

Your target's defensive ability or situation is measured by modifying the difficulty die of your attack check. A target that's small, well-covered or dodging effectively is a tough shot and might subtract 3 or 4 steps from your attack roll. A target that you've had a chance to zero in on or that you catch completely off-guard is easier to hit than normal, so you might add a step or two to your attack roll.

Because the degree of success influences damage, a higher attack roll implies both accuracy and lethality.

Damage: If your attack succeeds, make a damage roll to determine the severity of the wound your attack inflicts. (Your weapon's damage can be found on the weapon tables in Chapter 4.) Wounds and their effects are covered in Damage, later in this chapter, but the two basic things to know are that 1) the higher the success level of your attack, the better your damage roll, and 2) the higher your damage roll, the more likely you are to take out your target.

RANGE

In a combat scene, you might find yourself in a knife fight against an opponent within arm's reach, or you might be able to pick off targets with 500-meter rifle shots. Personal weapon range is described by six range categories:

Any colonial marine knows that 6 meters or less is inside the room.

• Adjacent (2 meters or less)
• Close (3 to 20 meters)

- Medium (21 to 50 meters)
- Long (51 to 200 meters)
- Very Long (201 to 500 meters)
- Extreme (501 to 2000 meters)

The range at which you can attack is determined by your weapon. For example, a taser or a sawed-off shotgun might have a range of close, while a typical rifle has a range of long or very long, and a specialized sniper rifle allows you to make extreme-range attacks. Heavier weapon systems (howitzers or cruise missiles, for example) use special range rules.

SCAR

Lots of factors might make an attack easier or harder, but the most common ones fall under the happy acronym SCAR: *size, cover, activity,* and *range.*

Modifier	Target Size
+2 steps	Huge target (elephant, light truck)
+1 step	Large target (horse and rider, small car)
–1 step	Small target (drone, raccoon)
–2 steps	Tiny target (rat, soda can)
	Target's Cover
–1 step	Target has 25 percent cover (a fireplug, tree, or prone vs. ranged attack)
–2 steps	Target has 50 percent cover (a window, doorway, or low wall)
–3 steps	Target has 75 percent cover (a foxhole or boulder jumble)
–5 steps	Target has 90 percent cover (a loophole or gun port)
	Target's Activity
+2 steps	Target stunned, blind, or unaware
+1 step	Target distracted
+1 step	Target prone (vs. melee attacks)
–1 step	Target dodging
	Target's Range
–1 step	Medium range
–2 steps	Long range
–3 steps	Very Long range
–4 steps	Extreme range
	Other Common Factors
+1 step	Attacker aiming
+1 step	Two or more attackers adjacent to the same target
–2 steps	Attacker with rifle or heavy weapon adjacent to an enemy
–? steps	Attacker wounded

Some conditions may override the normal range categories. For example, a heavy fog might make it impossible to see a target at long range, while a rifle shot in zero-g vacuum could conceivably carry for millions of kilometers. If you can see an enemy astronaut 10 km away, the GM could allow you to take the shot—at a hefty range penalty, of course.

COVER

One of the best ways to stay alive in a firefight is to put something bulletproof between you and the people who are shooting at you. If you can't find something bulletproof, something that obscures your position—smoke, brush, light office furniture—can still make it harder for an enemy to hit you.

Cover is rated by how much of your body it screens against attack—25, 50 or 75 percent. Soft cover that conceals you without actually stopping incoming fire is treated as one step less effective than hard cover.

Cover generally applies to ranged attacks only. If you're close enough to throw a punch or stab, you're close enough to strike around the obstacle providing cover.

Total Cover: If a target is completely protected by whatever it's hiding behind, a direct attack isn't possible—the attack automatically misses.

Cover and Dodging: If a target is both dodging and behind cover, don't stack the attack penalties. Just use the best one that applies. Either you're trying to hide as much of your body as possible behind the cover, or you're trying to keep moving to avoid being an easy target. You can't really do both at the same time.

People as Cover: It's not very heroic, but you can use people around you as protection of a sort. If there is someone standing in the line of fire between you and your attacker, you gain 50 percent cover against the attack. If the attacker misses you, there is a 50 percent chance that he must instead roll an attack against the person in the line of fire.

AUTOFIRE

Some firearms and energy weapons are capable of automatic fire (or autofire). Autofire uses up ammunition or weapon charges fast but allows you to attack several targets at once (or one target multiple times).

Burst: You can use a weapon with autofire to unleash a burst of shots at a single target. Firing a burst delays your next action by 1 impulse, and doubles the penalty for the range to the target. If you hit, your attack deals an extra box of damage. Roll damage normally and subtract the target's armor; if the hit deals at least 1 damage,

check off 2 wound boxes instead of 1. In the case of a Stellar success, check off 3 wound boxes instead of 2. Bursts require 3 rounds per attack.

Full Auto: Weapons capable of full auto unleash a hail of shots over an area. When you make a full auto attack, make an attack roll at each creature (enemy and ally) within a 6-meter square area. Take a −2 step penalty on your first attack, and each additional attack takes an additional −2 step penalty. Using full auto delays your next action by 2 impulses, and uses up 10 rounds of ammunition (or power charge). You cannot aim when making a full auto attack action.

Improved Autofire: If your weapon is capable of improved autofire, you can instead make full auto attacks on creatures within an area up to 10 meters on a side.

Example: Dieter Frank opens up on a group of scary aliens with an SMG. After accounting for range and other factors, his Firearm check begins at +2 steps. His first full auto attack is at +0 steps, the second is −2 steps and the third is at −4 steps.

THROWN WEAPONS

Some hand-to-hand or melee weapons can be thrown. When you throw a knife, spear or similar weapon at a target, make a normal *Martial Arts* or *Melee* check. Yes, you're actually attacking at range, but your training with that weapon covers all the ways you can use it. The weapon descriptions in Chapter 4 spell out which weapons can be thrown and their range category as thrown weapons.

Grenades: Throwing a grenade (or a lit stick of dynamite or a Molotov cocktail or whatever) works a little differently than a thrown melee weapon. The maximum distance of your throw is 4 meters × your *Athletics* skill modifier for standard grenades, or 2 meters × your *Athletics* skill modifier for heavy or improvised grenades. (Remember, your skill modifier is your ability rating plus your skill points.)

Your *Athletics* check is your attack roll with a grenade. However, most grenades produce blast effects (see below). If you miss, your grenade might still land close enough to cause damage.

BLASTS AND AREA EFFECTS

Heroes are often found near explosions, especially the sort caused by grenades, rocket launchers and similar weapons. These weapons (and sometimes environmental effects like out-of-control power plants) create blasts or area-effect attacks that can damage all creatures and objects in the area.

In most cases, throwing a melee weapon is also a successful disarm attempt … against you.

To use a blast or area-effect weapon in combat, first make an attack roll to determine the **blast origin**. The blast then affects everything within the **blast radius**. Creatures in the blast radius can attempt to **evade** the effect.

BLAST ORIGIN

The blast origin is the center of the blast—the exact spot where a grenade or mortar bomb lands. When you attack with a blast weapon, your attack roll (usually a *Heavy Weapon* check, or *Athletics* for a thrown grenade) determines just how close to your intended target point you get:

Attack Success	Indirect Fire Blast Origin	Direct Fire Blast Origin
Excellent or better	Exactly on target	Exactly on target
Average	2 meters from the target	Exactly on target
Failure	2d4 meters from target	2d4 meters from target

If a blast weapon lands off target, roll randomly to determine the direction of the miss (a d12 and "clock face" works well, with 12 o'clock being an "over" and 6 o'clock as a "short"). Depending on the blast, a failed attack might still get close enough to damage the target.

BLAST RADIUS

The area affected by a blast weapon is referred to as the blast radius. Blast radius depends entirely on the type of weapon used—for example, a concussion grenade has a blast radius of 3 m (6 m) for its primary and secondary blast, while a fragmentation grenade has a blast radius of 4 m (8 m). Targets within the primary blast radius suffer the primary blast effect, and targets within the secondary blast radius suffer the secondary blast effect.

EVADING A BLAST

Note that a successful *Dodge* check moves you, even though it's not your turn.

Creatures threatened by a blast can use a reaction to make a *Dodge* check. A successful check increases the creature's distance from the blast origin by 2/4/6 meters on an Av/Ex/St success. If you're now out of the area of the blast, you take no damage. It's possible to dodge from the primary blast area into the secondary blast area, reducing the damage you take without avoiding it altogether.

If you successfully dodge out of the area or take damage from the blast, you're now prone. If you're in the blast but take no damage, you're still on your feet.

Hard cover also protects against blasts. If you have hard cover between you and the blast origin, you gain a +1, +2, +3 or +5 step bonus on your *Dodge* check (for 25 percent, 50 percent, 75 percent or 90 percent cover). Success increases your effective distance

from the blast origin as described above, but you don't actually need to move—you just duck in place and let your cover take some or all of the blast.

AREA EFFECTS

Gas grenades, EMP bursts and similar weapons don't create explosions—they simply threaten an area with a specific effect. Usually, you'll make an *Endurance* check instead of a *Dodge* check to resist the weapon's effect, and you aren't knocked prone if you take damage.

The *Endurance* check counts as a "resist" action, not a "use a skill" action.

EXECUTIONS

Sometimes heroes find themselves at the mercy of villains who don't have any or who decide that a defeated enemy is too dangerous to leave alive. If you attack a helpless target (unconscious or completely restrained) and take an impulse to aim, you automatically score a Stellar success on your attack and deal maximum damage with your weapon. If the victim has no armor or other defenses, you instead inflict a mortal wound automatically (see Damage, later in this chapter).

NONLETHAL AND UNARMED COMBAT

Most combat scenes involve potentially lethal weapons such as knives, guns or lasers. However, it's often a good idea to avoid killing your adversaries, and sometimes you might not have a lethal weapon available.

Nonlethal Weapons: Some weapons have the nonlethal trait. When you lose your last wound box to a nonlethal weapon, you don't suffer a mortal wound. Instead, you're knocked out for a short time. In addition, wounds you suffer from a nonlethal weapon are automatically reduced in severity at the end of the combat scene (see the nonlethal trait in Chapter 4).

Weapons with the nonlethal trait suffer no penalty for use in nonlethal attacks. At the GM's discretion, you can use normal weapons to attempt a nonlethal attack—for example, using a pistol as an improvised club to pistol-whip an enemy or striking with the flat of a blade. Usually, you take a –1 step penalty to your attack roll to use a lethal weapon in a nonlethal attack (if it's even possible—any gunshot is a lethal attack, period).

Unarmed Attack: You can always punch, kick, head-butt or bite if you don't have a weapon handy. Your unarmed attack is a nonlethal weapon that deals 1d4 + 0/2 physical damage, although your talents can improve on that.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Modern firearms and futuristic energy weapons are quite deadly, but sometimes you don't need to kill your opponent—or you don't have a weapon handy. Anyone can use these special attacks, but whether they're effective or not depends entirely on the target.

GRAPPLE

Most melee combat in *ALTERNITY* is based on strikes: punches, knife stabs, chainsaw bayonets, force-projection swords and so forth. But sometimes you want to grab and hold an enemy to apply sustained leverage and pressure. That's where grappling comes in.

When we say "one hand free," note that tentacles, manipulator claws, and amorphic extrusions also suffice.

If you have at least one hand free, you can grapple another character so your opponent can't move away from you. Make an opposed check, using your *Hand to Hand* skill against your opponent's. If you win, your target gains the grappled condition (cannot move away and suffers a –1 step penalty on all skill checks that require physical motion except for *Hand to Hand* checks against you).

THE GRAPPLED CONDITION

This condition is key to the grappling rules.

Grappled: You can't move away from the creature grappling you, and you take a –1 step penalty on all skill checks that require physical motion except *Hand to Hand* attacks against your grappler or resist actions to attempt an escape. If you're prone, you can't stand up. Some skills (*Stealth* or *Computers*, as examples) are obviously impossible when you have the grappled condition. You can use the resist action to break free by defeating your opponent in an opposed *Hand to Hand* check.

Tackling: When you start a grapple with someone, you can choose to make it a tackle. You gain a +2 step bonus on the opposed *Hand to Hand* check, but you automatically fall prone. If you win, your opponent falls prone too and gains the grappled condition. Some very large or very strong targets may be too big for you to take down with a tackle (generally, anything more than 5 times your weight).

If your enemy is unaware of you or doesn't regard you as a threat, it's not an opposed check. Just make a *Hand to Hand* check (with step bonuses for surprise, if appropriate), and if you succeed, your target gains the grappled condition.

Maintaining a Grapple: If you're grappling someone at the start of your next action, you gain a +2 step bonus on *Hand to Hand* attacks against that enemy, but not on *Hand to Hand* checks you'll make when they try to escape. If you move, you travel at half speed.

Human (or Alien...) Shields: When you're grappling someone, you effectively have 75 percent cover (–3 step penalty on attacks against you) because the enemy you're grappling with is in the way. The enemy you're grappling does not have cover unless it's a mutual grapple. If the attack misses, there's a 50 percent chance the attacker must reroll the attack—but with the human shield as the new target.

Ending a Grapple: You can let go of someone you're grappling any time you want (no action required; just declare it).

When You're Grappled: When it's your turn and you have the grappled condition, you can use the resist action to break free by defeating your opponent in an opposed *Hand to Hand* check. If the enemy grappling you has only one hand free, you gain a +1 step bonus on the *Hand to Hand* check to escape. You lose the grappled condition, can move 2 meters and can stand up if you're prone.

You can also make unarmed attacks normally against the enemy who's grappling you or grapple your enemy back to turn it into a mutual grapple—a proper wrestling match. If you grapple back, it's an opposed *Hand to Hand* check. If you win, your opponent also gains the grappled condition and must take the resist action and win the opposed *Hand to Hand* check to escape and end the grapple.

It doesn't come up often, but in a mutual grapple, you can intentionally fail when the other combatant makes a resist check to escape. That ends the grapple because neither wrestler wants to be part of it anymore.

GRAB OBJECT

You can try to grab something another character is holding. As a 3-impulse action, make an opposed check using your *Hand to Hand* skill against the target's skill with the weapon she's using (or the *Hand to Hand* skill if it's not a weapon). If your opponent is on guard against you (and most people holding weapons in combat are), your opponent gains a +2 step bonus on the opposed check. If your opponent is holding the object in both hands, that's an additional +1 step bonus for her.

If you win the opposed check, you now hold the item; if you tie the opposed check, you're both holding it, and neither of you can use it. You'll need to make another grab object attempt to get sole possession of the item you're fighting over—and so will your opponent.

You can let go of something you're grabbing any time you want (no action required). If you and an enemy are both holding an item, neither of you can move without letting go of it first.

Human shields will almost always take the resist action to escape the grapple or the grab object action to go for a weapon the grappler is holding.

SHOVE

You can move through someone else, shoving them backward. You can attempt to shove as part of a move action. Your opponent can choose to block or use a reaction to sidestep.

In zero-g environments, the shove might extend beyond just 2 meters.

Block: If your opponent stands his ground, make an opposed *Athletics* check. If you win, you shove back your opponent by 2 meters for each level of success you beat him by, and your opponent must make a *Dodge* check or fall prone. If you don't win, you stop moving. You gain a +1 step bonus on your check if you move at least 4 meters before trying to shove someone and a +1 step bonus if you're significantly bigger than your opponent (at least 50 percent heavier).

Sidestep: To use this reaction, there must be someplace to stand out of your path but within 2 meters. As with all reactions, this delays your opponent's next action by 1 impulse. You continue your movement as you wish.

DRONE OPERATION

In high-tech settings, a vehicle AI will respond to some or all of these commands as well.

Issuing a command to a drone is ordinarily a 3-impulse action. The drone itself acts during the same impulse in which you issue the command or in the first impulse after it finishes its current command. Under ordinary circumstances, you and the drone act in the same impulse. You can also issue a command to a drone while it's carrying out its current instruction, and it'll undertake the new command in the first impulse it's available to act.

Here are some of the commands you can give a drone, subject to the tech era and the drone's software.

Observe (TE 6+): The drone moves to a designated point within its range and broadcasts what it sees and hears to the drone operator and others the operator designates. The drone also records what it observes. The drone remains in place until its duration nearly runs out (saving enough power to get back to the operator) or until the operator recalls it with a command.

Patrol (TE 6+): The drone moves along a path its operator designates. Straightforward paths can be programmed as part of the 3-impulse action, but elaborate paths require several minutes to program. The drone can continue on a looping path until its duration nearly runs out or perform the patrol once. While patrolling, it broadcasts and records what it sees and hears.

Attack (TE 6+): The drone attacks according to its targeting criteria. It performs this action only once; sustained attacks are something only full-fledged robots can do.

Fetch (TE 6+): The drone moves toward a designated object, grasps it with manipulator arms and delivers it to a point designated by the operator.

Communicate (TE 6+): The drone broadcasts the operator's voice (and video if the drone can display it), enabling remote conversation.

Track (TE 7+): As the Observe command, but the drone will follow a designated target to the limits of its range and duration.

Evade (TE 7+): The drone moves away from hostiles designated by the drone operator and adds random motion to its travel path.

Link (TE 7+): The drone establishes a short-range wireless link with nearby computers. The operator can use (and hack) the computer subject to limits imposed by security and the wireless connection.

In most science fiction, drones are a feature of tech eras 6 and 7. By the Stellar Era (TE 8), drones are fully intelligent robots and built like NPCs.

MOVEMENT

Combat scenes aren't stationary. Heroes constantly adjust their positions to take advantage of cover, get to a clear line of fire, close in for hand-to-hand attacks or get out of dangerous spots. Their enemies likewise move to make attacks or avoid danger. Challenge scenes might not include enemies trying to get at you, but you might have to deal with hazards such as blazing fires, falling debris or unpredictable energy discharges. Standing in the wrong spot can be a fatal mistake!

If the PCs aren't moving around, use the Props for Your Set section of Chapter 7 to "encourage" them.

SPEED

All creatures capable of movement have a Speed statistic, which represents how far a creature can move on foot by spending 2 impulses to use the move action. For most human heroes, Speed is 20 meters. You can use as much or as little of your speed as you want when you use your action to move (although if you're moving only a meter or two, you might want to use the reposition action instead). You can also move a short distance while using actions such as attack or use a skill.

SLOW TERRAIN

Terrain such as mud, shallow water, deep snow, heavy brush, badly cluttered furniture or loose rubble impedes your ability to move fast. Each meter of slow terrain you cross counts as 2 meters of your movement. For example, if you have to pick your way through a 4-meter wide patch of thick mud, you must spend 8 meters of movement to get through it, leaving you 12 meters of normal movement available for the rest of your move action.

SPECIAL MOVEMENT

You can include activities such as climbing, jumping or swimming in your move action. Any distance you move in these ways counts against your Speed for that move action (so if you run 18 meters and then start climbing a tree, you can't get more than 2 meters up the tree no matter what kind of success you get on your *Athletics* check to climb).

Some creatures (or heroes with the right gear) might have access to other types of movement, such as teleporting or flying.

USING A GRID

If you decide to use miniatures and a grid, hex map or other such surface to represent tactical positioning, we recommend a scale of 2 meters to a square (or hex). For ease of play, make 2 meters the base size for human-sized heroes and creatures—if you're in a square, enemies can't move through it. (It's a little big, but it isn't crazy.) Most ranges, speeds and areas in the game are given in multiples of 2 meters, so it's easy to cut the values in half to find out how many squares (or hexes) a creature can move in a move action or how many hexes a blast affects.

Climb: You must make an *Athletics* check to climb (although some climbing checks are pretty easy). You climb 2/4/6 meters on an Av/Ex/St success.

Fly: Your Speed depends on the gear (or natural ability) that provides you with the ability to fly. When you fly in an area of normal gravity, gaining altitude is considered slow terrain.

Jump: You must make an *Athletics* check to jump (see the *Athletics* skill for details). Most heroes can jump 2 meters horizontally or jump over a 0.5-meter high obstacle with no check needed.

Swim: If you're a trained swimmer (at least 1 skill point in *Athletics*), you can swim 4 meters per move action. If you're not trained, you swim at half that speed (2 meters per move action).

Tight Fit: Ordinary cramped spaces count as slow terrain. If a cramped space is extremely tight (say, a small air duct or crawling under a vehicle), you must make an *Acrobatics* check to successfully enter. You wriggle 2/4/6 meters on an Av/Ex/St success.

Zero-G: If you're trained in *Acrobatics* (at least 1 skill point), you can move at full speed in zero-g conditions. Otherwise, zero-g is considered slow terrain for you. To move in zero-g, you must begin your move adjacent to a wall, deck or other push-off point or have some other way to provide yourself with thrust.

POSITION

In many scenes, you can skip exact position—if you're in a barroom brawl, you can assume that everyone in the room is mixed up in the melee throwing punches. However, position can be very important if you're trying to move around enemies or keep them from moving around you, or when one person in the fight is trying to keep the range open for gunplay while the other is trying to close in for hand-to-hand combat.

Facing isn't important in an *ALTERNITY* game combat scene—you can assume that most creatures instantly turn to meet any approaching threat, even when it isn't their turn to act.

Adjacent: Creatures within 2 meters of you are considered **adjacent**. You must be adjacent to a target to attack it in hand-to-hand or melee combat (although some melee weapons may have longer reach). Most animals and animal-like aliens try to move adjacent to you to attack with claws, teeth and other natural weapons.

Moving Through Creatures: Other creatures block your movement. You can't move through an enemy's base (see Size, below) and must go around them or use the shove special action to get your enemy out of the way. You can move through a friendly creature's base, but your friend must be prone or must use a reaction to make room for you to pass.

One key test for the players is getting the impulse timing right when they're moving through a choke point.

BASE SIZE

If you need to know exactly how much space a creature or object takes up, you can assign it a base size—a circular area that a creature effectively controls. Humans aren't really meter-wide cylinders, but a hostile human can easily block a meter-wide passage and keep you from moving past him or her.

0.5 meter	small creature (small dog, raccoon, cat)
1 meter	average-sized creature (large dog, human)
2–3 meters	big creature (large bear, horse, rhino, large shark)
4–5 meters	very big creature (elephant, orca)
6–9 meters	huge creature (dinosaur, whale)
10+ meters	enormous creature (big dinosaur, immense whale)

DAMAGE AND WOUNDS

The universe is a dangerous place. When an enemy successfully attacks you or you run into a hazard that physically injures you, you become wounded. The **severity** of your wound depends on the **damage** caused by the attack (or the hazard). An attack or hazard might inflict anywhere from 1 to 20 or more damage, causing an injury ranging from a graze that you recover from in a matter of minutes to a potentially mortal wound.

Damage comes in two basic types: **physical** (bullets, blades, impact and so on) and **energy** (lasers, fire, radiation and so on). Both types can cause minor or lethal injuries, but some targets are more resistant (or vulnerable) to one kind than the other.

ENERGY TYPES

Usually the exact composition of an energy attack doesn't matter: lasers, flamethrowers, cold rays and lightning guns all just deal energy damage, and armor energy resistance works the same against any of them. However, a few unusual aliens or pieces of gear are especially resistant (or vulnerable) to specific types of energy. Here are the energy types you might see:

- Acid
- Cold
- Electricity (EMP grenade, shock glove, shock rifle, stun gun, taser)
- Fire (flamethrower, thermal grenade, plasma weapons)
- Gravity (gravity render)
- Laser (laser, phase weapons, star sword)
- Radiation (matter beam, neutron cannon, nega-glaive, null grenade)
- Sonic (sonic bore)

In addition, you might run into poison and psychic attacks. They aren't "energy" so they don't interact with armor.

ARMOR

Your armor reduces incoming damage, potentially turning a mortal wound to a light one, or a light wound to no injury at all. Subtract your armor **resistance** from the damage of the incoming attack to determine the actual severity of your wound. For example, if you're wearing a ballistic vest that has a resistance of 3, and you get hit with a rifle shot for 8 damage, your armor reduces the injury to 5 damage.

If an incoming attack has no damage type or a damage type other than physical or energy, your armor's resistance does not apply—your powered plate armor doesn't help much against an alien's mind blast or the poison already in your bloodstream.

WOUNDS AND DURABILITY

ALTERNITY heroes don't have hit points. Instead, every hero or adversary can withstand some number of wounds. When you suffer 10 points of damage from a laser rifle, you don't subtract 10 from anything; you have a wound of severity 10, which for most heroes represents a serious wound.

Damage from the attack	Wound Severity	Check Penalty
16+	Mortal Wound	Incapacitated
13 to 15	Critical wound	–3 steps
10 to 12	Serious wound	–2 steps
7 to 9	Moderate wound	–1 step
4 to 6	Light wound	—
1 to 3	Graze	—
0 or less	No injury	—

When you take damage, mark off a wound box that corresponds to the severity of the wound. When a wound doesn't specify severity, you can choose which open box to mark off (usually you choose your lowest available wound box). Wounds may also impair your ability to keep fighting by penalizing your skill checks; see Effects of Wounds, below.

Your durability is the number and type of wound boxes you possess at full health; Vitality and talent selection influence your wound track. A typical hero has two wound boxes in each wound type in the lowest three rows and one box in the highest three rows. Adversaries might have as few as one wound box of any kind or wound boxes for damage much heavier than heroes can sustain.

Wounds Escalate: If you don't have a wound box available for a new wound of a given severity, you instead suffer a wound of the next-worse severity with an open wound box. For example, if you normally have 2 light wound boxes but you've already sustained two light wounds, the next light wound you sustain becomes a moderate wound instead—and if you were out of moderate wound boxes too, that light wound would escalate all the way up to a serious wound.

EFFECTS OF WOUNDS

You suffer negative effects from taking too much damage. If you have a moderate, serious or critical wound, you suffer a **check penalty** that applies to every skill check you make. If you are suffering from multiple wounds, only the worst check penalty applies—your wound penalties don't stack. A hero can usually shrug off a few small hits, but too many small hits—or one solid shot from an enemy—can seriously affect your actions.

Incapacitated: When you lose your mortal wound box, you're incapacitated. You fall unconscious and can take no actions. What happens next depends on the lethality of the game—think of it as the difficulty level selected by the GM.

LOW LETHALITY

When you lose your mortal wound box, you remain unconscious until you receive medical attention. If medical attention is not available (for example, because all your allies are dead or because you're drifting off into space and no one can reach you), make a *Resilience* check after four hours. On a success, you awaken on your own and reduce your mortal wound to a critical wound (or the most serious available wound box). On a failure, you gain one "strike." You die if you accumulate three strikes before waking up, or if you take any more damage while mortally wounded.

LETHALITY RULES CAN VARY

Some campaigns might feature special rules for death and dying. For example, death in a post-singularity setting might be instantaneous ... but the character quickly returns to life after a brief period of regeneration and repair or awakens in his or her data cache with a new body a few moments after "dying."

STANDARD LETHALITY

When you sustain a mortal wound, you're in imminent danger of dying. You immediately fall unconscious, and begin a special skill challenge on your next action: You must achieve 3 successes on *Resilience* checks before you accumulate 3 failures, or you die. Each *Resilience* check takes 3 impulses, and you can use the skill even though you're unconscious. On your first success, you stabilize for the rest of the scene, and the time interval for your *Resilience* checks becomes one hour; on your second success, the time interval becomes eight hours. If you succeed in your *Resilience* challenge, you wake up on your own and reduce your mortal wound to a critical wound (or the most serious available wound box). You recover normally after that.

HIGH LETHALITY

High lethality works like standard lethality, except that you must make a *Resilience* check immediately when you suffer a mortal wound. If this check fails, you die. If it succeeds, you fall unconscious, and begin the *Resilience* challenge described above.

HEALING AND RECOVERY

Modern medicine can bring injured people back from death's door, but severe injuries may require complicated surgery or weeks (even months) of treatment and rest. Fortunately, the heroes of more advanced technological eras often have access to medical devices that can repair wounds in a matter of minutes or preserve life despite the most grievous injuries.

Dealing with wounds falls into four categories: stabilizing, treatment, surgery and recovery.

STABILIZING

In the context of the *ALTERNITY* game, stabilizing a wounded character means keeping a mortally wounded character from dying. To stabilize someone, you must be adjacent to them and you must spend an action to use your skill. Your *Medicine* check counts as 1, 2 or 3 successes on an Av/Ex/St result toward the target's *Resilience* checks to keep from dying. You can continue to aid the victim, although once the interval of the *Resilience* checks moves to one minute or one hour, you must devote the appropriate amount of time to aiding the victim.

If you don't have a medical kit or supplies on hand, you take a −2 step penalty to your *Medicine* check. High-tech gear may grant you a bonus on your *Medicine* check or allow you to resuscitate a victim who just died.

The *Resilience* skill (described in Chapter 3) covers efforts to self-stabilize.

TREATMENT

To actually repair a wound and "uncheck" the wound box, you must treat the victim. You can treat grazes and light wounds during an action scene without any specialized equipment. To treat moderate, serious or critical wounds during an action scene, you must have medical equipment that specifically allows you to. You can't treat mortal wounds during an action scene—first you have to stabilize the victim and convert the mortal wound to a critical wound, at which point you can attempt treatment if you have the right gear.

Using *Medicine* for treatment is a skill challenge; see the Medicine skill description in Chapter 3 for details.

Each wound you treat is a separate challenge. You must be adjacent to the injured person. Failing a treatment check doesn't hurt the victim—it just means you didn't make progress during that check.

SURGERY

Surgery is a slower alternative than treatment, but it allows you to treat multiple wounds at the same time and address severe wounds that you might not be able to fix with a quick treatment. Performing surgery is a *Medicine* skill challenge with a time interval of one hour per check (normal) or 10 minutes per check (emergency surgery, –2 steps on your skill checks). See the Medicine skill description in Chapter 3 for details.

RECOVERY

Living creatures (and artificial beings with self-repair systems) naturally heal up over time. Minor wounds improve automatically, but wounds of moderate severity or higher require a successful *Resilience* check to heal. If you're receiving medical care during your recovery, the character helping you can make a *Medicine* check to add +1, +2 or +3 steps to your *Resilience* check to heal up during that time period.

- Grazes heal up completely at the end of the scene.
- Light wounds heal up completely at the end of the day.
- A moderate wound is converted to a light wound after 1 day of rest if you succeed at a *Resilience* check. (Check for each wound.)
- A serious wound is converted to a moderate wound after 3 days of rest if you succeed at a *Resilience* check. (Check for each wound.)

- A critical wound is converted to a serious wound after 10 days of rest if you succeed at a *Resilience* check. (Check for each wound.)

If you don't rest, double the time required to recover from a wound. (In general, light activity such as walking, desk work or interacting with other people is fine, so long as you get at least eight hours of sleep a night and you don't get involved in any action scenes.)

STATUS EFFECTS

Heroes run into all kinds of troubles during adventures. In addition to the risks posed by bullets, blades and energy beams, you might fall prey to effects like being stunned, blinded, poisoned or temporarily driven insane. These sorts of special conditions are known as status effects.

DURATION

Status effects might hinder you for an impulse or two, or they might last for hours; refer to the specific hazard or weapon creating the effect for details on its duration. Common durations include the following:

 # Impulses: The effect lasts for a certain number of impulses from the moment it begins to affect you. Place a marker on the impulse track in the last impulse of the effect so that you remember when it ends. This type of status effect might instead affect your next action; for example, a stun effect usually delays your next action by 3 impulses.

Resist, Active: The effect lasts until you resist it by using the resist action and succeeding at the skill check noted for the effect. For example, a flash grenade blinds you until you succeed at a *Dodge* check to resist the effect. (No, you don't clear the spots out of your eyes by leaping around. We just figure if you're good at *Dodge*, you were a little more likely to look away when the grenade went off.)

Usually an average success is sufficient to clear the effect.

You don't have to use your next action to start making resist attempts, but it's usually in your best interest to clear the effect as quickly as you can.

Resist, Passive: Some ongoing effects may end without requiring active action on your part. At the end of each round, after impulse 8 but before the next round begins, you may make a skill check to resist the effect. If your check succeeds, the effect ends. You can't take the resist action to end the effect early—you can only check at the end of the round.

Passive resist effects work best for slow-acting poisons, thin atmospheres, etc.

Resist #: As active or passive resist, but you must achieve a number of successes with your checks to end the effect. For example, active resist 3 (*Willpower*) means you need 3 successes with *Willpower* checks to end the effect.

Resist (Fail): If you fail your skill check to resist the effect, you fall prey to additional or increased effects. For example, a knockout gas may begin as an effect that distracts you, but when you fail your resist action, you fall unconscious for several hours. If you have an active resist (fail) status, choosing to take an action other than resist counts as failing the check (but you can resolve that other action first).

Round End: The effect lasts until the end of the action round, and usually does something like causing or worsening a wound at that time. Each action round—at the end of impulse 8—the effect repeats (and, after affecting you, may allow you another resist check as a reaction).

Special: Some status effects end in different ways. For example, if you're prone, you can just choose to stand up when you get a chance to do so, or your grappled status ends immediately if the creature grappling you becomes incapacitated.

EFFECTS

Common status effects include the following:

Blinded: You can't see. Enemies gain a +2 step bonus on attacks against you, and your speed is reduced by 50 percent. You suffer a –5 step penalty to hand-to-hand and melee attacks unless you're already grabbing or holding the target. You can't target anyone with a ranged attack unless you first fix your target's location, which requires a successful *Awareness* check. Even if you do fix a target location, you take a –5 step penalty to your attack.

Damage Over Time: An ongoing effect that continues to cause damage until you end it. At the start of each round at the beginning of impulse 1, if the DoT effect has not yet been dealt with, you suffer 1 wound box of damage of the specified damage type.

Usually you fight off DoT with active or passive resistance, but some types of DoT allow your teammates to help you—for example, by making a *Medicine* check to treat you for DoT (bleeding). Typical methods for resisting DoT effects are as follows:

Type	Resist Type	Resist Skill or Method
Acid	Active	Resist 2 (*Endurance*)
Bleeding	Passive	*Endurance* or treatment (*Medicine*)
Fire	Active	*Dodge*; +1 step on resist checks if you fall prone
Poison	Passive	*Endurance* or treatment (*Medicine*)
Radiation	Passive	Resist 3 (*Endurance*)

Some items or alien attacks may deal more damage or be harder to resist; for example, an extremely lethal poison could be "poison damage over time (2 damage)," or "poison damage over time (passive resist 3, fail: death)." At the GM's discretion, heroes might be able to end damage-over-time effects by common-sense counter-actions, such as extinguishing a fire by jumping into a lake or neutralizing an acid with a strong base.

Dazed: You have all your faculties, but you aren't operating at peak efficiency. Every action you take requires one extra impulse (including the resist action to end the dazed status effect, if applicable).

Dead: You fall prone and can take no actions. If you're lucky, your friends might be able to resuscitate you with the right medical gear.

Distracted: You're not able to pay full attention to your foes for some reason. Enemies attacking you get a +1 step bonus to their attacks. Usually you're distracted by your own actions and cease being distracted when you stop doing those actions.

You can counteract the distracted effect with the evade action modifier, but that just means that the distraction is now slowing you down.

Grappled (Held): You can't move away from the creature grappling you, and you take a −1 step penalty on all skill checks except hand-to-hand attacks against your grappler or attempts to break free. You can use the resist action to break free by defeating your opponent in an opposed *Hand to Hand* check.

Incapacitated: You're unconscious and completely unable to act. You immediately fall prone (unless you're in zero-g), and you can take no actions. At the GM's discretion, an incapacitated character might be just conscious enough to notice other people in the room or mumble a few words in response to a question (a *Resilience* check would be appropriate).

Impaired: You're not at your best—you might be severely disoriented, exhausted or fighting off a sedative. You take a −2 step penalty on all skill checks, and your speed is reduced by 50 percent. In addition, you're considered to be distracted.

