

UNIVERSAL DECAY: DEAD STARS RULE B00K

BY JAY TYLER BARRELL

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DEDICATION

To heartbreak and pain, my two constant companions in life.

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In keeping with the industry standard of treating people like they are lemmings, let me say a few things:

- 1 - This is ONLY A GAME!
- 2 - Reading this book and playing the game WILL NOT result in psionic powers, befriending alien races, or traveling to the stars. (Although it might help with test scores in math, engineering, and the sciences).
- 3 - This is still ONLY A GAME!!
- 4 - Violence in a game setting does not in any way endorse violence in the real world.
- 5 - Yep, you guessed it, ONLY A GAME!!!

Done having your intelligence insulted? Good, I know I hate it. I mean seriously, if you are mentally deficient enough to NEED this speech, then you will not pay any attention to it! Speaking of which, why am I still **writing** this? Screw that, why are you still **reading** it?!

F ⊕ R E W ⊕ R D

It has been a long, long road to get to this book. It all started when I was trying to come up with an answer to the Fermi paradox (look it up), while studying astronomy back in the early 1990s. Of course I got nowhere, because the simple fact of the matter is that without more information than we have, we cannot even posit a workable hypothesis. However it fertilized the field of imagination; leaving it lying there until the right seeds came home to roost. Those seeds arrived in 1999 while I was reading James Hogan's "Immortality Option", and went out with a friend to see the new sci-fi flick "Virus". As I was sitting there in the theatre, about halfway through the movie, the two seeds germinated and the "Necrol" where born. **Here** was a possible answer to the Fermi paradox: a prior alien civilization's left-over mining facilities, left without any controls and evolving over the course of eons, were consuming newborn technological civilizations and using them as spare parts!

So...what to **do** with this idea? It still suffered from the flaws of all other proposed solutions: it had no evidence on which to base the hypothesis let alone to test it against in order to form a theory. At that time I was already an avid gamer, and decided to use it as the basis for a sci-fi and horror setting...I no rules system, but I knew what elements I wanted to setting and rules to have. So I started writing the stories and events that would form the new setting, and recording lists of what the rules would have to do.

Then in 2000 the OGL (Open Gaming License) came out with the new 3rd-edition D&D rules. By then I had already started making notes on a new game system to bring my setting to life. One of the main tenants of which was easy mutability and an open-access system that would balance itself as it grew. Of course this was also the same philosophy behind the OGL, if not the rules themselves, and it seemed a shame to re-invent the wheel. So I took my notes on the rules that I had at the time and began expanding them into what would later be called the "Universal Decay" rules system. Many people have asked me why I chose that name, and there are many reasons:

1 - The original setting was intended to be a sci-fi and horror setting, so I picked "Universe" in honor of space travel and "Decay" to elicit the thing that brings out the most primal feelings of dread in humanity. Originally it was just the name of the setting, "Dead Stars", but over time it became clearer and clearer that I would need a separate name for the rules themselves.

2 - The rules are intended to be applicable to any game style and genre, so they have "Universal" coverage.

3 - To make the system as encompassing as possible I borrowed a concept from program design: the decomposition of a larger problem into smaller and smaller chunks that are more manageable. This "Decay" allows for one element to be expanded on or changed without requiring a complete rewrite.

Eventually all of this led up to the release of the first version of the rules in 2003 as the "Dead Stars Rule Book", back when I was first thinking of separating the rules concepts from the setting but had yet to formalize the decision. Initially it was released online as a free download, kind of an open alpha testing stage. The feedback I got from this was **very** useful, both in terms of rules and insights into the process of creating a book for public release. The rule-changes eventually lead to the 2005 release of the "Universal decay: *Dead Stars* Character Primer" to give people a quick-and-easy look at the raw system itself. The stress of publication was too much for my PTSD-fried brain to handle, and so in 2007 I gave the business duties to my good friend Tristan. This was the best decision that I ever made since it allowed me to recover enough to release the "Universal Decay: *Dead Stars* Rule Book" in 2007 at a convention in Sacramento. Biggest....mistake...**ever!**

The convention, which shall go nameless in order to avoid lawsuits (you know who you are) lost just about **EVERYTHING** we had pre-paid for. Even with our receipts we had to pay for door tickets, ended up setting up shop on a table over a garbage can in the corner of the dealer's room, and it turns out that the organizers did not **RESERVE** the hotel rooms we had already **PAID** them for. So on top of all this, we had to drive almost two hours to a place to sleep...and me with a bad knee that does **not** handle travel well at all. To make matters worse our printer screwed up the entire print run we were to be selling, so that the page sequence ran...backwards?! As a result we had to get an 11th-hour emergency printing at the local quickie-copies shop that were spiral bound, and even charging at-cost we managed to sell just about none. This misadventure ended up costing us our entire year-long operating budget in the course of two weeks...with nothing to show for it.

So we fell back and punted. I took the time to rework the rule book and make it into a bookstore-format, the very volume you are reading this in; while Tristan started working on gathering the funds to put more polish in the artwork and get it book-listed as well as other business issues that I really do not have the knowledge to comment on. As a result you now have the tightest version of the "Universal Decay" rules I could possibly put together, with maximum polish, and a decade of constant playtesting. Not only this, but all the playtesting that we did over these past years, particularly of the alternate systems in Chapter 18, had to be done using other settings...giving us a large list of properties to develop in the future. Looks like a wild ride ahead, welcome on board!

Jay Tyler Barrell (December 29th, 2011...happy new year!)

CHAPTER ONE: GAMING BASICS

Most people picking up this book for the first time will not need to read this chapter in its entirety. Those readers familiar with the basics of role playing games may therefore want to skip ahead to the “*Universal Decay System*” section.

This chapter begins with the very basics of role playing games: what you need in order to play, basic terms and phrases used, and how they are applied.

However, others who have never played a role playing game before will definitely want to start at the beginning!

NEEDED MATERIALS

These are all the materials and elements needed to role-play using the *Universal Decay* system, as well as most other systems.

majority of games use dice, of varying in shapes and amounts (see below).

Friends: All role-playing games, often abbreviated as “RPGs”, are social games. You and a group of your friends, new and old, get together and have fun by exploring an imaginary world together. This makes them very similar to multi-player video games and MMOs. Unlike such games, the level of detail and immersion in the game play of an RPG is limited solely by the imaginations of those participating, not by hardware or programming.

Calculator: In many places there are heavy math calculations involved. Wherever possible I’ve tried to ease it by means of example charts and tables, but you are bound to come across a situation in which you will need to use a calculator anyway. Even if it is just figuring out how to divide up the loot.

Books: Even though an RPG, including *Universal Decay*, is an exercise in cooperative imagination, some outside direction is usually required. These rule books, like the one you are reading right now, are used to make a common set of definitions and conditions for the group. Within the framework they provide, the game can be enchanting and fun. Without common rules, games devolve into anarchy and chaos.

Imagination: This is a shared imaginary world, an imagination is pretty much a requirement. The more imagination the participants have and use, the more fun the game will be for all of them.

Paper: At least one sheet per player, for recording your character on (see below). Extra sheets for notes and maps are also recommended. There is a form called a “Character Sheet”, which is used to record a character in a common and easy to use format. Such a sheet is provided at the end of this book.

Players: All but one of the people in your group are players. Players make individual characters to use to explore the setting of the game. The characters face off against dire threats, experience great vistas, and participate in long-term plots with long-term goals. As the game progresses from one setting to the next the characters grow and develop in a manner that their players find appealing.

Pencils: Never write your character’s information in ink. Use a pencil so that you can erase it and make changes as the game progresses.

Game Master: The one person in the group who is not a player is the Game Master. They do not have a character to play...instead they play the entire game world! They control the threats the players encounter, describe the vistas they see, and are the creators of the long-term plots they are faced with. This is in no way an “us vs. him” relationship; the role of the Game Master is to describe and mediate, not to kill off characters as quickly or gruesomely as possible. In essence the “GM” is the setting. He is the one who arbitrates, decides, and dictates the effects of the players’ actions as well as the universe at large.

Dice: Every RPG uses some sort of random generation system to account for uncertainty and pure luck. These vary from decks of cards to “diceless” systems using bets and wagers. The

GENERAL GAMING TERMS

Setting

This is a description of the world (or worlds) that the shared game takes place in, as well as its inhabitants. This book contains the *Dead Stars* setting, provided not only as a reference but also in the hopes that YOU will write and make available your own material for the setting. In this way the setting can grow and develop, far beyond what I am capable of producing.

function. Such people are made like regular Player Characters, only they must subtract 1 from all their Ability Scores (see below). To reflect their lack of particular threat, their Challenge Ratings are also reduced by 1.

Characters

In a role-playing game, there are always three types of characters: Player Characters (PCs), Non-Player characters (NPCs), and Monsters (see below).

Notable NPCs: Not all folk are content to live their lives comfortably; some actually seek to improve their lot. This not only tends to describe some of the motivation for adventuring by Player Characters, but such NPCs can make for great villains or recurring aids to the party. They are made just like Player Characters, but are fully controlled by the Game Master.

Player Characters are made and controlled by the players, each of whom has one. They are the means by which the player gets to experience the shared world, and to influence it.

Dice

The Game Master makes Non-Player Characters - every person the players see or that influences them is an NPC. They are the means by which the Game Master provides an interaction, villainous or not, between the PCs and the various societies in the setting.

To mimic the element of uncertainty, *Universal Decay* uses dice to generate random values. Dice values are listed in number/d/size format, such as “5d6”. This is shorthand for “roll five six-sided dice and add them together”. Whenever you see a number immediately following a “d” you are looking at a shorthand term for the size of a dice. The minimum amount of dice you will need is given below, as well as what they are usually used for in the *Universal Decay* system:

Monsters are threats, things that might harm or kill the PCs and NPCs of the world. It typically falls to the Player Characters to deal with, or defeat, these threats.

Common NPCs: The vast majority of NPCs are not very remarkable. They perform the tiresome work that makes society

- * **d4 (at least 4):** Mainly for rolling damage.
- * **d6 (at least 10):** Also mainly for rolling damage.
- * **d8 (at least 4):** Damage again.
- * **d10 (at least 2):** Damage, but are also used for determining percentile (1-100) rolls. Roll it once for the “tens” digit, then

again for the “ones” digit. You can also use two dice of different colors, saying which are “tens” and “ones” before you roll. Some d10 dice have an extra “0” after each number, and are used to produce the “tens” digit by default.

* **d12 (at least 1):** Mainly, but rarely, yet more damage.

* **d20 (at least 1):** Skill checks, attack, saves, and ability rolls.

Some dice sizes do not exist normally, these are d2 and d3. These die values are rolled by using a d6. To find the result of a d2 roll a d6, 1-3 are “1”, and 4-6 are “2”. To find the result of a d3 roll a d6, 1-2 are “1”, 3-4 are “2”, and 5-6 are “3”. “Percentile” (which is abbreviated as “d100” or “d%”) can be generated using two d10 dice, as noted above.

Natural 1: Any time a rolled 1d20 comes up a 1, before any modifiers are applied. This results in automatic failure on attack rolls, and saving throws. Attack rolls and saving throws that fail in this manner during combat result in the user being emotionally

and physically drained, losing a point of Vitality (possibly causing *unconsciousness*). Attack rolls that are a natural 1s cause the user to make a Reflex DC 15 save (see “Checks” page 8), with a failure meaning they dropped their weapon. If this saving throw also comes up a natural 1, then they accidentally hit themselves with the melee weapon, break a bow’s string, jam their firearm (requires a simple Repair check to clear), or throw the weapon in a random direction.

Natural 20: Any time a rolled 1d20 comes up a 20, before any modifiers are applied. This results in automatic success on attack rolls, and saving throws. Attack rolls and saving throws that succeed in this manner during combat result in the user being strained by the rigor of achieving the success, losing a point of Vitality (if already at 1, the roll is instead a 19). Attack rolls that are natural 20s might also cause Special Damage if the target fails a Fortitude save.

UNIVERSAL DECAY SYSTEM

The *Universal Decay* rules system (“UD” for short) is **loosely** (to say the least) based on the d20 System Reference Documents, editions 3.0 and 3.5. The *Universal Decay* system has been altered to accentuate two things that the original d20 rules avoided whenever possible: realism and mutability. Because of this you will find that many elements of the *Universal Decay* system are already familiar to you from playing d20 games, but most of them will have been subtly or greatly altered from d20. So be sure to not take anything for granted, and use the appendix as much as you need to.

The design philosophy for the *Universal Decay* system is that realism brings with it believability, and that a player can have just as much fun building tricked-out armor as they can have killing monsters...so long as they have the rules-based tools to do so. That is exactly what the *Universal Decay* system gives you, the tools to play realistic characters in a believable setting, with the ability to enjoy playing techno-geeks and social monkeys as fun as laser-wielding warriors.

Traits

All game elements in the *Universal Decay* system are built on “traits”, be they creatures, characters, or weapons. Most of these traits are self-explanatory (i.e. “weight” means how much it weighs), but others require **some** explanation for clarity.

Traits are often referred to by tiered importance to a character: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary. This is a balance and design reference, as well as an easy categorization for reference purposes.

Primary: The six ability scores. These are the traits that all other traits are based on.

Secondary: Each saving throw, Defense Score, and to-hit bonus. These are often-referenced traits that are derived mainly from a class base value and ability score modifier.

Tertiary: Initiative, each skill rating. These are occasionally-referenced abilities that are mostly influenced by factors other than ability scores.

Ability Scores

The six characteristics that define the basic physical and mental ability of any creature, biological or mechanical, are called Ability Scores. A high ability score indicates increasing capability in all things that ability score represents, a lower one indicates increasing ineptitude. The base ability score is 10-11, which has no modifier.

Ability Score Modifier: This is a number applied to all checks that either use that ability score for their basis, or rely heavily upon it. This modifier is gained from the Table 1-1:

Ability Score Modifiers. The six ability scores (and their abbreviations) are:

Strength (Str): The measure of a creature’s muscle power, how much physical force their body can exert. It measures a being’s ability to deal damage in melee combat and their ability to deal with both carrying heavy objects and using heavy weapons. A “light weapon” is a weapon that weighs no more than 1/4th the wielder’s Strength score in pounds. A Strength of less than 1 means the being cannot move at all and is effectively paralyzed.

* **Determines:** You can comfortably carry up to four times your Strength score in pounds before being encumbered, and get to add your Strength modifier to all your melee damage rolls.

Dexterity (Dex): Overall physical coordination and agility. It measures how swift and accurate the being’s movements and reflexes are. A Dexterity of less than 1 means the being is paralyzed, incapable of movement.

* **Determines:** You add your Dexterity modifier to your Defense Score, Reflex save, Initiative, and To-Hit Rolls.

Constitution (Con): The being’s biological health and resiliency. It measures how healthy they are and how much punishment they can withstand. Robots and other similar beings, even though they are creatures, are not biological and therefore do not have any Constitution. A Constitution of less than 1 means the being is...dead!

* **Determines:** Your Constitution score is the basis of your Hit Points and you add your Constitution modifier to your Fortitude saves.

Intelligence (Int): Mental acuity and ability to reason. It measures the strength of a being’s mind and whether or not it is sentient. Beings with an Intelligence of 2 are capable of some learned responses, but are not sentient. Those with an Intelligence of 1 can be trained to perform a few simple tasks, but are beasts in all respects. Those with an Intelligence of 0 are incapable of any act that is not instinctual. Damage to Intelligence modifies behavior accordingly. Even though robots have an Intelligence score, they are typically incapable of independent thought and are therefore not sentient.

