TRAVELLER

REFEREES BRIEFING 6 GARDEN WORLDS

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER

REFEREE'S BRIEFING 6: GARDEN WORLDS

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INTRODUCTION

Some Travellers never encounter any environment wilder than the climate-controlled cabins of a starship or the well-regulated conditions of a highport. Those that venture planetside, however, might encounter all manner of different environments in their wanderings. Among these, a temperate region with a breathable atmosphere and enough water to support life is one of the most common. This is largely because colonists landing from space naturally choose the most habitable areas to occupy, and the initial colony site is the most likely to grow into a major city or the site of a world's starport. Thus, Travellers venturing beyond the urban environment of the starport are likely to find themselves in a green but not necessarily pleasant land. *Referee's Briefing 6: Garden Worlds* presents some of the conditions, hazards and wildlife likely to be encountered in such a region, along with ways the referee might use them in an adventure.

GARDEN WORLDS

Traveller's trade codes define a Garden World as having a Size code of 6-8, Atmosphere 5, 6 or 8 and Hydrographics 5-7. In other words, a garden world has large amounts of surface water plus a non-tainted atmosphere that is thin, standard or dense. It must also be about the right size and therefore have gravitational conditions suitable to human habitation.

The term 'garden world' seems to imply a perfect environment, but this is not generally the case. Indeed, the very factors that make a garden world what it is can also present challenges to those trying to live there. A garden world will typically have a well-developed and diverse biosphere. This is beneficial in many ways, but the presence of predators or destructive wildlife might provide a real challenge to a colony. At some point an apparent paradise becomes a hell world, with a rampant ecosphere that literally undermines buildings and eats colonists. However, most garden worlds are relatively welcoming.

Mean surface temperature is a critical factor in determining whether a planet suitable for the garden world trade code really is what the name implies. Temperatures and terrain will carry across the planetary surface of course, but a true garden world must have at least some areas that can be considered a temperate environment. The creatures described in this volume can be encountered upon or are native to worlds where garden world conditions exist. Some have specific requirements, such as a need for very wet or dry conditions, which are indicated in the description of each creature.

Similar environments can be encountered in pockets on worlds that do not have the garden world trade code. Any world that has a breathable atmosphere (which might be thin, dense or tainted) and enough water to support life might have regions that approximate garden world conditions. Some water worlds have no useable land, but typically there will be some land somewhere, and if it lies in an area with the right temperature range it may approximate the conditions described in this volume. Likewise, a well-watered deep valley on a world with a very thin atmosphere might be a little pocket of garden conditions on an otherwise much less habitable planet.

Note that atmospheric density gives an indication of pressure, but this varies with altitude. Thus, a world with a very thin atmosphere might have areas (deep valleys for instance) where the air is breathable without undue discomfort, and a creature requiring a thin (i.e. low pressure) atmosphere might live at very high altitude on a world with a dense atmosphere.

Just because a world has a dense atmosphere, this does not mean all its creatures are adapted to the sea-level environment; they might be introduced and find a niche. This could mean that there might be enclaves of introduced species limited to a particular region, cut off from the rest of the planet by an inability to cross intervening terrain or come down from the mountain tops. Alternatively, a species native to one world might adapt to another creating a variant that might surprise Travellers who think they know what to expect.

By way of example, flying creatures, as a rule, require a standard or dense atmosphere. Very light creatures, or those native to low-gravity worlds, might be able to fly, glide or float in less dense air. Flyers tend to be lightly built and not very robust. If Travellers encounter a lightly-built creature with skin flaps that might allow it to glide in a thicker atmosphere they may infer this creature is 'not from around here'. That might raise questions of how it moved from one world to another, perhaps subtly pointing the Travellers to the fact that things are not what they seem in the local star cluster.

C H A P T E R R - O N E

TERRAIN AND MOVEMENT

Terrain on a given world can be quite varied. This *Referee's Briefing* assumes the Travellers are abroad in fairly flat terrain, which may be open or covered in forest or jungle. Characteristically, open terrain will be grassland, with rolling hills and watercourses or areas of wetland. The amount of water available and density of the atmosphere will tend to determine how much erosion has taken place; a higher code for either hydrographics or atmosphere will tend to imply greater erosion and a 'softer' landscape. Glaciation in the past few thousand years will also affect a landscape, carving out deep valleys and moving boulders around to create deposits where a glacier retreated.

For our purposes, garden world terrain can be subdivided into several general terrain types. These generally follow some of the classifications used on our Earth, but Traveller is a science-fiction game rather than an ecology textbook, so we have generalised a little in the following sections. Obviously, regions of badlands, desert, mountains and the like will exist. These will be covered in another volume, since they do not properly fit the general garden world type.

Terrain greatly affects the speed at which Travellers can move, unless they are using an aircraft or grav vehicle. Even then, weather and terrain can affect speed in various ways. It is worth assuming that the cruising speed of such vehicles is the best likely to be maintained and that 'everything takes longer than you expect it to'. Wind, rain and detours around obstructions can increase the time taken to reach a destination even for a grav vehicle.

The speed given for ground vehicles likewise assumes good conditions and something resembling a road. Many vehicles have no offroad capability to speak of, and will become stuck sooner or later if they try to drive on anything much rougher than a lawn. Those that do have an offroad capability can make their road speed on smooth ground, though this risks hitting an unexpected rough patch and hurling everyone out of their seats. Offroad speed assumes clear-ish terrain with few large bumps or dips, and the ability to take a path involving relatively few detours.