Insane: You are not in control of your actions. The next time you take an action, roll a d10 to determine what you do:

1–3	Flee, moving away from all other creatures
4–6	Do nothing for 3 impulses
7–8	Attack the last creature that attacked you
9	Attack the closest creature, friend or foe
10	Act normally

After you take the action dictated by your insanity, you can attempt to shake off the condition by making a *Willpower* check (0 additional impulses). If you fail, you're still insane at the start of your next action.

Off-Balance: You take a −2 step penalty on any skill check you make on your next action.

Prone: You're on the ground. Enemies gain a +1 step bonus to attack you in hand-to-hand or melee combat, but suffer a –1 step penalty to hit you with ranged attacks. While prone, your Speed is 2 meters. You can stand up from prone with the reposition action.

Slowed: You're unable to move or act quickly. Reduce your speed by 50 percent. Any action you take other than the active resist action requires 1 more impulse than normal.

Stun #: Delay your next action by the number of impulses given in the effect description. (If no duration is specified, it's a Stun 3 effect.) You can't use reactions while stunned. If you were dodging, you stop dodging.

Weakened: You're suffering from fatigue, illness or some other mildly debilitating condition. You take a –1 step penalty on all skill checks.

HERO POINTS

An *ALTERNITY* PC is already a cut above the average person in the world. Your ability ratings provide you with some noteworthy strengths, your skill points and talents mark you as highly competent, and you often have access to top-grade gear that ordinary citizens just can't get their hands on. But, more important, you're a *hero*. You're the protagonist of the story, the star of the action movie, the individual who can step up and make a difference in a dangerous situation. To measure this otherwise intangible quality, you've got access to one additional resource no one else does: hero points.

Hero points represent extraordinary luck, resilience or perseverance. When the situation appears to be unwinnable, you have a knack for finding your way through; when anyone else would die, you somehow pull through. This special resource gives you, the player, a chance to reach into the game and, just maybe, change defeat into victory.

USING HERO POINTS

Hero points are an expendable resource—a pool of good karma, if you will. You can spend a hero point to do one of the following:

- Immediately take any action you could normally take in a combat or challenge scene as a 1-impulse reaction. You can interrupt another creature's action with a hero point reaction or simply act again immediately after you finish an action. You must be able to take a reaction to use a hero point this way.

- Improve the success of a skill check in a non-combat scene by one level (Failure to Average, Average to Excellent, or Excellent to Stellar).
- Change 1 or more critical wounds or mortal wounds you just received into light wounds.
- Change 1 or more light, moderate or serious wounds you just received into grazes.
- Catch some other lucky break (GM discretion applies).

GAINING HERO POINTS

You begin an adventure with 1 hero point. You gain an additional hero point each time you complete an important milestone in the adventure. It's up to the GM what constitutes an important milestone, but generally speaking, awarding 1 hero point per game session or 1 hero point per three combat or challenge scenes is a good pace. In addition, some character talents provide more hero points under certain circumstances.

NPC HERO POINTS

The GM may assign key NPCs a small number of hero points. In general, a minor boss or elite enemy (the most important foe within a milestone stage or small group of scenes) has 1 hero point, and a major boss (the most important foe in the whole adventure) has 3 hero points.

HIGH HEROIC GAMES

Want to play a game where the heroes don't stop so many bullets? Award more hero points. In effect, your pool of hero points becomes your first line of defense against serious injury. A hero in a high heroic game begins each adventure with 5 hero points, and gains 1 hero point per scene. In a high heroic game, NPCs gain more hero points, too. Minor bosses have 2 hero points, and major bosses have 5.

6: RUNNING THE GAME

"Don't say where we are! Once we know where we are, then the world becomes as narrow as a map. When we don't know, the world feels unlimited."

—Liu Cixin

A roleplaying game is basically an interactive story or a movie where you can choose what the characters do next. In Chapter 5, we covered the mechanics of combat and challenge scenes. In this chapter, we take a look at how to move from one scene to another, how to begin new scenes, and how to incorporate interesting environments and supporting characters (or NPCs) into your *ALTERNITY* game. But before all that, let's begin with two rules every GM needs to know.

WHEN TO ROLL THE DICE

The core mechanic (compare dice to your skill score) is designed to tell you whether an action succeeds or fails when the outcome is uncertain. But rolling the dice isn't always the best way to determine success or failure. Here are times when the GM should just dictate the outcome of an action:

- Physically impossible actions just fail. No matter how good of an escape artist you are, you can't fit a human body through a 5-centimeter opening.
- Routine tasks in routine circumstances don't need skill checks. If a pilot calculates jumps to other stars all the time, you can assume she succeeds unless some unusual complication is at work (a deadline to beat, faulty equipment or bad coordinates, say).
- Reward good preparation and engagement by the players. If a player makes a persuasive argument when her character is speaking with an NPC, it's OK to let the NPC be persuaded. (But remember, people aren't always rational.)

GM'S DISCRETION

If something comes up that the rules don't cover, the GM's allowed to use plain common sense to make a ruling and move on. Can a hero fire a laser pistol through the cockpit window of a starship without melting a hole in the glass? It's your call. Low-power lasers pass through ordinary windows pretty easily, so you'd have good reason to say yes. High-power lasers melt things, and there might be enough interaction with the glass to transfer energy to the window, so you also have good reason to say no.

Try to be consistent with your rulings; if you decide lasers melt glass in one game session and they don't in the next session, your players won't have a fair chance to predict the consequences of their decisions. Other than that, use common sense and keep the game moving.

SCENES AND NARRATION

Like a movie or a television show, an *ALTERNITY* adventure is organized into **scenes**. A scene in an *ALTERNITY* game is one distinct fight, interaction or challenge. Some scenes present the heroes with threats or obstacles to overcome. Other scenes are in the story primarily to provide information to the heroes (and thus the players), helping to move the narrative forward. A short adventure usually consists of three to five scenes; longer adventures are organized into **acts** of three to five scenes each.

The best ALTERNITY adventures feature a good mix of scenes. Even the most combat-heavy stories can use the occasional decision scene as the players debate which way to go next.

TYPES OF SCENE

Scenes fall into five general categories: **combat, challenge, decision, interaction** and **narration**. In addition, you'll often have downtime or rest periods, which aren't really scenes at all. It's also not unusual for a scene to combine types—if two heroes are trying to get information from an NPC while two other heroes are fighting off the assassins sent to silence her, you could easily be running a combat and an interaction scene at the same time.

COMBAT SCENES

Is someone using violence to solve a problem? Then it's a combat scene. Combat scenes follow the rules presented in Chapter 5, so they're fairly simple to run: Just roll initiative and decide which action a villain or hungry alien takes when its turn comes up. Combat scenes usually end when one side is wiped out, runs away or surrenders. However, you might find that a combat scene transforms into an interaction if the heroes manage to convince their enemies to stop shooting and talk instead. (Usually that involves someone using an action to use a skill such as *Culture, Influence* or *Misdirection* instead of attacking, or an NPC offering the heroes a persuasive argument.)

Retreat: To end a combat scene by retreating, move far enough away to break contact (or break line of sight). If your enemies choose not to follow you, you successfully retreat. If your enemies wish to pursue after they can no longer attack you, escaping becomes a challenge scene. Depending on the setting, you may be able to outrun your foes with opposed *Endurance* checks or slip away unseen with *Stealth* checks. If you fail to escape, a new combat scene begins when your pursuers reestablish contact.

Most intelligent creatures expect surrendering enemies to drop their weapons and hold their positions.

Surrender: To surrender, use your action to signal that you're surrendering. Proceed through all combatants' next actions; if no one else attacks, the combat scene ends (and an interaction scene might begin, if you've got some bargaining to do). The consequences of a surrender or a negotiated ceasefire depend greatly on the circumstances.

CHALLENGE SCENES

Challenge scenes are obstacles or tests in which success is uncertain and something important is at stake, but it's not actually a fight. If you're using a skill, but you're not shooting or talking to someone, it's a challenge scene. Some challenge scenes might go on for hours or days, while others might last only a few seconds. If time is critical and seconds count—for example, the heroes are trying to defuse a bomb or repair an energy shield to resist an attack coming at any moment—roll initiative and resolve the challenge scene in action rounds.

Retries: In general, you can't retry a challenge you failed unless you change the circumstances in some way: find a better tool, try a different strategy, use different skills or improve your skill level. The GM can permit a retry at his or her discretion.

DECISION SCENES

Many adventures feature decision points where the players choose what they're going to do next. Sometimes that involves choosing which way to go next or which lead to follow, and sometimes that involves spending time or resources to prepare for a challenge. If the heroes are under significant time pressure (for example, they've got mere minutes to come up with a plan to impress a criminal warlord) you can put the players "on the clock" and give them five or ten minutes of table time to arrive at a decision. Otherwise, it's just a matter of how long the players want to spend talking about their choices.

Decision scenes also cover making choices about preparations or gear purchases within the heroes' control. If the players tell you "we go buy five sets of scuba gear" and there's no reason to think that scuba gear might be hard to find, you can resolve the scene by saying something like, "OK, it takes a few hours to find a dive shop and it costs you $500 each to buy decent used gear, but you get your scuba equipment."

INTERACTION

Any time the heroes are talking to an NPC, it's an interaction scene. Some interaction scenes are skill challenges based on "talky" skills such as *Influence* or *Misdirection*, while other interaction scenes don't use any skill checks at all—sometimes the NPC just has something to tell the heroes, and no special skill is needed to get the information. See NPCs later in this chapter for more information on NPC attitudes and cooperation.

Roleplaying Resolution: The best way to handle interaction scenes is to ask the players what their characters are saying; if the player comes up with a convincing argument or a good offer, don't let a bit of bad luck in a skill check spoil the outcome.

NARRATION

If you're just telling the players what happens next, and they don't have any decisions to make for their characters, it's a narration scene. Narration scenes cover the "blank spots" between the fights, challenges or decisions facing the heroes. In a narration scene, the GM simply moves the story along to the next point where the PCs have a decision to make or a challenge to face. Avoid making decisions for the players in narration (for example, "You all decide to investigate the abandoned lab, and since it's dark, you turn on the lights ..."); players get to decide how their characters do things.

DOWNTIME

Heroes don't lead lives of nonstop danger. Between adventures, they might pursue ordinary careers or just lay low for days, weeks or months at a time. Downtime can also come in the middle of adventures thanks to travel requirements or long-term projects; for example, if the party's going to be on the Earth-Mars rocket liner for 17 days and the next scene of the adventure doesn't occur until they reach their destination, the characters have 17 days to pursue whatever sort of non-adventure interests they might have (and that they can reasonably take up while in transit). Common downtime activities include:

- Resting and recuperating from injuries
- Maintenance and repair of gear or vehicles
- Research projects
- Building or customizing equipment
- Pursuing a career or running a business
- Fulfilling duty or service obligations to an organization
- Travel

Downtime usually doesn't require a skill check; you just do it. (Research and customizing gear might be exceptions; if you're trying to cure a rare disease in your downtime, you're probably taking part in a very long-term skill challenge that allows you to attempt a skill check once per month or two of time you put into it.)

CONTACT

When the heroes encounter other creatures that may be hostile, it's referred to as a contact situation. Many contact situations immediately turn into combat scenes or come with fairly obvious set-ups: If a sentry robot is guarding the hatch to Engineering and the PCs decide to shoot their way past it, you pretty much know where the good guys and bad guys are and there isn't much doubt about their intentions. Other contact situations might lead to one side ambushing the other, fights at different ranges or even efforts to avoid contact altogether.

In general, contact begins as soon as one side becomes aware of the other (although sometimes both sides become aware of each other at the same time).

STARTING POSITIONS

To determine starting positions, first decide whether the scene has a **set starting range**. If the enemies kick in the door, you already know where everyone is when the scene opens. If the PCs need to get into Engineering and there's a sentry robot guarding the hatch, let the PCs decide where they want to be before they open fire.

If the situation doesn't have an obvious starting range—for example, the heroes are driving across a wasteland and a gang of marauders is searching for them—you'll need to figure out how far away the groups are from each other when they can first begin to interact, and whether one or both sides are trying to not be seen.

SPOTTING RANGE AND OPENING RANGE

The distance at which two potentially hostile forces can begin to interact with each other varies greatly with the terrain, weather and light conditions. **Spotting range** is the distance at which you first have a chance to detect the other side. If neither group manages to spot the other, both sides become aware of each other when they reach **opening range** (see the table below).

If no one's trying to be sneaky, have the heroes make a group *Awareness* check to spot the other group (if someone *is* trying to be sneaky, see Stealth and Detection, below). If the heroes have someone on point or a scout ahead of the rest of the team, that character instead makes a single *Awareness* check. If the check is successful, the heroes can choose whether to start the scene at spotting range or opening range. Excellent and Stellar successes should give the hero team some additional advantage, such as cover or a superior vantage point. If the heroes fail the *Awareness* check, the scene begins at opening range.

Group skill checks are covered in Chapter 5.

Terrain: You can see potential enemies a lot farther away on open ground than in dense jungle. Open terrain includes plains, desert, barren hills, highways or lightly trafficked roads. Dense terrain includes heavy forest, jungle, swamp or heavily built-up areas such as urban alleyways or shanty-towns. Anything in between is considered typical terrain—light woodland, suburbs, average city streets and so on. It's possible to have a great line of sight in one direction along an open feature like a river or a highway, and much denser terrain in other directions (like the thick woods alongside the highway).

Weather: Bad weather can shorten spotting and encounter ranges drastically. Poor weather includes rain, light fog, smoke or snow. Awful weather includes thick fog, blizzards, downpours and the like.

Light: Creatures with typical human vision can't see very well in the dark. Streetlights include typical artificial outdoor lighting (although some areas may be very well lit after dark). Starlight includes a typical moonless night or area lit by only a glimmer of light. If there's no light at all, the area is completely dark, and you can't see anything until you walk into it.

Indoors: When you're inside, your opening range is the size of the room or compartment you're in. If an interior space is really big (say, an enormous cargo bay or warehouse) treat it as outdoor terrain instead depending on how cluttered it is.

Conditions	Spotting Range	Opening Range
Open Terrain, Clear Weather, Daylight	Extreme (2d6 × 200 m)	Very Long (2d6 × 50 m)
Typical Terrain, Poor Weather, Moonlight or Streetlights	Long (2d6 × 20 m)	Medium (2d6 × 5 m)
Dense Terrain, Awful Weather, Starlight	Medium (2d6 × 5 m)	Close (2d6 × 2 m)
Indoors	—	Room Size

You can see large objects from much farther away if the terrain is open and the conditions are good. Very large objects such as trucks or small buildings can be spotted at double the normal range; large buildings or medium starships can be seen at 10 times the given distance. (Detection range between ships in space is covered under vehicle combat.)

STEALTH AND DETECTION

When one or both groups in the contact situation are trying to remain undetected, some combination of *Awareness* and *Stealth* checks determines who surprises who.

If the heroes are trying to be sneaky but the NPCs aren't, have the heroes make a group *Stealth* check. Apply a bonus or penalty depending on the NPCs' alertness and any sensors they have beyond the human norm (a +2 step bonus for enemies who aren't

paying attention or a −2 step penalty for enemies who are on high alert is fair).

On a success, the heroes can choose whether to start at spotting range or opening range and gain tactical surprise against the NPCs (who are unaware of the heroes—at least until the shooting starts). Excellent and Stellar successes likewise grant the PCs some sort of positional advantage.

If the NPCs are trying to sneak up on the heroes, have the hero team make a group *Awareness* check, and apply a bonus or penalty based on the NPCs' general stealthiness (a +2 step bonus for big or clumsy enemies or a −2 step penalty for enemies with camouflage or trained in *Stealth* is fair). On a success, the heroes can choose spotting range or opening range, with Excellent and Stellar successes granting positional advantage. On a failure, the scene starts at opening range, and the NPCs have tactical surprise against the heroes.

If both the NPCs and heroes are trying to be sneaky, make an opposed check: The team's group *Awareness* check versus the NPCs' group *Awareness* check. Add a bonus or penalty to each check reflecting the general stealthiness of the enemy side. The side that wins the opposed check gains tactical surprise and can choose to start the scene at spotting range or opening range. If both sides tie, the scene starts at opening range. No one is surprised.

Once you know the starting positions, the scene plays out based on the initial decisions both sides make in the **Fight, Flight or Other** section below.

FIGHT, FLIGHT OR OTHER

When two groups come into contact, a variety of things can happen. You have five basic choices: attack, retreat, interact, ignore or wait to see what the other group does. Usually the GM secretly decides what the NPC group is going to do, and then asks the players how they want to handle the situation.

If one side is undetected by the other, the detected side automatically chooses the Ignore option. The undetected side gains **tactical surprise** if they choose to attack.

Attack: If either side chooses to attack, it's a combat scene. Roll initiative!

Retreat: If one side retreats and the other side does anything but attack, the retreating side breaks contact—the encounter is over.

Interact: One side attempts to engage the other in social interaction. If the other side decides to listen, it's an interaction scene. At the GM's discretion, you may be at a disadvantage if you choose to interact and the other side chooses to attack (a −2 step penalty on your initiative roll would be appropriate).

If the PCs aren't in close proximity ("wait around this corner while I sneak ahead"), it's a good idea to have each individual or subgroup make *Awareness* and/or *Stealth* checks separately.

Every once in a while, the NPCs are trying to sneak *away* from the PCs. If that's the case, they get away on an *Awareness* failure and the scene starts at opening range on a success.

Ignore: You carry on with your business. If you fail to detect the other group (see Stealth and Detection, above), you automatically choose this option. Unless the other side attacks you or interacts with you, the encounter is over.

Wait: You hold your position and see what the other side does. If both sides wait, choose again.

Naturally, some behaviors are more likely than others in different situations. On a crowded city street, you ignore 99 percent of the people you pass by, and they ignore you. In game terms, you have an encounter only if it's likely to lead to a significant scene in the story the GM is weaving.

EXPLORATION

Mysterious alien ruins, derelict spaceships, lawless cities, strange planets ... heroes spend a lot of time searching through areas they've never visited before to find people, places or things import-ant to the current narrative. Sometimes you know what you're look-ing for; you might be searching a jungle for the wreckage of a plane, trying to track down a criminal hiding in the atmosphere plant of an asteroid city or searching an alien shrine for the legendary Jewel of Narlok. Sometimes you have no idea what might be waiting for you, and you're truly exploring the unknown to satisfy your curiosity (or perhaps strike it rich).

Regardless of your motivations, exploration follows the same basic process all RPGs use: the GM tells you what you find, you tell the GM what you want to do next and the GM tells you the results of your choices, which often lead to a new area or possible paths of investigation.

TIME AND SCALE

How long does it take the heroes to search a large island from an aircar? How often should you update the players on where their characters are or ask them which way they're going? It depends how big the area is and how the heroes are traveling (see the table below). Exploration falls into three rough categories of time and scale: site, area and region. You might also find time and scale useful for keeping track of long-distance travel.

The scales are different, but you can also use site, area and region categories for ship-based exploration.

Site: Anything you can reasonably cover in 10 to 20 minutes. For characters on foot, that's a city block, a warehouse or large build-ing, or a small hillock or hollow. The best time unit is 1 minute per "move," and a map scale of 20 to 50 meters works well.

Area: Anything you can cover in a couple hours. For characters on foot, that's an average town or a city district, a spaceport or a

patch of ground maybe 5–6 km across. Use a 10-minute time unit, and a map scale of 200 to 500 meters.

Region: A stretch of ground you can cover in a couple hours by bike or car (say, 10–100 km in size); characters on foot would take days to explore a region. Use a 1-hour time unit; the scale depends entirely on what sort of vehicle the heroes have.

Long-Distance Travel: If your objective is to just cover ground, you travel about 10 hours per day. For a couple days, you can push that quite a bit by driving 24 hours straight, for example. (A 1-day time unit assumes 10 hours of travel.)

Travel Speed							
Time Unit	*5 kph (foot)*	*25 kph (bike, ship)*	*80 kph (car)*	*200 kph (helo)*	*600 kph (plane)*	*25,000 kph (orbiter)*	*15 million kph (interplanet transport)*
1 minute	80 m	400 m	1 km	3 km	10 km	400 km	250,000 km
10 minutes	800 m	4 km	10 km	30 km	100 km	4,000 km	2.5 million km
1 hour	5 km	20 km	80 km	200 km	600 km	25,000 km	0.1 AU
1 day	50 km	200 km	800 km	2,000 km	6,000 km	250,000 km	1 AU

The distances given on the table don't account for good or bad conditions (see below). They're also approximated for GM convenience. Don't be afraid to substitute better numbers if they're available; if you know the heroes' aircar can hit Mach 2 (about 2,500 kph), then they go 2,500 kilometers in an hour of travel.

Speed in space is a complicated question: It's really how much acceleration you have available and how long you choose to accelerate. The figures given for an orbiter are typical near-planet "working speeds," while the interplanet transport represents a typical velocity achieved by a ship that can pull 10g acceleration during a voyage from Earth to Mars. Ships that can travel faster than light are much, much faster; if your ship can hit 10*c*, you can get to Mars in just a minute or two.

For ideas on how space travel works in your setting, see Chapter 7.

Terrain: Superhighways are easy going for drivers; mountains can drastically slow down characters traveling on foot. Terrain falls into four general categories:

- Optimal (highway, gentle plain): Increase travel speed 25 percent.
- Normal (rolling plains, light forest, typical urban): Maintain normal travel speed.
- Bad (marsh, heavy forest, rough hills, cluttered urban): Reduce travel speed by 50 percent.
- Extreme (swamp, jungle, steep mountains): Reduce travel speed by 33 percent.
- Impossible: No movement is possible under current conditions without special equipment or specialized vehicles.

Following roads or similar improved tracks allows heroes to reduce the penalty for moving through bad terrain by one level—if there are any roads to follow.

Weather: A little rain or a stiff breeze won't slow you down much, but severe weather (downpours, heavy snow, severe heat or cold) makes terrain one category worse than normal. Extreme weather (hurricanes, whiteouts, sandstorms, extreme heat or cold) makes terrain two categories worse than normal; you might need to wait for conditions to improve before pressing on.

The average distance between asteroids in our asteroid belt is about 1,000,000 km. The distance from Earth to Mars varies from about 54 million to 400 million km.

VISION

It's hard to explore an area, let alone fight effectively, if you can't see your hand in front of your face. Usually poor visibility is the result of a lack of illumination, but dense fog or thick smoke pose a similar challenge. Visibility can be good, fair, poor, very poor or none.

Visibility is not quite the same thing as spotting range or opening range in contact situations; terrain and obstacles like trees mean you usually don't spot other creatures until you're well within your maximum visibility range.

Level	Example	Max Visibility	Effect
Good	Daylight, clear	unlimited	none
Fair	Dusk, haze or streetlights	500 meters	−1 step to *Awareness* checks
Poor	Dim moonlight, light smoke or fog, inferior streetlights	50 meters	−1 step to *Awareness* checks and ranged attacks
Very Poor	Starlight, thick smoke or fog	5 meters	Impaired
None	No light	0 meters	Blinded

Max Visibility: This is the distance at which you can make out creatures or details in your surroundings. You can discern very large objects (buildings, mountains or starships) at much greater distances if your vision is not actually obscured by fog or smoke, but all you can see is a dark outline. You can also detect objects or creatures showing lights in dark but otherwise clear conditions as if the visibility is good.

Effect: This is the combat effect on creatures whose vision is limited.

ARTIFICIAL LIGHTS

Flashlights, suit lights or other sorts of artificial illumination provide fair light level to the range given in the item description and poor light level to twice that range. Of course, artificial lights can be seen from much farther away (several kilometers, usually) and can't help much with thick smoke or fog. If you make a ranged attack against someone you can see only by the light they're carrying, you take a −1 step penalty to your attack roll.

SPECIAL VISION

Advanced gear or natural adaptation may provide you with the ability to see better in conditions that otherwise might seriously hinder you.

Low-light Vision: The "night vision" goggles available today improve very poor or poor visibility to fair visibility for darkness only, but don't help with obscuring smoke or fog. You can't make out colors or fine details, such as small print on a page. You still need at least a little light for low-light vision to amplify, so in total darkness it doesn't help you.

Sonar/Radar: You "see" by generating a ping of sound (or radio waves) and discerning the echo produced by objects in your vicinity. Sonar or radar lets you see in total darkness and through fog or smoke; the range of your sight is given in the gear or ability description. You can't make out colors or fine details; everything looks like an outline to you.

Thermal: You see infrared radiation—the heat given off by various creatures or objects. This allows you to ignore darkness and obscuring conditions like smoke or fog; refer to the gear or ability description for the range of thermal vision. You can't make out colors or fine details, but you can tell how hot something is, and things that are warmer or colder than their surroundings are fairly obvious—you can tell which car in the parking lot was most recently in use, or which seat someone was sitting in a few minutes ago (the GM may allow *Awareness* or *Survival* checks as appropriate).

NAVIGATION

Street signs, map apps or system charts are often hard to come by in remote areas. Heroes venturing into unexplored territory with no idea of where they're going stand a good chance of getting lost. At best, getting lost causes delay and wasted effort, but getting lost in dangerous terrain can be a fatal mistake.

You may need to make a skill check to determine your location or travel in the direction you intend to go; *Academics* (for historical sites), *Culture* (for sites in a foreign country or alien system), *Survival* (for wilderness orienteering) or *Piloting* (for setting a course or staying on it) are all appropriate. Usually, just one character makes the skill check—it's up to the players to decide which hero is choosing the team's course.

Following a Path: If you have something to follow such as a road, a river, a good set of directions, the signal of a homing beacon or even a distant landmark to aim at, you'll eventually get to wherever your trail leads, no skill checks needed. Whether the path leads to someplace you want to go is an entirely different question.

Finding a Point: Sometimes you don't have a path to follow— you're looking for something, even if it's just "the fastest way out of

In higher tech eras, vehicles with autopilot can navigate for you ... in settled areas.

these damned hills" or "the clearing where we parked our orbiter." Navigating to a point is a complex skill check (success goal of 3, 6 or 10 successes; time interval appropriate for the travel distance). Each success represents progress toward the goal; usually the character leading the way or choosing the course makes the skill check. Clear terrain or prominent landmarks provide a bonus of +2 steps to the skill check; difficult or confusing terrain imposes a –2 step penalty.

Usually you can't "fail out" of a navigation challenge—you're welcome to keep marching in circles as long as you want.

ENVIRONMENTAL DANGERS AND DEBILITY

The rule of three: fit humans can survive 3 minutes without air, 3 hours without shelter in the cold, 3 days without water, and 3 weeks without food.

Heroes have a habit of finding reasons to venture into dangerous places and situations. Wounds caused by bullets and laser beams are bad enough, but there are plenty of other ways the universe can do you in: starvation, exotic diseases, a few hours of winter in North Dakota without a coat. In this section, we'll take a look at the sort of environmental dangers *ALTERNITY* heroes run into from time to time.

Debility: Debility is a special sort of damage that measures the slow breakdown of the body from slow-acting environmental causes, as opposed to bullets or fangs. Debility is measured in levels; you gain levels of debility when you fail *Endurance* checks to resist the effects of dangerous environments. The effects of debility depend on how many levels of debility you have and your Vitality score:

Debility 0	No effect; you're fine!
Debility < half your Vitality	Weakened
Debility ≥ half your Vitality	Impaired
Debility = your Vitality	Incapacitated
Debility > your Vitality	Dead

Debility and Wounds: Each time you gain a level of debility, mark off 2 wound boxes. Begin by marking off graze boxes, but you can't heal these wound boxes until you remove a level of debility. (Mark them with an X or different-color pen if you need to keep them straight from ordinary wounds.) Moderate levels of debility don't kill you directly, but they do make you easier to kill.

Removing Debility: Once you are no longer suffering from the situation or condition that caused your debility, you begin to recover. If you are incapacitated or impaired by debility, it takes 3 days of rest to remove a level of debility. Otherwise, it takes 1 day of rest to remove a level of debility. (The right medical devices or expert care can speed up your recovery.)

DISEASE

Bioweapons, alien bugs, infected wounds ... characters occasionally discover that the most dangerous enemies are the microscopic ones. When you're exposed to disease, you're usually required to make an *Endurance* check to avoid catching it. If your check fails and you catch it anyway, you're now an unwilling participant in a skill challenge to get better before the disease kills you. Each time you fail an *Endurance* check in your skill challenge, you gain 1 level of **debility** (see above).

Diseases have four characteristics: contagiousness, rapidity, deadliness and persistence. Each characteristic varies from disease to disease. For example, something easy to catch but not terribly lethal could have high contagiousness, high rapidity, low deadliness and low persistence. A really nasty bioweapon could have extreme ratings in all four characteristics.

In terms of narrative structure, the threat of a disease is more impactful than actually catching one.

Severity	Contagiousness	Rapidity	Deadliness	Persistence
Low	+2 steps	3 days	+1 step	1 success
Moderate	+0 steps	1 day	+0 steps	3 successes
High	–2 steps	8 hours	–1 step	6 successes
Critical	–4 steps	1 hour	–2 steps	10 successes
Extreme	–5 steps	1 minute	–3 steps	10 successes

Contagiousness: The step modifier to your *Endurance* check to avoid catching the disease upon exposure.

Rapidity: The time interval of your *Endurance* skill challenge to survive the disease.

Deadliness: The step modifier to your *Endurance* checks to survive the disease. Each time you fail an *Endurance* check, you gain 1 level of debility.

Persistence: The number of successful *Endurance* checks you must make to complete the skill challenge and fight off the disease.

Exposure: Some diseases are airborne, which means you can catch them simply by being near someone who's sick or a disease source open to the air. Other diseases are foodborne or waterborne—you catch them by ingesting contaminated food or water. Finally, some are communicable only through close contact with a victim's blood or fluids; if you're not in close contact with someone who's contagious, you won't catch it. In the context of an *ALTERNITY* adventure, the GM decides what constitutes "exposure" and what precautions can keep you safe (for example, a biohazard suit or sealed spacesuit is a pretty good defense against airborne diseases).

Sample Disease: The GM decides the streams and lakes of the planet Pasteur IV harbor a dangerous pathogen. Heroes who fail their Survival *checks on the planet may be exposed by drinking unsafe water. The pathogen is highly contagious, moderately rapid, highly deadly and moderately persistent. Heroes exposed must*

make an Endurance *check at a –2 step penalty to avoid becoming infected and make an* Endurance *check at a –2 step penalty once per day during the disease skill challenge. They require 3 successes to recover.*

Infected Wounds: Some diseases are transmitted through open wounds. Characters who sustain a light wound (or worse) from a diseased creature must make an *Endurance* check or catch the disease. No matter how many wounds the character receives during the scene, he or she makes just one *Endurance* check at the end of the scene to resist catching the disease.

Sometimes, just being wounded in an area with disease present is a potential condition of exposure—an uninjured character might have nothing to fear from a local microorganism, but a character with an open wound could be at risk.

DROWNING

We cover other asphyxiation scenarios in the Poison and Vacuum sections below.

If you have a moment to prepare, you can automatically hold your breath for 2 minutes (or 8 action rounds); otherwise, you can hold your breath for 1 minute (4 action rounds). After that, you must make an *Endurance* check at the end of each action round (or 15 seconds) to continue holding your breath. Your first check is at a +3 step bonus, but each subsequent check reduces the bonus by 1 step (and imposes a worsening penalty by your fourth check). When you fail the check, you become incapacitated and drown.

If no one aids you, that's it for you. If you are rescued within 10 minutes of drowning, you've at least got a chance. Reviving a drowning victim is a complex skill challenge: *Medicine*, time interval 1 minute, 3 successes to revive, –2 step penalty for 5 minutes or more of submersion, victim dies after 3 failed checks.

EXPOSURE

Dangerous cold or dangerous heat are not uncommon on Earth, but on alien worlds, climate extremes may easily exceed the worst extremes that our own arctic regions and deserts can dish up. Characters who don't have protection from the elements must make *Endurance* checks; each time you fail a check, you gain 1 level of debility.

Cold Water: Immersion in cold water is not good for you. Water temperatures below 10° C are dangerous, water temperatures below 5° C are very dangerous, and water temperatures at or below the freezing mark (unusual, but possible) are extremely dangerous.

Dry Heat: Arid conditions are much more tolerable than humid conditions. You gain a +2 step bonus on your *Endurance* checks to survive hot temperatures if the humidity is low, although you'll need to drink lots of water (otherwise, you do not receive the bonus).

Wind Chill: High winds make cold temperatures more hazardous; you suffer a –2 step penalty to your *Endurance* checks to survive cold temperatures if the wind is above 30 kph.

Hazard Level	Cold	Heat	*Endurance* Check Interval
Moderate	< 5° C (40° F)	> 35° C (95° F)	4 hours
Dangerous	< –10° C (15° F)	> 50° C (120° F)	1 hour
Very Dangerous	< –30° C (–20° F)	> 60° C (140° F)	10 minutes
Extremely Dangerous	< –50° C (–60° F)	> 75° C (165° F)	1 minute

FALLING AND IMPACTS

Hitting the ground at high velocity is dangerous to your health; avoid falling from high places. If you're pushed over a cliff or knocked off a narrow ledge, you can attempt an *Acrobatics* check as a reaction to catch yourself before you fall; if you succeed, you fall prone at the edge. The damage you sustain from a fall depends on how far you fall; bad falls can inflict multiple wounds at the same time.

Different Gravity: The distances given below assume Earthlike gravity. On low-gravity worlds, halve the actual fall height to determine your fall severity; on high-gravity worlds, double the actual fall height to determine severity.

Severity	Damage	Fall of . . .	Vehicle Speed
Minor	1d6 damage	2–3 meters	1–19 kph
Moderate	1d10 damage	4–5 meters	20–39 kph
Serious	1d12 damage (inflicts 1d3 wounds)	6–10 meters	40–69 kph
Critical	2d8 damage (inflicts 1d4 wounds)	11–24 meters	70–99 kph
Lethal	2d12 damage (inflicts 1d6 wounds)	25+ meters	100+ kph

Impact: Getting hit by a large, fast-moving object like a car is similar to falling—you collide with something bigger than you at a high rate of speed. The severity of the impact depends on how fast the vehicle (or other object) is moving. You can attempt an *Acrobatics* check as a reaction to throw yourself out of the way, assuming it's possible to get out of the object's path by moving a few meters. If you succeed, you fall prone in the closest safe space.

Real world: The average person has a fifty-fifty shot of surviving a 15 m fall or surviving being hit by a car going 70 kph.

GRAVITY

Earth-normal gravity (or g) isn't all that common in the universe. Heroes might visit massive planets with extremely heavy gravity or find themselves on derelict spaceships with zero gravity. Remember, gravity is acceleration—if you're in a ship boosting at 5 g and you're not in an acceleration couch, you're going to be glued to the floor. For our purposes, gravity comes in six levels: zero-g, micro, low, standard, high and extreme.
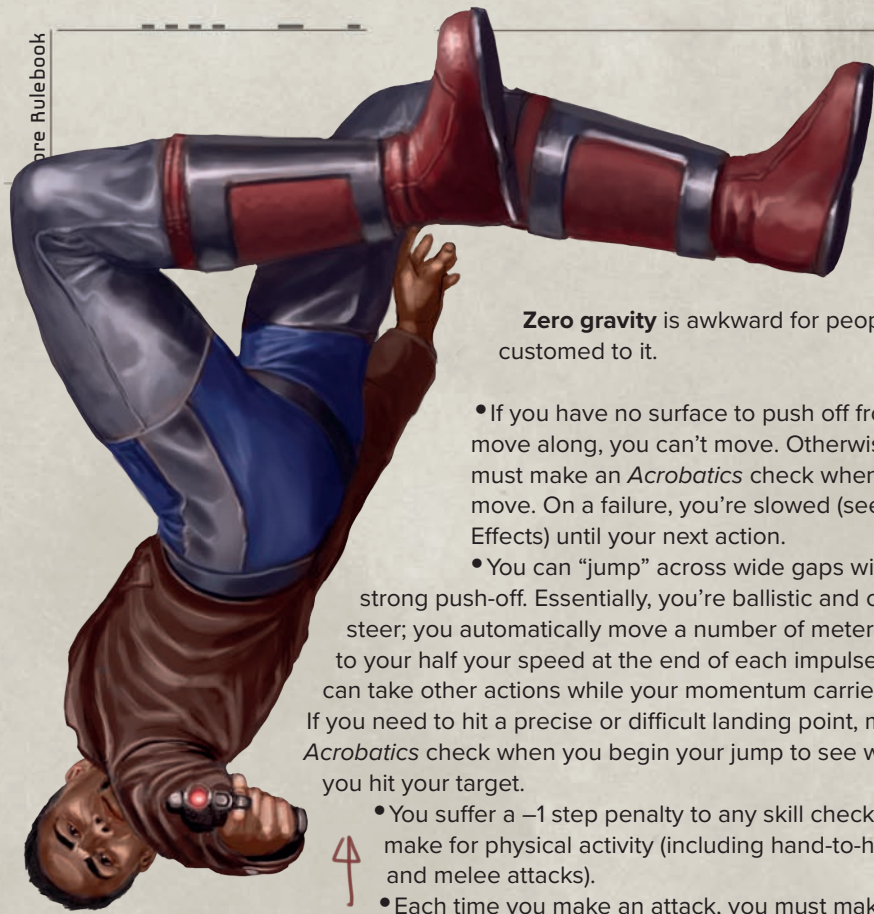
Zero gravity is awkward for people unaccustomed to it.