* **Determines:** Many skills are based on Intelligence and a high Intelligence gives you more skill points.

Wisdom (Wis): A being’s ability to perceive their surroundings and separate themselves in an intellectual capacity from outside forces. It measures their perception and self-control. A being with a Wisdom of less than 1 is insensible and unable to take any action.

* **Determines:** This is the basis of many skills, including your checks to avoid being surprised, and you add your Wisdom modifier to your Will save.

Charisma (Cha): The being's force of personality and sense of self-identity. It measures how well they can get along with others, and how well they can make others see their points of view, or get them to behave in a manner they desire. Many creatures, such as robots and other programmed beings, have no personality to speak of, and are therefore immune to persuasion. They also lack the ability to persuade others. A Charisma of less than 1 means the being is incapable of independent action of any sort and must be commanded to perform even the simplest tasks.

* **Determines:** This is used to determine the effects of a particularly fearful encounter and is the basis of all the interpersonal skills.

TABLE 1-1: ABILITY SCORE MODIFIERS

Ability Score	Modifier	Ability Score	Modifier
1	-5	12-13	+1
2-3	-4	14-15	+2
4-5	-3	16-17	+3
6-7	-2	18-19	+4
8-9	-1	20-21	+5
10-11	+0	Every +2 past 20	+1 extra

Saving Throws

A saving throw is a check made to avoid a harmful or debilitating effect. The three types of saving throws (and their abbreviations) are:

Fortitude (Fort): This saving throw is used to resist the effects of poisons, diseases, harmful nanites, and anything else that would affect the body directly but has a chance of failing to do so successfully. A character's Constitution modifier applies to their Fortitude saves.

Reflex (Ref): This saving throw represents instinctual involuntary reaction to imminent danger, and is used to reduce or avoid sudden attacks. A character's Dexterity modifier applies to their Reflex saves.

Will (Will): This saving throw is used to show a being's strength of mind, sheer willpower, and their capacity to resist external psychological. A character's Wisdom modifier applies to their Will saves.

In addition to the basic three saving throws, each one can have modifiers to specific types of causes. The most obvious example of this is a bonus to saves made to resist poisons. Such bonuses apply only when the save is against the cause the bonus is designated for, but can be to any of the three types of saves as needed. For example: a +1 bonus to save against psionic abilities would apply to Will saves to resist Telepathy, as well as Fortitude saves to resist Psychokinesis; but not to any saves to resist poison, explosions, or anything else.

Combat Scores

Defense Score: This is a measure of how hard it is to hit the character; it is the Difficulty Class of all attack rolls against them. It can easily be modified according to circumstances; most notably being caught unaware of the attack causes the loss of any Dexterity bonus. It is typically equal to 10 + the character's Dexterity modifier, although their size modifier often also affects it.

To-Hit Bonus: This is a measure of the base value of your attacking ability. It is based on your Base Attack Bonus (gained from combat-oriented class levels), and modified by your Dexterity and Size modifiers. Individual types of attacks use this

base value, modified by any relevant traits such as weapon weight, feats, and so on.

Hit Points: A measure of the target's physical durability. In most characters it is equal to their Constitution **score** plus half their Base Attack Bonus (rounded **up**). They are usually lost due to being struck by weapons. Losing Hit Points can result in penalties to performance, and losing them all can be fatal!

Vitality: This is a measure of the character's physical fitness, how much they can exert themselves before passing out. In most characters it is based on their Constitution and Wisdom modifiers plus a random value gained from each class level, plus Level Adjustment (if any). They are usually lost due to being struck by weapons, or due to extremes of luck under stress. Losing Vitality can result in penalties to performance, and losing all of them leads to unconsciousness!

Damage and Loss: Weapons deal damage that is usually expressed as a dice amount plus modifier (i.e. 2d6+2). Damage can cause Special Damage conditions, can have an overage bonus, and is resisted by armor (see Chapter 15: Combat). Damage called "loss" instead of "damage" (i.e. "1d6 Vitality loss") cannot cause Special Damage conditions, have an overage bonus, and is not resisted by armor. In addition to this, "damage" to Hit Points or Vitality can sometimes cause the loss of points in the other category, but "loss" to one cannot cause loss of the other.

Damage Reduction: This is a value that reduces the damage you take from kinetic sources, such as bullets and bladed weapons. It often has bonuses against specific types of kinetic damage.

Energy Resistance: This is a value that reduces the damage you take from radiated energy, such as lasers and lightning. It often has bonuses against specific types of radiated energy.

Skills and Feats

A skill is a learned ability that varies in aptitude according to practice and innate talent. Skill checks are made in all kinds of situations, but require dedicated practice to become any good at. Each skill's bonus is based off of a linked ability score's modifier; but most of the bonus comes from the character's ranks in the skill and synergy bonuses from related areas of study.

Feats are special abilities a being must either be born with or develop through practice. Once gained they are not improved through repetition and study. This is the main way they are different from skills, once you have a feat you have it at the best possible level you can have it at.

Classes and Leveling

Character Level (CL): This is a measure of the character's relative power without any gear. It is the combined levels of all their classes, plus their level adjustment. The higher a character's character level is the harder it is to gain another, and the more feats and ability scores points they can purchase.

Class Level: The number of total class levels you have in a particular character class. This determines how many skill ranks, Vitality, saving throws, and other abilities characters have from that class.

Level Adjustment (LA): This is a means of assigning a relative value of a character's racial and race-like bonuses a value for their power over those without the same or similar bonuses. The higher a character's Level Adjustment the more powerful they are without classes and gear. It is added to the character's class levels to determine the character's Character Level. Due to this Level Adjustment is added to maximum ranks in Racial skills, how fast Character Level feats can be purchased, and Vitality.

Gear Level (GL or GLM): Gear Level is a measure of the power of the character's combat-related gear and gear-like abilities

(such as psionics and magic). It comes in two parts: Gear Level and Modifiers. Gear Level (GL) is the most powerful weapon they are using. Gear Level Modifier (GLM) is a bonus to the GL from all combat-assisting gear like armor and psionic powers.

Effective Character Level (ECL): This is the character's level for purposes of gaining experience. It is the average of their Character Level (all class levels + level adjustments), and total Gear Level (all GLMs + highest Gear Level). It applies only to their experience award for facing challenges.

Experience Points (XP): The points a character earns from facing challenges, achieving goals, and being played well. There is a maximum amount that a character can save based on their character level. Experience points are spent to purchase levels, character level feats, and ability score improvements. When a character overcomes a challenge the character's XP award for it is divided by their ECL and then the number of people in the party (see "XP and Leveling" page 12).

Challenge Rating (CR)

A numeric measurement of the difficulty to overcome something hostile to a Player Character, such as a monster or a trap. In general terms a character of a given ECL facing an equal CR foe should have a 50% chance of overcoming it, not just surviving it. This is equal to the ECL of a character, if the foe being faced is also a character.

In the event of a challenge that is survived but NOT defeated/overcome, there is NO rewarded XP...getting to live IS your reward!

This is included here to make the text under "Classes and Leveling" above easier to understand.

Checks

Whenever you attempt an action that has some chance of failure, you roll a twenty-sided die (d20). To determine if your character succeeds at a task you do this:

- * Roll a d20.
- * Add any relevant modifiers.
- * Compare the result to the Difficulty Class (DC), see page 39.

If the result equals or exceeds the DC, your character succeeds. If the result is lower than the target number, you fail. In some situations rolling particularly high or low can also have added effects.

Non-Check Rolls: Die rolls not used for checks use mostly the same method as those for checks, only it is the product of the roll that is important and not whether or not it reaches a DC. This is typically used for damage rolls.

Modifiers

Modifiers are values that are added or subtracted from a score or roll. They come in many types, and sometimes each type has its own rules. Modifiers listed as supernatural are not used in the *Dead Stars* setting.

Alchemical (Supernatural): This modifier is derived from the application of supernatural laws governing substances instead of regular laws of physics and chemistry. It typically applies to saving throws, attack rolls, or ability score and skill checks.

Blessed (Supernatural): This modifier is gained as a physical representation of a thing's goodness, whether it is from itself or something else. It is counteracted by "corrupt" modifiers, with the total modifier being equal to the difference between the two. It can be applied to almost anything.

Circumstance: This modifier comes from the situation the check is being performed in, good or bad. It can be applied to any type of roll.

Competence: This modifier comes from a being's extreme aptitude with the roll involved. It can be applied to attacks, skill checks, and damage rolls.

Corrupt (Supernatural): This modifier is gained as a physical representation of a thing's evil, whether it is from itself or something else. It is counteracted by "blessed" modifiers, with the total modifier being equal to the difference between the two. It can be applied to almost anything.

Deflection: This modifier comes from some external force pushing harm away from the thing with the modifier. It typically only applies to Defense Score and Reflex saves.

Dodge: This modifier is gained from the being having twitchy nerves. It is lost at any time the being's Dexterity modifier is lost, but is not limited by their Dexterity modifier. It is also the only named modifier that stacks with other modifiers of the same name! It typically only applies to Defense Score and Reflex saves.

Divine (Supernatural): This modifier is gained as a physical representation of the influence of a very powerful supernatural entity, such as a god or primal force. It can be applied to almost anything.

Enhancement: This modifier represents the increase to a statistic that comes from using better materials, or direct augmentation by some other source. It can apply to almost anything.

Inherent: This modifier comes from the natural improvement of a particular ability or facet, typically denoting growth through use. It usually only applies to ability scores.

Insight: This modifier applies to bizarre logic and oddball rules of thumb...that somehow work! Any time a being seems to have an intuitive grasp of a particular check it is often because of an Insight bonus. Insight bonuses can be applied to any skill check, attack roll, and Defense Score.

Luck: This modifier comes into play whenever somebody seems to have their odds of success in a given endeavor skewed. It represents great good, or bad, fortune in one or more types of situations. This modifier can apply to any roll.

Mana (Supernatural): This modifies the Spellcraft check and maximum total DC modifiers for spellcasting.

Morale: This modifier comes from a being's force of determination, its lack or its overabundance, such as from fear or courage. Often, determination is what determines the outcome of many endeavors. This bonus can apply to Will saves, to-hit rolls, melee and throwing damage rolls, and Physical or Social skills. The bonus cannot be higher than the original bonus to the d20 roll, and counts as overage bonus damage to damage rolls. A morale penalty can apply to all of the same, plus every type of skill.

Pain: This modifier comes from the application or experience of extreme discomfort, of a sharp and immediate nature that a "circumstance" modifier does not govern. It can be applied to any ability score, skill, or attack roll.

Racial: This modifier comes from a particular species' inherent aptitude or incompetence at a certain task. It can be applied to any skill check.

Resistance: This modifier applies to defensive abilities, providing help in defending from something. It is typically applied only to saving throws.

Size: This modifier comes from something's extreme size, large or small. It typically applies to Defense Score, attack rolls, Hide, Listen, Move Silently, Search, and Spot checks.

Tech: Using devices of higher Civilization Level than yours imposes a -2 penalty (per Civilization Level difference) to d20 rolls associated with using it, plus -5 for each descriptor you don't have.

Stacking Modifiers

Each of the modifier types listed stacks (is cumulative with) with the other modifier types, so long as they are all of different names. This means that positive (and negative) values are added together for individual rolls or scores, so long as each such value has a separate name. For this purpose negative values of a type of modifier are actually called (modifier) penalties, and positive values are called (modifier) bonuses. Bonuses are added to the roll or value, while penalties are subtracted. They are also labeled with a "+" before the amount to indicate a bonus, or a "-" to indicate a penalty.

A modifier of one type that is a bonus, and another of the same type that is a penalty, are technically two different named modifiers. Due to this, the same modifier type can apply to something more than once - so long as one of the two is a penalty while the other is a bonus. The total value of such a pair of modifiers is equal to the absolute value of the penalty subtracted from the bonus. If the result is negative then the overall modifier is a penalty, otherwise it is a bonus.

If a value receives a modifier of a particular type and then a roll that uses that value receives the same type of modifier, the effects of the two modifiers stack.

Example: A character receives a +4 enhancement bonus to his Strength score, resulting in his Strength modifier being two points higher. He makes an attack with a weapon that has a +2 enhancement bonus to damage. The results of these two modifiers is that he gains a +4 bonus to his damage roll!

Some modifiers act a little differently. "Generic" modifiers, those without a name, always stack, even with other generic modifiers. "Dodge" and "pain" modifiers stack with other "dodge" and "pain" modifiers. "Blessed" and "corrupt" modifiers of the same type (bonus or penalty) cancel each other out, with only the difference between the two values being applied (i.e. +2 blessed and +5 corrupt becomes +3 only).

Multiples

Whenever a multiple for a value is given, you multiply that value by the multiple. If the same value has several multiples, multiply all the multiples together before applying the result to the value.

Some modifiers are listed as "+%" or "-%". These are added together before being applied to the primary value, in addition to the base amount for that value. If the value also involves a multiple, apply the multiple before the percentage modifier.

Example: If a weapon deals x3 damage due to one effect, and x4 due to another, the total multiple is instead x12 (x3 times x4). This x12 multiple is instead applied to the damage instead of either the x3 or x4 multiple.

Example: If a weapon deals -25% damage from one effect, and +75% damage from another, then it instead deals +50% damage (-25% plus +75%). This means that the total damage dealt is equal to 50% of the base amount, plus the base amount.

Example: If both of the above modifiers are applied to the same weapon, then the weapon deals the base amount x12, plus 50%. So a weapon which deals (for example) 4 damage as a base amount would deal a total of 72 damage (4 x12 is 48, 50% of that is 24, 24 plus 48 is 72).

Special Abilities

Special abilities are used to define common rules and conditions for creature, class, and item abilities. They are described in two parts, its activating factor and its overall type. Activating factors are either "Activated" (Act) or "Constant" (Cns). Overall type is "Extraordinary (Ex), "Psionic" (Psi), or "Supernatural" (Su). By

putting these two parts together with a hyphen, you get the total trait description.

Example: A psionic feat, such as Psychokinesis, is described as "Activated Psionic". Thus it would be listed as "Psychokinesis (Act-Psi)".

Activated (Act-): This type of ability requires conscious volition to use. Typically they are standard actions to use, but they can be also be move equivalent or even free actions if it is described as such. Examples include the Dodge feat, psionic powers, and Orlliss Sap. Use of an activated ability does not normally provoke an attack of opportunity unless it states otherwise, usually because it requires concentration.

Constant (Cns-): This type of ability is always at work, whether the user of it is conscious of it or not. Usually they cannot be deactivated, but some allow them to be suppressed as a conscious action of some sort. Even if suppressed, as soon as the user loses consciousness they snap back into action. Examples include the Toughness feat, racial Damage Reduction, and racial skill modifiers.

Extraordinary (-Ex): This type of ability is a function of regular biology, materials, or some other totally mundane agency. It is not paranormal or mystical in any way, but may seem so. Examples include the Hardness of objects, natural Low-Light Vision, and winged flight.

Psionic (-Psi): This type of ability is the result of aberrant and powerful mental abilities. While paranormal, it is explained by the application of mental architecture that creates a beyond-mundane effect without benefit of mystical forces such as magic. Examples include fetching, psychokinesis, and telepathy.

Supernatural (-Su): This type of ability harnesses the magical world, and mystical energies, to produce a paranormal effect. While similar effects could be created using high technology or psionics, this effect is not! Examples include spellcasting, wingless flight, and ghostly intangibility. This type of ability is not used in the *Dead Stars* campaign setting, and is only included for the sake of system completeness.

Equipment

No matter what type of item it is, all items share some common elements, below. Even uncrafted raw good share some of these.