In some regions, grassland and similar 'open' terrain can be cut by deep gulleys or dotted with boulders that will greatly slow the progress of even an all-terrain vehicle. Thick, low-lying vegetation can hide other hazards or tangle smaller vehicles, yet pose little difficulty to the large wheels of an ATV. Stands of scrubby bushes might be totally impassable to large vehicles, but a motorcycle, or Traveller on foot, may be able to slip through unimpeded.

Terrain is thus varied and movement speeds are a guideline only. As a rule, a person can walk about 1 km in ten minutes, or 6 km in an hour, in easy terrain. A speed of about 35 km per day is possible when marching or hiking in a disciplined fashion whilst carrying a load such as an infantryman's equipment or camping gear. This assumes good terrain and a planned route. Setbacks and detours can greatly reduce the speed of progress.

The distance a vehicle can cover depends on terrain conditions and the endurance of the driver. A team of operators working in shifts to reduce fatigue can keep going around the clock, though it is rather difficult to sleep in an ATV banging its way across the countryside. It might be possible to force a drive, but eventually progress will slow or the chance of an accident will increase unless the Travellers stop for proper rest.

GRASSLAND

Grassland is the most obvious garden-world terrain. As the name suggests, grasses (or the local equivalent) are the dominant vegetation. Stands of trees and bushes may be present, but navigation is generally unimpeded. Grassland is excellent for cultivation, so may be replaced in colonised areas by farmed terrain. Grassland will typically contain rolling hills and various watercourses, along with the occasional lake. The immediate area around these features may differ from the rest of the grassland.

Upland areas of grassland are typically termed moors, and generally characterised by hardy, low-lying vegetation. Some regions of grassland may be further categorised as steppe, semi-desert, montane grassland (high altitude grasslands found in mountainous regions) or tundra. Characteristics are generally similar, though the specifics of vegetation and animal life will vary.

Walkers and vehicles can typically make their normal offroad speed in grassland unless there are additional hazards.

SHRUBLAND

Shrubland is characterised by bushes and small trees, often with grassy areas between. Shrubland can be extremely dense, to the point of being all but impenetrable for hundreds of kilometres, but there are usually gaps that can be navigated at about half normal movement speed. Shrubland offers good concealment to predators and prey alike, though larger creatures will tend to be channelled into the passable areas. This may make encounters more likely, and potentially more hazardous as well.

Shrubland can exist in wet, dry or cold conditions, and may be combined with rocky terrain. If a route can be found, progress is typically at half normal speed, but those who must hack their way through dense areas or crawl through in an all-terrain vehicle crushing the bushes as they go will be lucky to make 5-10% of normal speed.

WETLAND

Wetland typically occurs in small patches near watercourses and lakes, but extensive wetlands can be found in low-lying areas. Marshes, swamps and watery forests are all wetlands, as well as grassland or shrubland with considerable amounts of free-standing or flowing water. Wetlands can be totally impassable to ground vehicles, or may be navigable with great difficulty. Movement off the roads or dry areas is difficult at best and treacherous in many cases. It is often hard to tell if the 'solid' ground up ahead is in fact nothing more than reeds growing in loose mud, and even an ATV can become stuck in such conditions.

Movement on a good road in wetlands is much the same as on any other road, but navigating tracks and known paths is slower. It is possible to make 75% of normal speed on tracks or in a boat. Navigating a wild wetland is much slower, with Travellers making 25% of their normal speed at best.

FOREST AND JUNGLE

Forest is characterised by large vegetation such as trees, giant ferns or fungi, and the like. It is generally not possible to take a large vehicle (anything larger than a motorcycle) through a forest except on a cleared or naturally occurring trail. Very dense forest may be impenetrable without hacking a path – which may become overgrown and essentially disappear in just a few days. Forests can occur on flat land or hills, which adds further difficulty.

Forest terrain can include temperate deciduous or evergreen types, sub-arctic taiga, rainforest or jungle. The wildlife will vary according to conditions, and as a general rule the warmer the climate is, the more of a nuisance insects and other small creatures can be. Some forests teem with biting or poisonous insects or dangerous parasites, making them dangerous to pass through.

A light forest can be navigated at about half speed by people on foot or using agile transportation such as motorcycles, horses and the like. Dense forest can be navigated at about 25% speed on foot; it is not possible to get far with vehicles or animals in such terrain. 'Impenetrable' forest is not completely impenetrable as such, but requires a path to be cleared or a person to traverse slowly and carefully with many delays to go around obstacles or climb over them. Impenetrable forest can be navigated at about 5-10% of normal movement speed, though some areas will be truly impassable.

C H A P T E R - T W O

USING ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

Animal encounters are a staple of adventure gaming and of fiction in general, and can be over-used as threats or opportunities for combat; not all animal encounters need be of the rampaging-alien-predator type. They can be used as a change of pace, as what amounts to scenery and/or background detail, and a puzzle to give the Travellers something to think about.

Animals are part of a universe, and can add richness and depth to a campaign even if they do not directly impact adventures. Flocks of strange bird-like creatures, herds of giant megafauna and curious local riding creatures can all help bring a universe to life whilst the strange behaviour of a creature can be a clue that something is amiss.