- If you have no surface to push off from or move along, you can't move. Otherwise, you must make an *Acrobatics* check when you move. On a failure, you're slowed (see Status Effects) until your next action.
- You can "jump" across wide gaps with a strong push-off. Essentially, you're ballistic and can't steer; you automatically move a number of meters equal to your half your speed at the end of each impulse (and can take other actions while your momentum carries you). If you need to hit a precise or difficult landing point, make an *Acrobatics* check when you begin your jump to see whether you hit your target.
  - You suffer a –1 step penalty to any skill check you make for physical activity (including hand-to-hand and melee attacks).
  - Each time you make an attack, you must make an *Acrobatics* check or knock yourself off-balance (see Status Effects).
- Heroes with zero-g training ignore the penalty for skill checks, and gain a +3 step bonus to *Acrobatics* checks in zero gravity.

Microgravity (less than 0.1 g) is effectively the same as zero gravity, except objects and creatures very slowly fall to the floor or ground, whatever that is. For example, water puddles on the floor and flames burn "up."

Low gravity (0.1 g to 0.6 g) is generally comfortable for people used to standard gravity. You gain a +1 step bonus to skill checks to climb, jump or lift heavy loads. Reduce falls by one severity level.

Standard gravity is generally Earthlike (0.7 g to 1.2 g). Heroes native to Earthlike worlds suffer no penalties in standard gravity. If you're native to a low-gravity planet, standard gravity is considered high, and if you're native to a high-gravity planet, standard gravity is considered low.

High gravity is significantly heavier than Earth's (1.2 g to 2 g). You suffer a –1 step penalty to all skill checks for physical activity (including hand-to-hand or melee combat, but not ranged combat). Falls increase one severity level.

Extreme gravity ranges from 2 g up to 4 g; it's the heaviest in which heroes can still move around (with great difficulty). You're impaired (see Status Effects), and falls increase one severity level.

Gravity above 4 g immobilizes human heroes and is generally not survivable for more than a few hours without artificial support. Humans can briefly endure higher g-forces; a good rollercoaster reaches 5 g or 6 g for a few seconds at a time, fighter pilots can take 9 g or so with special suits. It may be possible to survive as much as 50 g … for a few seconds.

Colonel John Stapp, USAF, is the current record-holder. He survived 46.2 g in a decelerator sled.

POISON

Venomous animals, poisoned arrows, chemical weapons … poisons of various sorts pose a significant threat to heroes. In the *ALTERNITY* game, poison comes in two basic types: fast-acting poisons that deal damage over time in combat situations or slow-acting poisons that kill over hours or days by inflicting debility on the victim.

Delivery: Poisons can be introduced into your body through several different mechanisms. If the delivery method succeeds (you drink the poisoned wine, the poisoned arrow inflicts a wound and so on), you are now poisoned.

- Contact: Mere contact with exposed skin delivers the poison. If you're wearing chem warfare gear, or you avoid touching or handling a poisoned object, you're safe.
- Ingested: Eating or drinking poisoned food or beverages delivers the poison.
- Inhaled: Breathing in a vapor or gas delivers the poison. A gas mask or an independent breathing system like that in a typical space suit or breathing mask protects you, as does holding your breath (if you know you're in danger).
- Injected: Receiving a wound from a poisoned weapon, being stung or bitten by a venomous animal or being injected with a hypodermic needle delivers the poison.

Fast-Acting Poison: Fast poisons tend to be "tactical"—they take effect swiftly enough to disable or kill a victim over the course of a combat or challenge scene. A selection of common poisons appears on the table below.

Onset: The time it takes for a poison to begin working.

Dmg Over Time: How many wound boxes of damage it deals at the start of each round once it begins working. Fast-acting poisons

deal lots of damage quickly, while slower poisons might deal only one wound per round.

Effect: A secondary condition of the poison. Secondary effects begin after the onset and last until you end the poisoned status by succeeding at the required number of *Endurance* checks to resist the poison (or until you receive an antidote).

 # Resist: The number of times you must succeed at an *Endurance* check to fight off the poison's effect. You resist poison passively at the end of the round, not actively by using the resist action.

Fail: The effect of failing an *Endurance* check to resist a poison.

Poison	Delivery	Onset	Dmg over Time	Effect	#Resist	Fail
Chloroform	Inhaled	1 round	none	Impaired	1	Incapacitated 1d6 × 10 min.
Cyanide	Ingested	Instant	2 wounds	Incapacitated	3	Death
Gas, Chlorine	Inhaled	1 round	1 wound	Distracted	1	
Gas, Mustard	Contact	1 minute	1 wound	Impaired	1	
Gas, Nerve	Contact	Instant	1 wound	Blinded, slowed	6	Death
Sedative, strong	Ingested	10 minutes	none	Impaired	1	Incapacitated 1d6 hours
Tranquilizer	Injected	1 round	none	Impaired	3	Incapacitated 1d6 x 10 min.
Venom, moderate	Injected	2 rounds	1 wound	Distracted	1	
Venom, strong	Injected	1 round	2 wounds	Impaired	3	
Venom, lethal	Injected	Instant	2 wounds	Impaired, slowed	3	Death

Slow-Acting Poison: Slow-acting poisons function like diseases (see Disease, earlier in this chapter). Instead of contagiousness, slow poisons are measured by toxicity. When you're exposed to a slow-acting poison dose, make an *Endurance* check modified by the poison toxicity. If you fail, you are now poisoned. The poison then progresses like a disease of the corresponding severity; for example, arsenic poisoning is a "disease" of moderate severity, while ricin poisoning is a "disease" of critical severity.

RADIATION

Dangerous radiation is a common hazard in science fiction settings. Heroes might find themselves facing damaged power plants, irradiated ruins, radiological weapons and cosmic phenomena such as solar flares or pulsars. Radiation injury is a pretty complex topic, but we'll reduce it to a relatively simple "game hazard" so you won't be tracking rems or enforcing decontamination procedures on your players.

You are exposed to radiation in one of two ways: by suffering a radiation injury in a combat or challenge scene (usually as a result of taking damage over time from a radiation effect) or by spending time in a dangerous area. The more serious the radiation injury, or the more time you're in the dangerous area, the higher the radiation exposure. Your radiation exposure determines just how sick you'll become later.

Radiation Injury	Time of Exposure in Dangerous Area	Time of Exposure in Extreme Area	Sickness Severity
—	10 minutes	1 impulse	Low
Graze	1 hour	1 action round	Moderate
Light wound	4 hours	1 minute	High
Moderate or serious wound	8 hours	2 minutes	Critical
Critical or mortal wound	24 hours	5 minutes	Extreme

Radiation Danger: For game purposes, area radiation comes in two intensities: *dangerous* (an hour or two of exposure will make you pretty sick) and *extremely dangerous* (mere minutes of exposure could be lethal). Realistically, you can accumulate very harmful doses over days or weeks of exposure in areas bombarded by moderate levels of radiation or face serious illnesses later in life, but we're ignoring that for now—we're interested in the sort of radiation hazards you see in action movies or sci-fi blockbusters.

Dangerous radiation sources include damaged power systems (especially fission or antimatter technology), solar flares or planetary radiation belts, fallout from nuclear explosions and weird alien artifacts.

Sources of extremely dangerous radiation include critically breached (or melted-down) power systems, cosmic phenomena such as gamma ray bursters or the accretion disks of black holes, nuclear weapons (especially neutron bombs), or very nasty radiological weapons.

Radiation Sickness: After you receive a significant dose of radiation, you're facing a bout of radiation sickness. Radiation sickness works like a disease (see Disease, earlier in this chapter), except you don't check for contagiousness—if you soak up a bad dose of radiation, you have radiation sickness, period. The severity of your radiation sickness depends on what sort of radiation injury you suffered. Fortunately, high-tech medical equipment and treatments can often save even the most hopeless of cases.

We're not going to worry about cancer down the road or whether you should have kids or not. It's a game, after all.

STARVATION AND DEHYDRATION

Heroes venturing a long way from civilization risk running out of food and water. You track your supplies in "days" of rations; for example, a character with a full pack might carry 10 days of rations. One day's rations typically weigh about 1 kg. In addition, humans

need about 4 liters (or 4 kg) of water per day. Characters without stores of food or water might be able to forage or hunt for food and find local water sources if a planet is reasonably Earthlike; see the *Survival* skill.

After two days without water or two weeks without food, you must begin to make *Endurance* checks to avoid gaining 1 level of debility. Continue to make checks for each day without water or week without food until you either improve your supply situation or succumb.

VACUUM

Sooner or later, you're going to find yourself outside your ship without a spacesuit, and that's not where you want to be. Contrary to popular depiction, you generally don't freeze in vacuum—it's hard to lose heat without any sort of matter in contact with you. You're also not going to explode, but you can suffer lethal injury if your lungs rupture.

Initial Exposure: Make a *Resilience* check. On a failure, you sustain a mortal wound. If you have a moment to ready yourself—your suit leak is slow or you're choosing to open the airlock—you can empty your lungs of air, and you don't need to make the *Resilience* check.

Acting in Vacuum: You're distracted. At the end of each even-numbered impulse, make an *Endurance* check; you have a cumulative −1 step penalty for each check after the first. On your first failed check, you become impaired. On your second failed check, you fall unconscious and start to asphyxiate.

Asphyxiation: The combination of asphyxiation and ebullism (your body fluids boiling in low pressure) finish you off in a couple minutes. Mercifully, you're unconscious by this point. At the end of each minute you're unconscious in vacuum, make an *Endurance* check. On a failure, you die. You have a cumulative −1 step penalty for each check after the first.

SUCKED OUT INTO SPACE

While you don't explode in vacuum, you can easily get blown out into space if something puts an unexpected hole in your ship or station. Air escaping through a large hole creates a powerful wind "blowing" out. In zero-g or microgravity, you're picked up and swept along; at the end of each impulse, you're carried 20 meters closer to the hole unless you find something to hold onto. If you're actually blown out through a large hole, you're now drifting away from your ship at the speed of 20 meters per impulse.

If the area now exposed to space is small, it can empty out very quickly. A large hole in a small room means that room is immediately emptied of air, becoming a vacuum. A large hole in a large room, or a small hole in a small room, causes the room to depressurize over the course of 2d6 action rounds (or more, if the area venting is really big).

OBJECTS

Take a look around you—if the room where you're sitting suddenly became the focus of an action scene in a movie, what sort of things would get in the heroes' way? What sort of things could be broken or destroyed? If the heroes blasted something with a plasma burst, how might that affect the scene? For the most part, everyday furnishings, appliances and knickknacks aren't worth paying attention to—you can assume a gunfight in an office lobby leaves a few bullet-ridden chairs and broken windows behind. However, sometimes it's important to know if you can punch a hole in a fusion plant's containment unit with a pistol shot, destroy a desktop computer by throwing it against a wall, or blast through an armored hatch with a rocket launcher.

OBJECT CHARACTERISTICS

If you need to describe an object in game statistics, use the following characteristics:

Size and Mass: The object's size and weight; handy for figuring out how hard it is to target with an attack or shove.

- Tiny (1 kg): soda can
- Small (10 kg): microwave, office chair
- Medium (50 kg): desk, shrub, lawnmower, interior door
- Large (250 kg): refrigerator, large bush, motorcycle, armored door
- Huge (1,200 kg): car, light truck, walk-in freezer, airlock, small tree
- Enormous (5,000 kg): heavy truck, large tree, water tank

Anything bigger than "enormous" is probably a building, ship or piece of terrain, not an object per se. Very big objects usually have some natural resistance to damage by virtue of their size; bullet holes might impair the working of a typical car, but they won't physically destroy it. (See Firepower and Big Targets in this section.)

Breakage: Things a hero might break, shatter or bust through with sheer physical muscle are usually assigned a breakage modifier—a step bonus or penalty to the *Athletics* check of anyone trying to break open or break through the object.

- Fragile: +2 step bonus (screen door, glass window)
- Normal: +0 step (interior door, light furniture)
- Tough: –2 step penalty (exterior door, sturdy furniture, safety glass)
- Very Tough: –4 step penalty (fire door, armored glass)
- Unbreakable: Not possible without a powerful weapon or explosives

Appendix 2 covers shooting at (and from) vehicles in greater detail.

Resistance: The amount of armor or toughness the object possesses. Does a bullet punch into it, pock or dent it, or just bounce right off? Resistance generally depends on what the object is made of or protected by:

- Cloth, leather, soft plastic: Resistance 0–1
- Plastic, wood, thin metal: Resistance 2–3
- Stone, concrete, dense plastic, average metal (0.5 cm): Resistance 4–5
- Sturdy metal (1 cm) or personal armor: Resistance 6–8
- Heavy metal (2 cm) or vehicular armor: Resistance 9–12
- Super-heavy metal (5 cm) or extreme vehicular armor: Resistance 13–15

Durability: The number and type of wound boxes the object possesses. Size, redundancy, quality of construction, compartmentalization or plain physical toughness all influence the object's durability track. Think of durability as "how many shots can this thing take before it's wrecked." Use the table below as a guide:

Just like wounded characters take a penalty to their actions, objects with significant damage may not work as well as they're supposed to. For example, trying to operate a reactor console that has suffered critical damage means you're taking a –3 step penalty on your *Engineering* checks. (We advise running at that point.)

OBJECT DURABILITY

Wound Box Type	Object Size/Toughness				
	Tiny	*Small*	*Average*	*Large*	*Huge*
Total (destroyed)	7+: ☐	10+: ☐	13+: ☐	16+: ☐	20+: ☐
Critical (–3 steps)	1–6: ☐	1–9: ☐	10–12: ☐	13–15: ☐	16–19: ☐ ☐
Serious (–2 steps)			7–9: ☐	10–12: ☐ ☐	13–15: ☐ ☐ ☐
Moderate (–1 step)			1–6: ☐	7–9: ☐ ☐	10–12: ☐ ☐ ☐
Minor				1–6: ☐ ☐	1–9: ☐ ☐ ☐

Shift 1 column to the left if the object is fragile for its size.
Shift 1 column to the right if the object is tough for its size.

FIREPOWER AND BIG TARGETS

Some targets are so massive that handheld weapons are basically ineffective against them—a handgun just isn't going to do much to stop a tank. If you want to stop a tank, you need a bazooka or an anti-tank gun. Targets that are big and tough have extremely high armor values. Good examples include:

Target	Resistance
Light vehicle, small house	5 + material
Heavy vehicle, light ship, bunker, building	10 + material
Medium ship, tank, vault	15 + material
Heavy ship, fortress	20 + material

For example, a bunker made from concrete (a material with resistance 4–5) should have an armor value of 14 or 15.

Weapons designed to damage or destroy massive targets either deal extreme damage (perhaps 6d10 energy for a battleship's laser) or have an armor piercing (AP) value of 10 or more.

INTERACTION

Many scenes in adventures fall into the category of social interactions: The heroes are trying to negotiate with an NPC for something they want or convince an NPC to treat them differently than usual. Scenes that revolve around the heroes talking with NPCs are generally referred to as "interaction" scenes or encounters—and if it's not clear whether the heroes can get what they want from someone, an interaction skill challenge may be called for.

Automatic Success and Failure: While a hero with a winning Personality and a bunch of skill points in *Influence* or *Misdirection* can talk his way out of quite a lot of trouble, the GM should begin interactions with a strong bias toward common sense. You don't have to succeed at an *Influence* check to get the cashier at a fast-food joint to sell you a hamburger; that's the cashier's job. (You might need to make an *Influence* check to persuade the manager to fix you a hamburger if they're closing for the night or if they're saving the hamburger for someone else, though.) Routine interactions for ordinary stakes should just succeed.

Likewise, some interactions don't succeed regardless of skill checks. If the GM determines a spaceport security chief is incorruptible, no attempt to bribe that NPC is going to work, regardless of check results. (However, convincing the honest security chief that your cargo is one thing instead of another might be possible.) People don't just give valuables to strangers or take insane risks for them on a whim; you'll need to create the right conditions first by winning the target's confidence, which takes time and may involve extensive research and a *Misdirection* skill challenge in its own right.

NPC ATTITUDE

Most NPCs you interact with in an *ALTERNITY* adventure begin with an attitude appropriate for their role. A xenophobic alien tribe is hostile to off-worlders and attacks any humans they see, unless they've learned to fear human firepower ... in which case they might flee, hide or quietly track the team looking for chances to ambush stray or unaware heroes. A conscientious security guard does her job, doing her best to protect the facility she's assigned to, while a disgruntled security guard does the absolute minimum she needs to do to avoid getting fired.

Attitudes fall into five basic categories:

- **Hostile:** The NPC takes action to hurt the heroes, report them to authorities or avoid contact if they appear too dangerous.
- **Suspicious or Unfriendly:** The NPC takes action to avoid the heroes or chase them away (and may become hostile if the heroes don't back off).
- **Indifferent:** The NPC interacts with the heroes as expected, but may become friendly or unfriendly depending on how the heroes interact.
- **Helpful:** The NPC interacts as expected, but adds minor assistance, advice or support.
- **Friendly:** The NPC gives you major support, even when you didn't ask for it. A friend will accept personal risk to aid you. Your contacts are generally friendly.

With most *Coercion* and *Influence* checks (plus many *Deception* checks), it takes a certain threshold of successes to change an NPC's attitude. If the bad guys are shooting at you—and thus hostile—it takes more than an Average *Influence* success to get them to lower their weapons.

Initial Attitude	Check required to improve by 1 category	...by 2 categories
Hostile	Excellent	Stellar
Suspicious	Average	Excellent
Indifferent	Average	Excellent
Helpful	Excellent	—
Friendly	—	—

A failed check either leaves the NPC's attitude where it is or worsens it by one category, depending on the situation and the stakes involved.

Improving an NPC's attitude by more than two categories generally requires an extended skill challenge. In this case, an Av/Ex/St result tallies 1/2/3 successes, and it takes 3 successes for each

attitude improvement. Once you've failed three times, the interaction has reached an impasse, and attitudes won't change further until time passes or the underlying conditions change.

In the case of *Coercion*, a successful act doesn't improve the NPC's actual attitude or demeanor, but it temporarily improves the NPC's behavior. The dirty cop you're intimidating is still suspicious, but she'll act helpful for the moment, muttering curses under her breath the whole time.

ROLEPLAYING

Sometimes, players hit upon the exact right thing for their characters to say in the exact right situation. If the GM feels the players, speaking for their characters, found the exact right argument or inducement to convince an NPC to do what they want, there's no need to roll the dice. Your reward for engaging with the story and thinking hard about how your character can change someone else's mind—or buy them off with an offer they can't refuse—is you automatically succeed at the interaction scene.

As long as your table is consistent, *ALTERNITY* works just fine whether you're more of an "act it out" type or a "roll the dice" sort.

If your argument or inducement is strong but the GM feels it's not a sure thing, the GM can simply award you a bonus on your skill check. A bonus of +1 step for a point well made to +3 steps for a compelling case would be appropriate; anything more probably falls into the realm of automatic success.

NEGOTIATIONS

If a skill check is called for, a negotiation ranges from a single check for a simple decision to a lengthy skill challenge for a complex or time-consuming decision. Brokering a peace deal between warring planets isn't the sort of thing you do with one roll of the dice. The three biggest components of a negotiation challenge are commitment, risk and reward.

Commitment: How much effort are you requesting from the NPC you're dealing with? Convincing villagers to delay an unimportant hunt by a day is not too hard, but convincing them to never again hunt a rare prey animal that represents an important rite of passage for their warriors is a much tougher sell.

- Simple decision/a few minutes: 1 success
- It'll take a few hours, tops: 3 successes
- It could go on for days or weeks: 6 successes
- You're asking for years of commitment: 10 successes

Risk: How dangerous is it for the NPC to go along with what you're suggesting? If a gate guard is likely to be fired for letting the wrong person into the facility, it doesn't matter that it would

take only a moment for her to buzz you in—she's likely to say no. Risk imposes a penalty depending on the potential consequences to the NPC:

- Risk of mild consequences (demerit, small fine): −1 step
- Risk of serious consequences (fired or injured): −3 steps
- Risk of extreme consequences (killed): −5 steps

Reward: What's the upside for the NPC? Minor rewards include a gift equal to a few hours' pay, a good word with a supervisor or a chance to spend time with someone the NPC finds congenial or attractive. Major rewards are things like a few month's pay, a promotion or the promise of a serious relationship with the right person. Extreme rewards include gifts of "quit your job" money, promotions of several steps and so on. Rewards provide bonuses to your negotiation skill challenge (+1 to +5 steps).

It doesn't matter if you can really provide the reward to the NPC; the NPC just has to believe you'll live up to your end of the deal.

INTERROGATIONS

If the heroes capture an important NPC who has information they want, you can play out the interrogation as a negotiation as described above. The key aspects of commitment, risk and reward still apply. But for less important interrogations (the quintessential "find out what the guard knows" situation), you can use a more streamlined technique.

Set Success Categories: Decide what the NPC reveals with each category of success:

- **Average:** Basic/limited answers to direct questions. The NPC's attitude is effectively indifferent.
- **Excellent:** Answers include extra context and volunteered information. Attitude is effectively helpful.
- **Stellar:** The NPC "flips" and becomes effectively friendly as long as the consequences for cooperation (described below) are intact.

The players don't know what specific information is associated with each category, but you should give it some thought ahead of time so you can roleplay the interrogation subject effectively.

RESISTANCE OR COOPERATION

Interrogation subjects tend to view their "should I talk or not?" decision through two lenses: the consequences for resisting the heroes' interrogation versus the consequences for cooperating. As the GM, you have the best insight into how the NPC would initially weigh those competing consequences; decide on a step bonus or step

penalty as appropriate. If the heroes threaten a helpless NPC with violence or imprisonment, that's a significant step bonus – unless talking will subject the NPC to the proverbial "fate worse than death," in which case there's a step penalty.

INTERROGATION METHODS

Once you've figured out your categories for success and set an overall step bonus/penalty for the consequences of resistance versus cooperation, it's time for the players to engage in the actual interrogation. Depending on your table's style, this can fall anywhere on the act-it-out to roll-the-dice spectrum (described in the Roleplaying section above).

Good Cop/Bad Cop: Players love using this interrogation technique, and they should—it's fun! To quickly adjudicate this approach, give the "good cop" PC and the "bad cop" PC each a turn to roleplay their part of the interrogation, then have one make an *Influence* check while the other makes a *Coercion* check. The PCs collectively gain the benefit of the better result.

False Confederate: Another trick is to convince the interrogation subject that you're really on their side. That's a matter of *Deception* checks, with a significant step bonus or penalty depending on how plausible the ruse is.

Technological Aid: Law enforcement agencies of TE 7 or higher have access to sensors that function as more reliable versions of modern-day lie detectors. At TE 7 they're hard-wired into interrogation rooms, but portable units emerge by TE 8. Treat the presence of those sensors as a step bonus (generally +1 or +2) for an interrogation. They can be hacked like other high-tech devices, and they don't work on alien physiologies unless they were built to do so.

Finally, some TE 9 settings have thought-reading sensors that not only detect lies, but make it hard or impossible for the interrogation subject to reveal the truth. Using such mind probes grants a +3 or higher step bonus on the interrogation, but the consequence for failure might be a brain-dead subject, not just a silent one.

The psionic techniques in Appendix 1 are useful in interrogations, too...

WHEN THE TABLES ARE TURNED

Sometimes heroes find themselves on the receiving end of an interrogation, or someone is trying to negotiate for something the heroes have. When this happens, act it out at the table, but let player choice be the deciding factor, not the dice. In other words, NPCs can't make *Influence, Coercion* or *Deception* checks to have their way with the player characters. As the GM, you can certainly influence, coerce, or misdirect them, but the NPCs are doing it solely with their words and the overall circumstances.

That doesn't mean you should put the dice away entirely, though. When the heroes are being interrogated or negotiated with, there are all sorts of things they can be doing:

- Turn an interrogation into a "plea bargain"-style exchange of information: *Influence* or *Deception*.
- Pick up clues (which may lead to future step bonuses) during the conversation: *Empathy*.
- Discouraging certain "dangerous" lines of inquiry: *Coercion*.

WHEN NEGOTIATIONS FAIL

Both in science fiction generally and roleplaying games specifically, a significant percentage of verbal confrontations turn violent. While harsh language won't stop an oncoming xenomorph, characters with expertise in social interactions sense when the conversation is going south and are better prepared to draw their blasters if it comes to that.

Attack Out of the Blue: If the social interaction is one where violence would be exceedingly rare (a transaction with a merchant or a trade summit between planetary leaders), then the side who first commits to violence gains tactical surprise (described in Chapter 5) against everyone on the other side who fails an *Empathy* check to pick up a moment's warning through body language. Assess a step penalty on the *Empathy* check depending on just how unlikely the attack was, given the social circumstance. Characters who succeed at the *Empathy* check roll initiative normally.

We All Knew the Risks: If the social interaction is one where both sides are anticipating the possibility of violence, then set up the start of the fight depending on whether the heroes or the NPCs committed to violence first.

The Heroes Commit First: Before the fight begins, have the heroes make *Misdirection* checks to disguise their body language and avoid tipping off the bad guys. On an Av/Ex/St check result, a PC gains a +1/+2/+3 step bonus on the subsequent initiative check.

The NPCs Commit First: In this case, have the heroes make *Empathy* checks to notice that the bad guys are reaching for weapons or otherwise about to end the conversation violently. On an Av/Ex/St check result, each PC gains a +1/+2/+3 step bonus on the subsequent initiative check.

As a reminder, these checks and bonuses are appropriate only when a social interaction becomes a combat scene. If the PCs meet an enemy patrol in the forest, initiative depends on *Stealth* and *Awareness* interactions, not *Empathy* and *Misdirection*.

Between Stealth/ Awareness and Empathy/ Misdirection, there's almost always a way to get an edge on an initiative check.

NPCS

On rare occasions, a small team of heroes exploring a distant planet with no intelligent natives might not have any social interactions during the course of their adventure, but most *ALTERNITY* adventures take place in settings populated by a supporting cast of NPCs. In fact, creating a vibrant and interesting universe of memorable people for the heroes to meet, battle against, fight alongside or help out in times of danger is a great way for the GM to build a game the players will long remember.

While you can create NPCs exactly the way you'd create a PC, the universe isn't full of only highly competent heroes. Most NPCs are noteworthy only because they provide a key skill use on the heroes' behalf (for example, a top surgeon operating on a badly wounded PC) or know information the heroes might need for the current adventure (for example, an eyewitness to a crime the heroes are trying to solve or an informant who can tell the heroes where to find the gang hideout). Only the most important villains or allies need anything like a full character description.

NPC ROLE

An NPC's role is simply the reason he or she is in the adventure. Is the NPC a faceless adversary the heroes battle in one combat scene, a helpful bystander with a key piece of information or a master villain with a world-threatening plot? NPC roles include allies, contacts, extras, professionals and villains.

ALLIES

Sometimes, a team of PCs needs a little help. An NPC ally is an additional hero character under the GM's control. An ally may be a temporary addition to the team for a single episode or adventure—for example, extra firepower the heroes' employer assigns to help with a tough mission—or a faithful sidekick who sticks with a hero through many adventures.

Allies are "full" characters with ability ratings, archetypes and skill point assignments. Allies are usually a level or two lower than most heroes in the party (the game is about the heroes, after all). Allies might join the team for a fair cut of the job's proceeds or dividends, because some higher authority assigns them to the team for a while, or as sidekicks acquired by heroes who choose the sidekick talent.

The GM designs the ally character and controls the ally during action scenes (although most GMs allow players to control their own sidekicks and only overrule the players' decisions if it seems clear a sidekick wouldn't do what the player wants the sidekick to do). Allies generally don't take suicidal chances or meekly tolerate

For ally NPCs, some skills are more useful than others. You'll almost never roll an NPC-vs.-NPC *Influence* check, for example.

abusive or negligent behavior from the heroes they're supposed to be working with; they'll leave, surrender or decline to participate in a highly risky plan if that's what any rational person would do.

CONTACTS

A contact is an NPC who can provide the heroes with information, resources or favors. Heroes acquire contacts during adventures by doing things for people. In addition, some character backgrounds come with contacts (and if you choose the right talents, you may have even more contacts than other heroes in the campaign).

Don't confuse contacts with organizations. If you're a CIA agent, the agency's going to provide you with the information you need to perform your mission, resources such as standard weapons or satellite phones, and favors like diplomatic cover. If you're a CIA agent with a contact, you've got access to someone outside Langley who can do things for you that the Company can't—a senator on the Intelligence Committee, a Russian mob boss who owes you big-time or maybe a white-hat hacker who helps you out from time to time.

The sort of help a contact provides is up to the GM. Moderate assistance includes a tip, a ride, posting bail or providing a piece of normal equipment that otherwise might be hard to find on short notice. Significant assistance includes short-term surveillance, the loan of a vehicle, posting a very expensive bail or normally restricted equipment. Critical assistance consists of a detailed target list, the loan of a starship, a governor's pardon or providing highly regulated gear such as a squad's worth of powered armor.

If it's not clear how much help a contact can provide, the GM can call for a **contact check.** To make a contact check, the hero with the contact makes an *Influence* check; the amount of help the contact provides is proportional to the success of the hero's check.

Contacts come in three grades:

- Average contacts: moderate assistance; no bonus to contact checks
- Excellent contacts: significant assistance; +2 step bonus to contact checks
- Stellar contacts: critical assistance; +4 step bonus to contact checks

EXTRAS

Most of the people the heroes pass by on the street are average in all respects—they're literally extras (in the cinematic sense) who are present only to create the illusion of a realistic world. When you touch down at an outpost on a distant world, you could meet

lots of interesting people: shopkeepers or dealers who can sell you gear you need, colony administrators who might hire you for a job, a gang of kids impressed by someone who's actually been to other planets. Extras can't provide you with unusual assistance or watch your back during a firefight, but they're often an important part of an adventure narrative (for example, the "quest givers" you see in many MMOs).

Dealers are NPCs who sell you stuff. If you're a good customer or it's clearly in their own interest to help you get what you need, they're friendly (and they might occasionally cut you a break on an item's price or buy back lightly used gear you're done with).

Employers hire you to do a job. You're a hero, so you don't get hired to deliver pizzas—you get hired to take care of a problem. How much an employer can offer and whether they're on the level varies quite a bit from adventure to adventure.

Friends are people you'd help out even if they couldn't pay you and who help you out in small ways that don't really rise to the level of being a formal contact. It's up to you to decide if a particular NPC is someone your character feels obligated to assist, but most heroes have at least a few people they look out for just because they like 'em. Relatives or romantic interests also fall into this category.

Informants are NPCs who know something of value in the current adventure but aren't persistent or long-lasting contacts. The moisture farmer who saw which way the desert raiders fled? She's an informant. The only reason she exists in your campaign is to provide the heroes with a useful bit of information when they ask the right question.

Adversaries are often extras, too. The thugs, mooks, stormtroopers or guards who only exist to shoot at the heroes in one combat scene? They're just not that important. In fact, most don't even need a name (although you might need to decide how much a particular mook or soldier knows about the villain's master plan and whether or not he'll talk if the heroes capture him alive).

PROFESSIONALS

Sometimes, it pays to just hire a pro. A professional is an NPC you hire because they've got a skill you need—for example, a doctor for an injured character, an engineer to repair a damaged ship, or a lawyer to get an injunction slapped on the megacorp before they remove artifacts from the alien tomb they think they own.

Professionals come in three grades:

The dealers who matter are the dealers who sell guns and other items that enable a hero's skills. Develop them first.

- Average professionals (key skill 11+, +1 step bonus; secondary skills 13+): $200/hour.
- Excellent professionals (key skill 10+, +1 step bonus; secondary skills 12+): $500/hour.
- Stellar professionals (key skill 9+, +2 step bonus; secondary skills 11+): $1000/hour.

A professional has a key skill—the specific one you need to hire—and several related secondary skills appropriate to their specialty. For example, an expert guide could have *Survival* as a key skill, and *Awareness, Firearm* and *Stealth* as secondary skills.

Facilities: Professionals often have access to superior facilities—for example, an OR and a crack surgical team at a hospital or a well-equipped repair yard. Excellent or superior facilities provide an additional +1 or +2 step bonus on the appropriate skill checks, but renting facilities (and a supporting team of experts) generally costs 10 to 100 times as much as hiring the professional.

VILLAINS

Most adventures feature a villain—an NPC who serves as the primary driver of the plot, and the center of resistance to the heroes' efforts. Villains come in all shapes and sizes; many are very formidable adversaries who can singlehandedly take on a whole team of heroes while others throw hordes of thugs or soldiers in the heroes' path. Still others pose no physical threat to the heroes at all—they're dangerous because they can use authority or misdirection to stymie the heroes. The important thing is that a villain has a place in the narrative: She's trying to do something the heroes need to stop, or she's trying to stop the heroes from doing something they need to do.

Villains generally require a "full" character or creature design; the GM needs to know what happens if the heroes confront them, even if the villains in question have no particular desire to shoot it out with the good guys. However, villains don't have to be built on the same chassis as a PC. Many villains are aliens or monsters of some sort and don't have an archetype or full skill selection. Even human villains rarely need to be constructed like evil heroes.

Villains and Hero Points: Just as heroes have hero points to help them shine at dramatic moments in an adventure, important villains also have hero points. Villains spend their hero points defensively to reduce the success of hero attacks (especially Excellent or Stellar successes). They can also spend hero points to succeed at an important skill check that isn't a direct attack on one of the PCs—for example, a *Piloting* check to vanish into a nebula or an *Engineering* check to sabotage a ship's power plant and create a new problem for the heroes to deal with.

When in doubt, save that last "hero" point for a getaway ... or at least to keep them from finding the body.

- Minor Villain (a level boss or a single signature encounter): 1 hero point
- Major Villain (an adventure boss): 2–4 hero points
- Epic Villain (a threat in multiple adventures): 5–6 hero points

THE AVERAGE PERSON

The typical human has ability ratings 4, 3, 3, 3, 2, 2; one skill at 3 points, and two at 1 point; initiative score 15/20/25; and durability of 1–9: ☐; 10+: ☐.

Don't assign specific abilities or spend skill points unless you have to. Instead, just give a quick NPC one key skill (skill score 14+) and two secondary skills (skill score 16+). Any other skill check is untrained (skill score 18+).

QUICK NPC DESCRIPTION

Most NPCs that heroes interact with can be reduced to a few crucial elements of description. You don't need to know the NPC's biography; you just need to identify a couple salient characteristics that make a character distinctive and a little memorable. A quick NPC description entails 1- or 2-word details in some or all of the following areas: **name**, **first impression**, **age/species/sex**, **job**, **motive** and **personality**.