Base Cost: The cost of an item that has been multiplied by mutables and then by Quality, but before it is adjusted by options.

Complexity: How hard it is to design the item, and how intricate it is to assemble. Higher-Complexity items can do more or better things, but are harder to Craft and easier to disrupt (i.e. lower Hit Points or other durability statistic).

Craft Skill: What subset of the "Craft" skill (see page 56) needed to make or Repair the item. The DC is based on Complexity and Quality.

Quality: The appropriateness of the item's materials and how well they are made before being Crafted. It also applies directly to the durability of the item, as well as to any checks associated with the item. It goes from 0 up, but Quality 0 items are almost completely uncrafted, such as a stick used as a club.

Total Cost: The real market value of the item before application of modifiers based on rarity of materials, manufacturing skill, and other social factors. It is derived from taking the base cost (see above) and adding in the cost modifiers of any options. For items without options, it is directly equal to base cost. This is the value used for Craft and Repair, and when adjusted for social factors it is also used for Shopping checks.

Weight: How much the item weighs in 1g of gravity (i.e. Earth normal). This is usually used to derive the item's Hit Points and other weight-related value, if appropriate.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: DEAD STARS SETTING



Triton's Run - Mike McElwee

TIMELINE

up to 1950 AD _____ Antiquity
 1950 AD to 2010 AD _____ Pre-War Earth
 2011 AD _____ Apocalypse
 2011 AD to 2100 AD (est) _____ Years of Barbarism
 2101 AD to 2500 AD _____ Consolidation
 2500 AD to 2550 AD/GY 0 _____ Birth of Gaeen Empire
 0 GY to 50 GY _____ Rediscovery
 50 GY to 100 GY _____ Colonization
 100 GY/PI year 0 _____ Necrol Invasion/Fall of Gaea
 30 PI _____ Orliss Arrive
 40 PI to 200 PI _____ Expansion
 45 PI _____ Serkalth Encountered

46 PI _____ Helizara Arrive
 90 PI to 180 PI _____ Recovery
 102 PI _____ Kranst Convention
 200 PI _____ Gorbrasch Discovered
 220 PI _____ Flakam Encountered
 250 PI to 300 PI _____ Reconstruction
 280 PI _____ DeathTek breaks from Omnibank
 300 PI _____ Now...

AD "Anno Domini", the common calendar year reference before the Apocalypse.

GY "Gaeen Year", the common calendar year reference after the Congress of the Rein established the Gaeen Empire.

PI "Post Invasion", the common calendar year reference after Operation Kamikaze halted the Necrol Invasion of the Gaeen Empire, by obliterating all the core systems.

This chapter provides details on running a game in the *Dead Stars* campaign setting. It covers the big-name locations, major players, and social factors that all combine to produce the setting. It also provides a brief look into how the PCs can fit into these elements for the purpose of providing the GM with ideas.

AREAS

Here is a listing of the largest or most famous locations in the *Dead Stars* universe, as well as a brief description of each. Their exact locations can be found in the book *Walking the Black*, but is not needed to run a decent *Dead Stars* campaign. Exact location and interstellar map information was not included in this book because it would be completely worthless in many campaigns, while in others it would be referenced constantly. Therefore a detailed stellar map is in another book, called *Walking the Black*.

Corporate Space

The Serkalth Beacon Network encompasses a small, globular region around their home world. All the direct paths to each star system are lined with deep-space beacons to aid travelers. Since first contact with humanity, the Serkalth have stopped expanding this globe and instead devoted much of their efforts to branching the beacon network directly into human space. This branching and re-crossing network now connects approximately 15% of the stars in human space, but its influence reaches at least 25%. These stars and all those near them have become dominated by corporate interests, even going so far as to co-opting planetary governments into virtual corporate states. This has led to the term "Corporate Space" being applied to the region - a term that has become universally accepted.

Laws: Law in Corporate Space is mostly concerned with trade and maintaining it. To this end, contracts are taken obsessively seriously, as is anything even remotely smelling of piracy. The usual things are forbidden: theft, murder, and extortion. Punishments for breaking laws usually boil down to fines and confiscation of goods, with forced labor or even organ harvesting being used in cases where the convicted cannot pay off their fines. The Kranst Convention was initiated in this area and is the most rigorously upheld set of laws (see below); violations of it are the only real capital crimes in Corporate Space.

Economy: The mainstay of the economy in Corporate Space is trade, the system of Ostorokon serving as the main trading hub. Outlying systems produce various goods and raw materials, which are taken to a central trading location and usually sold to a middleman. The middleman warehouses it to sell to whoever comes looking for that type of resource. It is these middlemen who form the corporations in Corporate Space, typically having trade contracts with multiple suppliers and customers. By far the largest corporation is Omnibank, which handles all the financial holdings of the various groups and factions, but stays out of the political arena as much as possible.

Politics: Each of the corporations in Corporate Space try to gain as much political and financial power as they can, usually at the existence of their competitors. This typically takes the form of misinformation campaigns to force targets to waste cash on worthless cargo and political sabotage in order to gain control over system governments. Sometimes a corporation will locate a poorly defended or undiscovered resource and will launch a secret assault to seize it before somebody else can. All corporations sponsor roving defense and prospecting teams, whose purpose is to protect their interests from the various dangers of modern times and to locate valuable new resources. Many corporations will occasionally pay freelancers to make a trading run outside of

Corporate Space. In both cases, the hirelings are often in danger from various threats, including the forces of rival corporations.

Society: Corporate Space is a society in which everything costs money and anything can be purchased for the right price. Organize crime runs rampant, often serving as a quasi-police force since these organizations dislike competitors and will "handle" any petty criminals operating in their territory. The largest criminals by far are in the bureaucracy - fearlessly extorting "processing fees" from their victims, protected from any local recourse by their positions. The most prevalent language in Corporate Space is English, although any language can be found in use on the fringe worlds.

PCs: Player Characters can play many roles in Corporate Space. They can be lower-management teams responsible for maintaining a small facet of a much larger corporation, having to face a constant political and financial battle to avoid "being downsized." They might be producers or prospectors trying to make a living selling their goods, taking the brunt of corporate power-wrangling and uncertain hazards on the fringes of Corporate Space. They might serve as a sponsored prospecting team, fighting off threats to their sponsor and trying to locate new resources. They might even be independent traders, trying to survive in a corporation-dominated area of space.

Loop of Pearls

The Loop of Pearls, sometimes just referred to as "the Loop," is a series of five star systems in close proximity that each produces a commodity needed by all the others. Located far from Corporate Space, this set of systems fell prey to internal infighting when the Necrol invaded the Core Systems, just like everybody else. Unlike the rest of human space they quickly realized that this would eventually lead to the complete extinction of all their populations and formed a peace that has lasted for centuries. Despite the overwhelming devastation of their first few decades of warfare, they have managed to rebuild their civilization up to the level of the rest of human space...but without the assistance of any outside agency! Their policies of non-interference with the rest of human space, and mutual defense, have led them to be viewed as isolationists, but that is not the case. All the systems of the Loop will willingly trade with small traders, but their early history has made them leery of any large group since a large-scale "trade agreement" could easily be a ruse for moving in a fleet of assault ships. The folk of the Loop have been at peace for so long that most of them find it difficult to engage in active hostilities, so they often hire the services of outsiders for any potentially dangerous duties.

Laws: Violence is punishable by restitution and/or telepathic "re-education," unless it was done in self-defense or the defense of others. Not even mass-murderers receive the death penalty. Theft, misleading public statements, and fraud are all punishable by fines and exile, in the extreme cases. A judge, who reviews all evidence and interviews all witnesses in private before giving his verdict, holds trials. While evidence gained by means of telepathy cannot be used to bring somebody to trial, the accused always has the right to a three-telepath trial - even if a regular trial would lead to conviction. In a three-telepath trial, each of three telepaths probe the defendant's mind in search only of their guilt or innocence on the charges - one from the police, one selected by the defendant, and a third randomly chosen from all registered telepaths in the area. It takes at least two of the three agreeing on the subject's guilt or innocence to produce a verdict. There are no appeals.

The Kranst Convention is heard of in the Loop of Pearls, but not followed. While all Psionics must have a detailed listing of their abilities registered with the local government, these records

are completely confidential and only released with the subject's permission or accessed when the government is looking for somebody to offer a contract.

Economy: The economy of the Loop of Pearls is based on trade, but the trade is almost completely within its own systems. There is also a burgeoning tourist economy, with folk from all over human space coming to enjoy the wonders and entertainments the highly cultured Loop systems have to offer. Omnibank credits are not traded here, except for their material worth of 1/4th a credit. Instead each system produces its own electronic currency. Every 30 standard days a courier ship from each system trades credits with all the other systems, allowing a person to move some or all of their government account from one system to another. Other than these ships, all other transactions between systems are on a barter basis.

Politics: Each of the systems in the Loop of Pearls has its own government, but no two governments are alike. For the most part they play little role in their population's lives, preferring to do their best to improve their living standards instead of playing political power games. Only in the case of a crisis does a particular government exert much authority over its population. This has led to remarkably low taxes and small size governments. Both Omnibank and DeathTek are trying to gain political foothold in the Loop of Pearls, but the natural caution with which the Loop dwellers view any large organization has stopped them from succeeding.

Society: The Loop cultures have several widely varying aspects, but also many common points. They are each essentially utopias, with low taxes, low crime, and virtually nonexistent poverty. Most of the taxes collected are used to fund public school and health programs, providing completely free education to any citizen of the Loop of Pearls, and basic medical care to everybody, including tourists. Sterilization is mandatory for all citizens of the Loop, but a mixture of a lottery and a "child rearing tax" is used to temporarily counteract the sterilization so that population levels can be maintained. Any births outside of this system are treated as criminal births, with the parents being permanently sterilized and the child becoming a ward of the state. Most menial jobs are handled by artificial-personality androids, but it is common knowledge that a few pre-Invasion AI androids have hidden themselves among the menial worker population. Rather than fear or ostracize these folk, the people of the Loop view them in as secret protectors and guardians - a view that these so-called "metal angels" have since taken to heart (if you will pardon the term). The gentle and secret machinations of these ancient guardians has shaped the Loop of Pearls into the near-perfect utopia it is today and protects it from the rest of the universe's problems as much as possible. The main languages spoken here are Japanese and Spanish. Most of the inhabitants are bilingual in the two.

PCs: PCs in the Loop of Pearls are most likely using it as a base of operations for their endeavors in nearby space, or maybe as a trading partner. They might be operatives from a major organization such as DeathTek or Omnibank, trying to create an outpost for their employers. It is possible that they have been hired to serve as guardians or to handle a particularly dangerous problem that has cropped up in the area. Pretty much the only thing they are unlikely to be is common Loop inhabitants going about their everyday lives, since even near-paradise can be pretty boring to the players.

Loop Systems: The systems in the Loop of Pearls are, in order: Simmons, Tev-Kenard, Kapstan, Tokiyama, and Surran. Each one is briefly detailed below, in alphabetical order.

* **Kapstan:** Closest to Surran, this system has two inhabited worlds, both moons orbiting a large gas giant in the system's outer

reaches. Other than the gas giant and its two inhabited moons there are no stellar bodies in the system, all having been incinerated when its sun went nova. The two moons have a thin strip of warm inhabitable land near their equators and the rest of their surfaces are given over to slowly expanding industrial complexes and mining operations. Most mass-produced or large production items, such as weapons and spaceship hulls, are made in Kapstan. Kapstan lacks the biological elements necessary to sustain a large population, so it must import most of its food and medicines. This system is an Empire, with emperors choosing his successor, providing it is not one of their direct blood relatives. The direct blood relatives of the previous emperor become dukes and barons and are in nominal charge of different regions as appointed by the new emperor.

* **Simmons:** Closest to Surran and Tev-Kenard, this system is nearly Gaea-like. The only heavily populated stellar body is 30% larger than Gaea was, and is the primary source of light metals in the Loop of Pearls. This world has very little liquid water and a thin atmosphere, but is otherwise perfectly inhabitable. There are smaller populations on orbiting habitats and the planet's three moons. Almost totally lacking in heavy elements, it must import most machinery and large-scale power generation technologies. A rogue planet's impact with a rockball world in the outer system in the distant past has resulted in the outer orbits being littered with untold numbers of micro meteors, preventing any sort of safe mining in the outer system. Simmons is a republic, with each inhabited stellar body electing a number of representatives according to their fraction of the overall population (the lowest population gets one representative, and they are used to set the divisor for the rest). The representatives then elect one of their own numbers to serve as the republic's president, but cannot choose a person from the most populous stellar body. The president alone has the ability to call items before the council and can only vote in the case of a tie. New elections are held every ten years.

* **Surran:** Closest to Kapstan, this system has an inhabited world just outside the liquid water zone of its star. This world's crust is very thin at its poles, which has caused massive volcanic ranges to form. These ranges melt snow and ice that encroaches on them from the glacier-covered surface closer to the equator and fills the air with greenhouse gasses. This causes snowfall precipitation randomly over the surface of the rest of the planet, with only the high equatorial mountain ranges being exposed to the rocky crust. In addition to this, there is a gigantic orbital habitat formed by a rosette of several interlocked spinning smaller habitats. The surface mountains are used to produce high-quality electronic devices, with materials pulled in from other stellar bodies. Tourism has recently seen a rise as well. The orbital habitat is mostly a trading hub for the planet, but also has a thriving information and entertainment industry. Surran is a true democracy, with each inhabited zone electing all of its public offices. The general populace votes for or against any measure that the elected officials propose.

* **Tev-Kenard:** Closest to Simmons and Tokiyama, this system is almost devoid of stellar bodies larger than 30 miles in diameter. It is rich in carbon and other organic elements however, as well as heavy non-metallic silicates and gaseous ice asteroids in the outer system. Originally settled as a food-production colony with a single hollowed-out asteroid moved into the inhabitable zone, the system now has several similar habitats all linked by a series of carbon nanotube cables. Gravity is provided by gravity plates along the outer surface, which are powered by solar power arrays in synchronous orbit. Tev-Kenard trades food and medical supplies for all of its other needs, which are practically everything else! The government here is a true monarchy, a veritable

dictatorship, but a common social belief in the usefulness of assassination makes sure that no bad monarch sits on the throne for long.

* **Tokiyama:** Closest to Surran and Tev-Kenard, this system is heavily populated with orbital habitats and colonized moons. Most of the materials of the system are heavy elements, so refining and prospecting are essentially the only industries here. Tokiyama exports heavy metals, including plutonium and uranium refined fuels, in exchange for all of its needs. Despite having the lowest population of all the systems in the Loop, it has the largest number of spacecraft thanks to ready access to hull materials. Tokiyama is a patriarchy, with the elders of a dozen noble families forming a ruling council and having full executive powers within their families.

The Karoc Cluster

On the fringes of human space there is an unstable region called the Karoc Cluster. This area would be unremarkable, too similar to several other such areas, if it were not for the fact that it is the central headquarters of Lorallon Radiological Services. Given the influence the corporation has in human space, it is a good idea to detail the resulting cultural fixtures of the area.

Laws: The only real hard-and-fast law in this area is “thou shalt not piss off Lorallon!” This corporation has easy access to nuclear weapons and no regard at all for Human life, so everybody else in the area treads softly when they are around. Other than this, each of the systems in the area is a virtual despotism, with the strong ruling over any they can dominate. Only Thousand Arms enjoys some degree of freedom and equality, since the Orlliss that run that system are trying very hard to integrate their settlement into the “norm” of Human society. They are just as hard-line as everybody around them, but there is no factional infighting to get in the way of their attempts to build a commercial center.