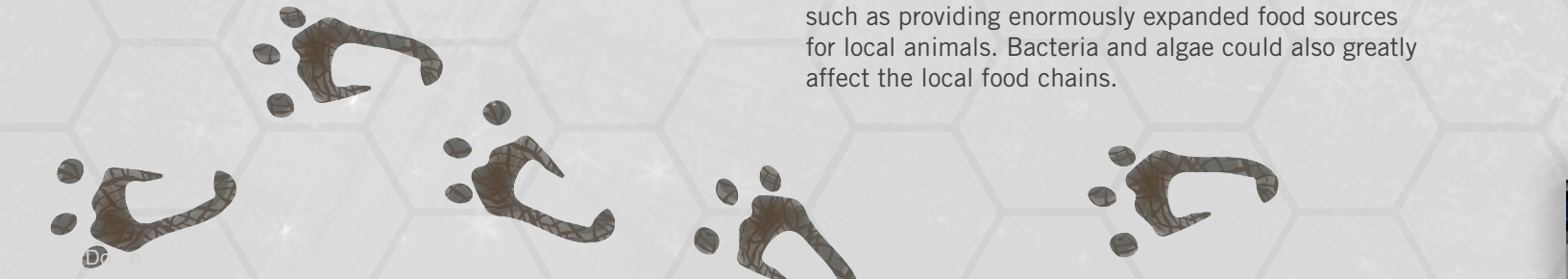
Since *Traveller* is a 'hard-ish' science fiction game, as a rule its animal encounters should be logical and obey the laws of nature. Life, of one sort or another, exists in a wide range of environments. The most hostile of places can be home to creatures of some sort, though as a rule extreme conditions tend to have only the simplest of life. Giant space worms that live in vacuum, or predators that do not seem to have anything to eat on their home planet, may break the Travellers' suspension of disbelief unless the universe allows for them.

Similarly, creatures encountered by the Travellers will tend to behave in a logical manner. Animals feed, attract mates, reproduce, protect their young and perhaps defend their territory. If a creature is doing something that does not comply with this model, then there should be a reason for it. Apart from anything else, if the Travellers can make logical inferences from the world around them, they will have a better and more plausible experience.

Thus, any given creature must make some sort of sense. The occasional weird energy being or other strange creature might have a place in a Traveller game, but for the most part animals should fit into the local ecosystem. That means there must be something for them to eat or some other source of energy, and there must be enough of it to support the population. If the Travellers find a world populated entirely by carnivores, they could be forgiven for wondering how that came about – and the referee should have an explanation! Normally the food chain is obeyed; something (typically plants of some kind) at the bottom of the food chain will be fed upon by herbivores, which are eaten by predatory creatures. These might be prey in turn for others, all the way up to an apex predator.

Other ecosystems are possible, but there must always be energy flow along the food chain and the system cannot be top-heavy without a catastrophe. Too many predators mean they will starve or eat each other to redress the balance. Too few predators will cause an explosion in numbers of previously predated species. The ecosystem can be upset by the introduction of species from offworld, but typically a new balance is found sooner or later. Offworld species may replace local ones in certain environmental niches, or be wiped out by them. Alternatively, a new ecosystem might result with a mix of introduced and indigenous species.

Animals can be introduced into an ecosystem deliberately, perhaps as a food source or to kill off a local creature thought to be a pest. They may also fulfil some useful function such as riding or draught animals. Alternatively, creatures might be accidentally transported or released. Other forms of life can also be carried by starships – deliberately or otherwise. Crops and decorative plants might be brought by colonists and get out of control or cause unexpected circumstances such as providing enormously expanded food sources for local animals. Bacteria and algae could also greatly affect the local food chains.



Thus, an ecosystem might be in flux, perhaps with scientists desperately trying to exert a measure of control. It could be in the throes of a population explosion of one creature type, or in total collapse. These factors will affect local conditions and may give rise to many adventures. For example, Travellers might be hired to rescue the last members of a predatory species left in the wild and transport them to a reserve, or acquire breeding pairs of a species and introduce them to another world. They might accompany scientists trying to find out why a world's ecosystem is rapidly dying, or have an unrelated adventure in the ruins of a city overrun by the local wildlife.

An extreme version of the ecosystem-out-of-control model formed the basis of the Classic Traveller adventures Chamax Plague and Horde. There, an alien species had eliminated a troublesome creature which (unknown to them) was in the last stages of wiping out a far more dangerous species. With their eggs no longer being eaten by predators, the creatures known as Chamax returned from the brink of extinction and wiped out more or less all life on their homeworld.

LIFE

Life can exist in many forms, from simple single-celled organisms to advanced technological cultures. There is no need to concern ourselves with complex definitions and biological theory, nor to worry much about bacteria and the like since most human/bacterial interactions can be dealt with using a course of antibiotics. Note that we exclude 'people' of any sort from these definitions, as interactions with fellow thinking beings tend to be different to those with non-sentient creatures. For our purposes there are effectively two kinds of life that matter – plant and animal.

In *Traveller,* a plant is something that behaves like an average person thinks a plant should – i.e. does not move around much, makes its own food by photosynthesis or an equivalent process, and does not react all that much to stimulus. An animal, on the other hand, is defined here as something that can move independently, cannot manufacture its own food and is capable of reacting to stimuli more quickly than the typical houseplant. Strange creatures and plants may be encountered that blur the boundaries of plant and animal life, but these are the exception rather than the rule.