Name is obvious: What do the heroes call the NPC? It's often helpful to give NPCs in the same area very different names just to avoid player confusion.

First Impression: What salient physical feature do the heroes see at first glance?

Age/Species/Sex: This is more physical description (although sex in this case indicates presentation).

Job: What does the NPC do for a living? What's he or she good at?

Motive: What does the NPC want in this adventure? Keep it short and pithy: "help make the town safe from pirates," "organize a strike for better working conditions" or "chase off the aliens so the wreck can be profitably salvaged" are all good examples.

Personality: What's the key personality trait heroes interacting with the NPC notice? All you really need is something to hang a bit of roleplaying on, such as "nervous," "overconfident," "bully" or "dignified."

HERO ADVANCEMENT

The *ALTERNITY* game isn't a "zero to hero" system—a beginning character is already a competent hero and a cut above most of the people in the universe. Even so, characters definitely grow over the course of their careers, learning new skills and mastering old ones. In some campaigns, highly experienced heroes also gain access to better gear and more powerful weapons. A suit of powered assault armor is never going to be something you just wear all the time, but as you approach 10th level, it might be something you can keep stashed on board your ship or easily requisition from the local authorities when you need it.

AWARDING LEVELS

Heroes level up when the GM decides it's appropriate for them to do so; this isn't an XP or kill-point system. We recommend awarding a new level to the heroes at the completion of two to three short adventures, or one medium-sized one (an adventure of about a dozen scenes). To put it another way, heroes should level up once every three to six game sessions.

LEVELING UP

When you gain a level, you can learn a new talent. You also gain 5 skill points. The maximum number of skill points you can assign to a skill is equal to 4 plus your new level, topping out at 10 skill points by the time you're level 6. (Later in your career it may be useful to take up some new skills and expand your horizons a bit.)

RETRAINING

In higher tech eras, retraining may involve directly rewiring the heroes' brains or altering their memories.

Over the course of your career, you might find that some element of your early training just isn't relevant anymore and refocus on skills or talents that are more useful to you. When you gain a level, you can "forget" a talent and learn a new one in its place. You can also remove up to 2 skill points from one existing skill and spend them on different skills. You can't choose to remove talents or skill points that are requirements for a different talent you still have.

GEAR

In fantasy games, heroes gain ever-more powerful magic swords and magic armor as they gain levels. There's a limit to just how believable this is in a sci-fi RPG, but it's still possible to improve your combat ability with weapons and armor or to obtain a kit that helps you succeed at difficult skill challenges with non-combat skills. You

could get your hands on a laser pistol of exceptional quality (per-haps with a more powerful beam than the standard mass-produced models or a larger and more efficient power cell) or a heavy-duty suit of carbon-fiber plate that offers better-than-normal damage resistance. If you can find a company specializing in limited runs of superior heavy pistols today, why couldn't you find it in the future?

Improving through gear upgrades generally involves using your mission earnings or calling in special favors to purchase Gear Modifications (see Rewards in Chapter 7). You might also just find a particularly choice piece of gear—for example, a prototype heavy laser in the evil corporation's weapons development facility.

Advanced characters are particularly good for one-shot adventures featuring PCs who are the "best of the best."

STARTING WITH ADVANCED CHARACTERS

As we noted earlier, an *ALTERNITY* character is a hero right from 1st level. However, a GM might want to let players begin with a broader array of skills and talents than normal. If you decide to start a campaign with heroes above 1st level, here are the cumulative skill points and talent selections for each level:

Starting Level	Skill Pts	Max Pts per Skill	Talents	Gear Class or Wealth					
				1	2	3	4	5	Wealth
1st	15	5	3	3	2	1			$4,000
2nd	20	6	4	3	2	2			$7,000
3rd	25	7	5	3	3	2			$10,000
4th	30	8	6	3	3	2	1		$20,000
5th	35	9	7	2	3	3	2		$35,000
6th	40	10	8	2	3	3	2		$50,000
7th	45	10	9		3	3	2	1	$80,000
8th	50	10	10		2	3	3	2	$120,000
9th	55	10	11		2	3	3	2	$160,000
10th	60	10	12			4	4	3	$250,000

Skill Points: The number of total skill points you can spend in addition to the starting skills provided by your choice of archetype.

Maximum Skill Points per Skill: The maximum number of skill points you can assign to any one skill.

Talents: The number of talents you know.

Gear: This table presents two different systems for gear: choosing items by class or using a pay-as-you-go approach. You either have the number of items specified at each cost class, or you have the wealth specified in the last column. For example, a 4th-level character begins with three Class 1 items, three Class 2 items, two Class 3 items and one Class 4 item, or instead begins with $20,000 to go shopping with.

You have access to gear of limited availability at higher levels: restricted at 3rd level, military at 6th level and experimental at 9th level.

7: CREATING ADVENTURES

"Know your ending, I say, or the river of your story may finally sink into the desert sands and never reach the sea."

—Isaac Asimov

If you're the gamemaster of your RPG group, you get to take the lead in choosing what kind of future you're going to explore in your game. Revolution in a far-future dystopia? Galactic exploration? A series of special forces ops to prevent time-traveling aliens from changing the past? It's all up to you. But that means you'll need to know how to create interesting and well-balanced adventures for your players to participate in.

If you don't know where to start, we recommend downloading some of the free *ALTERNITY* adventures available at sites such as DriveThruRPG.com. Read through a couple; you'll see what sort of scenes, decision points and adversaries an adventure needs. Now here's the most important advice: **You don't need to write thousands of words to create an adventure.** We write a lot because we don't know who's going to try to run the adventures we create, and we want to provide all the necessary background so you'll know how the story ought to change as the players move through the plot. But if you're creating an adventure you're going to run yourself, all you really need to do is go scene by scene and jot down enough notes to:

- Tell the players what the situation is
- Anticipate the most likely player responses
- Know which skill checks to call for when the players tell you what they want to do
- Run the adversaries in a combat scene
- Wrap up the scene and move on when the heroes succeed or fail

SCENES AND ACTS

The basic building block of an *ALTERNITY* adventure is a **scene**: a single discrete fight, challenge, or interaction that gives the heroes a chance to make choices about the unfolding story. Sometimes a scene represents only a few seconds of time—for example, a lightning-quick barroom gunfight that ends in a single shot—or sometimes it might represent days and days, such as a trek across a desert or an effort to repair a damaged spaceship.

Short adventures consist of three to five scenes; you can usually get through them in one evening of play. Medium-sized adventures consist of three to five **acts**, each with three to five scenes; you can usually get through one act of a medium-sized adventure in a single evening. If a scene is a single "room" of a complex, an act represents a single "level" or building the heroes explore.

EPISODES AND SEASONS

In planning an ongoing *ALTERNITY* campaign, it can be helpful to think of the campaign structure like that of a television show. Each adventure is an **episode** in a larger narrative. Think of the collections of episodes as a **season**. While each episode should reach a conclusion, it should also contribute to the story arc of the season. Your season could be made up of lots of short episodes or many long "two-parters" (a set of seven to nine acts with a neat mini-climax in the middle). The final episode should wrap up the season-long plot lines with a climactic finish!

A season should comprise about five or ten medium-length adventures. A 5-episode season means the PCs will be level 6 at the end (assuming they began at level 1), and the same characters can be ready for a second season in the same campaign setting. A longer, 10-episode season means the PCs should be able to experience the full level curve, from 1st to 10th.

COMBAT DIFFICULTY

Combat scenes in *ALTERNITY* should be both relevant to your story and a significant enough challenge to merit rolling initiative. Setting the difficulty of a combat scene is equal parts art and science. The foes the PCs fight are part of the puzzle, but so is all the set design (we cover set design later in this chapter).

Adversaries are described in more detail in Chapter 8, but for purposes of this discussion, here's what you need to know. Adversaries have a **threat rating** (or TR) describing what level of heroes they "match up" best against. In addition, you might find them in big mobs or as tough solos; in order of increasing power and decreasing numbers, adversaries include minions, standards, champions and bosses.

Guidelines for adding adversaries to your combat scene are as follows:

A combat scene of average difficulty pits a team of heroes against an equal number of standard adversaries of their level. You can substitute a champion in place of two standard adversaries or a boss in place of four. You can also replace a standard adversary with three minions of the same level. So, for example, your scene might have two standards and one champion, or one champion and six minions. This sort of encounter is not usually deadly for the heroes, but it serves to deplete their resources.

GEAR AND COMBAT DIFFICULTY

Heroes armed with Class 3 weapons and defenses are effectively one level higher than their actual level for purposes of Combat Difficulty. Heroes armed with Class 4 or 5 gear are effectively two levels higher. Likewise, heroes limited to Class 1 gear are effectively 2 levels lower than their actual level. If you know you're going into a tough fight, get your hands on some serious firepower!

A challenging combat scene involves more enemies or higher-threat adversaries. Increasing the number of enemies to six standard enemies or increasing the average adversary threat rating by 2 present the same rough increase in difficulty. In this sort of fight, expect one or more of the heroes to be seriously wounded.

A climactic battle scene involves even tougher odds for the heroes. Double the number of foes or use adversaries whose TR is 3 or 4 above than the heroes' average level. Such a combat will involve heroic acts and noble sacrifices!

Of course, these guidelines make several baseline assumptions about party makeup, character choices, tactics and gear level. Simple probability dictates that while a typical fight might be over within three combat rounds (24 impulses), over time you'll have quick scenes that end after a lucky string of dice rolls, and you'll have longer combats that stretch out due to the PCs constantly missing checks. PCs more focused on combat or better equipped will make short work of typical fights and be able to more easily take on adversaries a level or two higher. As you get a feel for the level of challenge your PCs can handle, you should increase or decrease the combat difficulty accordingly.

ACTION SCENE SETS

Rule Number One: No bad guys standing around in minimally furnished rooms, waiting for the heroes to arrive.

ALTERNITY doesn't work like that. This game sings when you spend as much time designing the environment for a scene as you do the NPCs within it. Whether you're trying to evoke a sense of science fiction grandeur or a gritty, tough-as-nails wasteland, the effort you spend on your game's places pays big dividends.

To state Rule Number One in a different way, if you're the director of the sci-fi movie playing out at your table, spend as much time in set design as you do in casting. If you deliver awe-inspiring, fear-invoking sets, your game sessions will be the richer for it. You'll challenge the characters—and your players—in ways that encourage them to stretch and grow. Good sets are the rich soil where great characters and compelling stories grow.

Minimalist sets are a bigger damper on your table's fun than minimalist adversaries.

With that goal in mind, here are key guidelines for *ALTERNITY* "set design":

REWARD—OR MANDATE—MOVEMENT

As you build the set for the scene, you'll quickly get a sense for where the heroes will arrive (generally an obvious entry door, hallway or outdoor path). Conversely, if NPCs are arriving to confront the PCs, you know where *they'll* be. Make sure there's a reason for the arriving group to move away from that entry point and for the "home team" to move around within the set as well. *ALTERNITY* is

a game that challenges characters to move as well as act—and to balance it all in the impulse system. The game can devolve into a static exercise in dice-rolling if the PCs never need to move beyond the doorway and the bad guys are on the far end of the room.

Provide cover elsewhere in the set or use manipulables (described below) to get the PCs to move through the set you've created. When you run the NPCs in the scene, make sure they move around, too. Think of what a "heat map" of your set would look like, and make sure the hot spots are spread out.

Mandating movement is most important in action scenes, but it has a place in interaction and narration scenes, too. Many an *ALTERNITY* adventure starts with a dialogue scene where the PCs meet a patron of some sort who outlines a mission for them to undertake. Rather than have this scene take place in a wardroom or office, make it a "walk and talk" where the commander describes a dangerous mission as she guides you through the secret base. You can break up the dialogue with descriptions of nervous workers in jumpsuits fueling up the assault hovercraft, loading the weapons and so forth. You're killing several birds with one stone: launching a new adventure, showing a recurring NPC in her element, offering some background tone and color, and giving the heroes a preview of the secret base they might be defending a dozen scenes from now.

INCLUDE A DYNAMIC ELEMENT

This guideline is intentionally broad—have the set change in some way mid-scene. The change can be entirely cosmetic. The sun might rise on the viewscreen behind the commander, revealing the pock-marked moonscape beyond the airlock. Planetary defense fighters might zoom overhead, going too fast to contribute to the local battle but making it clear that fighting is widespread.

The set change can be ominous: the hiss of poison gas seeping into the room or a spiderweb of cracks on the porthole glass. Or it can be immediately meaningful, such as reinforcements arriving, a sandstorm blowing in or the artificial gravity turning off. There are infinite ways to make your set dynamic; just make sure it somehow changes between the scene's start and its conclusion.

Sometimes your PCs will do this work for you; some players rarely leave a set unscathed. There's one easy way to ensure a dynamic set ...

If you favor improvisation, describe the dynamic element early in the scene, then figure out how it works as you go.

MAKE THE SETTING MANIPULABLE

... and that's to festoon it with buttons, levers, computer terminals and other objects the players can manipulate for good or ill. Give the players some way to make the encounter easier for them. It can be as easy as flipping over a table to gain cover or as complex as hacking the fabrication bot to fight on their behalf.

The manipulable object doesn't have to work the way players want it to, and there may be challenging skill checks involved. The key is that you offer a likely reward for engaging with the set and exploring the environment. One key difference between science fiction and fantasy is the prevalence of "moving parts"—tools, machines, computers and motors—in the environment. In an action scene, give the PCs security drones to deactivate, blast doors to divide their enemies and turbolifts that whisk them to safety in the nick of time. Mid-battle, give them opportunities to sound alarms, hack the lighting system, fire up the robotic assembly line and blow the bad guys out the airlock.

In an interaction scene, give one or both sides the opportunity to change the set as the conversation develops. The Inquisitron can slowly lower you closer to the lava as you negotiate for your lives. The scientist can demonstrate the runaway terraforming crisis by showing the heroes time-lapse holograms of the surface of Mars.

Manipulation of the set isn't just a PC thing, of course. The NPCs can—and should—manipulate objects too. If they're the "home team," they probably know more about how things work than the heroes do.

EVERYONE LOVES DESTRUCTION

One way to manipulate an environment is to blow it up. The explosions can be literal: a ticking time bomb, a reactor going full-on "China Syndrome," or barrage after barrage of heavy artillery. Localized destruction works, too. Think about what happens to stray bullets. Do they hit a steam pipe or a server rack? As you design your set, make sure it has destructible elements and consider the consequences of that destruction.

Sometimes destruction has an immediate tactical impact, like the cover that PCs and NPCs alike love to crouch behind. Sometimes it's just cosmetic—a shower of sparks when a bank of electronics gear gets hit or broken glass when someone gets thrown through a window. You don't have to pay a crew to clean up after the PCs, so don't be shy about destroying part or all of each set you create.

As shorthand, ask yourself:
What can I jump?
What can I press?
What can I blow up?

CHALLENGE THE CHARACTERS

ALTERNITY characters are intentionally well-rounded, so make sure your set rewards a broad set of skills. If the players make only attack rolls, you aren't getting the most out of the scene. As a start, try to build something that rewards skilled movement, such as an advantage for characters who are stealthy, acrobatic or athletic (good at jumping and climbing). Have one or more of the manipulable elements in the setting demand a technical skill check, and introduce something dangerous in the environment that will test their defenses and sturdiness.

CHALLENGE THE PLAYERS

A good *ALTERNITY* scene is more than just dice-rolling and check-ing numbers on a character sheet, of course. Design your set so it challenges the *players,* not just the PCs. Any robust combat scene is a tactical puzzle for the players to solve. Can they survive the battle, minimize resources lost and maximize the spoils of victory? As you add dynamic elements, manipulable objects and other aspects of set design, keep an eye on the whole; make sure you're giving the players a tactical exercise.

Interaction scenes likewise test the players' social acumen, acting ability and persuasiveness. Don't let them devolve into a mere *Influence* check or two. Sometimes you can challenge the players with a literal puzzle. Can they negotiate with aliens who only communicate with holo-glyphs? It's a matter of deciphering their high-tech hieroglyphics. Can you open the right valves to let the extra steam escape the boiler room without bleeding off so much steam that the airship crashes? Sure, that could be a *Mechanics* check, but it's better if you tell the players, "You have five valves to choose from—which one do you want to try?"

INCLUDE AN IMPRESSIVE VISUAL

Unlike TV and movie set designers, you have an infinite special-ef-fects budget. Go nuts with it! Even mundane places such as offices, hotel rooms and empty deserts should have an element of sci-fi spectacle. The office should have the holographic equivalent of PowerPoint floating over the desk plus an aquarium full of alien life. The hotel room should have a balcony offering a vista of an orange-red forest of flytrap-style plants snapping at gas-borne giant insects overhead. Sunset on the empty desert? Twin suns, of course.

ADVANCE THE NARRATIVE

Make sure each scene offers more than dice rolling and a tactical puzzle. Each scene—whether it's grounded in action or dialogue—should develop the plot, illuminate the characters or reveal the setting. No random fights with security guards or street thugs! Those security guards have radios with Overlord Krang haranguing them (character illumination), and those street thugs have gear and tactics that show they were once child soldiers in the outback (revealing setting).

Every scene can and should provide narrative propulsion, but that doesn't mean each scene brings the players closer to their goal. Setbacks are part of the game, too. As you design your set, ask yourself whether this scene advances the narrative if the PCs succeed ... and if it advances the narrative in a different way if the PCs fail. If the answers don't readily spring to mind, you've got some more narrative design ahead of you.

PROPS FOR YOUR SET

It's a big universe, and *ALTERNITY* has countless worlds full of alien, futuristic architecture. Below, we've provided a sampling of props—everything from doors and furniture to sentry lasers and teleporters. Use them (or adapt them) as you create sets for the scenes in your game.

One trick we often employ ourselves is to establish some key defaults for the sets in a particular area, then explain to the players, "Unless I say otherwise, they're all like this." Particularly for basic manipulables like doors and computer terminals, describing the default saves everyone time and helps players imagine themselves in the world.

On all these tables, the listed tech era is when the prop becomes widespread, not its first use.

DOORS

Doors are an easy way to add something manipulable to a scene or to make a scene dynamic—slamming a door shut to prevent the arrival of reinforcements is fun and dramatic. You can attempt to break through a door with an *Athletics* check or blast a hole through it by defeating its resistance and durability. You can also attempt to eavesdrop through a door, although thicker doors impose a tougher penalty to any *Awareness* checks you attempt.

Door Type	TE	Breakage	Res.	Durability	Awareness Penalty
Light interior door	1+	+2 steps	2	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐	–1 step
Ordinary door	1+	+0 steps	2	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10–12: ☐; 13+ ☐	–2 steps
Sturdy door	2+	–2 steps	3	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10–12: ☐; 13+ ☐	–2 steps
Fire/security door	3+	–4 steps	5	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10–12: ☐; 13+ ☐	–3 steps
Glass door	4+	+4 steps	0	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐	–1 step
Ordinary metal hatch	4+	—	7	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10–12: ☐; 13+ ☐	–3 steps
Armored metal hatch	4+	—	10	1–6: ☐☐; 7–9: ☐☐; 10–12: ☐☐; 13–15: ☐☐; 16+: ☐	–4 steps
Garage door	5+	–3 steps	5	1–6: ☐☐; 7–9: ☐☐; 10–12: ☐; 13+ ☐	–2 steps
Vehicle door	5+	–4 steps	4	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10–12: ☐; 13+ ☐	–3 steps
Autoslide	6+	+1 step	2	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10–12: ☐; 13+ ☐	–2 steps
EVA airlock	7+	—	8	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10–12: ☐; 13+ ☐	–4 steps
Docking collar	7+	—	10	1–6: ☐☐; 7–9: ☐☐; 10–12: ☐☐; 13–15: ☐☐; 16+: ☐	–5 steps
Landing bay	8+	—	10	1–6: ☐☐☐; 7–9: ☐☐☐; 10–12: ☐☐; 13–15: ☐☐; 16+: ☐	–5 steps
Forcefield door	9+	—	14	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10–12: ☐; 13–15: ☐; 16+: ☐	–5 steps
Teleportal	9+	—	3	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10–12: ☐; 13+ ☐	—

Bar: A door that can be barred on one side (typically a 1-impulse action) cannot be opened from the other side and adds a −2 step penalty on attempts to break it down. In higher tech eras, some facilities have doors that automatically bar themselves when the site is under a security alert.

Vehicle Door: If the vehicle door has a window, treat it as a glass door for break/damage purposes.

Autoslide: Covers everything from the automatic doors in modern supermarkets to the higher-tech sliding doors on sci-fi starships. Typically triggers on movement within 2 meters; no action required to open.

Hatch: If water- or airtight, it takes 3 impulses to open them manually. At TE 7+ they often open like autoslide doors.

Airlock, Collar and Landing Bay: Typically takes a 1-impulse action to engage the open/close cycle, but there's a 3- to 6-impulse delay while the environmental controls and safety sensors prepare to open. *EVA airlocks* allow access to/from a ship exterior, while *docking collars* typically connect one ship to another ship or to a space station. *Landing bays* are like giant airlocks, found on larger ships that stow cargo and smaller ships within them.

Teleportal: Can be installed into a wall or placed on the floor. Allows instantaneous travel within a given range, typically measured in kilometers. They can be set to automatically send travelers to a specific destination (no action required to activate) or can be programmed with specific coordinates (a 3-impulse action).

> Even at TE 9+, the autoslide doors make a hissing sound.

LOCKS

In general, an Average success with the *Security* skill opens a lock but breaks it, makes it obvious it has been picked or triggers a security alert. An Excellent success gets the lock open, leaving only miniscule forensic evidence behind. A Stellar success is undetectable and (if it's a high-tech lock) allows future bypasses to automatically succeed.

Lock	TE	Unlock time	Bypass mod	Bypass time	Res.	Durability
Mechanical Key, simple	3+	1 impulse	—	6 impulses	5	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐
Mechanical Key, complex	5+	1 impulse	−1 step	8 impulses	5	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐
Passcode, simple	6+	1 impulse	−1 step	8 impulses	5	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐
Passcode, complex	6+	2 impulses	−2 steps	10 impulses	5	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐
Keycard, simple	6+	1 impulse	−2 steps	4 impulses	5	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐
Keycard, complex	6+	1 impulse	−3 steps	8 impulses	5	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐
Voice, simple	7+	1 impulse	−3 steps	6 impulses	5	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐
Voice, complex	7+	2 impulses	−3 steps	6 impulses	5	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐
Visual, simple	7+	1 impulse	−4 steps	8 impulses	5	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐
Visual, complex	7+	1 impulse	−5 steps	8 impulses	5	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐
Biometric	8+	3 impulses	−5 steps	16 impulses	5	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐

Rapid Bypass: A character can accept to bypass a lock in half the time; doing so means an additional −2 step penalty.

Voice/Visual: Typically requires the user to be within 2 meters of the door to open. These locks can also be bypassed with the *Misdirection* skill (Average success required for the simple versions, Excellent required for complex). The listed bypass mod doesn't apply, but the GM should assess a step bonus/penalty based on the quality of the disguise attempt.

ELEVATORS, LIFTS AND WALKWAYS

Regardless of the tech era, elevators take only a 1-impulse action to summon and another 1-impulse action to select a destination. As in real life, the real delay comes from waiting for it to arrive.

From the modern era onward, some elevators are locked (see above)—at least for certain floors.

Escalators: Ordinary escalators rise at a 30-degree angle, stretching 8 meters on the angle to ascend 4 meters (one floor on a typical office building). Characters moving in the same direction as the escalator gain a 4-meter bonus when taking a move action, or a 4-meter penalty if they're running the wrong way.

Moving walkway: This includes conveyor belts in typical factories and airports.

Slidewalk: These automatically accelerate/decelerate users at the start and end. Getting on or off elsewhere requires an *Acrobatics* check to avoid falling prone.

Prop	TE	Arrival Time	Door close delay	Speed per impulse
Escalator	5+	—	—	1 m vertical
Moving walkway	5+	—	—	3 m horizontal
Office elevator	5+	1d6 x 2 impulses		4 m vertical
Cargo lift	6+	1d6 x 4 impulses		2 m vertical
Express elevator	6+	1d6 x 2 impulses		12 m vertical
Slidewalk	7+	—	—	10 m horizontal
Turbo-lift	8+	1d6 impulses		30 m horizontal

WALLS AND BULKHEADS

Walls are tough to get through, but heroes are nothing if not determined. The break and durability numbers represent what it takes to make a hole in a wall big enough to clamber through. The wall, if load-bearing, is still otherwise intact. If it makes sense in the scene, a critical wound to the wall is enough to make a hole you can shoot a weapon through.

Climb Modifier: The presence of pipes, cabling and other foot- and handholds may make climbing significantly easier, reducing or eliminating the step penalty.

Starship Glass: Covers any transparent substance used to allow direct vision out of space-capable vehicles.

Prefab Composite: Typically used for habitats on planets with minimal or dangerous atmospheres.

Windows: Use glass, impact glass or starship glass as appropriate.

Wall Type	TE	Break	Res.	Durability	Climb Mod
Brick/Cinder Block	2+	—	4	1–6: ☐☐; 7–9: ☐☐; 10–12: ☐☐; 13–15: ☐☐; 16+: ☐	–2 steps
Wooden Siding	2+	—	3	1–6: ☐☐; 7–9: ☐☐; 10–12: ☐☐; 13–15: ☐☐; 16+: ☐	–2 steps
Glass	3+	+2 steps	0	1–9: ☐; 10+ ☐	–5 steps
Plaster/Drywall	4+	–2 steps	2	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10–12: ☐; 13+ ☐	–3 steps
Heavy Concrete	5+	—	5	1–6: ☐☐☐; 7–9: ☐☐☐; 10–12: ☐☐☐; 13–15: ☐☐☐; 16–19: ☐☐; 20: ☐	–2 steps
Steel Bulkhead	5+	—	7	1–6: ☐☐☐; 7–9: ☐☐☐; 10–12: ☐☐☐; 13–15: ☐☐☐; 16–19: ☐☐; 20: ☐	–4 steps
Armored Bulkhead	5+	—	10	1–6: ☐☐☐; 7–9: ☐☐☐; 10–12: ☐☐☐; 13–15: ☐☐☐; 16–19: ☐☐; 20: ☐	–4 steps
Impact Glass/Plexi	6+	–2 steps	0	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10–12: ☐; 13+ ☐	–5 steps
Starship Glass	7+	—	4	1–6: ☐☐; 7–9: ☐☐; 10–12: ☐☐; 13–15: ☐☐; 16+: ☐	–5 steps
Prefab Composite	7+	—	4	1–6: ☐☐; 7–9: ☐☐; 10–12: ☐☐; 13–15: ☐☐; 16+: ☐	–2 steps

CEILINGS AND LIGHT

For your interior sets, the light doesn't *have* to come from the ceiling, but bundling ceilings and lights together ensures you give both some basic attention during set design. In a zero-g environment, construct ceilings as you would walls and/or floors (described below).

When lighting your set, decide roughly how many fixtures there are and where they're located. In general, any hit from a weapon breaks a light, and turning a light on or off from a switch is a 1-impulse action.

Max Visibility: Ranges are for the unaided human eye. Magnification gear can enable vision at greater distances.

Strong Directional Light: Common during EVA near stars or on inner-orbit planets with minimal atmospheres. Shielded visors enable normal sight.

Concert/Discotheque: Use this for other cases of flashing/strobing lights, such as artillery barrages and the immediate aftermath of huge explosions.

Ambient Light	Max Visibility	Awareness Mod.	Stealth Mod.
Moonlight/Starlight	5 m	–2 steps	+2 steps
Candlelight	20 m	–1 step	+1 step
"Battle Stations" lighting	50 m	—	—
Nightclub/Casino Office/Residence	20 m	—	—
Outdoor daylight	unlimited	—	—
Concert/Discotheque	unlimited	–2 steps	+2 steps
Strong Directional Light	unlimited	–2 steps	+2 steps

FLOORS AND SURFACES

This category includes the ground in an outdoor setting, of course—in a zero-g environment, it includes ceilings and walls as well. Your primary concern as a set designer is how the surface underneath the characters impacts their movement.

Shallow Water: Anything deeper than a puddle but shallower than about a meter. Any deeper than that, and you're swimming.

Cluttered Furniture: Rather than define the location of every table and chair in a restaurant, for example, you can define large swaths of your set as "cluttered furniture."

Toxic Goo and Lava: Adapt this for any hazardous substance on the ground. Use toxic goo as your model if you want the damage to end upon the character leaving the hazard, or use lava if you want the threat to linger afterward.

Surface	Effect
Broken glass	–2 m speed; take a graze wound if you go prone
Light underbrush	–2 m speed, +1 step on *Stealth* checks
Mud/snow	half movement
Rubble/debris	half movement
Cluttered furniture	half movement; enemies attacking you suffer –1 step cover penalty
Shallow water	half movement
Heavy underbrush	half movement, +2 steps on *Stealth* checks
Heavy rubble	*Athletics* check required to move; enemies attacking you suffer –2 steps cover penalty
Toxic goo	half movement; when you enter, you begin damage over time (acid)
Lava	half movement; when you enter and at start of even impulses take 2d8 energy damage begin damage over time (fire)

SHAFTS AND PRECIPICES

Sometimes there's no surface at all underneath a character ... not a problem in a zero-g environment, but potentially deadly when gravity gets involved (see Falling and Impacts in Chapter 6).

Anyone who has seen sci-fi movies knows there's almost always a ledge, antenna or other protrusion partway down even the deepest shaft. In *ALTERNITY,* we lean into that principle of set design. Getting thrown down a shaft probably won't kill you, but you'll probably be wounded and have to climb back up to rejoin the action scene.

A character pushed over a cliff or off a catwalk gets an *Acrobatics* check as a reaction to avoid the fall; if successful, the character is prone at the edge. You get a bonus to the check depending on what's nearby, so as you design your set, decide what the edge of the precipice looks like.

Object	Skill modifier
Safety railing	+4 steps
Window/door frame, nearby ladder, major protrusion	+3 steps
Rope or cabling	+2 steps
Natural rock or minor protrusions	+1 step
Bare ledge	+0 steps

To add a dramatic falling hazard to your set, allow a plummeting character to repeat the *Acrobatics* check at 2 m, 4 m, 10 m and 20 m (if the fall is that long). Place something in the shaft to grab onto (railing, cables, a ledge and so on) at those points to give the falling character a step bonus. If the *Acrobatics* check succeeds, the character takes damage for the fall distance down to that point and can climb back up.

For example, a character who fails the *Acrobatics* check at the ledge and fails to grab a power cable 2 meters down might succeed at grabbing a bracing strut (major protrusion, +3 step) 4 meters down the shaft. The character takes damage for a 4-meter fall instead of the full depth of the shaft, and it'll take 4 meters of climbing to get back to the upper edge of the shaft.

DEVICES AND MACHINES

ALTERNITY is a game that spans galaxies and millennia, so an exhaustive definition of all the devices and machines you can use as props would be, well, exhausting. Rather than define them by their purpose and function, we'll define devices as the props they are. What do they look/sound like? What happens when the players interact with them—and blow them up?

In general, devices have three damaged states: cosmetic damage (the first box), significant damage (the second box) and nonfunctional (the third box). Cosmetic damage doesn't impact the device's intended function. Significant damage means a step penalty (usually –2 steps) on skill checks using it, or slow/imperfect results.

Device	Breakage	Resistance	Durability
Fragile	+4 steps	0	1–3: ☐; 4–6 ☐; 7+ ☐
Ordinary	+0 steps	2	1–3: ☐; 4–6 ☐; 7+ ☐
Durable	–2 steps	3	1–6: ☐; 7–9 ☐; 10+ ☐
Hardened	—	6	1–6: ☐; 7–9 ☐; 10+ ☐

For the effects of damage, you can either choose a row from the table below or determine randomly what happens (useful if it's just

a random machine in the background that gets hit with lasers). If the device is an important prop within the scene (the space station's tractor beam, Doctor Prometheus's time machine, and so on), it's worth coming up with special effects when it's damaged or destroyed. Remember, you have an unlimited special effects budget ...

You can choose one row per device or mix it up randomly as the damage gets piled on.

MACHINE DAMAGE

d20	cosmetic	significant	nonfunctional
1	harmless sparks	flash of light (–2 steps *Awareness* for 1 rd)	electrical arcs (1d6 energy damage within 2 m every even impulse)
2	wisps of smoke	smoke (poor visibility within 4 m)	dense smoke (very poor visibility within 4 m, blocks line of sight)
3	ominous hissing	dangerous vapor (1d4 damage within 2 m every even impulse)	toxic vapor within 2 m (poison damage over time)
4	paneling falls off	broken glass within 2 m	light debris within 2 m
5	popping/clanking sounds	explosive boom (–1 step *Awareness* for 1 round)	ear-splitting screech/roar (–2 step *Awareness* for 1 round)
6	small puddle of leaking fluid	slippery puddle (rough terrain) within 2 m	toxic goo (see Floor section above) within 2 m
7	crackling sounds	heat/fire (1d4 energy if touched)	fire spreads (floor is effectively lava within 2 m)
8	alert tones/chimes	computer voice warns of malfunction	computer voice announces shutdown
9	sporadic jets of escaping coolant	floor is slippery (see Floor section above) within 2 m	floor is slippery and 1d4 energy from cold if touched
10	device enters low-power mode	device reboots or powers off/on	device briefly flickers back to life
11	maintenance panel pops off	device enters maintenance mode	device tries to repair itself
12	leak of effluent/sludge	sludge is effectively mud (see floors) within 2 m	sludge is effectively toxic goo (see Floors) within 2 m
13	device changes language	device performs elaborate but random function	device slowly ... stops ... working
14	parts fly off harmlessly, land within 10 m	minor explosion; fragments deal 1d6 physical within 2 m (*Dodge* to avoid)	major explosion dealing 1d8/2d6 physical in an 8 m/4 m blast
15	alarm/voice announces radiation leak	1d6 energy and irradiate within 2 m	1d10/2d10 energy and irradiate within 8 m/4 m
16	device becomes warm to the touch	device is painfully hot	parts of device melt and leak out
17	device goes dark	device flickers back to normal function	device goes dark again, humming ominously
18	device rattles	device shivers and shakes in place	device falls apart (debris within 2 m)
19	device functions autonomously but randomly	device goes into overdrive	device hisses and dies
20	device vibrates	device falls over/breaks moorings	device moves 1 m in random direction, then falls apart (debris within 2 m)

WEAPON EMPLACEMENTS

Weapon emplacements occupy a middle ground between devices (described above) and adversaries. To use a weapon emplacement in one of your sets, choose an *enclosure*, a *weapons system* and one or more *target criteria*.

ENCLOSURE

Like devices, enclosures have three damaged states: cosmetic, damaged (–2 step penalty on attacks) and nonfunctional.

Enclosure	Breakage	Resistance	Durability
Fragile	+4 steps	0	1–3: ☐; 4–6 ☐; 7+ ☐
Ordinary	+0 steps	2	1–3: ☐; 4–6 ☐; 7+ ☐
Durable	–2 steps	3	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10+ ☐
Hardened	—	6	1–6: ☐; 7–9: ☐; 10+ ☐

WEAPON SYSTEM

At its heart, a weapon system is just a weapon and an attack score. Weapon emplacements act last in a given impulse, and they just attack; they cannot dodge, aim or delay. More primitive weapon emplacements attack only once and must be manually reset. Advanced models have internal magazines or are connected to a power supply.

TARGET CRITERIA

As technology advances, designers of weapon emplacements develop more sophisticated ways of telling friend from foe.

Physical Trigger (TE 2+): Stepping on a pressure plate, opening a door or pulling the idol off its pedestal instructs the weapon system to attack whomever is standing in the designated spot.

Visual Camera (TE 6+): The camera knows (in general terms) what friendlies look like. Its effective Awareness is 18/23/28, or 16/21/26 for advanced models.