Economy: Lorallon Radiological Services is the main source of income in this area of space, one way or another. Their trade in forced labor/prison population and refined radioactive metals takes them all the way into and through much of Corporate Space as well as many other areas. The flow of materials back to their home base on Karoc, and shipping needs from there, provides the major impetus to the economies of the local systems. Lucien N Absentia provides FTL pilots and other psionic services. Thousand Arms provides warehousing and docking for transport ships, as well as life support and food. The Triton and Ettin systems provide ships and related materials when they are not blowing each other apart.

Politics: Lucien N Absentia wants nothing more than to be left alone, but lacks vital resources and so must allow trade with other systems in order to get them. Despite their overwhelming psionic superiority to just about everybody else in the area, they lack the organization and physical resources needed to wage an offensive attack to seize what they need. Thousand Arms wants to become a part of the burgeoning Human society, but they are incapable of playing any role more important than an over glorified overgrown service station. Triton and Ettin each believe that they own the gods-given rule of both systems, and devote considerable effort towards conquering one-another. Their attacks on each other’s manufacturing bases has left them incapable of doing more than small-scale manufacture and mining, so they must import most of the arms they need to wage their war. Over all of this the rulers of the Karoc system sit back and gloat, playing the manipulator to their own gain.

Society: There is no stable social order in any of the systems of the region unless you work for Lorallon Radiological Services. This corporation treats its employees well, so long as they do as they are told and are useful. Other than this, the only way of

insuring one’s safety in the region is to either be obviously superior to all contenders, not be worth the trouble of harassing, or pay for the protection of somebody more powerful. In Thousand Arms, this social order has become institutionalized, with the Orlliss rulers of that system extending their protection to anybody who is on the crew of a ship that is berthed there or who happens to be renting space in their orbital city.

PCs: The players have a wide choice of potential character options in this area of space and could fill many of them through out their careers. They could be part of the prison population on Karoc, trying to survive in that brutal anarchic wasteland. They might work for Lorallon Radiological Services as transportation engineers or on permanent middleman duty in one of the systems other than Karoc. Possibly they live on Lucien N Absentia, selling their services to those who come there to hire Psionics. Maybe they are traders operating out of Thousand Arms. They could even be somehow involved in the war in the twin systems of Triton and Ettin.

The Core Systems Cloud

The Gaea/Sol system and its closest 12 stars were forced to go nova in order to stop the Necrol invasion centuries in the past. Since then, the super-heated clouds of expanding gas have somewhat stabilized, even falling back into the space they passed through. It is speculated that, given enough time, they might even reform into star systems again. Of course, such an event would be unbelievably far in the future, so only the current status of the Core Systems Cloud is important.

Even though there was 13 total systems creating 13 gas clouds, the entire area is referred to in the singular because so many of the gas clouds have intersected. They are impossible to distinguish as separate from interstellar distances anyway. The initial expanding waves of energized gas were sufficient to obliterate everything close to the stars that formed them. However, the fact that these novae were induced means that they were not nearly as violent as a natural one would have been. This means that the planet on the outskirts of each system, and anything at the fringes of the systems, was not completely obliterated. Instead, they were shattered, broken, and rode the wave of destruction on random tangents. This has left behind several small, almost unnoticeable, deposits of mineral and technological wealth. Most of it is from the Gaeen Empire and benefiting from their high state of technology.

After centuries of prospecting, the majority of these relics have been found and claimed. The few that remain still attract prospectors, looking to make their fortunes on a “lucky strike” in the chaotic jumble of this radioactive wasteland. This is a particularly dangerous endeavor for many reasons. The scariest reason is because not all of the relics are of Gaeen Empire manufacture; many are the remains of Necrol forces caught in the outer system when the Core Systems went up. Even if a Gaeen Empire relic is found, there is no guarantee that it is not still protected by advanced security systems, such as automated sentry weapons and destructive nanites. Should a prospector find and retrieve a worthwhile relic, there is the risk of pirates and the remnants of the Gaeen Military destroying them to claim it for themselves before they reach “civilized” space. Finally, there is the cloud itself, with its storm fronts of radioactive fallout and micrometeorites propelled to near-relativistic speed by the novae and trapped in erratic orbits within and near the cloud.

Navigating the Core Systems Cloud is a nightmare of astrogation. Since bodies with appreciable gravity are completely unknown and visibility is reduced to only a few thousand miles at the best of times, ships entering the cloud area must travel in sub-interstellar hops. Those that try to travel greater distances often

find themselves in the dense cloud pockets around the remnants of large moons and planetary fragments, if not actually colliding with such an object. These clouds are dense and often so filled with radioactive particles that ships entering them are microwaved to death...very few survive such a mistake.

Laws: There is no law in the Core Systems Cloud area. Although many governments, including those of Corporate Space, will hold people responsible for anything they do there. Enforcement of their laws in this region is difficult at best, and frequently impossible.

Economy: Some deep-space stations have set up on the fringes of the Core Systems Cloud, typically at least a light-year away. They serve as re-supply stations and recreation areas for prospectors. In order to remain safe from pirates, they take advantage of the low gravity to hop coordinates whenever danger threatens. After such a trip, those remaining prospectors on board spread the station's location by word of mouth. A few have been compromised by prospectors returning after being infested by Necrol relics and turned into traps for the unwary - or fallen victim to the hazards of ghost stations. Because of their usefulness in making electronic repair components, Omnibank credit chips are accepted as currency here, but are taken by the stations only at half value (and never used to give change). Most transactions are therefore by barter.

Politics: This is a lawless and hostile area of space. While the pirate clans make it a policy never to attack the stations, they also don't bother defending them from freelance pirates and Gaeon Military, or other threats. Once inside the cloud however, all bets are off.

Society: The stations may provide a place for some R&R or to patch up damage, but they are no means bastions of culture or safety. Most folk in the area are freelancers or those down on their luck, looking for a place to hide or a build up a stake to begin rebuilding their lives elsewhere. Most end up leaving, broke and dejected, or dead. A few old-timers who strike it big stay in the area, not feeling comfortable with any other life. Oddly enough, the loose organization of the pirate clans provides access to far more "culture" from their raids on nearby systems and traders than the stations can provide. Because of the inherent difficulty in identifying a pirate vessel in this place, let alone capturing it so close to a light-years-wide bolt-hole, the Core Systems Cloud area has become a haven for cutthroats and ne'er-do-wells.

PCs: Players might be prospectors, trying to strike it big in a rickety ship that is barely space-worthy. They could be pirates, clan-affiliated or not, using the Core Systems Cloud as a hideaway and occasional hunting ground. Maybe they are traders who supply the stations, taking Omnibank credits at half value for the goods they bring from other places. They might even have a business on one of the stations, making a small profit on the ever-changing crowd of hopefuls and failures.

TRAVEL AND COMMUNICATION

Getting things from one place to another - be it people, goods, or information - is largely done by small-scale private enterprise that has evolved to fill the needed role. Each heavily inhabited area has people called "factors" who function as the local facilitator for FTL mail, cargo, and personnel travel. These people makes a living by connecting travelers with shippers and taking 1d10% of the cost from the traveler as a finder's fee.

Mail: Mail travels by undirected propagation, in clusters of 2d10x10 memory points of encrypted files and deletion codes for received mail. Ships that travel to another star system get paid for any mail cluster they deliver to a factor that is not more than 90

days old. In-system mail is delivered free of charge by local governments.

Cargo: Cargo is transported in two types, internal and external. Internal cargo is held inside the ship's cargo hold and thus more protected in case of piracy. External cargo is connected to the ship by a welded cable, and is exposed to the hazards of space travel for its entire trip. Units of cargo are in 1,000 lbs or part thereof.

Passengers: Passenger travel costs the same as internal cargo travel, and includes only a single passenger plus 250 lbs of carry-on goods (including carried gear). Such passenger travel is in a Cramped Personnel Quarters, but Normal can be had for x2 cost and +2 DC; Plush for x5 cost and +5 DC. Passengers are usually forbidden from taking onboard weapons more powerful than Simple, and explosives, in order to prevent sabotage or piracy.

A Streetwise check is required for somebody to locate a factor that has the specific service they want to contract for. The DC of the check, and the prices for them, are covered below:

TABLE 17-1: SHIPPING SERVICES

Service	DC	Fee
Sending Mail	10+LY	memory size x LY
Deliver Mail Cluster	10	10 x memory size x LY
Cargo, In-System	10	10 per unit x AU traveled
Interstellar, External	10+LY	+(500 per unit x LY)
Interstellar, Internal	15+LY	+(250 per unit x LY)
Passenger, In-System	15	10 x AU traveled
Passenger, Interstellar	15+LY	+(500 x LY)
Passenger, Normal	+2	x2
Passenger, Plush	+5	x5

ORGANIZATIONS

This is a listing and description of the few organizations that have managed to spread their influence beyond a handful of systems in the *Dead Stars* universe - the "big players." While innumerable organizations exist that span one or two stars, very few have the kind of adaptability and cohesiveness necessary to become "big players." Most fall apart or collapse under their own weight due to the lag in communications and active opposition from outside parties. Others fracture into smaller groups with reduced interests and areas of operation.

A few organizations have widespread influence in a couple systems, and outposts in many more, particularly in Corporate Space. These are not listed here simply because having an "outpost" does not mean the same as having "influence" in place outposts' location. Typically, it means the opposite: the outpost is subject to the whimsies of whoever really has influence in that area. For a similar reason, organizations that interact on a purely predatory basis are also not listed here, since their only contribution to their zones of operation is terror and death.

DeathTek

Originally a splinter group of Omnibank, this organization is set up as a loose confederation of munitions manufacturing empires.

Goals: DeathTek is the same goal as arms dealers through out history: to turn a profit. The individual Princes are not interested in anything but selling weapons and weapon systems, while using the revenue it generates to carve out an expanding empire. They will sell arms to anybody provided that they are not aware that the recipient plans on turning them on the seller. Selling to somebody planning on attacking another Prince is perfectly all right, and sometimes even encouraged.

Assets: Lots of guns, warships, and the facilities to produce more of the same. Client settlements also have a population devoted to DeathTek service through the simple expedient of not having any other employment opportunities.

Weaknesses: What DeathTek does not have is a stable and universal method of arms sales and inter-principality trade. They can make the guns, but have no way of selling them except through barter, which can cause resource problems. For this reason, they use Omnibank credits for such purposes. In order to maintain their internal monopoly, each principality issues its own "credit" to its employees, preventing them from easily leaving their employ since their bank account is totally controlled by higher management. DeathTek Princes will also purchase goods and services from others in DeathTek credit - typically for 10% more than they would in Omnibank credits. Unfortunately, DeathTek credits are not transferable to other DeathTek principalities, nor can they be exchanged for Omnibank credits.

Methods: Other than the occasional raid on out of the way systems and their defense fleets, DeathTek rarely engages in any sort of large military campaign. Instead, they will sell arms to both sides of a feud, then come in to take control when the populace is no longer capable of putting up a coherent defense. The necessary garrisoning and rebuilding efforts take up more resources than are gained in the initial arms sales, so each principality also sells arms to outsiders in order to raise the necessary funds. DeathTek handles every aspect of the munitions trade, from resource gathering to manufacture to sales. Instead of having store fronts, each principality maintains munitions depots in their area and prospective customers can either purchase from the depot's stock or pay a 20% service fee up front to have something custom made from their schematics and shipped to them.

Organization: DeathTek is organized into "principalities" - zones of control ruled over by a "prince" that is nominated by the previous ruler and cover at least two star systems, as well as depots on several other nearby locations. Each prince tries to expand their sphere of control, expanding their outposts until they gain complete control over a system or invading indefensible systems, but always with an eye for their neighboring princes. While the individual principalities have a working trading relationship, each knows that their neighboring princes would like nothing better than to steal their territory. This leads to a state of constant low-level warfare, usually by proxy, since all the princes maintain a defense fleet capable of overwhelming their neighbors with a retaliatory strike should the warfare ever become open. Because of this they will use proxy agents and saboteurs to weaken each other's outposts, then come in to "help out," whenever possible.

Lorallon Radiological Services

A company from before the Necrol Invasion that has managed to recover its interstellar status by selling refined radioactive metals...and deporting criminals for a fee.

Goals: The complete domination of the energy market in the universe, which they are close to achieving. After that...who knows.

Assets: The Karoc system and its large moon made almost completely of heavy metals. A strong alliance of mutual benefit with the Orliss, particularly the humanoid version. A fleet of cargo ships and way stations through most of human space.

Weaknesses: Complete lack of industrial capacity, with the exception of heavy metal mining and refining. The Karoc system has almost no usable metals and the only inhabitable stellar body is a desert-like wasteland - after extensive terraforming! This inability to produce large-scale products makes them reliant on

purchased goods of all sorts, which they satisfy with their cargo ships on the return voyages.

Methods: Lorallon is all about business and the bottom line. They know they have products and services in high demand through-out human space and have maximized their methods of turning this demand into a profit. A branching network of outposts covers about half the inhabited worlds in known space. Ships from Karoc fly a circuit along these branches, dropping off refined radioactive metals on the way out and picking up prisoners and supplies on the way back. Each of these ships also carries messages and a "shopping list" along their routes, often selling mail services for a reasonable fee. The depots then sell the metals for the funds needed to buy the desired supplies and maintain their own needs. The governments of the settlements where the outposts are located also pay the ships to take prisoners off their hands on their return trips, when they pick up supplies. This has lead them to having gigantic financial clout, to the point where they can influence almost any system in which there is an outpost located.

Organization: Lorallon is very centrally located in the Karoc system. Despite only controlling this one system, it is a "big player" thanks to the wide network of "way station" outposts it owns and the titanic depths of its pockets. In addition to this, it has virtual control of all the inhabited systems near it, since it is the primary supplier of contracts and goods in the area (see "Karoc Cluster" above). The corporate headquarters is located on the second moon of Karoc's only planetary body, a gas giant. This headquarters also contains most of the corporation's resources and is a megalithic arcology (city in a single building). The iceball third moon has a low-gravity refining center and spaceport, since enriching radioactive metals produces a lot of heat and too much radiation to be feasible on the inner moon. The inner moon has the mining operation and is actually a captured stellar fragment that is far too radioactive for long-term inhabitation. Both the first and third moons are controlled directly by the arcology on the second moon. The fleet of transport ships orbits the middle moon when not in use or needing to be serviced. A much smaller fleet of in-system cargo haulers takes materials to and from these ships to the installations on the three moons. All of this is controlled by a set of dedicated bureaucracies controlled by the organization's hereditary president, Asmet Travol Lorallon, who is ancient and reaching the limits of medical rejuvenation and life extension technology.

Luciferians

This is a "religion" centered around the old-Earth myth of "Lucifer, lord of light, bringer of wisdom." Their belief is that all sapient beings have an inherent right to existence and self-improvement, with reincarnation providing the opportunity to further one's spiritual growth. Attempting to cut short the life of another, except in the most straightforward of self-defense, or to control the choices others have, are the most heinous crimes imaginable. Psionics are obviously more developed than non-psionic beings, placing them higher up on the "enlightenment" ladder. This has caused them to become a loose organization of pacifistic Psionics and their adherents. Their usage of the name of an old-Earth devil for themselves, and their stubborn refusal to defend others, has lead them to being mistrusted in all human space. At the same time, their dedication to self-improvement and developing their inherent abilities has placed them near the top of the list of skilled psionic and mundane skill practitioners of various disciplines.

Goals: To develop their mental and psionic skills, and to help others do the same.

Assets: A widespread loose network of “monasteries” that provide shelter and a wide selection of skilled services to members of the religion and others and a widespread demand for their skills.