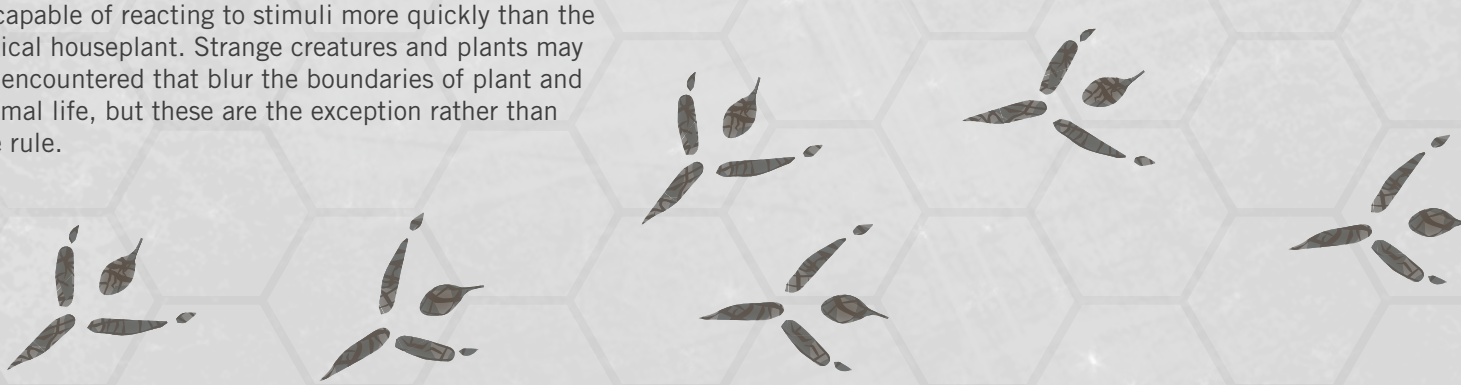
PLANT LIFE

Plant life mainly serves as a backdrop to adventure. Forests are something Travellers move though and occasionally set fire to; seaweed is smelly stuff they trip over on the beach. It is rare that a plant of any kind plays much of an active role in an adventure, though one may be the goal of an expedition to find a source of pharmaceuticals or some similar concept. Occasional hostile or even carnivorous plants could threaten the Travellers. For the most part, however, plants are part of the scenery and support animal life, which tends to be a bit more interesting. Nevertheless, plant life is important to a setting. The nature of the local plant life will dictate what animals can exist, and of course plants can be sufficiently tough and dense that they present an impassable obstacle to the Travellers. A wall of briars that will take days to hack through can be used by the referee to channel the Travellers into a place where interesting things might be about to happen… or to prevent their easy escape.

ANIMAL LIFE

Animals come in many different forms, but can be categorised to some extent by their habitat and habits. The *Traveller* rules are not particularly concerned whether a creature is a marsupial or mammal, nor even if it is warm or cold-blooded, other than where this affects its behavior and characteristics. However, such factors are important once a creature is introduced into a universe as they will affect other parts of the ecosystem.

The broadest of classifications start with environment: Aquatic, Avian or Land-Dwelling. Aquatic creatures will be presented in a different volume, covering river, wetlands and coastal environments, in addition to the open sea. Avian creatures, as already noted, need dense air and/or low gravity to fly, whereas land-based creatures can exist in almost any temperate environment.



C H A P T E R - T H R E E

HAZARDS

A garden world can pose all manner of hazards to Travellers. Many are little more than an inconvenience if the party is proceeding carefully and have time to react, but those who insist on haring across unknown countryside may well land themselves in trouble. The following hazards are typical of a garden world, and can be used as a minor obstacle by the referee. Sometimes, however, what appears to be a minor problem conceals something far more dangerous.

WEATHER HAZARDS

Garden worlds have sufficient atmosphere and water to produce quite vigorous weather systems. A bit of rain is not a problem for Travellers, though people who are cold, wet and hungry tend to make mistakes others might not. If the Travellers do have to slog through rain and mud, it is not unreasonable for the referee to impose penalties upon those who brought a pile of guns but no dry socks. In some extreme situations, it is possible for a Traveller to become hypothermic and perhaps even die from nothing more than being caught out in the cold far from shelter. However, this is not the stuff of freewheeling interplanetary adventure, so passive weather hazards of this sort should be used to 'push' the Travellers rather than kill them.

For example, Travellers who are caught in a downpour and soaked to the skin in cold conditions might decide they need shelter. The ruins nearby or that strangely-shaped structure on a hilltop might be a good place to dry out and get some hot food, so the Travellers enter a strange and potentially dangerous place where adventure awaits. This plot device is used quite frequently in adventure fiction and is perfectly adaptable to Traveller games.

There is, of course, a Certain Kind Of Traveller who will point-blank refuse to cooperate with this sort of adventure-wards nudge. In such cases the referee should consider what would realistically happen to someone so stupidly stubborn. If the Traveller has had fair warning that they could suffer consequences or even die from refusing to seek shelter, then the referee should not flinch from imposing those consequences. If a Traveller absolutely refuses to enter a wrecked ship to find shelter and insists on staying out in sub-zero conditions, frostbite might rob them of a few fingers or toes (and D3 points of DEX). This is realistic and, providing it is not being done vindictively by the referee, is perfectly acceptable.