Transponder IFF (TE 7+): In addition to a camera, the weapon emplacement has a receiver tuned to short-distance broadcasts from a keycard or other small object possessed by friendlies. Its effective *Awareness* is 15/20/25, but there's a –3 step penalty on both Awareness and attack rolls if the friend-or-foe data doesn't match what it observes through its camera.

AI-Augmented IFF (TE 8+): The system visually identifies friends and foes as a human might and learns as it goes. It has an effective Awareness of 13/18/23. Some advanced models are capable of basic conversation; social skills like Influence may convince them friends are foes or vice versa.
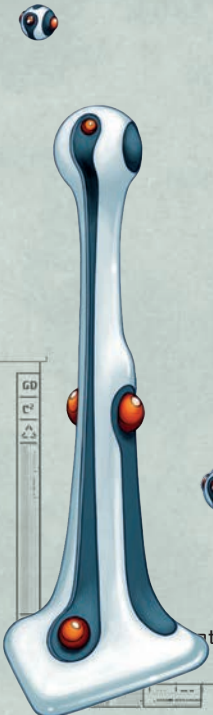
Weapon	TE	Attack	Range	Speed	Damage	Other
Spring-loaded spear	2+	14/19/24	melee	once	1d6+1/5 physical	
Remote-triggered crossbow	3+	15/20/25	M	once	1d6+0/4 physical	AP 3
Wall scythe	3+	13/18/23	melee	once	1d6+2/6 physical	
Saw blade disk	3+	16/21/26	C	once	1d6+2/6 physical	spread
Land mine	4+	13/18/23	melee	once	2d6(1d8) physical	blast 4(8)
Claymore mine	5+	14/19/24	C	once	1d6+6(3) physical	blast 4(8)
Sentry gun	6+	15/20/25	M	4	1d8+2/6 physical	Mag 4
Mounted taser	6+	14/19/24	C	6	1d4+0/1 energy	nonlethal, stun
Flechette launcher	7+	14/19/24	C	3	1d6+1/5 physical	Mag 3, Brutal
Autochain turret	7+	16/21/26	M	3	1d6+1/5 physical	Mag 10, autofire (3 targets within 6m)
Laser sentry	7+	14/19/24	L	5	1d6+0/6 energy	
Plasma sentry	8+	15/20/25	M	4	2d4/2d8 energy	
Phase projector	9+	14/19/24	M	4	1d6+2/7 energy	Ignite

REWARDS

Some heroes undertake missions with no expectation of reward, and sometimes heroes find themselves caught up in adventures in which the only reward is survival. But most heroes like to get paid for their work or at least win some well-deserved recognition. When you design an *ALTERNITY* adventure, you're not finished until you establish the rewards the heroes stand to gain for their work.

Adventure rewards are an important part of character improvement over the course of a hero's career. They provide a tangible motivation for heroes to risk their necks in dangerous circumstances and take on challenges other people don't want to face. Rewards also help to reinforce the "realism" of the narrative—your players naturally think about what their heroes want, and it builds their engagement in the campaign when they see opportunities for their heroes to get it, whatever it is.

Rewards fall into three categories: hero progress, gear or wealth, and story rewards.

HERO PROGRESS

In a campaign spanning multiple adventures, heroes naturally grow and learn over time. While even a 1st-level *ALTERNITY* hero is a competent protagonist in his or her adventure, high-level heroes continue to advance their skills, learn new talents and generally become tougher and more capable. An *ALTERNITY* adventure can account for this in the following ways:

- **Hero Point:** When the hero team succeeds in a major milestone within the adventure, award each hero a hero point. Milestone opportunities should come up once every two to four scenes in an adventure.
- **Standout Success:** When a player comes up with a great idea and her hero achieves a Stellar success on the ensuing check, you can declare a standout success. Award the hero +1 skill point in the relevant skill.
- **Level Up:** When the heroes complete a medium-length adventure, allow them to level up (see Hero Advancement in Chapter 6). Completing two to four short adventures or one major section of a long adventure would also qualify for leveling up.

We recommend awarding hero points about once per game session. A standout success is something we see as a spontaneous reward for a great moment at the game table; don't reward players for doing ordinary things well, reward them for making your adventure session more enjoyable for everybody. Finally, leveling up is something that should happen about once every month or two in real time—you want players to have at least a couple game sessions at each level, but experience steady progress through the campaign.

Don't let players go "fishing" for standout success. It's a micro-reward, not a standardized advancement system.

GEAR

Heroes can gain better gear in a number of ways. They might find a valuable piece of gear in a location they're exploring or take something useful from an adversary they defeat. The NPC hiring the heroes for their current mission might issue the improved gear at the start of the adventure to make their job easier, or the improved gear might be a specifically negotiated payment for a successful mission. A hero might even gain improved gear in recognition for valor or exceptional service.

New or Upgraded Gear: A gear reward can either be a piece of brand-new equipment of a specific item class (say, a Class 3 suit of armor), or an opportunity to upgrade an existing piece of gear (for example, a +1 Class upgrade to a Class 2 pistol). They're roughly the same—a Class 2 weapon with a +1 Class upgrade is roughly equal to a Class 3 weapon. In general, pistols are Class 2, rifles are Class 3 and heavy weapons are Class 4—so if you want to stick with pistols, you'll find it easier to choose a good weapon upgrade than a brand-new Class 3 weapon.

WEAPON UPGRADES

An upgraded weapon might represent a normal model "tricked out" with a fancy accessory or a custom-built version of exceptional quality.

Most weapon upgrades are permanent, but some special ammunition is considered consumable and is priced separately. At the end

of any combat scene in which you fire a weapon with special ammo, roll a d20; on a 10 or lower, you used up all your special ammo and revert to normal ammo for future scenes.

Ammo, Armor Piercing: You acquire a box of high-quality ammunition or a special focusing crystal for an energy weapon that gives your weapon armor piercing 3 (or improves its existing AP quality by 3). *Class 2 Consumable, any weapon.*

Ammo, Hollow Point: These rounds are designed to "mushroom" on impact, creating extra trauma. Your weapon gains the bleeding trait, but your target's armor resistance value improves by 3 if has any armor. *Class 1 Consumable, firearm only.*

Ammo, Incendiary: This special ammunition or focusing crystal gives your weapon the Ignite trait. *Class 3 Consumable, TE 7+ only.*

Deto-Max: An extremely powerful explosive, Deto-Max increases the blast radius of grenades, rockets and similar explosive projectiles by 2 meters and adds a +1 bonus to the damage. *Class 3 Consumable, any grenade or rocket warhead.*

Increased blast radius isn't always a good thing...

Good Balance: The weapon is light and quick for its size. A weapon with a speed of 4 or 5 improves (lessens) its speed by 1. *Upgrade +1 Class, speed 4 or 5 weapon only.*

High Accuracy: It just shoots well. You gain a +1 step bonus to all attacks with this weapon. You can't add this upgrade to a weapon that already has the accurate trait. *Upgrade +1 Class.*

High Power: This weapon fires an especially powerful cartridge or intense beam. You gain a +1 bonus to all damage rolls with this weapon. *Upgrade +1 Class.*

Holographic Sight: Increase the weapon's range by 1 range category. If you use the aim action modifier with this weapon, you gain a +2 step bonus to your attack instead of the normal +1 step bonus. *Upgrade +1 Class.*

Stealthed: The weapon is made from materials that don't trip routine security scanners and is compact enough to be easily concealable, imposing a −3 step penalty on any effort to search or scan you for weapons. *Upgrade +1 Class, knife or pistol only.*

ARMOR UPGRADES

Like weapons, armor upgrades might represent field modifications to existing gear or a brand-new suit of exceptional quality.

Environment-Capable: This armor gains the life support trait. *Upgrade +1 Class.*

Extra Toughness: This armor gains the tough trait. *Upgrade +1 Class.*

Hardened: Made from advanced alloys, this armor shrugs off many armor-piercing attacks. Reduce the attacking weapon's AP value by 3 (to a minimum of 0). *Upgrade +1 Class, any armor with resistance.*

High Capacity: The energy field produced by this device is especially resilient. Increase its deflection or cover value by 1 step. *Upgrade +1 Class, any TE 7+ defense with cover or deflect.*

Insulated: This suit dissipates energy damage better than most; increase the energy resistance value by 1. *Upgrade +1 Class, any armor with resistance.*

Light: Designed to be easier to wear than most armor of the same type, light armor reduces the armor penalty to speed by 2 meters and the penalty to various physical skills by 1 step. *Upgrade +1 Class, any armor with a speed penalty or check penalty.*

Reinforced: Extra armor panels help this suit handle impacts. Increase the physical resistance value by 1. *Upgrade +1 Class, any armor with resistance.*

Wound Amelioration: Advanced medical systems such as pressure cuffs, vital sign monitors and auto-injection of special coagulants and stimulants are built into the armor. You ignore bleeding effects and reduce your wound penalty by 1 step. *Upgrade +1 Class, any TE 7+ powered armor or life support armor.*

TOOL UPGRADES

The tool category covers a lot of territory, and some items probably aren't worth upgrading; it's hard to see why you might need an upgraded rope, for example.

Fast: Due to excellent ergonomics or high-powered internal processors, this device lets you get results quickly. When you're engaged in a skill challenge, each check after the first requires 1 fewer impulse than normal (usually, this means every check after the first takes 2 impulses, not 3). *Upgrade +1 Class.*

High-quality medical gear of the appropriate tech era saves lives. When that step bonus matters, it really matters.

High Quality: The device is well made and works better. You gain a +1 step bonus on skill checks you make using this device. *Upgrade +1 Class.*

Automated: The device is automated and can activate or deploy with minimal effort on your part. After you use an action to start the device, it can continue executing the program or conducting the operation you instructed it to. For example, an automated tablet running a decryption program could carry out the skill challenge for you while you do something else, or an automated med pack could treat a wounded character. The device takes a −1 step penalty on checks it makes for you when you're not actively guiding it. The GM is free to rule that some devices can't be automated, or are automated already (for example, the automed sled). *Upgrade +2 Class.*

Superior Quality: The best version of the device you can find. You gain a +2 step bonus on skill checks you make using this device. *Upgrade +2 Class.*

SPECIAL REWARDS

Equipment quality and skill points aren't the only ways to reward characters. Special rewards cover a whole range of more story-based forms of recognition—things that characters would care about, even if they won't necessarily provide measurable benefits on the next adventure they face. Typically, a successful adventure provides 0 to 2 special rewards that all surviving heroes can share.

Special rewards come in three grades: Average, Excellent or Stellar. In general, an Average reward is something with local significance (one city, one planet or one star system, depending on your campaign); an Excellent reward carries regional significance (one country); and a Stellar reward carries global (or galactic) significance. Special rewards include:

- Contacts (common)
- Fame (uncommon)
- Favors (common)
- Promotions (rare)
- Property (uncommon)

CONTACT

One or more heroes on the team earn an important new contact (see Contacts under NPCs in Chapter 6). The level of the contact you gain is determined by the level of the special reward, so an Excellent special reward should result in an Excellent contact.

Giving heroes a shared contact as a reward can build around-the-table cohesion.

FAME

You rescued the Premier from the terrorists and disarmed the fusion bomb planted to destroy the colony dome? Guess what, you made the evening news. Fame is fickle and it presents problems such as paparazzi, stalkers and the chance of being recognized when you do something illegal, but it has its advantages: You can get audiences with NPCs who otherwise might ignore you, command the attention of a lot of people with a public statement or get an invitation to an exclusive event. The level of your fame dictates how well known you are (the planet, the quadrant, the whole galaxy) and provides a bonus to interactions with people who are likely to be impressed by celebrity: +1 step for Average, +2 steps for Excellent or +3 steps for Stellar.

FAVOR

Someone's willing to bend the rules for you, just this one time.

Average: Select or purchase restricted gear; get a pardon for an ordinary crime; have a lost or destroyed personal item replaced; gain access to sealed files or a confidential intelligence report.

Excellent: Select or purchase military gear; get a pardon for a serious crime; have a damaged ship repaired; gain access to concealed files or a secret intel report.

Stellar: Select or purchase experimental gear; get a pardon for a capital crime; have a destroyed ship replaced; gain access to vital national security records or top secret info.

JUNK

Sometimes you find equipment that isn't up to snuff. The good news is junk-level gear is usually 1 class lower (and cheaper) than normal, so it's a way to get your hands on something you otherwise couldn't afford. Junk gear possesses one or more of these traits:

Bulky: When you use this item to make a skill check, it takes 1 impulse longer than normal.

Inferior: You take a –1 step penalty to skill checks requiring this item.

Jam-Prone: If the base d20 in your skill check comes up 5 or lower, the item jams or stops functioning. You must use a 3-impulse action to restart the item or clear the jam before you can use it again.

Underpowered (weapon): The weapon takes a –1 penalty on all damage rolls.

PROMOTION

If you're a member of an organization, gaining status and authority can be a very useful reward. A high rank means fewer people can order you to do things you don't want to do and makes it easier to commandeer the organization's people and resources for causes you think are important. You can't completely bypass the chain of command, but personnel of lower ranks are strongly inclined to act on your orders and don't ask questions unless you're instructing them to abandon their current duties or do something that seems questionable.

Average: You're equal to a mid-ranking officer, such as the commander of a Marine company, a small scout ship or a local research station.

Excellent: You're equal to a high-ranking officer, such as the commander of a regiment, a major warship or a planetary research facility.

Stellar: You're equal to a flag officer, such as a general, an admiral or the vice president of a major division in a mega-corporation.

PROPERTY

Mostly this is about bragging rights and the comfort level of your retirement, but you might find ways to make use of real estate, investments or luxury items during an adventure. Property of Average value includes a high-end condo, a sports car or investment in a prosperous local business. Excellent property includes a penthouse suite or vacation spread, a top-end sports car or investment in an important regional business. Stellar property includes such conspicuous consumption as a private island (or asteroid), a yacht or a multi-millionaire's stock portfolio.

REWARD PACING

How quickly should you give out rewards? It depends a great deal on your campaign. In a post-apocalyptic game, finding a box of pistol ammo in good condition is a big deal; in a high-tech game about star marines, finding weapons isn't important because the Corps issues you all the Bug-killing gear you need to do your job. The table below provides a "standard" pacing scheme to serve as a guideline for middle-of-the-road campaigns in which the heroes count on getting paid for their work and upgrade their gear accordingly.

ADVENTURE REWARDS

| Adventure Level | Gear Class or Pay (per Hero) | | | | | | Special Rewards |
	1	2	3	4	5	Pay	
1st	1*		1			$3,000	Average
2nd	1*	1				$4,000	Average
3rd	1*			1		$10,000	Average
4th		1*	1			$15,000	Excellent
5th		1*		1		$20,000	Excellent
6th		1*			1	$30,000	Excellent
7th		1*		1		$40,000	Stellar
8th		1*			1	$50,000	Stellar
9th			1*	1		$70,000	Stellar
10th			1*		1	$100,000	Stellar

* Consumable Item

Gear: If you use a "quick and dirty" gear system, you can simply assign bonus gear selections of specific class or quality as shown on the table. For example, heroes engaged in a 3rd-level adventure stand a good chance of gaining a Class 4 item (or an upgrade to a Class 3 item). If you prefer to use a pay-as-you-go gear system, the pay (or loot) for the mission should be something close to the value given under the Pay column. Note that these rewards are per character—if you're running a game for a three-hero team, you'll need to make sure the total pay for the adventure is three times the figure given or that three Class 4 items are present in the adventure for the heroes to requisition or find.

Consumable items include medical supplies (such as analgesic spray or wound gel) or limited-use weapons such as grenades or special ammunition (see Weapon Upgrades). If you find a consumable item, you usually find enough for three uses (one full can of analgesic spray or three actual grenades). Most adventures provide at least a few of these sorts of items regardless of which gear acquisition system you use in your campaign.

Ordinary ammunition and power cells don't count as consumable rewards. They just enable an object's baseline function.

CAMPAIGN DESIGN

You can run a regular *ALTERNITY* game as a succession of unrelated adventures that feature different PCs and different flavors of science fiction. However, many GMs prefer to run their game as a **campaign:** a persistent setting that lasts for several adventures and invests the players in the ongoing story of the heroes. Creating a campaign setting provides you with a wonderful opportunity to exercise your creative muscles and decide on the sort of sci-fi stories you'd like to tell with your *ALTERNITY* game.

You can create a campaign by modeling your universe after your favorite movie, TV series, book or video game—after all, if you and your friends love those stories, why not make up some adventures to play in that universe? Or you can create a campaign "from scratch" by thinking up your own sci-fi setting: stellar exploration, alien invasion, dystopia, post-apocalypse, human transcendence—whatever you like. We can't possibly provide thorough directions for such a creative endeavor, so this section simply walks you through some of the big decisions you might want to consider:

- What's the technology of your setting? How far in the future are you?
- Does your setting feature FTL (faster-than-light) travel? How does it work?
- Does your setting have aliens? How common are they?
- Who are the heroes, and what do they do?

Your answers to these questions are a great starting point for creating your own sci-fi setting. We'll briefly explore each of those topics in the rest of this section.

TECH ERA

For TE purposes, look more at ends than means. A steampunk society might be functionally TE 6, even though they're still relying on coal for everything.

Technology Era (or TE) is a rough measurement of a civilization's technological progress. It's shorthand for describing whether you're playing a modern-day game set on Earth or a far-future game that spans the galaxy. Progress can vary wildly from place to place within a setting—in a starfaring campaign, the heroes could easily discover uncharted worlds with Stone Age tribes, alien species that still haven't mastered gunpowder or electricity, or super-advanced societies whose godlike powers put the heroes' fusion plants and jump drives to shame.

Technological advances are rarely as uniform as the descriptions below suggest. It's entirely possible to find areas that excel in one aspect of progress—say, medical science—but lag behind in others, like high-energy physics or heavy industry. You can create societies such as those by simply noting "TE 5 planet (TE 6 for medicine)" or "TE 7 city (TE 6 for power)" if you need to describe them briefly.

Finally, eras have fuzzy edges; specific items like a particular weapon might come into use right at the end of a preceding era or might not be widely adopted until quite late in an era.

TE 1: PREHISTORIC ERA

Welcome to the Stone Age. Weapons and tools are made from stone, wood or bone. Some groups can domesticate animals or engage in simple agriculture or fishing. People know how to use fire and have a reasonably advanced language, but writing is still a long way off. Simple canoes and rafts are the most advanced vehicles available. Prehistoric settings tend to be places the heroes visit, not the main setting of the campaign.

TE 2: ANCIENT ERA

The Ancient Era marks the beginning of civilization. Metal weapons and tools come into use—first copper, then bronze, then iron. Cities become possible, supported by widespread agriculture, writing, laws and armies. Simple machines like mills or catapults come into use; vehicles include animal-drawn carts or chariots and oared galleys. Whatever it is, if the Babylonians, Egyptians or Romans could do it, a TE 2 society can probably do it. Like TE 1, TE 2 settings are usually places heroes visit, not live in.

TE 3: MEDIEVAL ERA

There isn't much difference between the Ancient Era and the Medieval Era. Metal use, animal power, stone fortifications, sailing ships—they're all fairly similar. But your players will notice a significant difference between a "Roman Empire world" and a "knights and castles world" just in terms of look and feel. Metallurgy improves with the development of early steel, more complex machines such as crossbows, watermills, trebuchets and printing presses come into use, and seafarers develop sailing vessels capable of crossing oceans. The first primitive guns appear at the end of this era. Shogunate Japan, Norman England or Renaissance Italy are good examples of TE 3 societies.

TE 4: ENLIGHTENMENT ERA

The Age of Reason marks the beginning of the transition away from muscle-powered technology. Simple, cheap and reliable firearms transform warfare, although swords and pikes remain useful enough to linger for centuries. The development of the scientific method and the spread of the printed word leads to an explosion of literature, philosophy and science. Steam engines begin to replace animal power in simple applications. Large, sturdy sailing ships chart the globe and make intercontinental trade possible. The France of Louis XIV, Revolutionary War America or Qinq Dynasty China are examples of TE 4.

In starfaring campaigns, worlds that deliberately choose to forego technological advancement—or that "backslide" after long isolation—tend to stop around TE 4.

TE 5: INDUSTRIAL ERA

Steam engines replace animal power and sail in the Industrial Era; fuel sources move rapidly from wood to coal to oil. Advanced steel and mass production techniques lead to repeating firearms such as revolvers and bolt-action rifles, followed by the introduction of machine guns and personal automatic weapons—this is the age of the gun. Railroads, airplanes, submarines, the automobile, electricity, radio, germ theory, anesthesia ... it all shows up in this era. It's easier to list the things we have in the present day that aren't available in TE 5: computers, television, the Internet, jet travel, satellites and manned space exploration. Anything from the American Civil War to the end of World War II falls into TE 5.

TE 6: MODERN ERA

Want to set your *ALTERNITY* game in the modern day? This is the era for you. We assume we don't need to explain this to you, although we'll note that a "retro" game set in the 1960s or 1970s might not have things we take for granted, like the Internet or a cell phone in everybody's pocket.

TE 7: SOLAR ERA

Imperfect examples: Firefly, the Expanse.

Move ahead 50 or 100 years from the Modern Era, and you're into the Solar Era—so named because humankind now maintains colonies on other bodies in the solar system and significant space-borne industry in places such as the asteroid belt. Firearms are still common, but more advanced weapons such as lasers and mag-netically powered rail guns have finally dethroned gunpowder as king. Fusion power and electric vehicles have replaced the internal combustion engine; advanced genetic therapies defeat many dis-eases and prolong human lifespan (at least for the rich). Computer systems now feature virtual reality and AI; some people spend almost their entire lives in virtual jobs and entertainment. Space-ships powered by fusion drives can reach any of the inner planets within a few weeks, or the outer portions of the solar system in a couple months. The nearest stars remain many years away, but with hibernation technology and massive investment, it's just barely possible to send humans in search of a new home.

TE 8: STELLAR ERA

Imperfect examples: Star Wars, Battlestar Galactica.

The advent of faster-than-light travel leads to a golden age of exploration and settlement. If there are other intelligent species

nearby, we finally meet them—otherwise, anybody with an idea of how people should live or who finds a resource worth exploiting looks for an opportunity to claim a planet for their own. Personal energy weapons generally replace projectile throwers, although old-style magnetic weapons (and very old firearms) remain popular with people who can't afford newer tech. Artificial gravity means hoverbikes and flyers largely replace ground-bound transportation in most advanced worlds. Medical science can repair almost any injury that is not immediately lethal.

The exact nature of the campaign's FTL travel is important; does it take months and months to reach a nearby star, a few weeks or a few hours? Is a trip to another world a routine "scene change" in an adventure, is it an adventure in itself, or is it something that happens between adventures? Even if starships can easily travel from one world to another, real-time FTL communication is not possible; news travels at the speed of whatever ship happens to be going in the right direction.

TE 9: GALACTIC ERA

Just as the Medieval Era is like a grander version of the Ancient Era, the Galactic Era is like the Stellar Era—but bigger in every regard. FTL drives are so powerful and reliable that a ship can reach any corner of the galaxy in a matter of weeks—which means that a trip to a world around a star just a few light-years away is no more than a day or two of travel. Interstellar commerce is routine; worlds can easily specialize as industrial planets, agrarian planets or resort destinations. Real-time FTL communications permit conversations with people in different star systems, although the range or bandwidth might be limited in some way.

Militarily, energy weapons continue to improve; personal energy defenses such as force shields and deflector belts become commonplace. Power plants fueled by antimatter or other exotic forms of matter provide virtually limitless amounts of energy. Medical science can restore life to the dead, provided the brain has not been badly damaged.

Imperfect examples: *Star Trek*, *Culture* novels.

TE 10+: UNIVERSAL ERA

In this era, technology becomes so advanced it might as well be magic, TE 10 makes impossible things routine—traveling to other universes through black holes, serial immortality, resurrecting individuals who died millions of years ago, personal force fields impervious to all harm, teleporting to other planets with a mere thought. This level of technology is beyond the scope of the *ALTERNITY* game, but it's possible heroes playing in lower tech eras might encounter TE 10 enigmas or entities during their adventures (and should be scared out of their wits when they do run into something so advanced).

FTL METHOD

Many *ALTERNITY* campaigns feature FTL (faster than light) travel between the stars. It's a classic of science fiction; who doesn't want to visit strange new worlds and boldly go where no one has gone before? The type of FTL drive you choose for your campaign comes with ready-made universe-building implications and fascinating adventure opportunities.

NO FTL

Even if your universe doesn't accommodate FTL drives, humans might still reach the stars someday. The best options are either "sleeper ships" in which the passengers are frozen for the trip, or "generation ships," in which the original passengers don't reach their destination—instead, their descendants do.

A generation ship is a campaign setting in and of itself. Imagine a dark dystopia between the stars, or barbarian heroes who learn of their world's true nature when the ship reaches its destination.

PLANETARY GATE

In some settings, you might not need a starship to reach another planet. A planetary gate is a device that teleports a traveler on foot to a matching gate on some other world. Gates of this sort provide the GM with a wide variety of tools for controlling and steering the heroes' explorations; after all, you can only go to a spot that the gate connects to.

Planetary gates also invite the question of who built them and why. If humans are building gates, how are we establishing new gates on planets we haven't visited yet? If aliens built the gates, are they friendly or hostile? Are they still around, or are they long gone?

WORMHOLE OR SYSTEM GATE

A wormhole gate works a lot like a planetary gate, except it's in space and it's big enough to drive a ship through. Like a planetary gate, the wormhole leads to a specific destination (or a set of destinations, possibly random). However, it spits out the traveler at some point in space in a different star system.

If the gate only permits small ships, you've got a perfect reason for hero teams to form: They're the crew of a ship that can fit in the gate.

JUMP DRIVE

The jump drive is basically a teleportation device. You carefully plot the coordinates you want to teleport to, and when you activate the drive, you disappear from your origin and appear at your destination. A jump doesn't have to be instantaneous; you might spend

hours, days or months in some other reality before returning to normal space.

Jump drives can be open-ended (you can jump from any place to any other place within your jump range) or tied to specific **jump points**. A jump point is a special location in a star system where it's possible to turn on your jump drive and travel to a matching jump point somewhere else.

WARP DRIVES AND HYPER DRIVES

If you want to build a campaign that's truly wide-open, your FTL technology is probably a warp drive or hyper drive: A ship with the right kind of engine can, at any time, start traveling faster-than-light and go wherever it wants. Note that even if you can break the light-speed barrier, it still might take a very long time to reach distant destinations; if you can go 10 times the speed of light, it will still take you about 134 years to reach the Orion Nebula, which is about 1,340 light-years from Earth. Choose a "warp ratio" that feels right to you and disperse your campaign's key worlds a few days' travel from each other. The key to keeping this sort of campaign manageable is to give the heroes reasons to visit specific planets.

The difference between a warp drive and a hyper drive is whether you're still in "normal space" during transit. In hyperspace, you can't see where you're going—you plot your course, jump to lightspeed and then don't interact with anything outside your ship until you arrive at your destination. A ship that just tears around in normal space but goes faster than light can choose to stop, change course or potentially receive or transmit messages while en route.

WEIRD DRIVES

Finally, your campaign may be based on a FTL system outside the bounds of any futuristic science or speculation. For example, you might travel by folding space with psionic talent, with a drive that makes your ship exist simultaneously at every point in the universe until you turn it off and appear at your destination, or by "sailing" on the stellar winds of some strange subethereal reality. The important consideration for the GM is whether the potential destinations are restricted in some way.

SUBLIGHT DRIVES

Although they're not as critical to campaign-building as FTL drives, sublight drives are also worth thinking about. Our current chemical-rocket technology means a trip to a nearby planet like Mars takes months and months; going someplace in the outer part of the solar system is a journey of years. The Holy Grail of in-system travel is a reactionless drive—something that provides thrust without the need to expel reaction mass. If you have a reactionless drive, you can maintain constant acceleration over days or weeks and build up to an extremely high velocity. Typically, you'd "flip ship" at the halfway point to your destination and decelerate the rest of the way. As a bonus, you'll also simulate gravity with constant thrust.

ALIEN CONTACT

Are we alone in the universe? Exploring that question is a classic element of science fiction. If aliens do exist in your campaign, where are they? Do humans venture into the distant frontiers of space to meet them, or do they come visit us on Earth? Aliens don't have to be from distant stars; you can build a campaign in which aliens come from alternate realities or dimensional doorways accessible from Earth—or perhaps as time-travelers from a distant era. For that matter, "aliens" could even be the result of genetic experimentation that creates radically different branches of *homo sapiens*.

NO ALIENS

Interested in a campaign built around modern-day espionage or near-future technothrillers? You might not want to include aliens in your game at all. Plenty of outstanding action movies work quite well by using terrorists, criminals or Nazis as bad guys.

DEAD ALIENS

Aliens could easily be separated from human civilization by vast expanses of *time* as well as space. In this scenario, the heroes don't run into any alien adversaries, but they might explore alien ruins or discover alien artifacts. Some of the most important mysteries in the setting could revolve around who the Builders or the Gatemakers or the Terraformers were, why they did what they did, and whether they're really gone forever.

ALIENS AS NPCS ONLY

Aliens exist in the campaign, but they're so rare, inimical, primitive or weird that it just wouldn't make sense to include one in the hero team. Perhaps humans are the only starfaring race, and the characters are explorers who visit worlds inhabited by uncontacted alien races. Or perhaps humans are up against another species that's completely hostile and uninterested in (or incapable of) communication; "Bugs," so to speak.

For a real twist, how about a setting with no humans at all?

ALIEN HEROES

The default assumption of the *ALTERNITY* game is that our part of the galaxy is inhabited by at least a small number of alien species who are inclined to work with humans under the right circumstances. Alien heroes offer players the chance to try out interesting new abilities or characters with unusual strengths and weaknesses, as well as imagining how someone from a very different background might see things. In Chapter 2, we present three distinct alien species for use as PCs, but there's no reason you can't create PC alien species of your own.

WHO ARE THE HEROES?

What do the heroes do in your campaign? What sort of problems and challenges are they called upon to face? To put it another way, who exactly are the stars of the show?

AGENTS

The heroes work for someone—a government, a corporation or perhaps a private foundation—and their superiors assign them to missions. Agents could be spies, investigators, law keepers, soldiers or even straight-up bug-hunters. Any campaign in which you go where you're told to go and do what you're told to do fits this model.

EXPLORERS

It's a sci-fi staple: Find new worlds, meet interesting aliens, discover amazing wonders. Your hero team could be the crew of a small survey ship operating on their own, or an elite first-contact team supported by the resources of a large and well-equipped ship. The obvious model for an explorer campaign is "the planet of the week"—each adventure brings the heroes to a new world. So, who are the heroes exploring for? What are they likely to find out there?

FREELANCERS

Freelance heroes sell their services to anyone who can afford them. One mission might involve recovering stolen property, the next could revolve around providing protection to a scientist visiting a dangerous planet, and the one after involves salvaging a wrecked ship from a pirate-controlled asteroid belt. The challenging part of being a freelancer is finding your next paycheck.

TRADERS

It's a big galaxy, and you can make a fortune by selling people what they want. In the trader campaign, the heroes are star-traders with a ship of their own and a keen eye for opportunity. The fire-gems of Wulreth II are worth a fortune to the jewelers of Iado Station, the laser rifles you can buy on Iado will fetch a pretty price from the rebels on Klaarth, and you can sell the thoator furs you collect on Klaarth to the miners of Wulreth II for fire-gems. The typical trade adventure involves tracking down new commodities, finding a market for goods you already have or doing something dangerous to acquire goods to sell.
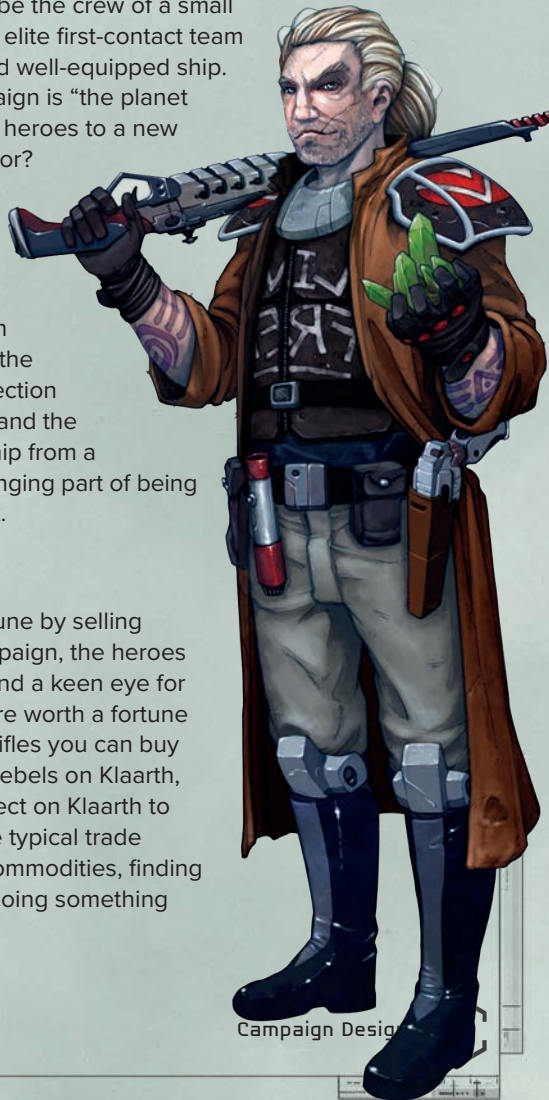
Campaign Design

8: ALIENS AND ADVERSARIES

"We are fashioned creatures, but half made up."

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*

The universe can be a dangerous place. In civilized areas, heroes run into criminals, assassins, hostile security and villains of all kinds. Out in the wilderness, hungry predators can pose a threat to parties who aren't ready for trouble—a threat that becomes infinitely more complex on alien worlds. Not every *ALTERNITY* episode features someone or something trying to kill you, but it's a rare adventure that doesn't pit the heroes against some enemy.

This chapter presents a selection of common adversaries and an easy-to-use system for designing aliens and villains of your own to throw at the PCs. We don't know what kinds of planets or strange dimensions your *ALTERNITY* game might visit, but we do know the game stats you'll need for a range of interesting combat scenes. All you need to do is pick a creature template, a threat level and a couple signature powers or traits, and you'll have just the opponent you need.

ADVERSARY STATS

Just like PCs, adversaries have initiative scores, movement speed, some sort of durability track, and various forms of attack. However, adversary stats are *not* derived from skill selections or talent choices. Adversaries are not PCs. You don't need to know how many skill points an alien ursoid has invested in its bite attack—you just need to know what its attack score is.

In this chapter, "creature" includes anything alive or artifically animated, including humans, robots and weird alien lifeforms.

NAME AND DESCRIPTION

So, what do you call this enemy, and what is its place in the world? Include as much or as little detail as you like. Sometimes it's fine to just describe an adversary as "Hypertech Security Goon" or "Heavy Laserbot"—you don't need to create different types of security officers for Hypertech, and as far as the PCs know or care, all heavy laserbots are the same. It's helpful to add a couple quick-read visual cues to an adversary, just so when the players ask, "What do we see in this room?" you can give them an answer such as, "a security officer in green and gray body armor," or "a yellow-painted, tracked robot with a laser turret."

THREAT RATING, SIZE, TEMPLATE, TYPE

Ex. TR 3 Medium Minion Humanoid, TR 6 Large Champion Mechanical

Threat rating, size, template and type provide the basic game description for an adversary—how dangerous it is, how big it is, how it fits in a combat scene, and what sort of creature it is. Many game rules interact with these basic descriptors; for example, EMP weapons are most effective against mechanical beings and worthless against living creatures that have no cyberware or powered gear.

Threat Rating (TR) is the creature's "level" on a scale from 0 (a minor nuisance) to 13 (deadly dangerous even to a full group of max-level heroes). When you build a combat encounter, a group of 8 minions, 4 standard, 2 champion or 1 boss adversary of a level equal to the heroes' level is a fight of average difficulty. If you want to create an easy fight, choose adversaries whose threat rating is below the heroes' level; if you want a hard fight, choose adversaries whose TR is higher (see Scene Design in Chapter 7).