Weaknesses: Complete lack of any sort of central authority, since such authority by definition imposes its decisions on others, and a widespread mistrust of their theology.

Methods: Luciferians travel wherever they can, trading their skills for passage and needed materials. When somebody gets the nerve to ask them for assistance, they provide it so long as it would not delay their travels or require them to interfere in the lives of any third party. Once they feel they have traveled far enough, they settle down wherever they happen to be and open up a monastery, where they trade their skills to others and provide training to any acolytes who wish to join them. When the founder of a particular monastery dies, the remaining members tend to disperse and travel.

Organization: Other than the founder of each monastery being nominally in charge of its activities, mainly due to the respect they are given by its members, there is no organization within the Luciferian religion.

Omnibank

This major incorporated organization is one of only three that spans almost the entirety of human space. It started as a simple banking institution, but the use of its collected funds to operate other businesses was too tempting for the board of directors to pass up. Now it has diversified into almost every industry imaginable through subsidiaries - even though these subsidiaries are typically small one or two system affairs. The only major subsidiary it had, its arms manufacturing branch, grew too powerful and split off into its own company: DeathTek. Since then, the board of directors has been very careful not to let any subsidiary branch gain enough resources to separate from the parent organization.

Goals: OmniBank’s only real goal is the pacification of human space and the cessation of all large-scale conflict within it. For the most part, it has managed to achieve that goal, but the constant discovery of lost worlds mixed with the anything-for-profit business practices of DeathTek have prevented Omnibank from fully succeeding. Now the board of directors is trying to secure civil peace by controlling the flow of resources - both materials and information.

Assets: Branches in almost every civilized system, a wide assortment of subsidiary industries, and an amount of funding undreamt of by even mythical dragons.

Weaknesses: Lack of any widespread industrial influence, except in the banking industry, and virtually no military assets.

Methods: Omnibank must mostly rely on hired help to provide guard services and the occasional offensive attack. In order to stabilize the universe, they move branches into civilized systems, provide cheap loans to the governments of those systems, and then insure that the government never can quite pay off the loan. Then they use the political pressure of the debt to force concessions from the government, usually designed to either protect Omnibank’s presence or to prevent the government from being able to wage any sort of war. Since the loss of the forces that DeathTek represents, Omnibank has had to hire mercenaries of various sorts for the occasional “black operation” they need to achieve their goals, such as the sabotage of shipyards building fleets of military vessels or the blackmailing of warmongering politicians.

Organization: Each Omnibank branch is directly answerable to the board of directors, whether that branch be a banking institution on some far-off world or a subsidiary industry. Omnibank maintains a buffer-department of accountants, auditors,

and Hive Mind telepaths that accumulates and analyzes these reports then provides summaries directly to the board of directors. The board then passes its edicts to the buffer-department, which disseminate the orders to the appropriate locations by means of the Hive Mind telepaths. The occasional courier ship is dispatched from one location to another, whenever large-scale information or physical resources need to be exchanged. On the rare instance in which a Hive Mind telepath must travel, such as the need to establish a bond with the new head of a branch, they typically do so incognito on public transports.

BAD GUYS

Every setting has its villains - the individuals or organizations whose works and activities are meant to provide opposition to the player characters and whose conflicts with others in the setting provide the dynamics that spawn adventures and inspire change. In some cases, the PCs take this role, often switching back and forth from antagonists to protagonists, and sometimes serving as both at the same time.

This section deals with the most common villains in the *Dead Stars* setting - the vile, malevolent, or antithetical entities that inhabit the universe. No game statistics are provided. Instead, only their general outlines and goals are listed. The idea is that this will provide the game master and the players with a working knowledge of these entities, such as the characters might be aware of.

Empire Pirates

One of the three types of “pirates” and one of the two major types, in the *Dead Stars* setting. These folk are the descendants of the Gaeon Military that have managed to adapt to the post-invasion universe well enough to survive. They still hold to the tenants of their ancestors, passed down through generations and still enforced with telepathic conditioning. Without a central Gaeon Empire to tell them what is and is not allowed in human space, they believe that since nobody has been given permission to trade or travel nobody has permission to do so!

They lay ambushes for unfortunate travelers and stage raids on small outposts or low-population worlds with a resource they need. Their depredations are not random; they will only attack in order to gain something they require to continue their existence. This makes them less of a random element than the Pirate Clans or unaffiliated pirates, but their severe discipline and occasional piece of Gaeon Empire technology makes their raids far more effective.

From time to time, the Pirate Clans will gather in small groups at isolated locations, typically in deep space. Here they trade materials, information, and personnel for breeding purposes. They also ensure that the doctrines of all those in attendance are still “pure” by means of telepathic inquisition and alteration.

All members of the Empire Pirates are the genetically and nanite enhanced offspring of the original Gaeon Military and they know they are superior to the rest of humanity. They are proud, disciplined, and ruthless to outsiders. From time to time they capture and enslave other Humans to use as disposable personnel - typically insuring their loyalty with telepathy. They never capture non-Humans, because their doctrine tells them that even the most friendly and helpful alien is an invader in human space that must be obliterated whenever possible.

When they attack a target, the empire pirates always follow a tried-and-true method. First they will launch either Limpets against a space-born target or Fetch EMP weapons into close proximity of outpost sensors and weaponry. Once the target’s

primary defenses have been disabled by this attack they Hop into close range and begin firing on it in an attempt to breach the hull. Meanwhile, one or more boarding pods are launched with heavily armored troops whose purpose is to capture personnel for interrogation. Against targets suspected of having large populations or internal defenses, one or more powered-armor troops are also sent in to provide fire support for the boarding party. After the hull has been breached and all of the target's personnel either captured or killed, the empire pirates strip the place of anything valuable or useful. After interrogation, the captured prisoners are either put to work as slave labor or used to maintain the life-support equipment...as biomass.

Infected

Steppingstone was the center for evolutionary and personal enhancement research of the old Gaeon Empire. It was also one of the 13 Core Systems, and therefore now an expanding cloud of energized gas. When the Necrol invaded the system many of those in it managed to escape, researchers and subjects alike. Since most of these subjects were either in control groups, or had relatively innocuous enhancements, they are not considered to be any major threat to safety in human space. But one project was different...

With the knowledge that the expanding and increasingly independent star systems would one day try to succeed from their control, the Gaeon Empire started a project to create a type of super-soldier that was essentially a deployable weapon. The goal was an agent that could be infiltrated into a star system and then run amok until all those in the system had either fled in terror or been killed. A terror weapon that would insure the dominance of the Gaeon Empire for decades to come. To that end the "Titan Infection" project was created.

The project had many sub-interests seeking the best means of meeting the goal, but one theme was universal: the use of a series of self-replicating nanite colonies to replace and augment Human biology. Those subjected to these nanites would have the ability to rapidly grow new cells to replace damaged or inefficient tissues and their more bulky and less efficient Human subsystems would be replaced with nanite-created superior engineered organic systems. Separate nanite colonies would monitor levels of nutrients and hormones in the subject's bloodstream and create the optimal amount of augmentation drugs possible. More nanites would replace bone marrow with dedicated nanofactories that would produce nanites capable of analyzing the subject's body for all foreign pathogens and eliminate them.

The overall effect was staggering. The central group was capable of consuming almost any organic matter and deriving nourishment from it. They had strength, agility, and endurance far beyond the Human norm. All symptoms of aging had been eliminated, since the nanites would replace cells failing to perform with fresh cells. Any injury that was not immediately lethal could be healed in hours at the most. These truly were super-Human. Even their senses were enhanced, many with pseudo-cybernetic augmentations created by nano-scale manipulation of cell structure and composition.

The downside was equally astonishing. The stress that rapid cell replacement placed on the bodies of the subjects meant that their stem cells depleted at a rate far faster than Human normal and needed to be replaced intermittently. Instinctive survival drives would cause the subjects to become increasingly hostile as their bodies decayed, eventually turning homicidal and devouring other Humans in order for their nanite-controlled digestive systems to consume their stem cells and replenish the host subject. This was an inefficient method of deriving stem cells and would have to be repeated frequently in order to get enough since the

stolen stem cells were not genetically identical to those of the host. While they were in the laboratory, the researchers used cloned stem cells and medical equipment to inject duplicates of the subject's original stem cells directly into their major organs - a practice which was far more efficient and effective.

This side effect was not thought of as a bad thing by the researchers, since it gave them a method of insuring their hostility towards the populations they would be sent against, as well as an easy way to lure them back into captivity once their work was done. Those that survived the centuries after the invasion, or their decedents, often try to use medical equipment to increase the efficiency of their stem cell theft.

The best view of the research was that blood samples from one subject could be used to try and "convert" another subject instead of tailoring new nanite colonies to the physiology of the new subject. This allowed them to stress test prospective subjects for the programs and weed out the unfit, as well as gave the soldiers a new weapon to use: pathogenic spreading. They could infect others on the target world with their strain of the nanites and thusly create a small army of soldiers to continue the act of destruction. In order to insure that they would do so, a kind of reward system was designed into the nanites. For every new soldier infected successfully a coded radio signal would be sent out. This signal would change with each attempt. If the basic radio-receiver created in the maker's brain picked up this signal, then they would be rewarded with a slow stimulation of their pleasure center.

The project had entered long-term experimentation and started to yield up data showing that the physical enhancement of the earlier subjects was slowly improving in effectiveness when the Necrol invaded Steppingstone. Now the Infected have spread into the general population along with the rest of the system's survivors. They have created progeny in order to "get buzzed" by their rebirth. They have spread, they are hungry, and they are physically indistinguishable from other Humans...

Necrol

The Necrol, while prominent in establishing the status quo, are no longer the overwhelming force they were when they invaded Gaeon space. The local Machine Intelligence lost so much of its force when the Core Systems were forced to nova that rival Intelligences consumed it. The other Intelligences are busy fighting each other and the systems controlled by the non-Human races, they simply do not have much resources LEFT to make assaulting Human space more than a past-time. Remnant Governor Intelligences from the defeated Machine Intelligence still exist within human space - enough to make life interesting for humanity.

Necrol Hierarchy: This is the list of Necrol types, in order of greatest to lowest in the command structure of each Necrol civilization.

* **Machine Intelligence:** These are the only TRUE intelligences in the Necrol civilization. Each Machine Intelligence occupies a bus-sized apparatus of enslaved psionic Governor Intelligences, power generators, sensor arrays, and defensive weaponry. The actual creature itself however is a globe about three feet across, which is built around a Nanite Factory of God-Like Complexity. The nanites are used to lay down, alter, and maintain the pathways of the surrounding computational circuits, giving the "brain" a scope and adaptability that far exceeds even the most powerful network of super-computers in human space. Once the brain is finished being constructed, it takes over control of the nanite factory from its creating parent Machine Intelligence. At this point, it has all of the knowledge needed to create its own Necrol civilization from raw materials. By using encrypted radio

communications it can control EACH of the Necrol nanites within its broadcast range, which is about 20 miles without augmentation. This allows it to make real-time alterations in the form and function of anything infected with Necrol nanites up to and including the near-instantaneous take-over of creatures and the adaptation of their bodies to service its needs.

* **Governor Intelligence:** This is a near-artificial intelligence, usually made from several living brains that are fused together and controlled by Necrol computers. They are used to oversee operations that are beyond the communication range of a Machine Intelligence or that require organic variability and intuition. While it is easiest for a Necrol to use captured organic tissue that has been Immersed in this manner, all Machine Intelligences are also capable of constructing the necessary organic cells from elements by the direct control of Necrol nanites. The directing intelligences of a space outpost and the psionic systems of specialty-purpose systems are the most common examples of this type.

* **Autonomous Drone:** This is a system that is capable of independent action approaching that of "free will." It has a very rigidly defined mission or operating mandate, but is then free to act and change its methods in pursuit of these goals. They are usually made from whatever materials are possible, liberally laced with Necrol technology, in order to provide them with a wide assortment of abilities in case they are needed. Warrior Drones and Infiltrators are the most common examples of this type.

* **Pure Drone:** This is a creature or computerized system that has had its controlling systems completely replaced by Necrol technology, or at least had their functions totally usurped. They are typically enhanced fairly well with Necrol technology so that they can better serve in their assigned functions. Necrol Spiders and the "Immersed" living creatures are the most common examples of this type.

* **Enslaved Drone:** The lowest form of Necrol, mostly these are living beings or computerized systems that have had their own will and control centers usurped by Necrol technology. They might have minor enhancements, but they are usually viewed as a completely disposable resource. Creatures contaminated with Necrol nanites that have been implanted with a controlling computer are the most common example.

* **Nanite Infested:** Not a real Necrol, but on their way. This is a creature or computerized system that has had its nervous/control system completely usurped by Necrol nanites. They are still free willed, but the nanites are constantly sending out a coded radio signal trying to attract a Pure Drone to continue the conversion process.

Necrol Civilization: Instead of having one central civilization, all Necrol colonies are their own civilizations. Because even using Governor Intelligences and artificial long-range Telepathic brains cannot allow for real-time micromanaging, a Necrol civilization cannot occupy an area larger than about one star system. Now take into account that each and every Machine Intelligence views all other Necrol civilizations as just pre-processed spare parts, thanks to their hardwired directives to "gather and return" resources, and you have a recipe for disaster.

Two neighboring Machine Intelligences will almost assuredly start a war of attrition against each other, complete with a Machiavellian chess-game of maneuver and counter-maneuver, until one has destroyed the other and lost much of its own resources in the process. But after one has emerged the victor, it must send a Machine Intelligence to the new star system in order to make it productive, which starts the process all over again.

The unknown progenitor of the Necrol foresaw this happening and thus designed into them a certain set of directives that ALL Machine Intelligences have no choice but to obey.

1 - A Machine Intelligence must never wage war on the Machine Intelligence that spawned it.

2 - A Machine Intelligence must report the positions and strengths, as it understands them, of all nearby Machine Intelligence to the one that spawned it.

3 - A Machine Intelligence must report all of its technical discoveries and innovations to the Machine Intelligence that spawned it.

4 - A Machine Intelligence must always try to use the minimum feasible resources to consume a new resource.

Despite these precautions, the Necrol are still involved in inconstant infighting, but it is more of a war of opportunity. Each Machine Intelligence has learned a few lessons that serve to make them less attractive targets to their neighbors and to insure their own survival in the long term.

1 - Best to seed their own spawn into all neighboring systems in order to create buffer zones and observation posts.

2 - Never give any but the necessary information to your spawn in case they are consumed and the information learned by an enemy Machine Intelligence.

3 - Never cooperate towards a mutual goal with another Machine Intelligence, since it provides them with tactical information on you.

4 - Always keep the data on any valuable technology resident in yourself and insure your own obliteration to prevent this data from being learned by an enemy. In this way, you provide incentive to not attempt invasion to learn valuable information.

5 - Never trust another Machine Intelligence.

Necrol "Biology": All Necrol are comprised of two parts: their Nanites and their Structure.

Necrol nanites are God-Like Complexity nanomachines capable of self-replication, movement through any matter, conversion of the entire EM spectrum to electrical or radio energy (but can still be overloaded), identification of all elements, and the movement of atoms or entire molecules from one location to another. In addition to this, they can also be controlled through the use of extremely low frequency but highly encrypted radio signals, which can be either broadcast or passed from one to another to form a data chain. Necrol computer systems use their nanites to provide energy efficiency, repairs, and even construction of small components. The computer centers themselves use these nanites to serve as mobile data paths, allowing the computers to make small adaptations in routine over time in order to achieve goals.