Most Travellers will do the sensible thing when faced with passive threats like being cold, wet, or hungry. It is not realistic to decide that the Core Rulebook allows them to go without food for so many days, and so to push their march on empty stomachs rather than accepting a delay to search for food. Real people do not behave like this outside the most extreme of circumstances, so Travellers should not either.

Along with providing background colour and the occasional passive push, the occasional more serious weather hazard can be thrown at Travellers as an exercise in problem-solving or just an interesting incident along the way.

DOWNPOUR

Heavy rain is not a big deal under most circumstances, but can limit visibility so travel becomes highly dangerous. Rain can also make the ground muddy to the point where vehicles can get virtually no traction, making it hard to traverse slopes and dangerous to make almost any manoeuvre. Heavy rain nearby can cause flash flooding, which can pose a very serious threat to unwary Travellers. There is also the possibility of getting a vehicle stuck in a previously traversable gulley, with heavy rain causing water to rise around it. The Travellers might even find themselves forced to abandon their vehicle and all its contents, and thus be thrown into an adventure rather less well prepared than they would like.

FOG

Fog rarely poses a hazard in and of itself, but it can disorient Travellers and cause them to blunder into other hazards. Even thin mist makes judging distance tricky, and thicker fog can make vision beyond a few metres impossible. Driving in such conditions is extremely slow and tiring, and is hazardous unless the vehicle has good electronic sensors. Even then there are dangers; radar cannot always resolve a gulley ahead in time to avoid

plunging into it, while othjer obstacles might simly not radiate (and thus be visible) other wavelengths of the electromagnetic spectrum. Fog requires moist conditions to form and can be quite localised. It makes other problems more dangerous rather than being a threat in its own right – a Traveller who sits tight or moves cautiously through fog will get cold and damp; one who tries to move quickly runs much greater risks. There are also other factors to consider; fog can be eerie and unsettling, and there may actually be scary things out there in the mist.

HAIL

Hail is unpleasant but not usually life threatening. However, some regions experience very nasty hailstorms with lumps of ice the size of tennis balls falling from the sky at great speed. Hail of this sort can smash even toughened windows and may batter a Traveller to death if they cannot find shelter from it. Even body armour may be inadequate to protect against such a pounding. The largest known hailstone on Earth was 20 cm in diameter and weighed almost 1 kg; other worlds may experience even more extreme conditions. The arrival of such a storm will force everyone inside shelter and perhaps require a hurried roundup of livestock and fragile equipment. A storm front might be used by the referee as a 'clock' for an adventure, limiting the time the Travellers have to finish their tasks, or it could be a plot device to force them into a 'pressure cooker' situation.

Ordinary hail stings and is generally unpleasant to be out in, but does no harm. It will reduce visibility and cause Travellers to be inattentive to their surroundings or task as they hunch into their coats. The referee should ask anyone who wants to ignore stinging hail and maintain a steely-eyed lookout for a Routine (6+) END check every few minutes.

Heavy hail is capable of hurting Travellers and damaging vehicles. Damage per round to Travellers caught out in such a hailstorm will typically be 1 point per round, rising to D3 or 1D points per round during particularly intense periods. This may not be enough to penetrate body armour or do structural damage to a vehicle, but the cumulative effects can be damaging. Travellers wearing non-rigid armour may still take a point of damage every round. Likewise, vehicles may not be structurally damaged but vulnerable parts such as windows or thin metal such as a typical ground vehicle's skin will be dented, cracked or even broken.

LIGHTNING & ELECTRICAL CONDITIONS

Lightning is not usually a hazard to sensible Travellers. Staying off high points and taking elementary precautions will generally be sufficient to avoid being struck under most conditions. Vehicles, including grav vehicles, will protect their occupants and generally be unaffected by lighting even if struck, though this does assume the vehicle has an all-round metal structure.

Particularly intense lightning or electrical conditions can be more dangerous. A powerful static electric field can interfere with electrical systems and possibly disable a vehicle, and will generate multiple strikes if a Traveller tries to pass through it. The severity of these strikes depends very much upon the strength of the field. Typically, a field might generate strikes doing 1D damage to a random Traveller every round. The strike is, of course, charge dissipating to earth and will be attracted to conductive objects more readily than Travellers. It may be possible to use a metal item such as a lightning rod, reducing the chances of a Traveller being struck.

A very intense electrical field might generate near-constant strikes, doing 1D damage (or more) to each Traveller and damaging equipment. Such a field is unlikely to occur naturally but could be the result of freak weather conditions combined with local phenomena such as particular rocks and crystal formations.

WIND

Extreme wind conditions can be very dangerous. Worlds with a dense atmosphere might experience incredible storms that make tall buildings – or even any building above ground level – impossible to construct. Grav vehicles might not be useable in such an environment, in case they are tossed out of the air by a sudden storm. Indeed, an apparently 'garden' world might be uninhabitable above ground due purely to wind effects. Vegetation in such a case would be low and resilient, and animal life would only be possible within its shelter.

Localised wind effects can also be significant. There is nothing unusual about a gale-force wind, but it will complicate an otherwise relatively straightforward task undertaken by the Travellers. A storm front might be used as an adventure clock or as a plot device to drive everyone indoors. It might also be an adventure trigger; for example, a remote outpost might have been so badly battered by a storm that it is no longer habitable, necessitating a rescue mission.