Size is important because small creatures are smaller targets (see Attacks in Chapter 5). Common sizes from smallest to biggest are: tiny (a rat), small (a child or an average dog), medium (most adult humans), large (a horse or small car) and huge (an elephant or truck).

Template is the creature's basic role and function in combat: minion, standard, champion or boss. Template affects the creature's durability and attack potential, and it guides encounter-building. For example, minions are usually encountered in large numbers, but they're individually fragile and often go down with just one hit. Champions and bosses are much tougher, but you rarely fight more than one or two at a time.

Type describes a creature's basic nature: animal, human (or human-like), plant, mechanical, supernatural or something weird like an energy being. It doesn't come up in combat very often, but it's a quick way of assessing whether something cares about being in vacuum or subjected to an EMP (for example).

Different settings will feature different categories of creature type.

INITIATIVE AND SPEED

The creature's initiative check score and its movement rate are noted on this line. Initiative is based on its threat and template, while speed depends on its type and special traits. Unless stated otherwise, assume a creature's speed is 20 meters per 2-impulse action.

Types of Movement: Unless otherwise stated, speed refers to a creature's ability to cover distance by moving along the ground. Many creatures are able to **fly**. Flying creatures must move each time they take an action in order to stay in the air unless they have the ability to **hover** (many natural fliers have actions that combine moving and attacking). Gaining elevation in normal or heavier gravity is treated like moving in difficult terrain—the flyer "pays" 2 meters of movement to move forward 1 meter and gain 1 meter of elevation.

AWARENESS AND SENSES

It doesn't come up in every combat scene, but sometimes you need to know how hard it is for the heroes to sneak past an adversary and what kind of unusual senses it might possess. For most creatures, *Awareness* is a Focus ability check. If senses are "normal," that means they're average for a human. Anything else is a special trait.

ABILITIES

The creature's ability ratings, expressed as shorthand skill scores for Average success; for example, Str 16+, Agi 15+, Vit 13+ and so on. Creatures can get Excellent or Stellar successes on their ability checks by achieving a check result 5 or 10 higher than the score given, so if a creature with Vit 13+ gets an 18 on its check result, that's an Excellent success.

In general, adversaries don't have specific skills. They default to ability checks against the key ability for a skill. We can't imagine why you might need a security goon to make an *Academics* check, but if it comes up at your game table for some reason, just have that NPC make an Intelligence check instead.

If you need to know the actual ability rating instead of the check score, just subtract the shorthand score from 20 (so a Strength check of 16+ means a Strength rating of 4).

Intelligence: In addition to a skill score, the Intelligence ability notes whether a creature's basic intellect is instinctive, animal, programmed or sentient.

- *Instinctive*: Low-order animal with limited behaviors, such as a worm, jellyfish or scorpion.
- *Animal*: Higher-order animal with complex behaviors (like most vertebrates).
- *Programmed*: Machine intelligence designed to act only within a narrow function or set of functions (for example, detecting and attacking intruders). Full AI or adaptive programming is better described as sentient, not programmed.
- *Sentient*: Self-aware intelligence ranging from near-human to super-human capability.

Active social skills are particularly rare. *Influence* doesn't work on PCs for example, and it's rarely worth it to use dice to adjudicate all-NPC interactions.

ACTIONS

This section describes the actions the creature typically takes in combat. The most common entry here is some form of attack. Attack actions list the *speed* (impulse cost), *range* (melee or ranged), *targets* (usually 1) and *attack score* for the attack form, followed by the damage inflicted by an Average hit or an Excellent/Stellar hit and any special effects. Damage is given as either physical or energy; if the damage has no type, it bypasses armor.

WOUND PENALTIES FOR ADVERSARIES?

You'll notice that most of the creatures appearing later in this chapter don't suffer the same check penalties for being wounded that PCs with similar injuries suffer. That's deliberate. Using different wound effects adds texture to enemies and makes them more distinct. In many cases, a severe wound effect does impact a foe's ability to fight (by blowing off a laser turret from a combat droid or damaging an adversary's movement mode, for example). In other cases, wounds might make the foe even more dangerous, like the alien warrior that enters a berserk frenzy when close to death. Of course, some humanoid NPCs are built to work like PCs, and you can bet an NPC with a bad wound penalty is looking for a way to end the fight through retreat, negotiation or surrender.

Just like characters, creatures that score Stellar hits deal a bonus wound box of damage.

In addition to the actions listed in this section, creatures have access to the full menu of action types and action modifiers described under Actions (see Chapter 5). If an alien beast needs to get closer to a hero to maul her with its claws, it can use 2 impulses to move—or if it's only a few meters away, it can add the charge action modifier to one of the attacks listed in this section to close the distance and get to work.

Creatures of low intelligence (or without hands) might not be able to take advantage of the interact action; doors have foiled dogs' ambitions for thousands of years. Likewise, creatures driven by pure instinct probably don't have the self-awareness to consider the evade action modifier or the patience to try aiming when confronted with a tough target. The GM should use common sense in deciding what animals—even alien animals—are really capable of.

REACTIONS

If a creature has any special reactions it can take during combat, they're described in this section. Just like the heroes, creatures using reactions delay their next action by some number of impulses (usually 1). Creatures without a reaction section can still use generic reactions available to any creature (for example, making a *Dodge* check when exposed to a blast).

DEFENSE

This section describes how difficult it is to attack and damage or destroy the creature.

Size: If the creature's size makes it easier or harder to attack, it's noted here.

Armor: This is the creature's resistance value against physical and energy attacks. In many cases, it represents a tough hide or unusual physiology, not actual armor the creature wears.

Immune: Some creatures are immune to certain types of damage or effect. If the attack hits, the creature ignores the effect.

Stun Resistant: Many champions and bosses are hard to disable through stunning attacks. Creatures that are stun resistant treat any stun effect they suffer as a daze effect of the same duration.

Vulnerable: Some creatures are especially susceptible to certain types of damage or effect. The details are described here.

Durability: The creature's wound boxes and the effects it suffers when it's wounded make up its durability. Just like a PC, a creature who doesn't have an open wound box available at a particular severity level "rolls up" to the next highest wound level and marks off a wound box there. Some creatures, especially higher-level champions and bosses, may have two or more severity levels for the same damage amount. When such a creature takes a wound, use the lowest available severity listed for the adversary.

Most creatures also suffer a **wound effect** for receiving a serious wound. Wound effects happen the first time (and only the first time) a creature sustains a wound in that row (but feel free to use the flavor text for the wound effects whenever it's appropriate).

Note that unlike heroes, NPCs sometimes have wound effects that aren't penalties.

OTHER

Special traits and characteristics not described elsewhere are noted here. If a creature actually has some amount of skill points in a specific skill, it's listed here, along with its shorthand skill score for an Average success. Standard gear or valuables might also appear here.

READY-TO-USE ADVERSARIES

This chapter presents 20 pre-designed adversaries suitable for use in a wide variety of *ALTERNITY* campaigns. You may find it useful to "re-skin" creatures to create new adversaries for the heroes; for example, take away the wings, and a chiirth is a reasonable facsimile of a particularly vicious pack-hunting wild dog.

TR	Creature	Template
1	Android Worker	Minion
1	Human Gangster	Minion
1	Human Guard	Standard
1	Robot Floating Eye	Standard
2	Chiirth	Minion
2	Human Enforcer	Champion
3	Android Agent	Standard
3	Psuur	Boss
4	Robot Explorer Probe	Champion
4	Human Assault Trooper	Minion
5	Marzog Warrior	Minion
5	Marzog Berserker	Standard
5	Raigath	Standard
6	Energon	Boss
6	Human Operative	Standard
7	Arachnoid	Champion
8	Robot Jägerbot	Standard
9	Android Exterminator	Boss
10	Human Armored Marine	Standard
11	Behemoth	Boss

ANDROID

Androids appear human, but their innards are mostly feats of electronic and mechanical engineering, not biology. Depending on the culture, they may have a distinctive eye or skin color or obvious tattoo to signify their artificial nature, or they might blend in with the human populace.

EPSILON-CLASS WORKER

TR 1 Medium Minion Mechanism
Senses normal; *Awareness* 17+
Initiative 14/19/24; **Speed** 20 meters

Str 13+	Agi 16+	Vit 15+	Int 16+ (sentient)	Foc 17+	Per 17+

ACTIONS

Improvised Weapon (Tool) 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 16/21/26; *Damage* 2/5 physical.

Mob Attack 3 impulses. Five androids within 10 meters of each other acting at the same time can make a mob attack. Instead of making attack checks, the androids threaten all targets adjacent to at least one member of the mob. Each threatened creature must make a *Dodge* check with a step penalty equal to the number of adjacent mob attackers or suffer one Average hit from an improvised weapon.

REACTIONS

Defensive Cower 1-impulse reaction. When missed by an attack, android goes prone and begins evading.

DEFENSE

Armor: 1 physical, 1 energy

(1+ dmg)	☐	incapacitated	*Announces system failure*

OTHER

Skills Technical skill of your choice 12+

Minion Attack This creature's attack deals one wound of the lowest severity if its damage overcomes the target's armor.

Gear Tool such as a wrench or heavy screwdriver, basic datapad

GAMMA-CLASS AGENT

TR 3 Medium Standard Mechanism
Senses normal; *Awareness* 16+
Initiative 12/17/22; **Speed** 20 meters

Str 13+	Agi 16+	Vit 15+	Int 16+ (sentient)	Foc 16+	Per 18+

ACTIONS

Laser Pistol 3 impulses; *Medium* 1 target; *Attack* 14/19/24 (+2 steps); *Damage* 1d6 + 3/6 energy.

Surprising Strength 4 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 14/19/24 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d4 + 1/3 physical, and target must make *Resilience* check or be knocked off balance.

REACTIONS

Threat Reassessment 2-impulse reaction when wounded by an attack; make Laser Pistol or Surprising Strength attack with +2 step bonus against enemy that wounded it.

DEFENSE

Armor: 2 physical, 2 energy

(12+ dmg)	☐	incapacitated	*"But I never truly lived…"*
(9 to 11 dmg)	☐	–2 step penalty to checks	*"System failure imminent."*
(6 to 8 dmg)	☐	–1 step penalty to checks	*"Engaging backup systems."*
(1 to 5 dmg)	☐		*"Threats detected."*

OTHER

Skills *Athletics* 12+, *Resilience* 13+
Gear Laser pistol with biometric lock

ALPHA-CLASS EXTERMINATOR

TR 9 Medium Boss Mechanism
Senses normal, low-light vision, thermal vision; *Awareness* 16+
Initiative 12/17/22; **Speed** 20 meters

Str 11+	**Agi** 14+	**Vit** 13+	**Int** 16+ (sentient)	**Foc** 16+	**Per** 18+

ACTIONS

Dual Wielded Lasers 4 impulses; *Medium* 1 or 2 targets; *Attack* 14/19/24 (–1 step, attack twice); *Damage* 1d8 + 7/11 energy.
Grab 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 8/13/18 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d8 + 3/7 physical, and target must make *Athletics* check or be grappled.
Robo-Crush 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 grappled target; *Attack* 8/13/18 (+4 steps); *Damage* 1d8 + 7/11 physical.

REACTIONS

Android Escalation 2-impulse delay when android receives the first box of damage in a new row; this android gains a step bonus when damaged (reflected in table below).

DEFENSE

Stun Resistant Stun effects on the android are treated as daze effects instead.
Armor 2 physical, 2 energy

(16+ dmg)	☐	incapacitated	*"Termination… incomplete…"*
(16+ dmg)	☐☐☐	+2 step bonus to checks	*Organic layer destroyed*
(13 to 15 dmg)	☐☐☐	+1 step bonus to checks	*Robotic parts begin to show*
(1 to 12 dmg)	☐☐☐☐		*Stares at you dispassionately*

OTHER

Skills *Athletics* 10+, *Resilience* 10+
Gear Two laser pistols (or other guns; this android is strong enough to dual-wield long arms and look cool doing it)

ARACHNOID

A horrible, spider-like alien predator the size of a large horse, the arachnoid is driven by its voracious hunger to try its luck on any potential prey smaller than itself.

ARACHNOID TRAPPER

TR 7 Large Champion Animal (Alien)
Senses thermal vision; *Awareness* 15+
Initiative 10/15/20; **Speed** 30 meters

Str 12+	Agi 15+	Vit 13+	Int 19+ (instinct)	Foc 15+	Per 19+

ACTIONS

Web Net 3 impulses; *Close* 1 target; *Attack* 11/16/21; *Effect* target grappled (resist action to escape, opposed by trapper's Agility 15+).

Drag 1 impulse; 1 target grappled by web net; opposed check (arachnoid Str vs. target *Athletics*; arachnoid gains +2 steps vs. smaller targets). If the arachnoid wins, the target falls prone and the arachnoid drags it 10 meters closer.

Mandibles 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 8/13/18 (+1 step, or +3 steps vs. grappled target); *Damage* 2d4/2d8 physical.

REACTIONS

Spiny Legs 1-impulse reaction. When hit by an attack, move up to 2 meters and make the following attack: *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 8/13/18 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d4/1d4 + 3 physical, and target must make a *Dodge* check or be knocked prone.

DEFENSE

Large Enemies gain +1 step bonus to attack the arachnoid.
Stun Resistant Stun effects on the arachnoid are treated as daze effects instead.
Armor 3 physical, 3 energy

(16+ dmg)	☐	dead	*Collapses in twitching legs*
(16+ dmg)	☐	Can no longer use reactions	*Spurt of dark ichor, shrieks*
(13 to 15 dmg)	☐☐	Releases grappled targets	*Leg shot away, clacking*
(10 to 12 dmg)	☐☐	Distracted until next action	*Hisses at attacker*
(1 to 9 dmg)	☐☐		*Ignores the injury*
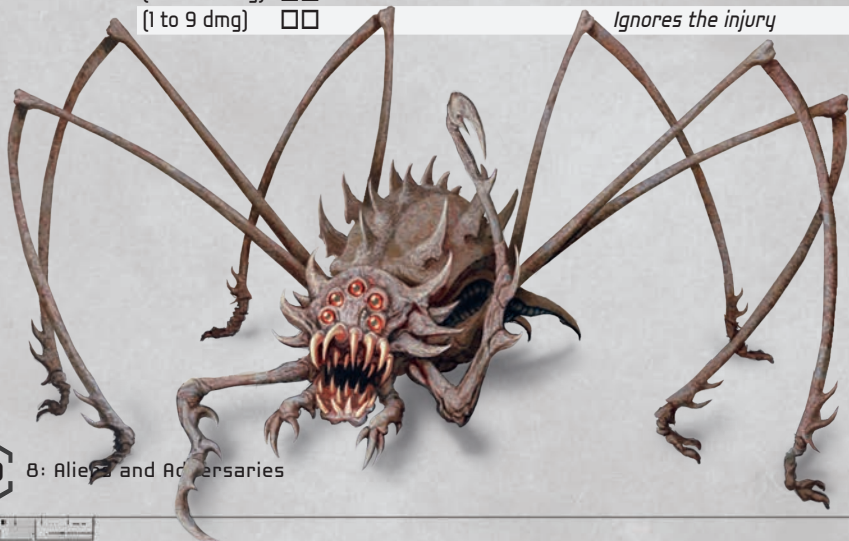
Camouflage +4 step bonus to *Stealth* checks to hide in its native environment.

Ambush The arachnoid hunts by hiding with a hidden web net already deployed 10–20 meters away in a spot where prey is likely to pass by. A creature that enters an arachnoid's ambush makes an *Awareness* check to spot the web net before stepping on it. If the check fails, the creature is automatically grappled by the web net, and the arachnoid gains tactical surprise.

BEHEMOTH

Whether genetically engineered for war or the product of evolution run amok on some savage world, the behemoth is a living armored assault. Worse yet, the creature possesses powerful bioelectric organs that shock anyone nearby when the behemoth is provoked, which is just about any time it sees another living creature.

BEHEMOTH

TR 11 Huge Boss Animal (Alien)
Senses normal, electrosense; *Awareness* 12+
Initiative 11/16/21; **Speed** 30 meters

Str 5+	Agi 17+	Vit 8+	Int 18+ (animal)	Foc 14+	Per 18+

ACTIONS

Rampage 5 impulses. The behemoth moves 20 meters and makes up to three Gore attacks against different targets at any point in its move. It can move through the spaces of medium and smaller creatures during this action.

Gore 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 5/10/15 (+1 step); *Damage* 2d6/1d12 + 8 physical, armor piercing 3, and a large or smaller target must make an *Athletics* check or be pushed 6 meters and knocked prone.

AUTOMATIC ACTIONS

Shock Aura Resolve at end of impulse 4 and impulse 8. *Effect* all targets within 6 meters must make *Endurance* check or suffer 2d6 energy damage (electricity) and be stunned (3 impulses).

DEFENSE

Huge Enemies gain +2 step bonus to attack the behemoth.

Stun Resistant Stun effects on the behemoth are treated as daze effects instead.

Armor 5 physical, 3 energy

Immune damage and effects caused by electricity

(16+ dmg)	☐	dead	*Falls with earth-shaking thud*
(16+ dmg)	☐☐☐	uses Rampage as a reaction	*Bellows and goes berserk!*
(16+ dmg)	☐☐☐☐	knocked off-balance	*Jolted to one knee, roars*
(13 to 15 dmg)	☐☐☐☐	Distracted until next action	*Maddened by pain*
(1 to 12 dmg)	☐☐☐☐		*Roars and stomps the ground*

OTHER

Electrosense The behemoth detects creatures within close range by their bioelectric fields.

Electroheal The behemoth heals 1 wound box when hit by an attack or effect that would deal at least 5 energy (electricity) damage before its armor. Its own shock aura does not count.

CHIIRTH

Chiirthi are small, scaly, winged creatures about the size of a goose or pelican. They're skittish and elusive as individuals, generally avoiding larger foes, but chiirthi are rarely found alone. They're pack hunters that greedily swarm to attack anything resembling prey.

CHIIRTH

TR 2 Small Minion Animal (Alien)

Senses normal, echolocation; *Awareness* 14+

Initiative 9/14/19; **Speed** 20 meters, fly 50 meters

Str 16+	Agi 13+	Vit 16+	Int 17+ (animal)	Foc 16+	Per 18+

ACTIONS

Swoop 3 impulses. The chiirth flies up to 30 meters and attacks at the end of its move; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 14/19/24; 2/6 physical, and target grappled.

Gnaw 3 impulses; 1 grappled target; *Attack* 13/18/23 (+1 step); 3/7 physical, and target suffers damage over time (bleeding; passive resist *Endurance* or *Medicine* treatment ends the effect).

DEFENSE

Small Enemies suffer a –1 step penalty to attack the chiirth.

Armor 3 physical, 0 energy

(1+ dmg)	☐	dead	*flaps, thrashes, croaks, dies*

OTHER

Swarm Attack The chiirth gains a +1 step bonus with its swoop attack for each other chiirth swooping at the same target in this impulse, to a maximum of +3 steps for 4 chiirthi attacking the same target.

Minion Attack This creature's attack deals one wound of the lowest severity if its damage overcomes the target's armor.

Echolocation Chiirthi can detect creatures and objects at medium range even in total darkness.

ENERGON

An example of life as we do *not* know it, the energon is a being made up of energized plasmas and magnetic fields. Under normal circumstances, it shows little interest in humans, but the energon is *very* interested in powered devices, which it regards as rich food sources.

ENERGON

TR 6 Medium Boss Enigma (Alien)
Senses normal, energy sense; *Awareness* 12+
Initiative 5/10/15; **Speed** fly 30 meters
Str 20+ **Agi** 12+ **Vit** 14+ **Int** 15+ (sentient) **Foc** 13+ **Per** 16+

ACTIONS

Plasma Lash 3 impulses; *Melee* (6 meters) 1 target; *Attack* 10/15/20 (+2 steps); *Damage* 1d8 + 2/6 energy, and target must make a *Dodge* check or suffer damage over time (fire).

Drain Charge 2 impulses; *Close* 1 target item with power cells; *Attack* 10/15/20; target's power cells lose 50 percent of their full charge if equipped or 20 percent if carried, and the energon heals 1 wound box, or 2 wound boxes on a Stellar success.

REACTIONS

Shock Bolt 0-impulse reaction when a creature within close range takes an action of at least 3 impulses; the energon attacks the acting creature. *Close* 1 target; *Attack* 10/15/20; *Damage* 1d8 + 0/4 energy.

DEFENSE

Insubstantial Physical attacks against the energon suffer a –5 step penalty; energy attacks suffer a –2 step penalty.

Stun Resistant Stun effects on the energon are treated as daze effects instead.

Armor 0 physical, 3 energy

Immune fire, grapple, knocked prone, poison, push

(15+ dmg)	☐	dead (see Death Burst)	*Explodes!*
(15+ dmg)	☐☐☐	shock bolt now 1-impulse reaction	*energy discharges slow down*
(12 to 14 dmg)	☐☐☐☐	loses insubstantial for 1 impulse	*briefly flickers into solidity*
(9 to 11 dmg)	☐☐☐☐	weakened until end of next action	*crackling aura dims a little*
(1 to 8 dmg)	☐☐☐☐		*FZZZT.*

OTHER

Death Burst The energon explodes upon death. *Blast* 4 m (8 m); *Primary Damage* 2d6 energy and target stunned (3 impulses); *Secondary Damage* 1d8 energy; successful *Dodge* check reduces damage by 5 and negates stun.

Energy Sense The energon detects all devices that store or generate energy within long range.
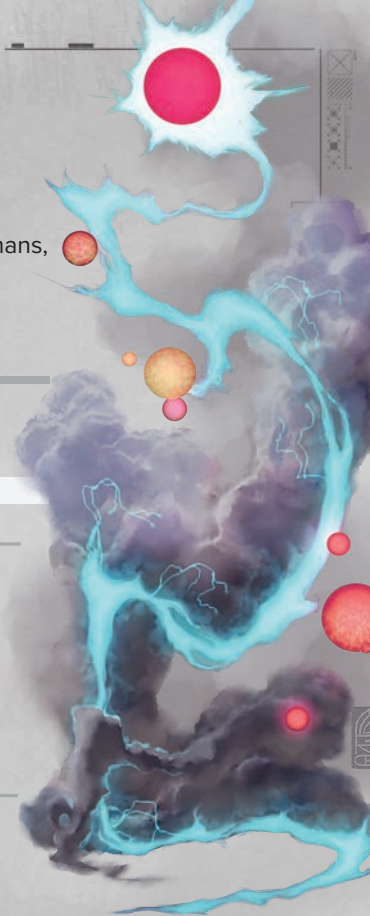
HUMAN

Most humans do their best to stay out of dangerous situations such as gunfights with teams of trained killers. However, heroes have an unusual talent for finding foes who think it's their job to take what the heroes have or stop them from getting what they want.

GANGSTER

Punks, hoodlums, goons, criminals—whatever they're called in a particular setting, they're trouble, especially on their home turf. Gangsters carry a variety of weapons: 25 percent have only a knife, 50 percent have a knife and pistol, and 25 percent have a knife and SMG (and happily attempt burst attacks if they have a good opportunity).

HUMAN GANGSTER

TR 1 Medium Minion Humanoid (Human)
Senses normal; *Awareness* 18+
Initiative 14/19/24; **Speed** 20 meters

Str 16+	**Agi** 16+	**Vit** 17+	**Int** 17+ (sentient)	**Foc** 18+	**Per** 17+

ACTIONS

Knife 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 16/21/26 (+1 step); *Damage* 3/8 physical.
Pistol 3 impulses; *Medium* 1 target; *Attack* 16/21/26; *Damage* 3/8 physical.
SMG burst 4 impulses; *Medium* 1 target; *Attack* 16/21/26 (+1 step); *Damage* 3/8 physical.

DEFENSE

(1+ dmg)	☐	incapacitated	*swears,staggers and falls*

OTHER

Cheap Shot The gangster gains a +1 step bonus to attack a distracted or unaware opponent in addition to the normal bonuses.
Minion Attack This creature's attack deals one wound of the lowest severity if its damage overcomes the target's armor.
Skills *Acrobatics* 14+, *Athletics* 14+, *Stealth* 14+
Gear weapon, $50

GUARD

Many guards are just civilians with a flashlight and maybe a stun gun, but this guard is a trained member of an armed security staff. The guard's most dangerous weapon is the radio—one quick call, and every guard in the place is on alert.

A typical police officer in an ordinary city could also use these game stats.

HUMAN GUARD

TR 1 Medium Standard Humanoid (Human)
Senses normal; *Awareness* 15+
Initiative 13/18/23; **Speed** 20 meters

Str 16+	Agi 17+	Vit 17+	Int 17+ (sentient)	Foc 16+	Per 18+

ACTIONS

Stun Baton 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 15/20/25 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d6 + 0/3 physical, target is stunned (3 impulses).

Pistol 3 impulses; *Medium* 1 target; *Attack* 15/20/25 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d6 + 1/5 physical.

Tactical Comm 2 impulses; report intrusion or disturbance to all guards on site.

DEFENSE

Armor 2 physical, 1 energy

(10+ dmg)	☐	incapacitated	*drops in a nerveless heap*
(7 to 9 dmg)	☐	–2 step penalty to all checks	*"I'm hit! I'm hit!"*
(4 to 6 dmg)	☐	–1 step penalty to all checks	*grunts and ducks a second late*
(1 to 3 dmg)	☐		*"Freeze! Drop your weapon!"*

OTHER

Skills *Athletics* 14+, *Medicine* 15+, *Security* 15+
Gear ballistic vest, combat baton, light pistol, two clips, comm device, $100

ENFORCER

There are criminals, and there are *killers*. The enforcer is a competent and ruthless gun for hire. Some enforcers sell their services as bodyguards to major crime bosses, some work as mercenaries and some lead bloodthirsty crews of pirates or raiders.

HUMAN ENFORCER

TR 2 Medium Champion Humanoid (Human)
Senses normal; *Awareness* 14+
Initiative 12/17/22; **Speed** 20 meters

Str 15+	Agi 16+	Vit 16+	Int 17+ (sentient)	Foc 16+	Per 17+

ACTIONS

Twin Pistols 4 impulses; make two heavy pistol attacks each with –1 step penalty.

Heavy Pistol 4 impulses; *Medium* 1 target; *Attack* 14/19/24 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d8 + 1/5 physical.

Brawl 2 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 14/19/24 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d4 + 0/3 physical, and target must make *Resilience* check or be knocked off-balance.

REACTIONS

Return Fire 1-impulse reaction when wounded (once per scene). The enforcer makes a heavy pistol attack against the creature that wounded him or her.

DEFENSE

Armor 2 physical, 1 energy

Stun Resistant Stun effects on the enforcer are treated as daze effects.

Improved Cover The enforcer improves the defensive effect of any cover he uses by 1 step.

(11+ dmg)	☐	incapacitated	*sinks to ground, groaning*
(11+ dmg)	☐	–2 step penalty to all checks	*staggers, clutching wound*
(8 to 10 dmg)	☐☐	–1 step penalty to all checks	*roars in anger, blood dripping*
(5 to 7 dmg)	☐☐		*winces and snarls a curse*
(1 to 4 dmg)	☐☐		*"Is that all ya got?!"*

OTHER

Skills *Acrobatics* 14+, *Influence* 13+, *Security* 13+, *Stealth* 13+

Gear ballistic vest, two heavy pistols, two clips, comm device, $500

ASSAULT TROOPER

Disciplined, professional and unquestioningly loyal, assault troopers are rank-and-file infantry often employed as base garrisons or in counterinsurgency operations. They lack the powered armor and firepower support of armored infantry, but they're more than capable of handling local unrest and insurgents.

HUMAN ASSAULT TROOPER

TR 4 Medium Minion Humanoid (Human)

Senses normal; *Awareness* 18+

Initiative 13/18/23; **Speed** 16 meters

Str 15+	Agi 16+	Vit 16+	Int 17+ (sentient)	Foc 17+	Per 18+

ACTIONS

Plasma Carbine 3 impulses; *Long* 1 target; *Attack* 13/18/23 (+1 step); *Damage* 4/8 energy.

Brawl 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 12/17/22 (+1 step); *Damage* 3/7 physical.

Combined Fire Three assault troopers within 6 meters of each other acting at the same time can combine fire. Instead of making attack checks, the troopers choose a target point. Any creature within 4 meters of the target point must make a *Dodge* check or suffer one wound. Targets behind cover add their cover bonus to their *Dodge* checks.

DEFENSE

Armor 6 physical, 5 energy

(1+ dmg)	☐	incapacitated	*Sprawls to the ground*

OTHER

Minion Attack This creature's attack deals one wound of the lowest severity if its damage overcomes the target's armor.

Skills *Armor Training* 14+, *Athletics* 14+

Gear Carbon enamel armor, plasma carbine, two concussion grenades, medkit

OPERATIVE

The operative is a smart, capable agent who combines excellent combat skills with the ability to blend in with a crowd. Some work as government investigators, some are top corporate problem-solvers and some are ruthless assassins.

HUMAN OPERATIVE

TR 6 Medium Standard Humanoid (Human)

Senses normal, low-light vision; *Awareness* 12+
Initiative 11/16/21 (+1 step); **Speed** 20 meters

| Str 16+ | Agi 15+ | Vit 17+ | Int 15+ (sentient) | Foc 16+ | Per 15+ |

ACTIONS

Laser Pistol 3 impulses; *Long* 1 target; *Attack* 11/16/21 (+2 steps); *Damage* 1d6 + 1/6 energy (1d6 + 4/9 energy vs. a wounded, distracted or unaware target).

Martial Arts 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 12/17/22 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d4 + 0/3 physical (1d4 + 3/6 vs. a wounded, distracted or unaware target).

DEFENSE

Armor 2 physical, 2 energy
Defensive Martial Arts Melee attacks against the operative suffer a –1 step penalty.
Holo Displacer Ranged attacks against the operative suffer a –3 step penalty (does not stack with cover effects).

(15+ dmg)	☐ incapacitated	*spins away from blow and collapses*
(12 to 14 dmg)	☐ –2 step penalty to all checks	*hisses in pain, looks for a way out*
(9 to 11 dmg)	☐ –1 step penalty to all checks	*"Argh! Damn you!"*
(1 to 8 dmg)	☐	*"Seriously?"*

OTHER

Finisher Gains a +3 damage bonus when attacking a wounded, distracted or unaware target (included above).
Skills *Acrobatics* 11+, *Computers* 11+, *Misdirection* 11+, *Security* 11+, *Stealth* 11+
Gear hardmesh suit, laser pistol, comm device, low-light contacts, $1000

ARMORED MARINE

The most heavily armed and armored troops anywhere in space, the Armored Marines are an elite outfit of powered-armor specialists trained for extreme space-to-ground operations. On rare occasions they're called upon to deal with problems no ordinary troops can handle.

HUMAN ARMORED MARINE

TR 10 Medium Standard Humanoid (Human)

Senses normal, low-light, thermal, radar; *Awareness* 15+
Initiative 11/16/21 (+1 step); **Speed** 20 meters, fly 30 meters

| Str 10+ | Agi 16+ | Vit 14+ | Int 16+ (sentient) | Foc 15+ | Per 18+ |

ACTIONS

Jump Attack 5 impulses. Jump up to 60 meters horizontally or 30 meters vertically and make a rail rifle or Z-missile attack at any point during the move.

Rail Rifle 4 impulses; *Extreme* 1 target; *Attack* 6/11/16 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d8 + 5/10 physical.

Z-Missile 4 impulses; *Very Long* blast; *Blast* 6 m (10 m); *Primary Damage* 2d8 energy, armor-piercing 5; *Secondary Damage* 1d10 energy. Successful *Dodge* reduces damage by half.

Punch 4 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 6/11/16 (+1 step); *Damage* 2d4 + 0/4 physical, and medium or smaller target must make an *Endurance* check or be stunned.

Thruster Jump 2 impulses. Jump up to 100 meters horizontally or 40 meters vertically.

DEFENSE

Armor 5 physical, 5 energy

Life Support Immune to most environmental conditions.

Grav Deflector Physical attacks against the marine suffer a –3 step penalty. Energy attacks suffer a –1 step penalty.

(16+ dmg)	☐ incapacitated	*Pieces of armor go flying, collapses*
(16+ dmg)	☐ –2 step penalty to all checks	*Armor rocked, shower of sparks*
(13 to 15 dmg)	☐ –1 step penalty to all checks	*CLANG! "Damn! Taking fire!"*
(1 to 12 dmg)	☐	*"Getting some rain on the roof."*

OTHER

Skills *Athletics* 6+, *Armor Training* 6+, *Mechanics* 14+, *Security* 13+

Gear Centurion V assault battlesuit powered armor, three Z-missiles, tactical net

MARZOG

Hulking, bloodthirsty and utterly fearless in battle, marzogs are the primitive denizens of an alien world. They hate all other sentient species and furiously attack any offworld travelers who make the mistake of landing on the marzogs' home planet. While their Stone Age technology might seem laughable at first glance, the marzogs' sheer strength and reckless savagery makes them very dangerous at close quarters. Worse yet, they understand small beings with fiery weapons and metal chariots aren't gods and can die just like any other creature.

WARRIOR

Every marzog from early adulthood to the end of its life considers itself a warrior. Marzog tribes organize themselves into great hordes of spear-wielding maniacs, who eagerly hurl themselves into battle with single-minded ferocity. If their initial attack fails, warriors are willing to reorganize their efforts for ambush and stealthy arrows from the forest shadows.

MARZOG WARRIOR

TR 5 Medium Minion Humanoid (Alien)
Senses normal; *Awareness* 16+
Initiative 12/17/22; **Speed** 24 meters

| **Str** 14+ | **Agi** 16+ | **Vit** 15+ | **Int** 17+ (sentient) | **Foc** 16+ | **Per** 18+ |

ACTIONS

Bow 4 impulses; *Medium* 1 target; *Attack* 12/17/22 (+1 step); *Damage* 3/7 physical.

Spear 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 13/18/23 (+1 step); *Damage* 4/8 physical.

DEFENSE

Armor 3 physical, 0 energy

| (1+ dmg) | ☐ | dead | *stabs weakly at the air, coughs, falls* |

OTHER

Minion Attack This creature's attack deals one wound of the lowest severity if its damage overcomes the target's armor.

Gang Up The warrior gains a +1 step bonus to its melee attack if at least one other marzog is adjacent to the target.

Skills *Athletics* 12+, *Stealth* 14+ (10+ in forest or jungle), *Survival* 14+

Gear bone armor, bow, spear, 12 arrows

BERSERKER

The strongest and most fierce of a strong and fierce species, berserkers are battle-scarred champions of a hundred tribal skirmishes. Their sheer ferocity enables them to ignore terrible injuries, fighting through seemingly critical wounds as if they were mere grazes.

MARZOG BERSERKER

TR 5 Medium Standard Humanoid (Alien)
Senses normal; *Awareness* 15+
Initiative 10/15/20 (+1 step); **Speed** 24 meters

| **Str** 13+ | **Agi** 15+ | **Vit** 14+ | **Int** 17+ (sentient) | **Foc** 15+ | **Per** 17+ |

ACTIONS

Berserk Charge 4 impulses; move up to its speed and make an axe attack (replaces charge action modifier).

Axe 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 12/17/22 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d8 + 3/7 physical, and the target is pushed 2 meters and knocked prone (*Athletics* check negates).

REACTIONS

Fierce Will 1-impulse reaction. When the berserker is hit by an attack, it can attempt an immediate *Resilience* check (+2 step bonus) to reduce the damage by 5.