When not receiving Necrol control signals, the nanites revert to their default program, which is to seek out sources of magnetic fields, then tap off the field to gain the energy needed to replicate. As the nanites spread over the source, the source's output weakens and become erratic. Once a particular source is totally inundated with nanites they then use the stolen energy to send out a coded radio signal that notifies all Necrol machines in range that there is a system ready for consumption.

Many worlds filled with primitive life-forms are first exposed to Necrol in the form of nanites that rapidly spread over the surface of the planet until all creatures are infected. Then a Governor Intelligence that has been watching the spread sends word back that the planet is ready for consumption by a Machine Intelligence.

The structure of a Necrol is the physical form that takes advantage of the services the nanites provide. This can be anything from a infested rabbit that has a control chip implanted in it, and is being used for observation, to a city-sized factory in orbit producing ships from asteroids. Necrol usually build along a pyramid model, with smaller Necrol providing assistance and support to fewer larger Necrol. For instance, the ship factory

would be the body of a Governor Intelligence, which would be served by a dozen or so Autonomous Drones that fetch the asteroids.

Each Autonomous Drone has a dozen or so Pure Drone Spiders that are used to fit the engines the Autonomous Drone carries onto the asteroids, and the factory has a few hundred that are used to maintain and move material inside of itself.

Pirate Clans

Some people take up lives where they prey on others, either along widely traveled trade routes or poorly defended outposts. Most of those who do this eventually meet with a bad end, either by violence or ill luck. Those that survive still have the basic needs and drives of all Humans: food, family, and community. They gather together, raising families into the business of piracy and forming loose communities of inter-related extended families. They become "pirate clans."

Each of the clans has a flotilla of space ships hooked up as a habitat, or even an actual habitat that has been taken over. This "safe port" is usually located either at a secret location in deep space or hidden in a star system. From here the family launches raids within their territory and occasionally go on long-trip voyages when seeking something of interest. All booty taken is then brought back to the safe port for storage and use by the clan. In addition, things that they do not need immediately, or at all, are put on cargo haulers that have never seen use as pirate vessels and sent to contacts in legitimate spaceports as trade goods. In order to maintain their base's secrecy, and prevent being attacked by pirates, these ships travel fresh routes instead of relying on safer and quicker established routes.

It is possible to buy one's way into a pirate clan, usually by approaching one of their contacts with a large bankroll or very valuable materials. The entrance price is then shared out among the crew of the ship that they sign on to, and the contact that signs them up receives their share of any booty for the next year. This helps to insure that the crew will welcome the introduction of "fresh blood," and that the contact will only pass on people that they believe will be valuable to the crew. This tradition is not the only way to get into a pirate clan; they will from time to time offer probationary member status to outstanding individuals on board the vessels they hit.

All pirate clan vessels are a patchwork mixture of advanced, poor, and makeshift equipment, often with multiple redundancies on primary systems. Whenever a pirate clan captures a new vessel they usually have to use it to not only repair their own ships, but also often scavenge it for materials needed to make other captured vessels usable. This make it work attitude has lead to the popular saying, "If anybody can make it fly, a pirate clan can!"

Pirate clan raids are never set-piece affairs; they strike as quickly as possible. When engaged the raiding force splits into two, with the larger artillery platform firing from extreme range, while a collection of fighters tethered to a Hop-capable gunship teleports into close proximity to the target. As soon as they reach close proximity, all the telepaths and fetchers on board the pirate clan ships try to prevent the target vessel from leaving the area. The gunship then attacks the target's weapon systems, while the fighter craft attack sensor and power systems. The goal of these tactics is to disable the crew of the ship, or barring that, its ability to fight back. Pirate clans rarely use Limpets and almost never attack multiple ships, unless it is a concerted effort by several clans.

Sirens

Nobody knows exactly what these are, and that is probably the scariest thing about the entities called "Sirens." What is known is that some ships that have traveled into deep space have encountered telepathic voices that compel their passengers and crew to act in a suicidal manner. They try to leave the ship and go to the voices or attempt to scuttle the ship. Psionic people seem to be either immune to the telepathic assault or are just not assaulted. However, if they try to impede the efforts of those who are assaulted, then the Sirens' victims attack them in a maddened manner.

Most Sirens seem incapable of attacking more than six victims at a time and many encounters result in fewer simultaneous attacks. This could be because those ships attacked by larger numbers are simply never heard from again, or not. In any case, once a Siren victim dies from exposure to space, a new victim is not assaulted. Should a victim die in any other way, a new victim is assaulted if possible.

The only known way to stop a Siren assault once it has begun is to travel into the gravity well of a star system. At that point, all of the victims under assault by a Siren are suddenly in complete control of their faculties again, although many exhibit severe psychological problems afterwards. Hoping from the area has absolutely no effect on a Siren attack; neither does activating a ship's gravity field.

There is much speculation as to the nature of the Sirens. Some think that they are incredibly powerful telepaths, possibly of Necrol origin, that inhabit outposts in deep space and periodically scan for minds to assail. Others think that they are creatures of pure mental energy that live in space and feed off the minds of those that die within their realm. Some think that they are actually the echoes of the minds of ship crews that have died from space exposure and traveling to a star system puts them to rest.

Nobody knows their exact nature for sure, and their appearance seems to be completely random.

Vegiterribles

A bizarre form of space-born plant life that seems capable of surviving in any environment - given a few requirements. This life form seems to progress along a simple development pattern that is also highly effective. Its similarities to humanoid configuration and its adaptation to technology lead many to think it is an engineered life form. This argument is further reinforced by the fact that its analog of sap is filled with what can only be described as specialty-purpose organic nanites.

The first stage is the most innocuous, and the reason for the Vegiterribles' insidious spread through human space. In this form they it is just a patch of adhesive vines that cling to any metallic, plastic, or ceramic surface they come into contact with. The vines are sheathed in naturally grown high-strength polymers that protect the plant from the vast extremes of space. As time passes, the plant uses electrical current to break down the material it has adhered to and slowly expand into a larger patch. Since it tends to only derive minute amounts of electrical current from thermal differences in its outer sheath and the material, as well as have a highly limited exposure to organic elements, it can go unnoticed for months or even years while it slowly spreads. The overall structure itself is not compromised, since the adhesive plant is usually just as strong as the material it is replacing.

Eventually, the plant grows into a power conduit or high-carbon element such as a life support system, at which point its grown rate increases dramatically. This initial sudden surge of resources is also the point at which the plant begins its second developmental stage, by growing an egg-like pod at the same

location. The tendrils of the vines that insinuate themselves into the structure feed back material and energy to the egg pod, until it is fully developed and about four feet across.

Once the egg is fully formed it splits open and releases both a cloud of spores and the final development stage of the Vegiterrible life form: an ambulatory humanoid zombiform. The zombiform's outer carapace is made from the same material as the vines and is therefore incredibly resilient. It has a wide array of senses, including a magnetic-anomaly sense that it uses to pick up on the presence of electrical energy, and a weak broadcast ultraviolet chemical scope that tells it the location, shape, and composition of all items in its line of sight. It is equipped with an arm that is effectively a burst-fire needler, shooting small hardened vines that it uses to reproduce.

The zombiform then proceeds to hunt down all the sources of electrical energy it can find and places small vines at them in order to "seed" itself. Any organic thing it comes across it shoots with the needler. Not to kill it, but to insure it is immobile and to spread itself more; death is incidental. If it starts to run low on ammunition, or is severely damaged, it will retreat to the nearest egg pod in order to reload or heal.

The spores that the egg pods release when they open are almost as dangerous as the zombiform. They are nanoscale active immune spores, which break down any non-Vegiterrible nanite or organic cell and use them to reproduce. The reproductive process only works on organic matter or carbon-bearing nanites and even then tends to leave large amounts of organic material unconverted. Even though the spores are airborne, they are not self-motive, so it is possible to avoid contamination so long as you avoid exposure to the air around the egg pods.

One saving grace of the Vegiterribles is that they seem to be as much a problem for the Necrol as they are for everybody else. Areas infested with Vegiterribles have managed to successfully repel many Necrol invasions, with the defeated Necrol being consumed to produce more Vegiterribles. In the observed encounters between the two, the only method the Necrol have had to prevent the contagion from spreading is to use nuclear weapons to obliterate all traces of the Vegiterribles, which tends to leave nothing else behind for the Necrol to consume.

TREATIES

In the *Dead Stars* setting there are few treaties that are known through most of human space. Most treaties are simple affairs, more along the lines of a cease-fire agreement or a declaration of mutual understanding over a resource. Two treaties, however, stand out both for their scope and their longevity. Both of these are described here.

Kranst Convention

In 102 PI, following the discovery of the tragedy in the Kranst system, all of the governments and major corporations in Corporate Space ratified the Kranst Convention. This document is a set of rules that cover everything from the definition of illegal tactics in space combat to the protection of FTL pilots. It is the closest thing to a universal law that exists in human space. Even though only about a quarter of human space abides by it, it is still very well known in all the places Humans have settled. The only Human worlds that have not heard of it are Lost Worlds, since it was drafted long after the Necrol invasion.

On War: According to the Kranst Convention, the following tactics are illegal to use. Violators of this article are subject to punitive warfare by the rest of the Convention's signatories.

* **Tele-Bombing:** The act of using Fetching to send a hazardous item into the hull of an enemy space vessel. The reason for this is that the practice has a tendency to cause the death of any FTL pilots in the vessel.

* **Orbital Bombardment:** The act of dropping large objects from orbit or space onto the surface of a planet. The reason for outlawing this is that it makes the planet incapable of being used for any purpose until the surface disruption has died down, which can take years.

* **Nanoplague:** The widespread use of destructive or lethal nanites that are capable of unlimited function and possibly replication. This is illegal because even with safety features built-in, it is all too common for such agents to have pockets of still-active nanites when the area is being re-inhabited.

FTL Pilot Rights: In order to protect the ability to engage in interstellar trade, the Kranst Convention also addresses the rights and protections of FTL Pilots. Violation of any of these strictures is usually handled as theft, with the violator being forced to make financial restitution to the person whose rights they violated.

* **Privileged Quarters:** FTL Pilots are to be given private quarters, and dine on the best foods available on the ship, during which times their skills as an FTL Pilot are to be used. These measures are to be taken in order to make the dangers of space travel attractive to the people that make it possible and to prevent their mistreatment.

* **Private Passage:** The quarters of an FTL Pilot are considered to be their private domain and ships personnel do not have the right to enter them. Likewise, the FTL Pilot is allowed 250 lbs of cargo that nobody except port personnel is permitted to inspect. They may replace this with a fellow traveler that stays in their quarters and must be fed as well as the FTL Pilot. This insures that the FTL Pilot can make some money on the side by running their own cargo or passenger or just have a few personal valuables on hand. It is often used when a prospective FTL Pilot apprentices themselves to a more experienced FTL Pilot.

* **Self-Governance:** The FTL Pilot is only under nominal subordination to the ship's captain and can choose to not follow any order they feel would violate their safety or the Kranst Convention. In such instances, they must take all available means to travel to the nearest inhabited system and disembark, unless the captain of the ship agrees to forgo the order and maintain their employment contract. Should a contract be violated by a FTL Pilot in this way, then the contract is considered null and void.

Interstellar Shipping: In order to facilitate interstellar trade, and cut back on piracy, the organizers of the Kranst Convention took the opportunity to ratify laws regarding the standardization of interstellar trade. Violation of any of these articles is usually punishable by the confiscation of property sufficient to cover the damages that local judiciaries decide upon. This can lead to corrupt officials using these articles to gouge those they do not like, or simply as a means of supplementary income. Since it was the ancestors of these same officials who put the articles in the Kranst Convention in the first place, that is understandable.

* **Contract Binding:** All signatories on a contract are not bound by the dictates of that contract until such time as they have registered the contract with a port authority. This involves the contract being stored on the authority's computers for reference at any point in the future by any party. In practical terms a "service fee" of 1d10 x 100 credits is usually charged for each signatory on the contract and 1d10 x 10 credits to pull up the contract when somebody requests it.

* **Ship Registration:** All ships must have an specific ID code imbedded into their active sensors, which transmits their port of registration, ship name, registration code, ship type, and ship size. Each port maintains a database of ship registrations, including the

name of the ship's officers, its captain, and reports from all the FTL Pilots who have traveled with the ship. FTL Pilots are allowed free access to this information. Registering a ship costs 1/10th of the ship's unloaded market value and must be done every time the ship changes owners. Using a ship without this registration code enabled is a violation that is punishable by confiscation of the ship and its cargo, while using one with a false registration is also a criminal offense.

* **Payment of Port:** Ships must pay port authorities for docking and cargo holding fees, the rates of which are posted publicly and not retroactive. In exchange, the port must provide guards for the ship, its cargo, and free access to life-support, energy, and close range communications systems, including public networks. Before leaving port the ship must file its intended destination with the port's authorities. These fees are typically assessed based on the Mass of the ship, to the tune of 25 credits per day per Mass rating. Cargo storage fees are 15 credits per day for orbital storage, or 5 credits per day for surface storage. Many port masters charge additional "handling fees" as a source of auxiliary income.

* **Rescue Services:** Every port must maintain one space rescue ship for every 10 ships it is equipped to handle. This rescue vessel must be Hop-capable and armed sufficiently to defend the port from casual piracy. Should a ship in distress enter the system, all reasonable efforts must be made to save the crew and salvage the vessel if at all possible. While the rescue services are made at no charge, any materials used or repair costs that occurred during the rescue must be paid back by the crew of the ship.

Orliss/Lorallon Accord

In 30 PI, an Orliss settlement ship that was redirected finally arrived in the Karoc system. The Orliss intelligence that ran the ship crafted some representatives to interact with the strange new sapient race that they found barely clinging to life on the second moon of the system's only planet. After several weeks of investigation and negotiation, the scout ship struck an agreement with the head of Lorallon Corporation - an agreement that later became the basis of the Orliss/Lorallon Accord.

The Orliss vessel was refitted with a simple Imaging Chamber and the materials to both use it and make the FTL Pilot and Lorallon's negotiator comfortable. The biomass that had to be cleared out to do this was fashioned by the ship's intelligence into a set of male and female humanoid Orliss representatives, who were to serve as intermediaries and to begin surveying the world. The Orliss ship then left human space to travel to the star system that spawned it.

Its unexpected arrival was hailed as the single most important discovery of Orliss civilization. The Lorallon FTL Pilot and negotiator were treated with almost reverential respect and deferment. Despite this, the negotiations were brutal. The Orliss were not naive enough to forget their advantageous bargaining position. Eventually, the tentative agreement the ship made was upheld, and expanded on. The tenets of this agreement, called the "Orliss/Lorallon Accord" are:

* **Terraforming Karoc:** The main stipulation was that the Orliss had to begin terraforming the second moon of the Karoc system. Until this was completed, only a handful of FTL Pilots would be made available to them and only for as long as they were being used to ferry terraforming materials. The accord only stated that the surface be habitable with a breathable atmosphere, since the moon's lack of surface-born heavy elements meant that it could never be anything but a barely-habitable wasteland. In order to get the mass needed to create an oxygen/nitrogen atmosphere, a nearby system was virtually emptied of the remnants of its only world: an iceball that had shattered into an asteroid belt. It took

the Orliss over a decade of concerted effort to make the Karoc surface inhabitable and populate it with a simple, artificial biosphere, but they succeeded.

* **Fleet Construction:** Under the guidance of a combined Human/Orliss design team, a fleet of 200 ships was produced using Human technology and Orliss manufacturing techniques. Half of these ships were set aside for use by the Orliss, with Human FTL Pilots that were to serve on board them for five years. The other half was given over to Lorallon for their own use. Since the ships were produced a pair at a time a few each year, it was not uncommon for the same FTL Pilots to serve on multiple ships as their time in service on one ended and another ship came online. These first ships were also used by Lorallon to form the basis of their radiological fuel trading empire.