Hurricane-force winds are extremely destructive and pose a severe danger to anyone out in them. Not only is there a risk of being swept up and dropped from a great height or smashed into something, but the air will also be full of flying debris.

Every round a Traveller is exposed to such winds, the referee should roll 2D. On 11+, the Traveller is hit by debris for a random amount of damage. The referee should then roll 1D; this is the number of dice that should be rolled for damage taken by the Traveller.

Such debris might not penetrate the skin of a large vehicle such as an ATV, but extremely strong winds might bowl even such a large vehicle over and roll it away, unless it is secured or placed in a sheltered location.

TERRAIN HAZARDS

The following hazards can occur in various terrain types on garden worlds.

Boulder Field or Outcrop

A boulder field is typically created by a long-retreated glacier, but could also result from fracturing or erosion of a rocky outcrop. Areas of this sort are not hard to traverse on foot, but it may not be possible to take wheeled or even tracked vehicles across them. In some cases, the ground is covered in modestly sized rocks that can be driven over by an ATV or similar vehicle, but which still create a difficult surface to drive on, necessitating Drive checks. Tricky manoeuvres such as negotiating a slope or moving quickly over rough ground can become suddenly hazardous. A boulder field might also hide various animals, some of which may be willing to attack Travellers if conditions are suitable.

Burned Area or Wildfire

Burned areas of grassland or forest can result from lightning strikes or the activities of sophonts. Burning of this sort is often necessary for the life cycle of local plants, which grow rapidly in the wake of the destruction. A burned area of forest might be much easier going than moving through living trees, but debris can hide other hazards such as holes, animals, and stinging plants. A wildfire in progress is a much more immediate hazard, and sufficient to threaten even a vehicle such as an ATV. The flames may not be able to enter the vehicle but internal temperature may rise more than the environment controls can handle, harming occupants and critical systems. Tyres and other combustible materials may also be endangered. Crashing through a narrow area of fire can be accomplished if done quickly, but trying to drive through a large and widespread fire is likely to result in being slowly cooked.

Concealed Marsh

Grasslands, moors and wooded areas may all have areas of concealed march or other soft ground. Cautious Travellers might spot a change in vegetation or other warning signs, but it is entirely possible that they might suddenly become stuck in what appeared until the moment of disaster to be just another stretch of grassland. Marshes of this sort occur in areas that lie a little lower than the surroundings, but are not necessarily associated with watercourses. In addition to the obvious hazards of becoming stuck or drowning, marshes are often inhabited by pestilent insects, some of which may be poisonous or carry disease. A sufficiently dense cloud of insects can make driving a vehicle impossible without radar or other instruments, and may fatally distract a Traveller on foot.

Deep Gullies

Most grassland and similar terrain has the odd gulley cut by water, and these can in some cases be quite deep. Areas with significant runoff from higher ground may be criss-crossed by deep gulleys that make driving impossible. A network of gulleys might make vehicular access to a location impracticable, forcing the Travellers to approach on foot with only what they can carry. Scrambling down one side and up the other on foot can be exhausting, and there is always the danger of loose rocks or soil in a dry gulley or a marshy area in a wet one. Gulleys may not, of course, be natural. They could be the result of human activity, or dug by large creatures of some kind.

Dustbowl

Dustbowl conditions can occur where an area of grassland or similar terrain has dried out to the point where soil and dead vegetation blows around in the wind. This can result from overfarming or natural conditions, and might even happen in a forest. The resulting terrain will be disturbing to some Travellers, with dying or dead trees and shreds of semi-lifeless vegetation here and there around the exposed roots. The sudden rehydration of such a region can cause even more damage, as loosened soil is washed away from root systems and new watercourses are destructively cut. This might expose something that has been hidden for a long time, such as ruins in a forest, or cause serious ecological problems for the region.

Lake
Normally a lake is a feature rather than a hazard, but sometimes an unexpected body of water can endanger a fast-moving vehicle, or at least require a long detour. Finding out that the Travellers' destination lies upon an island within a lake can be a problem for those who not prepared to cross it. Alternatively, a lake might not be all that obvious. It might resemble a large damp reed-bed, with a bottom that suddenly drops tens of metres to create hazardous deep areas. A lake might also be home to dangerous creatures that otherwise would not be encountered in that area.

Multiple Watercourses
An area crossed by several watercourses, whether they intersect or not, can be very difficult for ground vehicles to cross. An ATV or similar vehicle might be able to 'swim' across or along a watercourse, but steep banks and marshy surroundings can make crossing a region of this sort something of a slog. As with other difficult terrain, it is often not distance that separates places but the time and effort required to move between them. Travel along a river or stream might not be especially difficult, but crossing several small streams can take a long time and involve secondary hazards caused by fast-moving water or resident creatures.

Rasputitsa
The term Rasputitsa comes from a Russian word which can be translated as 'season of mud'. In the spring and autumn, some areas of grassland become marshy and soft, with unpaved roads impassable and even good roadways made slippery and hazardous by muddy conditions. Rasputitsa may come as a surprise to Travellers who expect a green and grassy plain to be firm going for their vehicle. A mud-season can bring travel to an almost complete stop in some regions, creating largely isolated social groups even though they are not separated by any great distance.