DEFENSE

Armor 2 physical, 1 energy

(14+ dmg)	☐	dead	*Dies, axe broken in its hand*
(11 to 13 dmg)	☐	–2 step penalty to all checks	*Roars in rage, shaking its weapon*
(8 to 10 dmg)	☐	–1 step penalty to all checks	*Snarls, dabs its own blood on face*
(1 to 7 dmg)	☐		*Doesn't even seem to notice!*

OTHER

Blood-Crazed The berserker gains a +1 step bonus to attack if it's wounded.
Skills *Athletics* 11+, *Stealth* 13+ (9+ in forest or jungle), *Resilience* 12+, *Survival* 13+
Gear bone armor, axe

PSUUR

Sly and secretive, the psuur is a degenerate descendant of a once-technological species that haunts the ruins of its long-vanished civilization. It is a scuttling horror that looks a little like a 50-kilo centipede with a head crowned by lashing tendrils. These barbed tendrils house invasive neural filaments to take over the victim's nervous system and hold it motionless while the psuur feeds.

PSUUR

TR 3 Medium Boss Animal (Alien)
Senses normal, thermal vision; *Awareness* 12+
Initiative 7/12/17; **Speed** 30 meters

Str 15+	Agi 13+	Vit 14+	Int 16+ (animal)	Foc 14+	Per 15+

ACTIONS

Tendril 2 impulses; *Melee* (8 meters) 1 target; *Attack* 13/18/23 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d6 + 0/3 physical. If the damage results in a wound, the target must make a *Willpower* check or be stunned (3 impulses) and become grappled. The target can resist the grapple with an opposed check (*Willpower* vs. psuur's tendril skill). The psuur can't use this action if it's already grappling three targets.
Neural Control 2 impulses; 1 grappled target. The target must make a *Willpower* check. On failure, the target uses a 1-impulse reaction to attack the closest creature other than the psuur with whatever weapon it has in hand (–2 step penalty to the attack).
Feed 3 impulses; 1 grappled target; *Attack* 13/18/23 (+3 steps); *Damage* 1d8 + 0/4 physical, and the target is impaired (resist *Endurance* to end the impaired effect).

REACTIONS

Human Shield 1-impulse reaction. If the psuur is targeted by an attack while it is adjacent to a creature it is grappling, one such creature becomes the target of the attack, and the psuur releases that creature.

DEFENSE

Armor 1 physical, 2 energy

Skulk If the psuur has cover, an attacker must make an *Awareness* check (+2 step bonus if the psuur is grappling a victim) to target the psuur with a ranged attack.

Stun Resistant Stun effects on the psuur are treated as daze effects instead.

(12+ dmg)	☐	dead	*Shrieks horribly and goes still*
(12+ dmg)	☐☐☐	can only grapple 2 targets	*A lashing tendril is shot away!*
(9 to 11 dmg)	☐☐☐☐	releases a grappled creature	*Shrieks and lets go*
(6 to 8 dmg)	☐☐☐☐	knocked off-balance	*Knocked over, twists upright again*
(1 to 5 dmg)	☐☐☐☐		*Clicks menacingly at you*

OTHER

Camouflage +4 step bonus to *Stealth* checks to hide in its native environment

RAIGATH

A vicious, clever pack hunter, the raigoth specializes in hit-and-run attacks designed to weaken and herd its prey into the teeth of its waiting packmates.

RAIGATH

TR 5 Medium Standard Animal (Alien)
Senses normal; *Awareness* 11+
Initiative 8/13/18 (+1 step);
  Speed 30 meters

Str 14+	**Agi** 14+
Vit 15+	**Int** 18+ (animal)
Foc 14+	**Per** 17+

ACTIONS

Hamstring Rush 4 impulses; move up to its speed, make a bite attack and move another 10 meters. If the bite attack inflicts a wound, the target is impaired (resist *Resilience*).

Bite 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; *Attack* 11/16/21 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d8 + 1/5 physical (1d8 + 3/7 vs. a prone target), and the target must make an *Athletics* check or be knocked prone.

REACTIONS

Elusive 1-impulse reaction. When targeted by a melee attack, the raigath can attempt a *Dodge* check. If it succeeds, it moves up to 6 meters and the attack automatically misses.

DEFENSE

Armor 4 physical, 2 energy

(14+ dmg)	☐	dead	*Dies, snapping at the air*
(11 to 13 dmg)	☐	slowed, loses hamstring rush	*Lamed by deep wound in flank*
(8 to 10 dmg)	☐	knocked prone	*Knocked over on its side, thrashing*
(1 to 7 dmg)	☐		*Screams and snaps at you*

OTHER

Savage Inflicts +2 damage vs. prone targets
Skills *Dodge* 11+, *Stealth* 11+, *Survival* 11+

ROBOT

First becoming generally available at TE 7, robots quickly become ubiquitous, built with nigh-infinite configurations and capabilities. Use the following examples as a launching point for your own designs.

FLOATING EYE

A basketball-sized security robot powered by hover-jets, the floating eye is armed with a stunner that is supposedly nonlethal. It's commonly used to monitor medium-security areas and patrol areas that are hard to monitor with fixed security systems.

FLOATING EYE

TR 1 Small Standard Mechanism (Robot)
Senses normal, weapon detector (2 m range); *Awareness* 16+
Initiative 12/17/22; **Speed** fly 25 meters (hover)

Str 16+	Agi 16+	Vit 17+	Int 17+ (programmed)	Foc 18+	Per 20+

ACTIONS

Stunner 3 impulses; *Close* 1 target; *Attack* 16/21/26; *Damage* 1d4/2d4 energy, and target must make an *Endurance* check or be stunned (3 impulses).
Tactical Update 3 impulses; the robot reports to its networked security system.

REACTIONS

Evasive Flight 1-impulse action when targeted by a ranged attack; Make a *Dodge* check and move 4 m if the check succeeds, causing the attack to miss.

DEFENSE

Small Enemies suffer a –1 step penalty to attack the floating eye.
Life Support
Armor 1 physical, 1 energy

(10+ dmg)	☐	incapacitated	*sphere clanks to ground*
(7 to 9 dmg)	☐	–2 step penalty to checks	*smoke emerges from chassis*
(4 to 6 dmg)	☐	–1 step penalty to checks	*panels pop off, sparks fly*
(1 to 3 dmg)	☐		*"Hostile action detected!"*

Networked The floating eye is linked to its parent security system. Its video feed can be accessed remotely from a security station (although it might not be monitored continuously).

EXPLORER PROBE

A rugged, tracked robot the size of a refrigerator, the explorer probe is designed for extended autonomous activities on hostile planets. It's equipped with defense systems to drive off local lifeforms that interfere with its mission.

EXPLORER PROBE

TR 4 Large Champion Mechanism (Robot, Amphibious)
Senses normal, low-light, thermal; *Awareness* 15+
Initiative 12/17/22; **Speed** 20 meters

| Str 13+ | Agi 16+ | Vit 14+ | Int 17+ (programmed) | Foc 18+ | Per 20+ |

ACTIONS

Manipulator Arms 4 impulses; *Melee* 2 targets; *Attack* 13/18/23 (+1 step, or +2 steps vs. prone target); *Damage* 1d8 + 3/7 physical, and target must make an *Athletics* check or be knocked prone.

Sonic Emitter 3 impulses; *Close* spread; *Attack* 13/18/23 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d8 + 3/7 energy, and target must make an *Endurance* check or be stunned (3 impulses).

Flamer 4 impulses, once per scene; *Medium* 1 target; *Attack* 13/18/23 (+1 step); *Damage* 2d6/2d10 energy and ignite (minor blast 4 m, 2d6 energy).

REACTIONS

Pressor Shield 1-impulse reaction when targeted by physical ranged attack; make an opposed Strength check to counter the attacker's check result.

DEFENSE

Large Enemies gain +1 step bonus to attack the probe.
Stun Resistant Stun effects on the probe are treated as daze effects instead.
Armor 3 physical, 2 energy
Life Support

(13+ dmg)	☐☐	incapacitated	*smoke pours out, humming stops*
(10 to 12 dmg)	☐☐	−2 step penalty to checks	*humming sound gets louder*
(7 to 9 dmg)	☐☐	−1 step penalty to checks	*robot emits low, throbbing hum*
(1 to 6 dmg)	☐☐		*"Investigating anomaly."*

OTHER

Skills *Dodge* 15+, *Science* (planetology) 15+, *Survival* 15+

JÄGERBOT

Sturdy, all-terrain robots fitted with multiple legs and a powerful laser, jägerbots are cheap and effective replacements for human infantry. They're often used as heavy garrison forces because of their good firepower or sometimes as disposable "first-wave" assault assets.

JÄGERBOT

TR 8 Medium Standard Mechanism (Robot)

Senses normal; *Awareness* 18+

Initiative 12/17/22; **Speed** 20 meters

Str 16+	Agi 16+	Vit 16+	Int 18+	Foc 18+	Per 19+

ACTIONS

Laser Cannon 4 impulses; *Long* 1 target; *Attack* 9/14/19 (+1 step); *Damage* 2d10 + 0/4 energy.

Restraint Arm 3 impulses; *Melee* 1 target; Attack 9/14/19 (+1 step); *Damage* 1d4 + 1/6 physical, and target must make an *Athletics* check or be grappled.

REACTIONS

Reflective Shield 2-impulse reaction when targeted by energy ranged attack; make a *Dodge* check to counter attacker's check result. If opposed check results in a miss, attack instead reflects to a target of the robot's choice within medium range. Original attacker attacks the new target at a −2 step penalty.

DEFENSES

Life Support

Armor 2 physical, 2 energy

(16+ dmg)	☐	incapacitated	*collapses in heap of wires and struts*
(14 to 15 dmg)	☐	−2 step penalty to checks	*hitches and jerks when it moves*
(11 to 13 dmg)	☐	−1 step penalty to checks	*fluids leak from servomotors*
(1 to 10 dmg)	☐		*"Engaging defensive protocol"*

OTHER

Skills *Dodge* 13+

CREATING ADVERSARIES

ALTERNITY heroes face an astounding variety of potential foes, from dangerous wild animals (like bears or snakes) to hostile humans (like criminals or enemy soldiers) to alien creatures from other planets or dimensions. The ready-to-use adversaries presented earlier in this chapter represent only a small selection of the foes a typical *ALTERNITY* campaign might eventually include. Since we can't devote hundreds of pages in this book to monsters the GM might or might not use, this section provides you with simple rules and guidelines for quickly creating almost any monster you can imagine.

You'll find more foes in the *ALTERNITY Xenologist's Guide* supplement and other appropriate products.

Creating the stat block for an adversary involves these five steps:

1. **Choose a Threat Rating (1 to 13).** This is the level of hero you expect this adversary to be a fair fight for. If it's higher than 10, it's a difficult challenge even for high-level heroes.
2. **Choose a Template.** Is the creature something the heroes meet in large groups or something intended to stand up against the entire team all by itself? Your choices are minion, standard, champion or boss.
3. **Get the Stats.** Refer to the template and threat rating tables later in this section. Find the appropriate template table, and find the row for the desired threat rating. Your creature begins with the game stats described there.
4. **Choose a Size and Type.** Decide how big your creature is, and then choose a type. This describes its basic nature and body form—for example, animal, humanoid, mechanism and so on. See Description at the beginning of this chapter.
5. **Choose Attacks, Defenses and Actions.** Decide how the creature attacks and whether it has any special defenses or actions (the ready-to-use adversaries in this chapter provide a number of good examples).

A quick example: Need a tiger-like beast for your adventure? That's probably a TR 2 Champion—a hero team might run into one or two at a time, but probably not more than that. Tigers are bigger than humans, so it's large, and it's clearly an animal. Tigers attack with claws and fangs, so a simple maul attack is all you need. Tigers don't have particularly thick hides or force fields, so a defense themed around being fast and hard to hit is probably the right choice; it could be naturally elusive, like the raigath earlier in this chapter.

CHAMPION AND BOSS ATTACKS

Champions and bosses face a special challenge in combat—they're usually outnumbered. That means a champion needs to play the part of two standard adversaries, and a boss needs to play the part of four. The durability tracks for champions and bosses handle this on the defensive side, but you'll also need to assign these creatures special offensive abilities to keep pace. Some good choices include:

- An attack that affects 2 or more targets at once
- An attack action that includes multiple attacks against different targets.
- A reaction that includes an attack
- A very fast attack (1 or 2 impulses—although a 1-impulse attack probably shouldn't be usable in consecutive actions)

TEMPLATE TABLES

The adversary's attack skill score, defense skill score, hit boxes and basic damage range are listed for each level.

Attack: The creature's target number for an Average success with an attack. As with all attacks, exceeding this number by 5 or more results in an Excellent hit, and exceeding it by 10 or more results in a Stellar hit.

Defense: The creature's skill score for a defense roll (for example, a *Dodge* check to get out of a blast area).

Wounds: The creature's wound boxes, with the damage numbers required to inflict a wound of that severity. The "last" box in the critical column serves as the creature's mortal wound box (if there's only one, that's both the critical and mortal wound for the creature).

Damage: The expected damage the creature deals with a successful attack, listed with both Average and Excellent damage results. While the damage listed is a flat number, you should create a damage expression that approximates the target. For example, a level 1 standard foe deals 5 damage on an Average hit; that could be 1d6 + 2 or 1d4 + 3. On an Excellent hit, that creature deals 9 damage, which could be 1d6 + 6 or 2d6 + 2.

Example: Steve is building a mutant bear-monster and decides it's a TR 4 champion. He refers to the Champion Adversary Template. The mutant bear's skill score for its attacks should be 13+ (or 13/18/23), and its attacks should deal 8 damage on an Average hit. Its skill score for defensive checks such as Dodge *should be 15+. Finally, reading across the wound categories, the mutant bear should have 2 light wound boxes, 2 moderate wound boxes, 2 severe wound boxes and 2 mortal wound boxes, arranged as shown:*

(13+ dmg)	☐	*dead*
(13+ dmg)	☐	*critical wound*
(10 to 12 dmg)	☐☐	*severe wound*
(7 to 9 dmg)	☐☐	*moderate wound*
(1 to 6 dmg)	☐☐	*light wound*

That's a lot of bear!

MINION

Minions are a special category of adversary. These are the simple grunts and cannon fodder. Individually, they aren't much of a threat to most heroes, but they are dangerous in larger numbers. Because they are intended to be used in large numbers, they have special rules for attacks and damage.

- Minions have one hit box. Any hit that penetrates armor defeats a minion.
- An Average hit from a minion's attack overcomes armor equal to 1 plus half its level. An Excellent hit overcomes armor equal to 5 plus half the minion's level.
- When a minion hits a target and overcomes the target's armor, that target takes a 1-damage wound.
- Stellar hits from minions deal only one wound, not two, but they ignore armor.

Minions have suggested attack and defense values, just like other adversaries. However, they don't need durability or damage entries. Instead, they have the following characteristic:

Armor Penetration: This is the resistance value of armor the minion's attack overcomes.

When you use minions, include something with an area effect in your set design; see Chapter 7.

MINION ADVERSARY TEMPLATE

Level	Attack	Defense	Armor Penetration
1	16	16	1
2	15	16	2
3	14	15	2
4	13	15	3
5	12	14	3
6	11	14	4
7	10	13	4
8	9	13	5
9	8	12	5
10	7	12	6

STANDARD ADVERSARY TEMPLATE

Level	Attack	Defense	Light Wound	Moderate Wound	Severe Wound	Critical/ Mortal Wd.	Damage
1	16	16	☐ 1–3	☐ 4–6	☐ 7–9	☐ 10+	5 / 9
2	15	16	☐ 1–4	☐ 5–7	☐ 8–10	☐ 11+	5 / 9
3	14	15	☐ 1–5	☐ 6–8	☐ 9–11	☐ 12+	6 / 10
4	13	15	☐ 1–6	☐ 7–9	☐ 10–12	☐ 13+	6 / 10
5	12	14	☐ 1–7	☐ 8–10	☐ 11–13	☐ 14+	7 / 11
6	11	14	☐ 1–8	☐ 9–11	☐ 12–14	☐ 15+	7 / 11
7	10	13	☐ 1–9	☐ 10–12	☐ 13–15	☐ 16+	8 / 12
8	9	13	☐ 1–10	☐ 11–13	☐ 14–15	☐ 16+	8 / 12
9	8	12	☐ 1–11	☐ 12–14	☐ 15	☐ 16+	9 / 13
10	7	12	☐ 1–12	☐ 13–15	☐ 16+	☐ 16+	9 / 13
11	6	11	☐ 1–12	☐ 13–15	☐ 16+	☐ 16+	10 / 14
12	5	10	☐ 1–12	☐ 13–15	☐ 16+	☐ 16+	11 / 15
13	4	9	☐ 1–12	☐ 13–15	☐ 16+	☐ 16+	12 / 16

CHAMPION ADVERSARY TEMPLATE

Level	Attack	Defense	Light Wound	Moderate Wound	Severe Wound	Critical/ Mortal Wd.	Damage
1	16	16	☐☐ 1–3	☐☐ 4–6	☐☐ 7–9	☐☐ 10+	7 / 11
2	15	16	☐☐ 1–4	☐☐ 5–7	☐☐ 8–10	☐☐ 11+	7 / 11
3	14	15	☐☐ 1–5	☐☐ 6–8	☐☐ 9–11	☐☐ 12+	8 / 12
4	13	15	☐☐ 1–6	☐☐ 7–9	☐☐ 10–12	☐☐ 13+	8 / 12
5	12	14	☐☐ 1–7	☐☐ 8–10	☐☐ 11–13	☐☐ 14+	9 / 13
6	11	14	☐☐ 1–8	☐☐ 9–11	☐☐ 12–14	☐☐ 15+	9 / 13
7	10	13	☐☐ 1–9	☐☐ 10–12	☐☐ 13–15	☐☐ 16+	10 / 14
8	9	13	☐☐ 1–10	☐☐ 11–13	☐☐ 14–15	☐☐ 16+	10 / 14
9	8	12	☐☐ 1–11	☐☐ 12–14	☐☐ 15	☐☐ 16+	11 / 15
10	7	12	☐☐ 1–12	☐☐ 13–15	☐☐ 16+	☐☐ 16+	11 / 15
11	6	11	☐☐ 1–13	☐☐☐ 14–15	☐☐ 16+	☐ 16+	12 / 16
12	5	10	☐☐☐ 1–14	☐☐ 15–16	☐☐ 16+	☐ 16+	12 / 16
13	4	9	☐☐☐ 1–15	☐☐☐ 16+	☐ 16+	☐ 16+	13 / 17

BOSS ADVERSARY TEMPLATE

Level	Attack	Defense	Light Wound	Moderate Wound	Severe Wound	Critical/ Mortal Wd.	Damage
1	16	16	☐☐☐☐ 1–3	☐☐☐☐ 4–6	☐☐☐☐ 7–9	☐☐☐☐ 10+	7 / 11
2	15	16	☐☐☐☐ 1–4	☐☐☐☐ 5–7	☐☐☐☐ 8–10	☐☐☐☐ 11+	7 / 11
3	14	15	☐☐☐☐ 1–5	☐☐☐☐ 6–8	☐☐☐☐ 9–11	☐☐☐☐ 12+	8 / 12
4	13	15	☐☐☐☐ 1–6	☐☐☐☐ 7–9	☐☐☐☐ 10–12	☐☐☐☐ 13+	8 / 12
5	12	14	☐☐☐☐ 1–7	☐☐☐☐ 8–10	☐☐☐☐ 11–13	☐☐☐☐ 14+	9 / 13
6	11	14	☐☐☐☐ 1–8	☐☐☐☐ 9–11	☐☐☐☐ 12–14	☐☐☐☐ 15+	9 / 13
7	10	13	☐☐☐☐ 1–9	☐☐☐☐ 10–12	☐☐☐☐ 13–14	☐☐☐☐ 16+	10 / 14
8	9	13	☐☐☐☐ 1–10	☐☐☐☐ 11–13	☐☐☐☐ 14–16	☐☐☐☐ 16+	10 / 14
9	8	12	☐☐☐☐ 1–11	☐☐☐☐ 12–14	☐☐☐☐ 15–16	☐☐☐☐ 16+	11 / 15
10	7	12	☐☐☐☐ 1–12	☐☐☐☐ 13–15	☐☐☐☐ 16+	☐☐☐☐ 16+	11 / 15
11	6	11	☐☐☐☐ 1–13	☐☐☐☐ 14–15	☐☐☐☐ 16+	☐☐☐☐ 16+	12 / 16
12	5	10	☐☐☐☐ 1–14	☐☐☐☐ 15	☐☐☐☐ 16+	☐☐☐☐ 16+	12 / 16
13	4	9	☐☐☐☐ 1–15	☐☐☐☐ 16+	☐☐☐☐ 16+	☐☐☐☐ 16+	13 / 17

CREATURE TYPE

A creature's type describes its basic nature: Is it an animal that evolved on some world, a human (or human-like alien), a mechanical creation like a robot, or something else altogether? Type determines a creature's innate vulnerabilities and resistances—for example, animals need to breathe, and mechanisms don't.

Animal: Animals are living creatures that move, eat, and respire. They are not sentient and don't use tools or weapons. Most animals have Intelligence scores of 0 (instinct only) or 1 (animal), resulting in a check score of 20+ or 19+ respectively.

Enigma: An enigma is alive, but has bizarre or nonorganic life processes. It is immune to effects that work on ordinary biochemistry (poison, for example) and may not need to breathe.

Humanoid: A living creature reasonably close to human in intelligence, tool use, and ability to communicate.

Mechanism: Artificial beings that are not alive. They do not need to breathe and are immune to effects that require living biochemistry, but they require power in the form of fuel, charge cells, or internal generators.

(Alien): This descriptor is added to a creature that is not descended from Earthly lifeforms. Characters unfamiliar with its native ecosystem take a -2 step penalty to interact with the creature.

APPENDIX 1: PSIONICS

Mental powers such as telepathy, ESP, telekinesis and other strange abilities are commonplace in some settings, rare in others and completely absent from many more. Heroes armed with psionic abilities can be perfect spies, undetectable assassins or near-omniscient directors and controllers. No secret is safe from a spy who can read minds; no VIP is protected from an enemy who can compel a bodyguard to fire a weapon with a mere thought.

Mental powers aren't part of every *ALTERNITY* game. They're a great fit for a wide-open space opera with hundreds of potentially psionic alien races or a modern-day conspiracy campaign touching on paranormal situations, but they might seem out of place in a post-apocalyptic or hard sci-fi environment. Deciding whether to include psionics is an important point of world-building for the GM.

PSIONICS IN PLAY

A character's psionic ability consists of **psionic skills** and **psionic talents**. Any character or creature that has at least 1 skill point in a psionic skill or possesses a psionic talent is considered **psionic**; all other characters and creatures are **nonpsionic**. Powerful psionic characters have a lot of skill points and talent selections invested in psionic options, while characters with little ability—say, occasional premonitions of danger or an uncanny knack for sensing a lie— might have only a handful of points in a single psionic skill.

To use a psionic ability in a combat or challenge scene, you need to make a skill check against the appropriate psionic skill. If your check succeeds, you activate or perform the psionic action you are attempting. (The things you can do with psionic skills are covered in the skill descriptions.) If your check fails, you can't successfully initiate your psionic power.

You can use psionic skills as often as you like, but some uses of your ability require exceptional effort and might lead to psionic fatigue (see below).

PSIONIC EFFORT AND PSIONIC FATIGUE

Many uses of psionics are fairly routine; a telepath can quickly send a thought to a nearby friend as easily as he or she might speak to that person, while a psychokinetic can scoop a coin off a table just by taking an action to do so. However, serious displays of mental power such as taking control of an enemy's mind or lifting a car out of a swamp require **psionic effort**. After attempting to use a psionic skill that requires effort, you must make a **fatigue check** (your choice of a *Resilience* or *Willpower* check).

On a failed fatigue check, you increase your psionic fatigue by 1 level.

0	No fatigue
1	Mild: –1 step penalty to all psionic skill checks and fatigue checks.
2	Moderate: –2 step penalty to all psionic skill checks and fatigue checks.
3	Severe: –3 step penalty to all psionic skill checks and fatigue checks. You suffer a psionic wound of 1d6 damage.
4	Brain Burn: As severe, but you suffer a psionic wound of 2d6 damage instead of 1d6, and you cannot expend effort until you reduce your psionic fatigue level.

Recovering From Fatigue: At the end of any scene in which you have at least 1 level of fatigue, you can attempt a new fatigue check to reduce your fatigue by 1 level. In addition, when you rest at least 8 hours, you reduce your fatigue level by 1 and can make a fatigue check to reduce your fatigue by an additional level.

PSIONIC COMBAT

Psionic attacks fall into two broad categories: psychokinetic attacks and telepathic attacks.

Psychokinetic attacks are real manifestations of physical force or energy. The target's armor (if any) resists psychokinetic attacks normally—a telekinetic punch deals physical damage, while a pyrokinetic burst deals energy damage. Psychokinetic attacks are invisible; no visible energy connects the attacker and target. However, a character launching an attack is clearly concentrating on *something* at the moment of the attack, and the effects on the target may be obvious. Psychokinetic attacks can pass through any medium unless stated otherwise, but the attacker must have line of sight to the target.

Telepathic attacks are intangible strikes of projected thought and can affect only living creatures. They are not physical and directly affect the target's consciousness. Like psychokinetic attacks, they are invisible and can pass through any medium. The attacker must have line of sight to the target or otherwise be able to perceive the mind of the target (for example, a live video connection to a target who is close enough to be within range of the attack or hearing someone speak on the other side of a door).

PSIONIC INJURY

Wounds inflicted by telepathic attack work just like wounds inflicted by other attacks and force the target to mark off wound boxes normally: You can defeat a badly wounded target with your mind blasts more easily than you can defeat a fresh foe. However, you can choose whether your psionic attack is lethal or nonlethal after you roll for damage.

Some psionic attacks inflict harmful conditions as well as damage—for example, temporary insanity or paralyzing fear. You can attempt to recover from a psionically inflicted condition by spending 1 impulse to make a *Willpower* check unless stated otherwise by the effect.

PSIONIC SKILLS

Four skills serve as the gateway to psionic powers: *ESP*, *Mind Over Body*, *Psychokinesis* and *Telepathy*. These skills work like other skills in the game, except you can't attempt a skill check with a psionic skill if you're not psionic.

Skill	Key Ability
ESP	Focus/Personality
Mind Over Body	Focus
Psychokinesis	Intelligence
Telepathy	Intelligence/Personality

When you make a check using a psionic skill, you can choose to expend psionic effort. If you do, you gain a +3 step bonus to that skill check. Some skills might suggest other ways to expend effort.

ESP

Extra-sensory perception allows you to perceive things you shouldn't be able to perceive: distant people or places, psychic impressions left behind by past stress or trauma, or glimpses of the future. When you assign a skill point to *ESP*, choose one of the following specialties: premonition, psychic history or remote viewing. You gain a +1 step bonus to *ESP* checks in your field of specialization.

Premonition: You can make an *ESP* check at the beginning of an adventure to determine the strength and usefulness of your premonitions. At any point during the adventure, you can "spend" your premonition as a free action to gain a bonus on a check you make or inflict a penalty on a check an opponent makes against you. The value of the premonition bonus (or penalty) depends on the success of your *ESP* check: 3 steps (Average), 4 steps (Excellent) or 5 steps (Stellar).

You can tie your premonition to another character who is well known to you, in which case you decide when to grant that character the premonition bonus (or penalty to someone acting against that character). However, you must be able to convey a quick warning to the subject of your premonition to grant the bonus, so they must be able to hear you, and you can't be unconscious when the moment arrives.

You can expend effort to continue a premonition after you use its bonus or penalty. In effect, spending effort buys you a second (or third or fourth) use of the premonition bonus. You can also expend effort to create a new premonition in an adventure after you use up the original one.

Psychic History: Use *ESP* to read a place or object for psychic impressions. You must physically handle the object or be in the location you're examining to make a check. In general, impressions are created only when people experience intense emotion in a place

or while holding or using an object; the more powerful the emotion, the stronger the impression. For example, a gun used occasionally for target shooting has a much weaker psychic impression than one used to commit murder. Impressions fade over time, so long-ago events are "weaker" than more recent ones.

Your success level determines the amount of information you gain:

- *Average Success:* You gain a sense of the emotions or personality involved, such as "A woman met her death bravely in this room," or "This watch belonged to a remorseless killer driven by a compulsive disorder."
- *Excellent Success:* You gain a strong image (or other sensory signature) of the person who left the impression sufficient enough to recognize him or her later.
- *Stellar Success:* You "see" the event that caused the impression as if you'd been there in person.

Old impressions call for a penalty of –1 step (a year or so) to –5 steps (many centuries). Strong impressions provide a bonus of +1 step (a single death) to +3 steps (thousands of deaths). Most ordinary objects and places retain no readable psychic history at all.

Remote Viewing: Use your *ESP* to view a distant scene in your mind's eye as if you were there. On a successful check, you observe the target location for 3 impulses (and you are distracted from your actual location). You can continue observing by making another *ESP* check; you gain a +2 step bonus to keep watching a location you are already watching. The success level of your check indicates the quality of your view:

- *Average Success:* You "see" the site as if you are at very long range (200 meters). You can identify vehicles and note the presence of people without identifying them.
- *Excellent Success:* You "see" the site as if you are at medium range (10 meters). You can recognize individuals and obvious emotions or actions.
- *Stellar Success:* You "see" the site as if you are adjacent to it (2 meters). You can read documents or computer screens in view.

You must be familiar with the site you are attempting to view or able to make an informed guess about it. For example, you can attempt to view "the bridge of that starship over there" because you know it has a bridge, but you can't view "whatever's on the other side of this hatch" because you don't know what might be in that compartment. You can view a spot you've seen a picture of (for example, a postcard) or even a town you know just by a name on a map. You gain a +2 step bonus if you are very familiar with the target, and a –2

step penalty if the only thing you know is a name. You can't target people; you have to target a site you know something about (so you can't try to view "Tyrant Gannel's secret hideout, wherever that is.")

Remote viewing works at extreme ranges: close range is 10 kilometers, medium is 100 km, long is 1,000 km, very long is 10,000 km and extreme is 100 AU (a star system).

MIND OVER BODY

You possess an uncanny ability to control your body with your mind. You can perform incredible feats of balance, endure extreme conditions or even staunch your wounds.

Adaptation: At rank 2, your mastery of this psionic skill grants you a +1 step bonus on any *Endurance* check you must make. The bonus improves to +2 steps at rank 5 and +3 steps at rank 8. You can expend psionic effort to increase these bonuses by +3 steps.

Balance: At rank 1, your uncanny balance grants you a +1 step bonus on any *Acrobatics* or *Dodge* check you attempt. This bonus improves to +2 steps at rank 3, +3 steps at rank 6 and +4 steps at rank 9. You can expend psionic effort to increase these bonuses by +3 steps.

Movement: At rank 4, increase the distance of any jump you attempt by 50 percent. This bonus improves to 100 percent at rank 7 and 200 percent at rank 10. You can expend psionic effort to double this bonus.

Self-healing: You can attempt a *Mind Over Body* check to reduce wound penalties for the duration of the scene by 1, 2 or 3 steps for an Average, Excellent or Stellar result. If you expend effort, you also heal 1, 2 or 3 wound boxes depending on your success level.

PSYCHOKINESIS

You can move distant objects with the power of your mind. You can levitate objects far heavier than you could normally lift, turn a small object into a dangerous missile, or seize your enemies with invisible force and hold them motionless.

Psychokinesis observes the normal range categories and penalties; it's easier to pick up something close to you than something far away. In addition, you can affect multiple targets at once with a penalty of –1 step for each additional object. At the GM's discretion, a number of small but similar objects (a drawer full of silverware or a pile of gravel) count as just one object as long as you're moving them together. You can operate devices with complex moving parts (for example, aiming and firing a gun you're levitating) with an additional –2 step penalty to your *Psychokinesis* check.

If you try to grab something another creature is holding, make an opposed check (your *Psychokinesis* versus your opponent's

Athletics). You must win the check to yank the target object away from your opponent.

Lift: Make a *Psychokinesis* check to move an object within range. Your success level dictates how far you can move the object; up to 5 meters (Average), 20 meters (Excellent) or 50 meters (Stellar). If you don't set down the object before your next action, you must make a new *Psychokinesis* check to continue lifting it.

The mass of the target object adds a bonus or penalty to the check, as shown below.

<1 kg	+2 steps
1–10 kg	+1 step
10–100 kg	no modifier
100–250 kg	−1 step
250–500 kg	−2 steps
500–1,000 kg	−3 steps
1–2 tons	−4 steps
2–5 tons	−5 steps

Missile: Pick up something close by and hurl it as an attack at a target within long range. The missile must be 10 kg or less and within 10 meters of you. Your *Psychokinesis* check is your attack roll (normal range penalties apply). Your missile inflicts 1d6 + 0/4 physical damage if your attack succeeds; you can expend psionic effort to increase damage to 1d6 + 4/8. Some missiles might have additional effects—you can "throw" an armed grenade much further than you could with arm strength alone, or you can stick a hypodermic needle into a distant foe. At the GM's discretion, very soft or delicate objects might deal half damage or no damage at all when used as missiles.

Restrain: Make a *Psychokinesis* check to seize a creature or small vehicle with telekinetic force until your next action. The success level of your check determines how firmly you're holding the target:

- *Average Success:* Target speed is reduced by 50 percent, and the target takes a −2 step penalty on any physical skill check. The target can't aim, charge or dodge.
- *Excellent Success:* As above, but the target is immobilized.
- *Stellar Success:* As above, but the target can take no physical actions at all, and you can move the target up to 10 meters.

You are distracted while using *Psychokinesis* to restrain a creature.

A creature restrained by *Psychokinesis* can attempt an *Athletics* check as a 1-impulse action to struggle free. If the creature equals or beats your level of success, the restraint ends.

Massive targets are difficult to restrain; see Lift (above) for check modifiers based on the target weight. You gain a +1 step bonus to continue restraining a creature you are already restraining.

TELEPATHY

You can communicate with other creatures via direct mind-to-mind contact, read their thoughts or compel them to act as you direct. When you assign a skill point to *Telepathy*, choose one of the following specialties: contact, probe or suggestion. You gain a +1 step bonus to *Telepathy* checks in your field of specialization.

You can use *Telepathy* only on living creatures. You must be within range of the telepathic discipline you're using, and you must have line of sight to the target or be able to perceive its existence (for example, by engaging in a video conversation or hearing someone nearby).

You can affect multiple targets at once with a penalty of –1 step for each additional creature.

It's difficult to interact with creatures whose minds are very different from yours; you take a –1 step penalty to interact with a creature with an Intelligence of 1, and a –2 step penalty to interact with an Intelligence 0 creature. Truly mindless creatures such as plants or jellyfish just don't have nervous systems that harbor a mind, and you can't use *Telepathy* on them at all. In addition, minds that are very alien (GM's discretion) inflict an additional –2 step penalty to your check.

Contact: Make a *Telepathy* check to establish mind-to-mind communication with a creature you know or that you can see or perceive. The success level of your check indicates the clarity of your communication:

- *Average Success:* You can transmit a simple message and receive an answer. The message can't be more complex than 10 words (a single clear image or emotion counts as a "word").
- *Excellent Success:* You can exchange ideas as if holding a conversation with the target, including emotions or images as needed.
- *Stellar Success:* You can see through the target's eyes (or experience other senses) and allow the target to see through yours.

Telepathic contact is simply communication; you can't compel the target to act or read thoughts not directed at you, and non-sentient creatures are limited in their ability to understand you. If you don't share a language, you can still communicate effectively through images and emotions, although delivering precise instructions

may be difficult or impossible. Once you establish contact, you can remain in contact indefinitely or until you use *Telepathy* against a different target.

Telepathic contact can work at extreme ranges: close range is 10 kilometers, medium is 100 km, long is 1,000 km, very long is 10,000 km and extreme range is 100 AU (a star system).

Probe: Use your *Telepathy* skill to read someone's thoughts. The target must be within medium range. You normally perceive the target's thoughts until your next action, and you are distracted while doing so. You can continue reading the target's thoughts by making another *Telepathy* check.