* **Free Passage:** For a period of 50 year after the terraforming of Karoc, each Lorallon ship was to set aside a berth for a single humanoid Orliss and up to 250 lbs of their gear. In this manner, the Orliss seeded themselves in human space and started to spread and explore.

* **Technical Assistance:** Lorallon was to provide technical manuals and treatises on all retained Human technology they had access to for a period of 60 years from the beginning of the accord. This gave the Orliss the time they needed to become completely comfortable with Human civilization and technology. The Orliss also used this time to learn as much as they could about the phenomenon of psionics and the science behind it in an attempt to engineer it into themselves. They have never managed even a single success, but managed to rediscover how to genetically engineer psionic abilities in Humans.

* **FTL Access:** Lorallon was responsible for advertising the Orliss' desire for FTL Pilots in their travels and escort them to Karoc for hiring at no cost to the FTL Pilot. The Orliss would then reimburse Lorallon for the travel costs of the FTL Pilots, as well as pay Lorallon an amount equal to what they pay the FTL Pilot. Lorallon was to provide this service for 100 years after the completed terraforming of Karoc. It is thanks to this clause that the Orliss have discovered the depredations of the Necrol on their territories. When they found Humans they thought that the Orliss race spanned thousands of stars. Now they know that they hold onto only a few dozen.

BANKING

A person does not put money into the bank in order to earn interest on it, but to keep it from being stolen. Without a strong, central government to prosecute criminals across the stars, it is far too easy for a thief to skip a solar system to evade prosecution. In order to have the peace of mind that comes with not walking around carrying your rent money, banks offer the service of holding onto it.

The banks get something out of this of course. They get to use the money as capital funds to loan to others (see below) or to finance their own enterprises. Since banking requires a heavy investment in bureaucracy, most banks are single-star affairs. A few that are closely tied, or even subdivisions, of large businesses can cover several star systems. The largest such institution by far is Omnibank, which has at least an outpost in most of human space.

A person can transfer funds from one bank to another branch of the same bank in another star system, if there is one, by means of paying a service fee. This usually costs 10% of the funds to be transferred and the accounting information necessary for the transfer are then sent as an encrypted secret packet in the various mail systems. Random propagation of the packet through the mail

system eventually causes it to wind up at its destination, where a "received" packet then enters the mail system in order to delete the information.

Loans: There is typically very little rule of law in the *Dead Stars* setting, at least beyond the limits of a single solar system. This means that a person could easily evade their debts by simply leaving for new worlds. Thus, bank loans are a high-risk proposition, like in the ancient times of old earth. This has led to a renaissance era mindset in all banking practices. The simple explanation is that in order to make up for the high percentage of money loans that are never paid back, those who make it a point to lend money tend to do so in interest rates of 100% annually or more, depending on how much of a risk the recipient is.

In order to insure that anybody pays back these loans, they employ the simple expedient of enforced brutality on debtors. If somebody cannot pay back their loans by the agreed upon time, they seek to force at least partial payment. The loan contract usually allows them to confiscate all property in the system until they have recouped the agreed upon amount...including the debtor's body. Should the debtor flee the system in order to avoid this fate, they simply post a warrant for their capture. This warrant tends to be about 10% of what the debtor owes and most often has the stipulation that the debtor must be turned over to Lorallon Radiological Services for punitive collection. Lorallon then sends the loaner notice of retrieval in their mail system and the bounty hunter who caught them is issued their payment (a process that can take several weeks from the time of capture).

Essentially, these people would be called "loan sharks" in the early 21st century, but now they are much more civilized about it.

Financing: Omnibank gains much of its financial wealth from the practice of financing the purchase of vehicles. Anybody who can pass an aptitude test to show their ability to use or manage the vehicle responsibly can gain such financing. The test focuses on financial capability as well as the ability to pilot it, requiring 3+ ranks in both Pilot and Profession, as well as costing 100 credits for the test at that Omnibank center. The Omnibank branch then pays for the vehicle in question, and runs a debt account equal to the price of the vehicle +100% in the person's name. The person must pay off at least 10% of the vehicle's price each year to avoid repossession of the vehicle. If the vehicle is destroyed the debt still exists, but failure to pay for it causes indentured service until they pay off the remaining debt +50%.

Bounty hunters are paid 10% of the remaining debt when they return the vehicle, or 5% of the adjusted debt if they return the person.

EXAMPLE STAR SYSTEM: KAROC

Star: M8III, Stellar Mass 3.8 (288.8 AU gravity well)

Orbits (11): Empty (0.42 AU), Empty (0.73 AU) [Inhabitable Water Zone], Empty (1.05 AU), Empty (1.68 AU), Empty (2.94 AU), Asteroid Belt (5.46 AU), Asteroid Belt (10.5 AU), Asteroid Belt (19.9 AU), Asteroid Belt (38 AU), Gas Giant (81 AU) [327,000 mi diameter, 3 moons], Oort Cloud (146.3 AU)

Habitations (and Population): Lorallon City and surrounding settlements (3,500,000), Larollon Radiological Mines (4,000)

Government: Corporation (Lorallon Radiological Services), and anarchy (in Lorallon City and settlements, outside of corporation facilities)

Imports: High-end electronics, food, medical goods

Exports: Uranium, Plutonium

Home System Feat: Wastelander

Brief Description

There were most likely other planets in this system long before humanity found it, but the star doubtlessly consumed them as it expanded into a red giant. The gravitic tides created by the pull of the system's only surviving stellar body, a gas giant, and the system's sun has long since shredded the three remaining planets into asteroid fields. There are two of these asteroid rings between the gas giant and the sun, which helps to shield the gas giant from solar activity. The last of the three asteroid fields circles the red giant at a little over twice the distance that separates the gas giant from the star.

The gas giant has three moons, one natural and the other two captured former planets. Its natural moon, which is also the closest to it, is an immense ball of solid metals and trace elements. It is made mostly of uranium and, where the moon's gravity and heat work to refine it deep beneath the surface, plutonium. The second moon is the only truly habitable one and has even been partially terraformed, even though its appearance is as a waterless barren wasteland. The third moon is a ball of what amounts to dirty ice, far from the heat given off by the gas giant.

Karoc Slums Max Item Value: 15,000

Item Type	Price	DC	Resource	%
Armor (personal)	+15%	+1	Gemstones	1
Armor (vehicle)	+40%	+5	Heavy Metals	1
Combustion Fuel	+50%	+3	Industrial Crystals	2
Cyberware	+100%	+3	Industrial Metals	3
Drugs & Medicine	+50%	+4	Light Metals	8
Electronics	+15%	+0	Organic Compounds	1
Explosives	+60%	+2	Radioactive Metals	0
Firearms	+30%	+2	Rare Minerals	9
Gene-Jacking	+110%	+8		
Primitive Weapons	+20%	+4		
Nanotech	+100%	+5		
Nuclear Fuel	+120%	+13		
Powered Armor	+100%	+5		
Programs	-5%	-4		
Robots	+100%	+2		
Survival	-10%	-2		
Tools	+30%	+2		
Vehicles, Flying	+100%	+5		
Vehicles, Ground	+80%	+2		
Vehicles, Space	+120%	+10		

History

Just before the fall of human civilization, the Gaea government had sold mineral rights to this system to the Lorallon Corporation. As the corporation was building its facilities on the gas giant's second moon, a base from which to start mining, the Necrol invaded. The owner of the Lorallon Corporation and his son managed to escape from Infinite Waters just before its star was forced to go nova to stop the Necrol invasion. Having no other resources, they traveled to their only remaining corporate holding: the Karoc system.

When they arrived with several refugees that they brought from Infinite Waters, including a few dozen Drakes, they took over control of the facility. The refugees were turned into forced labor, used to perform all the dirty tasks necessary to maintain life in the Karoc system. The owner of the corporation was killed 20 years later in a worker's uprising that was eventually suppressed, leaving his son Asmet Travol Lorallon in control of the corporation. He holds that position to this day, maintaining his life with cutting-edge medical treatment, nanite infusions, genetic engineering, and forced organ donation. Indeed, there isn't much of Asmet left in Asmet.

Ten years after the worker's revolt, the Orlliss arrived in the system, having launched their seed-ship from another system six light-years away. Asmet entered into a bargain with the aliens, giving them access to psionic star travel and Human technology in exchange for their aid in terraforming the moon that the Lorallon facility had been barely surviving upon as well as travel off of it for business reasons. 10 years later, the moon was well along to its current state and the Orlliss had begun their travels into human space, assisted by the Lorallon Corporation's representatives and their old databases.

This gave them the contacts they needed to eventually set up their two most profitable ventures: the selling of mined uranium and plutonium and the importation of "undesirables" from other systems. Now the Lorallon Corporation is known as the galaxy's primary supplier of fissionable metals and people to talk to if you want to get rid of a prisoner and guarantee he suffers before he dies. All of the prisoners the Lorallon Corporation takes in are shipped back to the Karoc system, and forced to work in the radioactive mines. This usually shortens their life expectancy to about one and a half years and they are the lucky ones! Those they import when there are not any openings in the mines are dumped into Lorallon City, to survive as best they can in the anarchic resource-poor world!

Living There

Life in Lorallon City and its surrounding settlements is a struggle to see tomorrow. The days are 25 hours, and the gravity is 1G, but that is as close as it gets to the paradise of Gaea. There are no seasons and the average daytime temperature is 105 degrees Fahrenheit, spiking to 120 degrees at mid-day, with nightly lows as far as 30 degrees. There is no cloud-cover, but there are intermittent dust storms. These storms make it harder to breathe the hot arid air, in addition to carrying a static charge that often causes the banks to sizzle with electrical discharges. It never rains on the moon, ever, and water can only be had by reclaiming it, or by importing it. The folk of the settlements and the shantytown and ruined buildings outside of the Lorallon City corporate facilities often trade with the corporation in exchange for food and water, or else make do with the waste run-off water that comes out of the corporation's reclamation facility.

The folk of the shanty-town, somewhat a misnomer given that there are several two and three story buildings dotting the area, are totally dependant on the corporation for the means to live. They sell their services to corporate goons as either brute laborers or as town criers and often as minor manufacturers of goods that would be prohibitively expensive to import. In exchange, the corporation gives them food, and corporate credits they can use to purchase things they could not manufacture themselves. These folk have no rights in this society, and are often kidnapped to serve as short-lived labor or medical supplies... If anybody lays a finger on a corporate employee, they are hunted down and killed publicly and messily. The corporation even offers rewards for the capture of those they want to punish, or exploit.

Out in the wilderness of the desert, there are both prospectors and roving bands of cannibals called Ghoulies. The prospectors search out silicon, magnesium, and other non-metallic materials used in the production of electronic circuits, which they sell to the corporation in exchange for food and corporate credits to purchase goods and services with. The Ghoulies are usually either violent criminals imported from other worlds, or the descendants of such criminals. They attempt to capture and consume any other creatures they find, extracting water from their blood and sustenance from their flesh. Ghoulies are typically recognized by their leather clothing - you do not want to know what it is made

from. This clothing serves as primitive light armor: DR 2, ER 2, Damage Threshold 3, Quality 1, Gear Level 1.

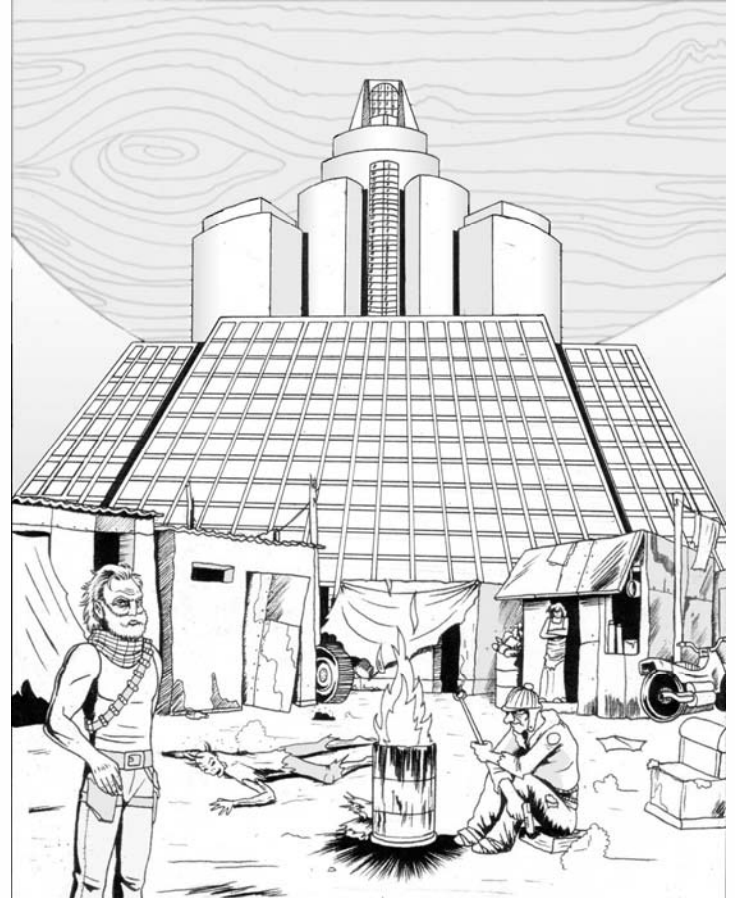
No matter where they live, the main goal of all the folk in the Karoc system is getting out of the Karoc system! This is especially difficult. The second moon is ringed by orbital defense satellites that fire on any ship descending to or taking off from the surface, unless they are heading into or taking off from the spaceport in Lorallon City. The spaceport is the single most heavily defended spot on the planet, ringed entirely by the Lorallon corporate facilities, the second most heavily defended place on the planet! The entire area is a veritable fortress, up against which the shantytown of Lorallon City abuts.

The soil here has a faint blue tinge in many places, owing to the terraforming microbes it carries that process nitrogen dioxide and animal wastes into oxygen and nitrogen crystals. There is also a higher-order plant called carrow, which produces edible seeds and whose stalk can be used to weave cloth. There are only three animals on this moon, each of them engineered by the Orlliss to serve a function in the terraforming process.

The large and docile Roathbeast slumps along the ground, consuming soil microbes and processing them. It grows to be about 600 lbs and has a thick leathery hide covered in fine fur. Its meat is fit for consumption.

The quick and skittish Crill is a diminutive animal about the size of a cat, with tusks. It travels around, devouring any carrow plants it finds and exuding the plant's seeds in its spoor. Its skin is furless, and slightly scaly to hold in water, and its flesh is safe to consume.

The powerful and dangerous Rekik is a medium hunting animal the size of a large dog, or a panther. It stalks the sandy wastes preying on both Roathbeast and Crill for its food. It has been engineered to not attack anything except these two animals and will not come within 100 ft of a Human scent. Its skin is thick leather, and its flesh is safe to eat.