Seismic Tremors
Not all planets are seismically active, though a similar phenomenon can result from other causes, such as the collapse of a rock shelf. Seismic tremors could be huge, destructive earthquakes that flatten buildings and perhaps initiate a 'disaster movie' situation – or expose a long-lost Ancients site. Alternatively, smaller tremors could be used more subtly by the referee. Driving a vehicle or winning a gunfight might be made a lot more difficult if the ground is shaking. Indeed, frequent small tremors could make an area unsuitable for habitation, creating a virtually unknown frontier region on an otherwise well charted planet.

Plant Hazards
Plants can pose various forms of hazard to Travellers, ranging from simple terrain-related issues to plants that actively threaten the unwary. A garden world with too many hostile plants might instead be considered a form of hell-world, but dangerous plants exist on many worlds otherwise quite pleasant. A plant hazard can usually be spotted at a distance and avoided, but in overgrown terrain it may not be spotted until the Travellers have blundered right into the danger zone.

Killing a plant is difficult with firearms or most hand weapons. Fire or energy weapons can be used, but may cause secondary problems such as wildfires.

More commonly, Travellers will simply want to free themselves from a plant and move away. Cutting a vine can be done deliberately and carefully with a sharp implement of almost any type as a significant action. If the Travellers want to render a plant harmless with guns or hand weapons this is likely to take a few minutes and will result in quite a mess.

Dopetraps
It is not altogether clear whether the term dopetrap refers to the Travellers who get caught by these predatory plants or the way they are caught. Either way, a dopetrap plant uses spores or fragrant chemicals to sedate nearby prey. Most dopetraps resemble flowers or patches of fungi, though there are exceptions to this rule.

One such is the Arex Tree, whose blossom is used to make medicinal and recreational chemicals. Anyone inhaling the sedative spores or fragrance of a dopetrap must make an Easy (4+) END check or fall asleep. The check rises in difficulty every 1D rounds until it is failed or the Traveller moves out of range. The latter depends on wind conditions and the size of the dopetrap plant, but is typically around 2D metres.

Once asleep, targets must make a Difficult (10+) END check each minute to wake up. Whether they do or not, they take one point of damage. This continues until the victim wakes up and crawls out of range or their system shuts down and they die. Some dopetraps are predatory, others are symbiotic with insects or animals that feed on the victims and in turn nourish or pollinate the plant. A sealed suit such as a vacc suit will protect against the effects of a dopetrap and, in most cases, a filter mask will also be sufficient. However, there are species which can affect a Traveller through a conventional filter mask, albeit not easily. In such cases, the difficulty of the END check never rises above Average (8+).

Impassable Vegetation

Impassable vegetation can occur in almost any terrain. A section of forest might be too thick to get through, or an otherwise open region might have stands of strangely resilient plants. Travellers might find that springy, tough plants resist even an All-Terrain Vehicle. Machetes and chainsaws may make little impression on some kinds of vegetation, which could surprise some Travellers. Fire is not always a good option – some vegetation does not burn well unless something like a plasma gun is used, whilst other types can be all too flammable; Travellers who try to burn their way through a dense patch might end up starting an enormous conflagration, with all manner of interesting consequences.

Tanglers

Tanglers are typically found in forest, jungle and wetland terrain. Various species exist, with roughly similar characteristics. Most tanglers are vines of one sort or another, sometimes with edible fruit. Indeed, the much sought after kreiswein is made from grape-like fruit growing on the dangerous Kreis Tangler, native to several worlds in Charted Space.

Tanglers react to pressure by constricting their vines. Most are not especially fast, and can be escaped by a quick rush to safety with an Average (8+) DEX check when the vines begin to move. Of course, this can lead the escapee into other dangers. Once the vines have gripped a Traveller, they are hard to dislodge, requiring a Difficult (10+) STR check to escape. Vines can also be cut, though they are resilient enough to tangle up the axle of a vehicle.

Large patches of tanglers can make an area extremely hazardous for people on foot, and can immobilise a vehicle. Some species live in water, and can immobilise the propellers of a boat. They are not sentient or guided by anything but the most basic of stimuli, but this does not make them any less dangerous. Anyone caught by tanglers will remain stuck until they starve to death or, potentially, suffocate. A few rare species have thorns which pierce the skin of victims and draw out tissue fluids to feed the plant. These are often known as vampire-tanglers.