The success level of your check indicates the quality of your view:

- *Average Success*: You can read surface thoughts (things the target thinks about often or is currently considering).
- *Excellent Success:* You can read guarded thoughts (things the target would not willingly reveal, even under duress) or any recent memories.
- *Stellar Success:* You can access old memories, as well as secrets the target has been conditioned or trained to protect (things the target would rather die than reveal).

The target may attempt an *Awareness* or *Telepathy* check to notice some force is attempting to discern its thoughts. You can expend psionic effort to cover your tracks, imposing a –3 step penalty on the target's check to notice your probe. If the target is on guard, your probe attempt becomes an opposed skill check (your *Telepathy* against the target's *Willpower*).

Suggestion: Use *Telepathy* to cause a creature within medium range to perform a task you direct it to perform, or otherwise influence your interaction with it. Creatures naturally resist foreign influences; the target counters your *Telepathy* check with a *Willpower* check. If your attempt fails, the target knows some outside force tried to influence it.

Creatures operating under a telepathic suggestion don't realize they are being influenced, and they react normally if interrupted in the task. For example, a creature carrying out a task you give it abandons that task and defends itself if attacked or stops immediately if someone challenges its actions.

The success level of your *Telepathy* check determines the duration and complexity of the suggestion you can implant:

- *Average Success* (1 action round): Distract a target, or cause it to perform a simple task it has no reason not to, such as waving an official-looking person through a checkpoint.

- *Excellent Success* (1 minute): Cause a target to perform a long task it might ordinarily take (start a coffee break, monitor an irrelevant screen) or a simple task it might not normally take (wave a suspicious individual through a checkpoint).
- *Stellar Success* (10 minutes)*:* Cause a target to perform a long, complex task it would not normally do (for example, open a gate for a delivery or go download a file to a USB drive when those aren't part of the target's job).

Targets ignore obviously violent or self-destructive suggestions. You can get a guard to distract or misinform a coworker, but you can't get her to shoot the guy.

MENTALIST ARCHETYPE

Your mind is your weapon. Your special gift makes you a prized asset for governments and corporations ... or a deadly threat to the powers that be. Whether you use your powers to enrich yourself or place them at the service of people who uphold the law and defend society, you are the object of fear and misunderstanding. Choose your friends wisely, because many people are eager to make use of your abilities, and their purposes may not be yours.

If you want to be a mentalist, make the following choices:

- *Initiative Bonus:* You have a +1 step bonus on initiative checks.
- *Mandated Talent:* Choose the Kinetic Control, Mental Combat or Psychic Intuition talent.
- *Discretionary Talents:* Choose two more talents. These two talents cannot be from the same constellation, but one of them *can* be from the same constellation as your mandated talent.
- *Mandated Skills:* Choose one skill in each of the following categories: attack, defense, psionic, social and environmental. Assign 4 skill points to each skill you select.
- *Discretionary Skills:* You have 15 more skill points to spend on additional skills or improve mandated skills. You can't begin play with more than 5 skill points in any individual skill.
- *Mental Power:* You have a +1 step bonus on skill checks to resist or recover from psionic fatigue.

PSIONIC TALENTS

Most psionic talents are available only to psionic characters. However, at the GM's discretion a nonpsionic character can select Mental Block (in settings where psionics are commonplace, training to resist telepathic attack is likewise common).

★**Kinetic Power:** You gain a +2 step bonus on all psionic fatigue checks. You must be trained in *Psychokinesis* to choose this talent.

Electrogeneration: You can generate electrical current to run devices that run on batteries, power cells or electrical power systems. Your check result determines how long the device runs: 3 impulses, 1 round or the duration of the scene for an Average/Excellent/Stellar result. The object mass step modifiers described in the Lift function of *Psychokinesis* apply to your skill check.

Kinetic Block: You can use a reaction to make a *Psychokinesis* check when you are hit by an attack that deals physical damage. Reduce the damage by 3, 6 or 9 for an Average, Excellent or Stellar success. Each additional block you attempt in a scene takes a cumulative –1 step penalty.

Levitation: You can use telekinesis to fly. As a 3-impulse action, make a *Psychokinesis* check; you can fly 5 m, 20 m or 50 m for an Average, Excellent or Stellar success. If you begin your turn in mid-air, you must expend psionic effort to remain aloft, or you fall.

Pyrokinesis: You can expend psionic effort and use your *Psychokinesis* skill to accelerate molecular motion, causing something to become blisteringly hot or even burst into flames. Choose a single target or an area. If you choose a single target, this is an attack based on your *Psychokinesis* skill (range long; speed 4; damage 1d10 + 2/6 energy; target must succeed at a *Dodge* check or catch fire). If you choose an area, you create 6-meter burst within long range. Your *Psychokinesis* check determines the damage of the blast: 1d6 + 2/5/8 energy for an Average, Excellent or Stellar success.

★**Mental Block:** Enemies suffer a –2 step penalty to *Telepathy* checks and attacks that target you. You must be trained in *Telepathy* to choose this talent.

Compulsion: When you achieve a Stellar success on a *Telepathy* check to implant a suggestion in a target, you can force the target to take an action that it would normally be violently opposed to taking (attacking an ally or opening an airlock, for example).

Mind Bolt: You can launch a bolt of mental force that suppresses or destroys the target's consciousness. This is an attack based on your *Telepathy* skill (target living creatures only; range medium; speed 3; damage 1d8 +0/5; ignores target armor). If you incapacitate a target with mind bolt, you can decide whether it is lethal or nonlethal damage.

↪**Long-Range Bolt:** Increase the range of your mind bolt attack to very long.

↪**Powerful Bolt:** Increase your mind bolt damage by 1.

↪**Stunning Bolt:** When you successfully attack a target with your mind bolt, you can expend psionic effort to stun the target. The target must make a *Willpower* check or become stunned for 3 impulses. If your attack reached an Excellent (or Stellar) success level, the target takes a –1 step (or –2 step) penalty on its *Willpower* check.

Mind Shield: Reduce damage you suffer from mind bolt attacks (or similar effects) by 3.

Unleash Fear: You cause the target to perceive the thing he or she most fears. This is an attack based on your *Telepathy* skill (target living creatures only; range medium; speed 3). On a successful attack, the target must make a *Willpower* check or gain the insane condition. Your success level modifies the target's *Willpower* check: –2 steps if your success is Excellent or –4 steps if your success is Stellar.

★**Psychic Intuition:** When someone observes you, you can attempt an *ESP* check to notice their attention even if you could not otherwise see them (for example, if you are being watched through a hidden camera or by remote viewing). On an Excellent success, you gain a general sense of who's watching you and how; on a Stellar success, you know exactly who and where they are. If you want, you can end a remote viewing attempt against you when you notice it.

You must be trained in *ESP* to choose this talent.

Remind your GM you have this ability from time to time. You don't know when to use it.

Living History: You can use *ESP* to search the psychic history of a living creature in your presence, not just an object or place. You must choose a specific event the creature was present for; if you don't specify something, you instead gain a glimpse of the most powerful event in that creature's life. You can often see things the subject does not recall or was unaware of at the time.

Powerful Premonitions: You gain a +2 step bonus on *ESP* checks to gain a premonition.

Psychic Search: You can choose to target a person instead of a place when you use remote viewing. You must know the person you're looking for or have a photo (or other image) of them. If your *ESP* check succeeds, you recognize the target's location if you are already familiar with it; otherwise you gain only a rough sense of distance and general direction to the target.

APPENDIX 2: SHIPS AND VEHICLES

From *Mad Max*'s Pursuit Special to the starship *Enterprise*, vehicles and ships are part of *ALTERNITY*'s DNA. Players love acquiring them, upgrading them, and performing stunts with them that their manufacturers never imagined. Starships in particular are complex enough to warrant their own sourcebook (the forthcoming *Shipyard*), but a brief overview here should get the characters moving.

Before we proceed, a quick terminology note: for our purposes, the difference between a **vehicle** and a **ship** is that a ship includes living/sleeping quarters, but a vehicle doesn't. Of course you *can* sleep in a car, but it wasn't designed for that. Another way to understand the difference is to think of it in terms of set design. If the *ALTERNITY* film in your head uses just one or two camera angles for your character, it's a vehicle. (A jet fighter is a good example.) If the characters are moving around within it and you'd build it like a set, then it's a ship (the *Millennium Falcon* falls into this category).

For purposes of the rules below, any time we say "vehicle," we mean both ships and vehicles.

ACTION SCENES WITH SHIPS AND VEHICLES

Heroes get into all sorts of trouble with their vehicles. To design an action scene where vehicles are prominent, first answer a fundamental question: Is vehicle position in this scene absolute or relative?

- **Absolute:** Each vehicle moves its speed in meters when its operator takes the control action (see below). Distances are measured in absolute terms, just like they are in non-vehicle combat scenes.
- **Relative:** Positions are described in general terms from a key vehicle (usually the one the heroes are in). Operators use the control action (see below) to increase or decrease their distance from the key vehicle, and the stationary terrain (buildings, starports, etc.) is an abstracted background that the vehicles are maneuvering through.

If you're trying to build a classic starfighter dogfight or car chase, then relative position feels more cinematic. Absolute position works best when there's only one vehicle in the scene, when vehicles are mixed with people on foot, or when the vehicles are mostly being used to arrive or depart from the scene entirely.

Absolute Distance: Absolute position is straightforward—if a marauder's dune buggy is 300 meters away and it's moving at a speed of 100 meters, it moves 100 meters closer or further away when

the operator acts. If you can jump 6 meters and the marauder's buggy is 5 meters away, you can board it. If your weapon has a range of 200 meters and the marauder is 220 meters away, it's too far away to hit.

Relative Distance: Relative position is deliberately imprecise. All that matters is the "cinematic" distance between the **key vehicle** (generally the heroes' vehicle) and each of the other vehicles involved in the scene. Relative position is described as **immediate**, **near**, or **far**.

- *Immediate:* The vehicles are side-by-side, bumper-to-bumper, or right on the other one's tail. They're close enough to collide with each other or for particularly brave characters to leap from one to another.
- *Near:* The vehicles are a couple of seconds apart. Some personal ranged attacks may be possible.
- *Far:* The vehicles are about ten seconds apart.

If a vehicle gets farther than Far from the key vehicle in the scene, it's no longer part of the scene—either it escaped, or the key vehicle did.

The exact distance represented by immediate, near, and far varies with the kind of vehicles involved in the scene. For a modern-day car chase, it might be 5 meters, 100 meters, and 300 meters. In an asteroid-field starfighter duel, those distances could be 1 kilometer, 5 kilometers, and 20 kilometers. Characters with personal weapons can take shots at enemies in a car chase, but pistols won't be terribly effective unless you're right on the other guy's bumper ... and if you're in jet fighters screaming along at supersonic speeds, personal weapons are pretty much not a factor.

CONTROLLING VEHICLES

Most vehicles need someone at the controls to direct the vehicle's movement. You must keep a vehicle under control, or it becomes uncontrolled. To control a vehicle:

- Use the control action and make a skill check (usually *Driving* or *Piloting*, depending on the kind of vehicle), or add the maintain control action modifier when you take a different action.
- You must use the control action and make the skill check at least once every other action (in other words, half the actions you take in the scene must be the control action).
- Your vehicle becomes uncontrolled if you do anything other than use the control action or an action combined with the maintain control action modifier, take a second consecutive action other than control, or fail the appropriate skill check.

CONTROL (3 IMPULSES)

Drive, fly, or otherwise guide a vehicle you're operating. You must make a *Driving* or *Piloting* skill check, as appropriate.

Absolute Movement: Any successful check means the vehicle moves in the direction and speed you intend, subject to the dictates of physics and common sense. *ALTERNITY* isn't so granular that you need to worry about a vehicle's exact performance details; just be reasonable about pushing the limits of the vehicle's maneuverability.

Relative Movement: Your ability to alter your position relative to the key vehicle (or, if you're in the key vehicle, relative to all other vehicles) depends on the results of your *Driving* or *Piloting* check:

- On a **failure**, you lose control of the vehicle at least temporarily. The vehicle has the uncontrolled condition.
- On an **Average** success, you maintain position relative to the other vehicles in the scene.
- On an **Excellent** success, you can increase or decrease the distance to other vehicles by one category. If the distance is already immediate, then decreasing the distance allows you to make a ram attack (described below). If the distance is already far, then increasing the distance removes one of the vehicles from the scene.
- On a **Stellar** success, you can increase or decrease the range to other vehicles by one category, and other vehicles who try to alter the range in the other direction before your next action suffer a –2 step penalty on their *Driving* or *Piloting* checks.

The operator makes checks only during an action scene. There's no chance of going uncontrolled during routine travel.

Maintain Control (Action Modifier): Keep one hand on the wheel or the stick while you do something unrelated to operating your vehicle (for example, shooting a pistol out the window or interacting with your smart phone). Add a 1-impulse delay to your next action. Your vehicle remains under control until your next action (which must be the control action, or else your vehicle becomes uncontrolled).

VEHICLE CONDITIONS

If a vehicle is **uncontrolled**, everyone in or on the vehicle suffers a –1 step penalty to *Driving* and *Piloting* checks and any attacks. This condition lasts until an operator gets at least an Average success to regain control (or the vehicle crashes into something and becomes halted).

If a vehicle is **halted,** it's not moving. If you're using relative position, other operators gain a +5 step bonus on checks to increase or decrease distance. If you're using absolute position, then the halted vehicle's speed is 0. This condition lasts until an operator takes a control action to get the vehicle moving (whether the skill check is successful or not). Its ability to regain speed is limited to the acceleration given in the vehicle description.

Momentum: If you're using relative position, the system already accounts for an uncontrolled vehicle continuing forward while it swerves, veers, or drifts. If you're using absolute position, an uncontrolled vehicle continues on its existing course and speed every third impulse, subject to common sense and the prevailing terrain. When the vehicle contacts something sizable, it crashes and becomes halted.

OTHER OPERATOR ACTIONS

While most operators concentrate on control actions, other options exist. You must spend half your actions driving, but you can find moments to do other things on alternating actions ... as long as you aren't suddenly required to avoid a hazard or attempt to regain control.

Attack: Whether firing a pistol out the window or launching a nacelle-mounted grav-torpedo, attacks follow the normal rules outlined in Chapter 5.

Activate/Deactivate Autopilot: This 1-impulse action, generally available on vehicles of TE 7 or higher, switches the vehicle from operator control to autonomous control. While the autopilot is active, whomever is sitting at the controls is free to take other actions. The autopilot takes the control action whenever it needs to, automatically scoring an Average success. If the vehicle is uncontrolled, activating the autopilot brings it back under control in 1d3 impulses.

Stunt: Operators can make matters more difficult for other drivers by using berms as makeshift ramps, swerving into oncoming traffic, or flying just a few meters above the hull of a dreadnought. A stunt attempt works like a normal control action, except that you voluntarily accept a –1 step penalty to your check. If your *Driving* or *Piloting* check succeeds, then other vehicle operators attempting to match your maneuver (or maintain their relative position) suffer a –3 step penalty on their next *Driving* or *Piloting* check.

A stunt isn't always available; sometimes there isn't enough oncoming traffic to make it a sufficient challenge. See the Dynamic Environments section below for the timing on stunt opportunities.

RAMMING ATTACKS

If a vehicle reaches zero range (or immediate distance in relative position), its operator can ram another vehicle by attempting a *Driving* or *Piloting* check at a –2 step penalty. Doing so deals damage to the target vehicle equal to the ramming vehicle's ram damage, and the ramming vehicle takes damage equal to the target vehicle's ram damage, –3. If the operators of both vehicles were trying to decrease range (and it's thus more of a head-on collision), then the ram deals double damage boxes to both vehicles.

On a Stellar success with a ram attack, the target vehicle takes double ram damage—or triple ram damage if it's a head-on collision.

ATTACKING VEHICLE OCCUPANTS

If an attacker can see occupants of a vehicle (including the operator), they're subject to attack. On the defensive side of the equation, most vehicles provide some semblance of cover as noted in the vehicle descriptions. Occupants cannot usually take the evade action modifier.

ATTACKING THE VEHICLE ITSELF

Vehicles take damage just like characters do. When a vehicle is "wounded," the step penalty applies to any *Driving* or *Piloting* checks the operator makes. Attacks made by occupants of the vehicle don't suffer that step penalty, but if the vehicle becomes uncontrolled because the *Driving* checks got too difficult, then attackers *are* penalized by that condition.

When a vehicle is destroyed, its occupants sustain Falling and Impact damage (see Chapter 6) based on the speed the vehicle was going when it was destroyed. At TE 6 and 7, reduce the impact severity by one level; at TE 8 or higher, reduce it by two levels. Airbags and far-future safety features make a big difference!
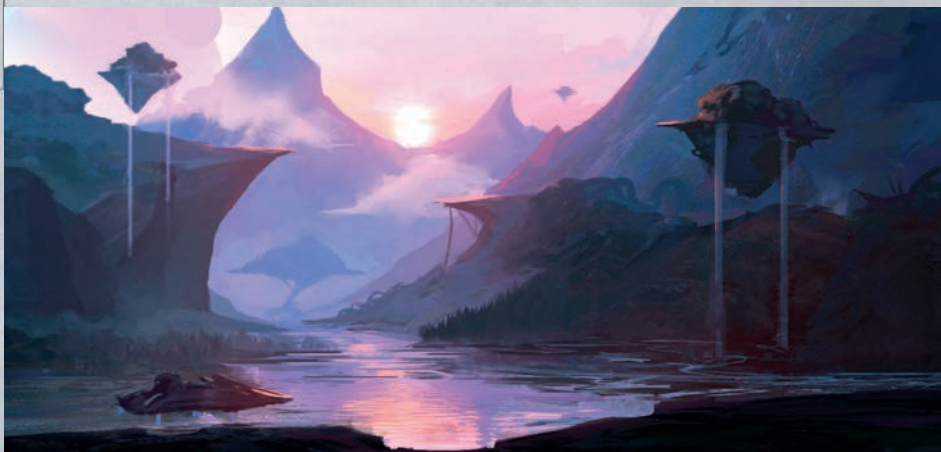
DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENTS

Once you've decided on absolute or relative position, then answer a second fundamental question: Where is the scene taking place?

The key to a satisfying action scene with vehicles is creating a dynamic environment that changes as the heroes traverse it. Your description of the passing landscape each round makes the action scene seem more real. Tell the players what kind of building their characters are driving past, what sort of starship debris they're maneuvering around, and what the holo-billboard they just careened through was advertising.

It's useful to think of the vehicle environment like you would the set design for a ground combat scene. Just as empty rooms and flat plains are boring for *ALTERNITY* ground combat, featureless deep space or empty highways aren't interesting for vehicle combat. Heroes need environmental elements to move through or around: asteroids, rush-hour hovercar traffic, dust clouds, or even a nearby gas giant (and its attendant gravity well) to provide a little challenge.

Try to make roughly half the results enable stunts, and half punish uncontrolled vehicles.

In general, a vehicle-based action scene begins with an environmental challenge at the start of the scene and changes to a new challenge each round after impulse 8. Typically the challenge gives operators a chance to attempt stunts or imposes extra difficulty or complications for all participants.

To determine what environmental challenge matters for the next round, choose or roll 1d10 on a table created for the encounter. Designing the table is the equivalent of doing the set design work for a ground-based action scene. Once you've done that, define immediate, near and far distance bands for relative movement.

To give you some ideas, here are tables for two quintessential vehicle scenes: a car chase through a present-day city and a dogfight that's part of a wider engagement between two massive starfleets.

MODERN-DAY DOWNTOWN CAR CHASE

(immediate 0–10 m, near 11–50 m, far 51–200 m)

d10	Environmental Challenge
1	**Knot of traffic.** All *Driving* checks suffer –1 step penalty. Stunts (tight passing) are available.
2	**Police join the chase.** Add 1d3 motorcycles or sedans chasing all operators, unless one side is already aligned with law enforcement.
3	**Gridlock.** All *Driving* checks suffer –1 step penalty, and failed checks on the control action result in the vehicle halting.
4	**Streets narrow.** Stunts (alley driving) are available. At end of next impulse 8, all uncontrolled vehicles collide with a building, suffering ram damage and coming to a halt.
5	**Pedestrians get in the way.** Operators can choose to take a –1 step penalty and avoid them, or heartlessly mow them down.
6	**Construction zone.** Stunts (jumps) are available. At end of next impulse 8, all uncontrolled vehicles crash into construction barriers or equipment, suffering ram damage and coming to a halt.
7	**Minor obstacles** (wooden barriers, café tables, etc.) cause cosmetic/collateral damage. Stunts (tight maneuvering) are available.
8	**Large truck backing up.** At end of next impulse 8, all uncontrolled vehicles crash into it, suffering ram damage and coming to a halt.
9	**Slippery pavement** (ice, water, or oil). All *Driving* checks suffer –1 penalty.
10	**Fruit cart!** First failed *Driving* check this round collides with the cart, sending produce everywhere and bringing vehicle to a halt.

FLEET BATTLE DOGFIGHT

(immediate 0–500 m, near 500 m – 2 km, far 2 km – 10 km)

d10	Environmental Challenge
1	**Intervening debris.** All attacks from one vehicle to another suffer –1 step penalty.
2	**Disintegrating wreck.** Stunts (close flyby) are available. At end of next impulse 8, all uncontrolled vehicles crash into the wreckage, suffering ram damage and coming to a halt.
3	**Indiscriminate laser barrage.** First failed *Piloting* check this round takes 2d8 energy damage.
4	**Grav-wake disturbance.** All *Piloting* checks suffer –1 step penalty.
5	**Two ships ram each other nearby.** Stunts (flying through the gap between them) are available. At end of next impulse 8, all uncontrolled vehicles join the collision, suffering ram damage and coming to a halt.
6	**Interceptors join the chase.** Add 1d3 interceptors to the scene, letting the prevailing situation or the dice determine whose side they're on.
7	**Massive ship changes course suddenly**. Stunts (flying along the hull) are available. At end of next impulse 8, all uncontrolled vehicles crash into the ship, suffering ram damage and coming to a halt.
8	**Capital ship dead ahead!** At end of next impulse 8, all uncontrolled vehicles crash into it, suffering ram damage and coming to a halt.
9	**Large debris field.** Stunts (weaving through the wreckage) are available. First failed *Piloting* check this round takes 1d8 physical damage.
10	**Stray homing missiles.** Each operator can accept a –1 penalty on *Piloting* checks to avoid the missiles, or ignore them and take 2d8 physical damage.

VEHICLES IN THE CAMPAIGN

In some *ALTERNITY* campaigns, vehicles exist only in the background, as conveyances to get the heroes from scene to scene. If that's true for your game, then give the heroes access to vehicles with a minimum of fuss. If you foresee lots of action scenes with vehicles or the player characters are keenly interested in them, here are a few ways to give them vehicles to call their own.

Special Reward: As described in the Property section in Chapter 7, characters can receive property—including vehicles—as a level-based reward. As long as you invent a story justification for vehicle ownership (financial windfall, special requisition from headquarters, built from spare parts, etc.), you don't need to worry about the exact sticker price of a vehicle.

Adventure Specific: If the heroes need a vehicle for the adventure, ensure they have access to one, but inform the players that it's not necessarily for the PCs to keep. If the players grow fond of the vehicle or find themselves working on ways to keep it, you have a new motivational tool.

"The Keys Were in It:" Sometimes the heroes abscond with a vehicle that doesn't belong to them, or they find one unattended in the aftermath of a battle. They can keep it as long as it's in good repair and neither the authorities nor the prior owner are able to recover it.

The maximum speeds rarely matter in an action sequence. What matters is the operator's skill within a dangerous, dynamic environment.

SAMPLE VEHICLES

Most *ALTERNITY* campaigns feature setting-specific vehicles—and the more specific, the better. Give your vehicles makes, models and reputations just as real-world cars and airplanes have. The following sample vehicles are just as jumping-off points for your own designs.

MOTORCYCLE

Tech Era 6
Speed Max 200 kph (330 m per action); accel/decel 50 m per action
Capacity 1 driver, 10 kg cargo
Cover None
Ram Damage 1d6 physical
Armor 4 physical, 2 energy
Durability

(7+ dmg)	☐	destroyed
(4 to 6 damage)	☐	–1 step penalty
(1 to 3 damage)	☐	

Features Nimble handling (+1 step on *Driving* checks for control action)
Reward Class Average

POLICE SEDAN

Tech Era 6
Speed Max 160 kph (270 m per action); accel/decel 30 m per action
Capacity 1 driver, 4 passengers, 250 kg cargo
Cover Heavy (−3 steps to enemy attacks)
Ram Damage 2d8 physical
Armor 7 physical, 3 energy
Durability

(16+ damage)	☐	destroyed
(13 to 15 damage)	☐	−3 step penalty
(10 to 12 damage)	☐☐	−2 step penalty
(7 to 9 damage)	☐☐	−1 step penalty
(1 to 6 damage)	☐☐	

Features Radio, dash-cam, computer
Reward Class Excellent

SPORTS CAR

Tech Era 6
Speed Max 190 kph (320 m per action); accel/decel 40 m per action
Capacity 1 driver, 1 passenger, 50 kg cargo
Cover Medium (−2 steps to enemy attacks)
Ram Damage 2d6 physical
Armor 5 physical, 2 energy
Durability

(16+ damage)	☐	destroyed
(13 to 15 damage)	☐	−3 step penalty
(10 to 12 damage)	☐	−2 step penalty
(7 to 9 damage)	☐☐	−1 step penalty
(1 to 6 damage)	☐☐	

Features Nimble handling (+1 step on *Driving* checks for control action),
   performance suspension (+1 step on *Driving* checks for stunts)
Reward Class Excellent

SPEEDER

Tech Era 7
Speed Max 250 kph (415 m per action); accel/decel 30 m per action
Capacity 1 pilot, 7 passengers, 500 kg cargo
Cover Heavy (−3 steps to enemy attacks)
Ram Damage 2d8 physical
Armor 5 physical, 3 energy
Durability

(16+ damage)	☐	destroyed
(13 to 15 damage)	☐	−3 step penalty
(10 to 12 damage)	☐☐	−2 step penalty
(7 to 9 damage)	☐☐	−1 step penalty
(1 to 6 damage)	☐☐	

Features Autopilot, communicator, computer linked to global data
network
Reward Class Excellent

INTERCEPTOR

Tech Era 8
Speed Max 6 g accel in space, max 3,000 kph in typical atmosphere
(4,800 m per action); accel/decel 400 m per action in atmosphere
Capacity 1 pilot, 1 gunner
Cover Total unless canopy opened; then Medium (–2 steps to enemy
attacks)
Ram Damage 2d10 physical
Armor 8 physical, 5 energy
Durability

(16+ dmg)	☐	destroyed
(16+ dmg)	☐	–3 step penalty
(13 to 15 dmg)	☐☐	–2 step penalty
(10 to 12 dmg)	☐☐	–1 step penalty
(1 to 9 dmg)	☐☐	

Features Autopilot, communicator, computer linked to global data
network, life support for 3 days, neutron cannon, z-missile
launcher
Reward Class Stellar

SHIPS

An *ALTERNITY* ship is transportation, but it's so much more than
that. Whether it's a tramp freighter, a stealth cruiser, or a vast capital
vessel, a ship is also a resource, a set for all sorts of scenes, and
quite probably the heroes' home base for the campaign.

SHIPS AS RESOURCES

For the heroes, the ship isn't just a means of transport. It's a pur-
veyor of goods and a dispenser of information, too—a sort of
Batcave where the PCs can do research, build high-tech gear, store
artifacts and mementos from their adventures. At a minimum, any
ship capable of a long voyage has certain basics:

- Food/water/air for a significant multiple of a typical journey.
- Mechanical and electronic tool sets, and at least some abil-
ity to fabricate new parts from raw materials as needed.
- A computer capable of complex navigation computation,
plus access to a Wikipedia-equivalent database of gen-
eral information. (In interstellar societies, this database

is updated automatically whenever a ship reaches a new system.)

- Leisure activities to keep the crew content and entertained.
- Emergency power (batteries and backup generators) to keep the ship functional for weeks.
- Emergency communicators capable of sending messages to orbit (if on a planet) or throughout the system (if in space).
- EVA suits or vacuum armor for the crew, plus significant extras.
- A dedicated sick bay or other medical area, plus emergency medical supplies stowed throughout the ship.

Beyond those basics, ships have further resources depending on their purpose. Trade ships have grav-sleds, exoskeleton lifters, and other means of loading/unloading their cargo. Exploration ships have scientific laboratories devoted to botany, geology, and other hard sciences, plus drones with an array of specialized sensors. Military vessels devote space to their armaments, shields and ordnance, plus sensor and communication options their civilian counterparts lack.

SHIPS AS SETS

Consider the various incarnations of *Star Trek*'s *Enterprise*. The bridge was a set used in almost every episode, even though full-fledged combat engagements were relatively rare. Likewise the sick bay, engineering and a scattering of other locations were key sets for decision, interaction and challenge scenes.

When a ship becomes prominent in your ongoing game, give extra attention to describing the setting for these scenes. The heroes should feel at home and be able to easily imagine themselves in various places on the ship. When the players are talking among themselves, a simple "Where on the ship are you guys right now?" snaps them into imagining the fictional world as they converse.

You can also use the ship as the set for an action scene, but if the players have a sentimental attachment to the ship, do so sparingly. Boarding actions can be riveting scenes, but some players don't like being attacked on their "home turf." If your table is amenable, though, use the set dressing elements described in Chapter 7 to define the basics, like how the hatches function, where the gravity controls are, and what happens when someone vents the crew quarters out into space.

SHIPS AS COMBATANTS

A ship-versus-ship battle, where the PCs are on the bridge operating various systems in concert, is beyond the scope of this book. Those action scenes—plus the rules for building your own ships—are covered in the *Shipyard* sourcebook. If you want to run the occasional scene where the PCs' ship is essentially the key combatant in a battle, use the following guidelines.

SHIPS WITH PERSONALITY

If the heroes' ship is important to your game, lavish attention on it. Give it personality—perhaps literally. If your setting includes artificial intelligence, then a ship can become an important NPC. In some ways a ship is the perfect GM-controlled companion for the players. It's an invaluable aid in the logistics of an adventure and can literally swoop in to save the day, but it doesn't compete with the players for the spotlight and doesn't mind fading into the background when it's time for the PCs to take center stage. Simply build the ship's AI like you would any other NPC. You can give the ship access to technical skills that the PCs lack, enabling exploration and investigation scenes that would otherwise be beyond the PCs' abilities. And if the ship is in the habit of flying itself, give it the *Piloting* skill too!

Lean on the vehicle rules presented above. Set up the ship like you would a vehicle, with damage boxes, speeds, weapons, and relevant features like autopilots and systems that grant the characters step bonuses for certain actions.

Set the scene in a dynamic environment. Deep space is not OK! Even a gas cloud or derelict space station gives the heroes and their enemies something to maneuver around. Create a dynamic environment with new challenges every round, just like the vehicle environments described in that section. Everyone likes dodging asteroids, lurking in nebulas, coming at enemies out of the sun and blasting the wreckage to clear a path ahead.

Nobody sits it out. Make sure every character has something to do every round. Firing weapons, performing sensor sweeps to find enemies and grant bonuses to the gunners, and flying the ship are just the start. Someone can operate the damage control system and make *Engineering* checks to "heal" the ship mid-battle. Another character can take control of the power plant and reroute power from shields to weapons or vice versa to make their ship hit harder or survive an enemy barrage. Every *ALTERNITY* character has some technical skills—this is the time to put them to use.

SAMPLE SHIPS

To ignite your imagination, here are stat blocks for a few basic craft. Building a ship is a matter of choosing a hull size (as low as 50 tons of displacement for civilian yachts and more than 500,000 tons for planet-busting dreadnoughts), then adding modules for crew, cargo, drives, weapons and other systems until the hull is filled. Extrapolate from following sample ships as you invent your own and provide the heroes with the means to reach the stars.

DEEP SPACE SURVEILLANCE CRAFT

Tech Era 7
Hull 200 tons
Drive 3 g reactionless sublight drive.
Modules Small bridge, common crew ×8, galley, passive long-range sensor suite, active long-range sensor suite, drone launch bay, laser turret, 10 tons of cargo.
Features Electromagnetic hull masking

LIGHT TRANSPORT

Tech Era 8
Hull 600 tons
Drive 4 g reactionless sublight drive, jump drive with 15 ly range, 3 ly/day speed, 1 day recharge.
Modules Medium bridge, officer cabins ×6, passenger cabins ×6, galley, wardroom, medbay, passive sensor suite, active sensor suite, vehicle launch bay, plasma turret, grav-mine launcher, 200 tons of cargo.
Features Adaptive cargo modules, atmospheric maneuver thrusters

INTERDICTION DESTROYER

Tech Era 9
Hull 5,000 tons
Drive 1000*c* warp drive (milspec)
Modules Large bridge, officer cabins ×15, common crew ×85, galley ×3, wardroom, medbay, milspec sensor suite, encrypted ansible, vehicle launch bay, drone launch bay, dynamic milspec shields, dorsal matter beam, forward torpedo launcher ×4, rear torpedo launcher ×4, hostile boarding apparatus, tractor beam (1,000-ton capacity), 200 tons of cargo
Features Milspec anti-piracy suite

INDEX

ALTERNITY

SCIENCE FICTION ⋈ ROLEPLAYING GAME

Name _____   *Archetype*

Level: _____   *Hero points:* _____   *Initiative:* _____   *Speed:* _____   *Encumbrance:* _____

STRENGTH   ___   FOCUS   ___
INTELLIGENCE   ___   VITALITY   ___
AGILITY   ___   PERSONALITY   ___

WEAPONS

weapon	range	speed	damage	special
_____	____	____	_____	_____
_____	____	____	_____	_____
_____	____	____	_____	_____
_____	____	____	_____	_____

ARMOR AND DAMAGE

Armor reduces **physical** by _____, **energy** by _____

severity	description	wounds
16+	Mortal wound (cannot act)	☐
13–15	Critical wound (−3 die steps)	☐☐☐
10–12	Serious wound (−2 die steps)	☐☐☐
7–9	Moderate wound (−1 die step)	☐☐☐
4–6	Light wound (no effect)	☐☐☐☐
1–3	Graze (no effect)	☐☐☐☐

Every PC has the black boxes. A high Vitality score and the Rugged talent constellation grant some or all of the gray boxes.

TALENTS

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

SPECIES NOTES

_____
_____
_____

OTHER GEAR

gear	mass
_____	___
_____	___
_____	___
_____	___
_____	___
_____	___
_____	___

SKILLS

Academics (Int)	___/___/___		*Hand to Hand* (Str/Agi)	___/___/___
Acrobatics (Agi)	___/___/___		*Heavy Weapon* (Str/Int)	___/___/___
Armor Training (Str/Int)	___/___/___		*Influence* (Per)	___/___/___
Athletics (Str)	___/___/___		*Mechanics* (Int)	___/___/___
Awareness (Foc)	___/___/___		*Medicine* (Int)	___/___/___
Coercion (Per)	___/___/___		*Melee* (Str/Agi)	___/___/___
Computer (Int)	___/___/___		*Misdirection* (Per)	___/___/___
Culture (Per)	___/___/___		*Performance* (Per)	___/___/___
Deception (Per)	___/___/___		*Piloting* (Agi/Int)	___/___/___
Driving (Agi)	___/___/___		*Primitive Wpn* (Agi/Foc)	___/___/___
Dodge (Agi)	___/___/___		*Profession* (any)	___/___/___
Empathy (Foc/Per)	___/___/___		*Resilience* (Vit)	___/___/___
Endurance (Vit)	___/___/___		*Science* (Int)	___/___/___
Energy Weapon (Agi/Foc)	___/___/___		*Security* (Agi/Int)	___/___/___
Engineering (Int)	___/___/___		*Stealth* (Agi/Foc)	___/___/___
Extreme Sports (Agi/Vit)	___/___/___		*Survival* (Vit/Foc)	___/___/___
Firearm (Agi/Foc)	___/___/___		*Willpower* (Foc)	___/___/___