Karoc - Mike McElwee

EXAMPLE STAR SYSTEM: TRITON'S RUN

Star: K7VI, Stellar Mass 0.55 (6.05 AU gravity well)

Orbits (6): Desert Low-Iron 1g (0.3 AU) [11,150 mi diameter, 3 moons, year of 60 standard days, local day 29 hours] [Inhabitable Water Zone], Empty (0.7 AU), Asteroid Belt (1 AU), Rockball (1.65 AU) [2,375 mi diameter, 0 moons], Gas Giant (2.9 AU) [34,000 mi diameter, 5 moons], Oort Cloud (5.2 AU)

Habitations (and Population): Desert Planet 0.3 AU - Landfall (27,000), Rejection (16,000), Enterprise (12,000), Impossible Dream (10,000); Gas Giant Moons 2.9 AU/Oort Cloud 5.2 AU - Pirates (200 to 3,000)

Government: Desert Planet 0.3 AU - Oligarchy; Pirates - Unknown

Imports: Food, medicines, plastics, ceramics, radioactive minerals

Exports: Rare Earths, Electronics

Home System Feat: Rediscovered World, or Wastelander

Brief Description

Triton's Run is a booming frontier system in the tradition of the "wild west" of old Earth, only in their case the frontier passed them by long ago. Its inhabited world is nearly barren, a scrub-lined desert with high mountains and violent weather. It is a rare-earths mining and refining area with an eye towards becoming a major trading concern, but the natural impediments to accomplishing this are formidable.

The main impediment is that the system is about ten light-years from the nearest other star system, which led to it being largely ignored during the pre-Invasion colonization craze. Given that its star is on the low-end of luminosity, it was believed that there was no inhabitable world in orbit of it and if there were that there would be insufficient resources to make exploitation worthwhile. Sadly, even though it has an inhabitable world the lack of most resources still plagues it.

The second impediment is the presence of the closest system...Ostrokon. Ostrokon is already the major trading hub in the area, so it has a vested interest in not losing business to its neighbor. In addition to this, there is bad blood between the two systems, which mainly is felt in Triton's Run. Because of Ostrokon's ancient mistreatment of the refugee ship that founded Triton's Run, the citizens of this world have a pathological detestation of Ostrokon and refuse to do any sort of business with them - even if it would help them in their own goals.

Triton's Run Max Item Value: 15,000

Item Type	Price	DC	Resource	%
Armor (personal)	+40%	+2	Gemstones	10
Armor (vehicle)	+0%	-1	Heavy Metals	4
Combustion Fuel	+70%	+6	Industrial Crystals	15
Cyberware	+0%	+1	Industrial Metals	8
Drugs & Medicine	+80%	+6	Light Metals	6
Electronics	-90%	-10	Organic Compounds	1
Explosives	+50%	+2	Radioactive Metals	2
Firearms	+40%	+1	Rare Minerals	16
Gene-Jacking	+50%	+8		
Primitive Weapons	+10%	+1		
Nanotech	-50%	-2		
Nuclear Fuel	+100%	+4		
Powered Armor	+15%	+2		
Programs	-90%	-14		
Robots	-10%	-2		
Survival	+10%	+1		
Tools	+15%	+0		
Vehicles, Flying	+20%	+2		
Vehicles, Ground	+10%	+1		
Vehicles, Space	+40%	+5		

History

The colony ship Triton founded Triton's Run, which was in the outer-system transfer station at Alpha Centauri when the Necrol invaded. Taking on board what refugees and supplies it could, the ship set out into deep space to the colonies. It had not yet received clearance and direction on where to go from the Gaeen Empire, so like many other refugees the ship traveled from system to system looking for a home...and was rejected in all of them.

Eventually their wanderings took them to the system of Ostrokon, where their request for sanctuary was met with force. The Ostrokon government, long desiring its independence from the Gaeen Empire, saw the colony ship and its inhabitants as a threat to their new social order. Seeking to eliminate that threat they launched their secret cache of gunships, and proceeded to fire upon the weapon-less Triton. The refugees, beaten and battered, managed to evade their pursuers by Hopping out of the system, but only barely.

With the ship severely damaged, hull breaches in many sections, they could not enter any high-luminosity star without baking to death from solar radiation. But the damage was too extensive to be repaired without external supplies, which could only be gained from an inhabited system or at least mineral resources. Pulling up a star chart the captain of the Triton found that there was a low-luminosity star in the middle of a gap in the local layout of space just next to Ostrokon. Hoping to find the minerals needed to fabricate repair supplies, they set out for the un-named star.

When they arrived they found that the star actually had a world with an oxygen-rich atmosphere in orbit of it, and all the basic materials needed for life, even if it would be a hard life. A debate then ensued, since the colony ship was designed for planet-fall, but would then be incapable of escaping to orbit and there was no shuttlecraft that could be used to ferry materials and personnel. Eventually, it was decided by a slim majority that since the whole point was to find a new home, and this place could be made into a home, that the ship would land and its people rebuild their lives. In honor of the ship and their trials, they elected to name the system and the world "Triton's Run."

The town of Landfall was founded next to a metal deposit that the ship's sensors had detected. The town itself was built from a mixture of heat-cemented silicate bricks, extracted metals, and the ship itself. As time went on most of the colony's efforts had to be devoted towards food production, since the local water table was thin and very far belowground. With the loss of the capacity for orbital surveying, prospectors set out into the wilds to make detailed maps of the area as well as to find materials needed for different endeavors. It was then that the world's wealth of easily obtained rare earths was discovered, which led to a boom in electronics production.

One of these prospectors, a member of a semi-religious order of ascetics that was against the "easy solution" of founding a colony in this system, discovered something amazingly important on one of his long trips in the desert. He found caves that led to an underground cavern system literally filled with the most precious material on Triton's Run at the time - water. Evidently it was fed into by the deep-earth water table and a set of volcanic vents at the bottom fed it energy and caused the heated water to rise into the caves. An entire microbiology of oxygen-producing plants that fed on the byproducts of nitrogen-fixing pseudo-fish and derived their energy from volcanic heat was responsible for much the free oxygen in the planet's atmosphere, a riddle solved.

Returning to Landfall he told the other members of his group about this find, and they proceeded to lead a group of colonists dissatisfied with the initial decision to land to this wealth. There above the caverns they formed the town of Rejection and

proceeded to erect large sealed domes for use in growing the hoarded plant seeds from Gaea to form enclosed semi-wild habitats. This town eventually formed a symbiotic relationship with Landfall, receiving their metal goods in exchange for food and medicines.

The smaller town of Enterprise was founded a generation later by decedents of the original colonists. They had managed to locate an active volcanic vent barely below the surface not too far from Rejection and set out to tap it for geothermal energy. With this wealth of renewable energy they could then start up major manufacturing endeavors, which they did. Importing metal from Landfall and foodstuffs from Rejection, these children of the Rejection colonists started the first major manufacturing center on Triton's Run, which was responsible for eventually bringing the standard of living up to a state similar to that of the rest of the *Dead Stars* setting.

Seeking to emulate the successes of Rejection and Enterprise, fifty years ago a small group of "hopeless dreamers" set out to found their own town. Using ultra light aircraft they surveyed the terrain until they located a straight run of mountains with an easily accessed aquifer at their base. There they traveled, and founded the town of Impossible Dream. It took them a decade of hard work and innovation, but eventually they managed to create a hydroxide fuel refinery and vast solar array to use to power their ambitious project...returning to space.

To accomplish this, they constructed a ten-mile long magnetic accelerator along the peaks of the mountains, running from their base. By using the entire output of their solar array they could power the accelerator to launch up to 10,000 lbs into orbit, even though it had the capacity to launch much more the power to do so just wasn't available until recently. By launching communications satellites and observation satellites, they were able to pay for their major endeavor with subscription fees for the services of these devices. Then, 20 years ago, they launched their first interstellar-capable space ship and re-entered the civilization of Human space.

Living There

The folk of Triton's Run are a hearty people, accustomed to facing hardships in order to achieve their goals. Since the resources of the system are rather sparse, most of its exports are the rare earths that the inhabited planet has in abundance. The colonists have taken their wealth of electronics raw materials to heart and used it to construct a veritable information utopia. This gives the planet of Triton's Run a paradoxical appearance: on one hand computers and even robots are everywhere, but on the other hand the people dress in low-grade clothing or armor and typically carry cheap firearms.

Since the rule of law in the system is weak, everybody is responsible for their own protection. Each settlement has a local sheriff, with the larger settlements also having several deputies, but they exist mostly as a deterrent to flagrant criminals and violence. The council of elders that governs each settlement collects taxes and invests the law-enforcers with their legal powers, as well as seeing to the equitable distribution of necessities like food and water to the locals. In the event of a trial, these elders also form a judiciary council that tries the case with the defendant and the aggrieved representing themselves.

In addition to the large settlements of Landfall, Rejection, Enterprise, and Impossible Dream there are several dozen - some say a hundred - of small homesteads located all over the desert. These small groups of people have found a valuable mineral, a near-surface aquifer, or some other desirable resource and have built a fortress on it in order to make a living extracting it. Many of these homesteads fail due to bandit attacks, or the resource unexpectedly running out, but those that manage to hold on from

one generation to the next tend to produce descendants that are highly capable and self-reliant that seek their fortunes elsewhere. If you are looking for a generally-capable warrior, technician, or some other skilled worker the common wisdom has it that you can't do better than a second-generation homesteader.

The buildings of Triton's Run are constructed primarily from heat-baked silicate blocks - rough fire melted sand. These blocks are supported by high-strength steel alloy frames and covered in mats of leathery plastic to prevent abrasion on the interiors. The roof of every building is covered in solar panels that track the sun and store energy in a Charge Pack to provide power to the building. Some areas also have large domed climate-controlled habitats used for plant production, which is the main source of food on the planet. These buildings may look like fragile crystals, but nothing could be further from the truth. Their walls are foot-thick doped glass one-way mirrors, held together by high-strength steel frames.

The durability of construction on Triton's Run is both a matter of using available resources and of necessity. The planet is randomly swept by violent electrical dust storms that are virtually sandblasters, scouring all soft materials to ribbons when they hit. Before the launching of the weather observation satellite at Impossible Dream, these storms would claim dozens of lives a year. In addition to this there is a semi-stable problem with banditry from disgruntled locals and off-worlders that prey upon the smaller homesteads and outskirts of the major settlements. Particularly successful bandits end up with bounties issued for their heads, leading to a small cottage industry of bounty hunters that often take jobs off world for good enough pay.

Most of the off-worlders on Triton's Run are in the spaceport at the relatively small settlement of Impossible Dream. Several trading houses and trade-related businesses have sprung up in the area to take advantage of the town's space traffic. The magnetic accelerator is capable of launching a load of up to 100,000 lbs into space, provided that it has a metal frame to magnetize. This service costs credits equal to 1/10th the payload's weight in pounds if the customer can provide their own Charge, but if not then the elders of Impossible Dream will sell them Charge at a 1 credit per point basis. It takes an amount of Charge to launch a payload equal to the Mass (1 Mass = 1,000 lbs) of the payload squared times 100.

The planet's plant life is very hardy and capable of retracting their leaves into rigid stems in order to protect them from the electrical sandstorms that rage across its surface. The animal life is mostly primitive, but incredibly varied, and has similar mechanisms for survival. The sandy soil is filled with microbes that process carbon and nitrates spread by the storms, with the dew that condenses overnight. All told, the biosphere of Triton's Run is very primitive but effective and extremely adaptable to new factors such as human habitation.

Of all the animals on Triton's Run, only one discovered is dangerous. The Rock Beast appears to be an ovoid rock partially covered in sand when at rest, indistinguishable from all the other such rocks that cover the planet. It hunts by vibration, with its usual prey being the burrowing pack animals called Sand Fish. When it senses vibration anywhere within 20 ft it props itself up on a pair of legs and lets fly with a barbed tongue that spears several of the small Sand Fish at once and hauls them in to devour before moving on to a new area. Since humans have colonized Triton's Run, the Rock Beast has become a noisome danger. It is incapable of telling the difference between the vibration caused by a pack of its normal prey and one or more humans. The multiple barbs of its tongue are capable of dealing serious, even fatal, harm to a lightly armored human.

Name [] Player [] Race []

Level	Base Class	Level	Prestige Class	Description
Character Level [] []	--Psionicist []--	[]	[]	Ht: [] Wt: []
Gear Level [] []	--Rogue []--	[]	[]	Age: []
Armor GLM [] []	--Scholar []--	[]	[]	
Program GLM [] []	--Technician []--	[]	[]	
GLM [] []	--Vagabond []--	[]	[]	
TOTAL ECL [] []	--Warrior []--	[]	[]	SIZE CATEGORY []

Level Adjustment **SPEED** []

UNIVERSAL DECAY: DEAD STARS

by DaemonEye Publishing
and Jay Tyler Barrell

CREATION PRIORITY Race: [] Abilities: [] Skills: [] Cash: []

ABILITY SCORES				INITIATIVE	
Base	Bonus	Total	Mod	Damage	[]
STR []+[]=[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
DEX []+[]=[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
CON []+[]=[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
INT []+[]=[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
WIS []+[]=[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
CHA []+[]=[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

Insanity - Cha PK To-Hit [+] (Int mod + Psi Level)
Radiation Doses: (alpha []) (beta []) Cancer Points: []

SAVING THROWS				
TOTAL	Base	Ability	Misc.	Conditional Modifiers
FORT []=[]+[Con]+[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
REF []=[]+[Dex]+[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
WILL []=[]+[Wis]+[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

DEFENSE SCORE				
10	+ Dex []	+ Size []	+ Misc. []	= []

HIT POINTS & VITALITY					
HIT POINTS		VITALITY		PSI VITALITY	
Current	Max	Current	Max	Current	Max
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
1/2 Max	1/4 Max	1/2 Max	1/4 Max	Death Threshold	Psi Level
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

ARMOR						
BONUS DR: ([]) ER: ([])						
SUIT	Type	Max Dex	ACP	WT	Current/Max	
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	DR	[]/[]
Total Cost	Options/Max	GLM	Quality	ER	[]/[]	
[]	[]/[]	[]	[]	DT	[]/[]	
[]	[]/[]	[]	[]	[]	[]/[]	

WEAPONS						
WEAPON	Size	Range	Ammo	Damage	Type	WT
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Total Cost	Options/Max	GL	Quality	[]		
[]	[]/[]	[]	[]	[]		

SKILLS					
Total	Ranks	Mods	Classes	Mental Skills	Key Ability
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Appraise	Int
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Astrogation	Int (t)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Cryptography	Int (t)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Knowledge ([])	Int (t)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Knowledge ([])	Int (t)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Knowledge ([])	Int (t)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Knowledge ([])	Int (t)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Knowledge ([])	Int (t)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Listen	Wis
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Research	Wis (c)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Search	Int
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Spot	Wis
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Survival	Wis

Total	Ranks	Mods	Classes	Physical Skills	Key Ability
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Balance	Dex (a)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Climb	Str (a)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Escape Artist	Dex (a)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Freefall	Dex (a)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Hide	Dex (a)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Jump	Str (a)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Move Silently	Dex (a)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Pilot	Dex(a,c)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Sleight of Hand	Dex(t,a)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Swim	Str
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Tumble	Dex(t,a)

Total	Ranks	Mods	Classes	Psionic Skills	Key Ability
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Fetching	Wis(t,p)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Fetchng "Time Skip"	Wis(t,p)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Psychokinesis	Int(t,p)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Psychokin "PK Shield"	Int(t,p)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Telepathy	Cha(t,p)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Telepathy "Brain Ripper"	Cha(t,p)

Total	Ranks	Mods	Classes	Social Skills	Key Ability
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Art ([]) Cha	Cha
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Bluff	Cha
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Diplomacy	Cha
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Disguise	Cha
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Gather Information	Cha
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Handle Animal	Cha (t)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Intimidate	Cha
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Profession ([]) Wis (t)	Wis (t)
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Sense Motive	Wis
[]=[]+[]	[]	[]	[]	Street Smarts	Wis

(a) Armor Check Penalty. (c) Technical Proficiency. (p) Psionic. (t) Trained Only.

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