Thornspitters

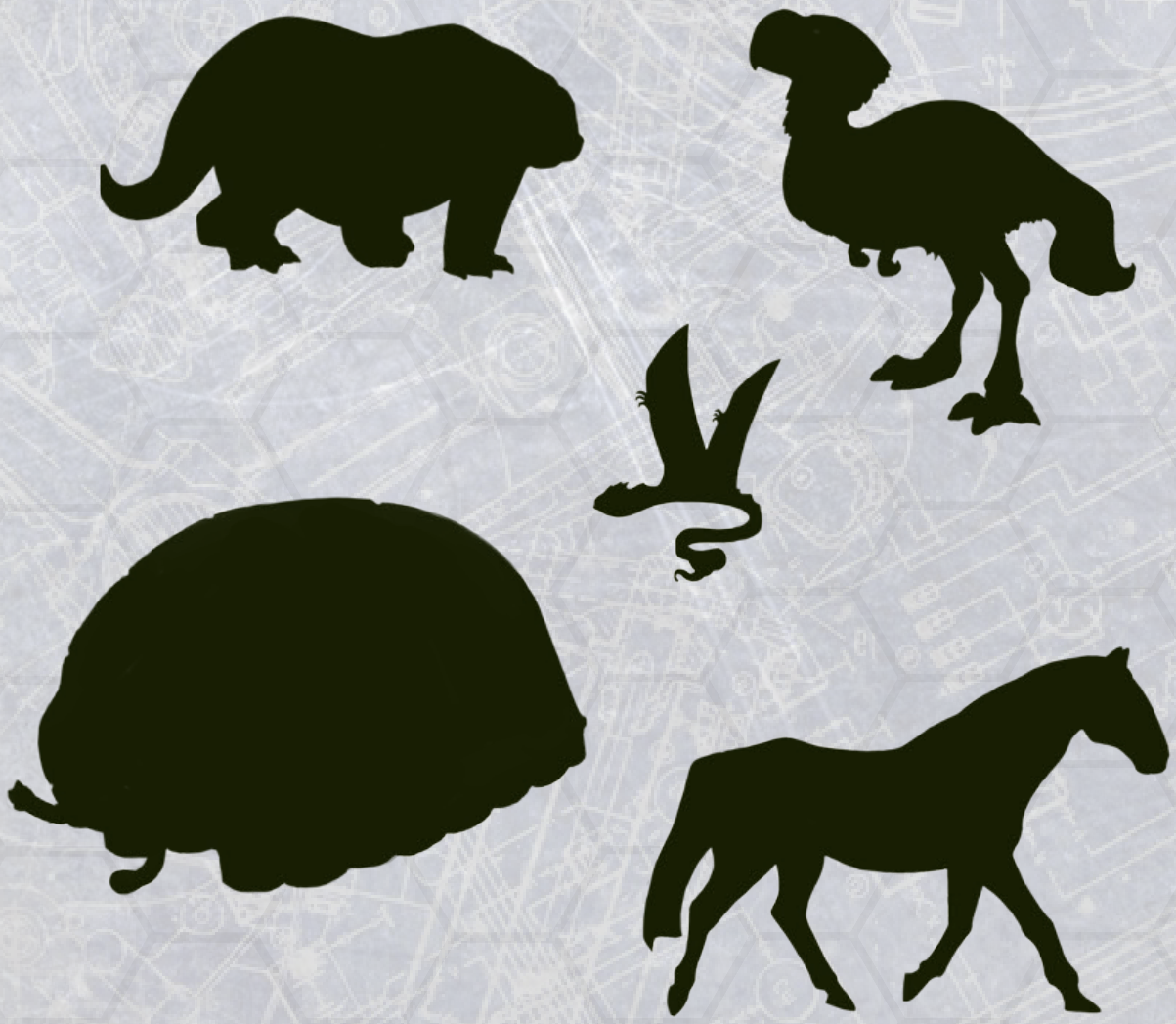
Various species of thornspitter exist throughout Charted Space. Some are native to a single world; some can be found on multiple planets which are very distant from one another. Thornspitters typically take the form of a bush or small tree, rarely more than 1-2 metres high, with wide-spreading roots that leach nutrients from nearby soil and create a patch where few other plants can grow. This results in an easily passable area which channels creatures moving through a forest or overgrown region within range of the spitter's thorns.

A thornspitter can launch heavy thorns over a distance of 3-4 metres. They are usually incapable of penetrating heavy clothing or armour but will punch into skin and deliver a fast-acting toxin which does 2D damage with the Stun trait. Any creature losing consciousness within the root area will receive further thorns whilst it is down, eventually building up into a lethal dose. Humans and similar sophonts will suffer heart and respiratory failure after receiving twice their END in damage. The decomposing corpses of previous victims feed the voracious root system of the thornspitter plant, whilst bones are sometimes cleared away by scavenger animals tolerated by the plant or otherwise immune to its effects.

The Travellers Aid Society presents

JAYNE'S GUIDE

TO ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS OF GARDEN WORLDS



The following creatures can be encountered in most garden world environments, though some are native only to a single world. Others have been spread by humans and other starfarers, not always deliberately.

LAND-DWELLING CREATURES

Land-dwellers are the most diverse of creatures. They can be found in many different types of terrain, though smaller and more agile creatures tend to live in broken or heavily overgrown areas, with larger animals preferring open country. Land-dwelling creatures range from walkers, which might walk upright or on four or more legs, through various types of climbing and crawling animals to masses which resemble protoplasmic blobs of flesh and may be immobile.

PSEUDOSAUR

The interstellar naturalist Maxwell Argevenny is responsible for classifying many creatures, or at least giving them their popular name. Sadly, he was never very imaginative, and tended to assign his own name plus 'pseudo-something' to virtually everything he labelled. The pseudosaur was one such, named for its vague resemblance to the Terran allosaurus. In fact, the pseudosaur is a mammal, with soft fur rather than scales. The pseudosaur hunts in mated pairs plus any young that might be present. Typically, a family group will consist of a male and a female plus two to four immature pseudosaurs. A female will produce a single offspring each time, with young taking around five years to reach full maturity.

Some very old pseudosaurs can become patriarchs or matriarchs to an extended family which usually contains several of their own offspring as well as unrelated animals. These groups will normally establish a territory and drive off any rivals, remaining as a web of separate but connected family packs. The patriarch (or matriarch) will usually be brought food by junior members of its extended family, though what they get in return is not always obvious. Some patriarchs can be ancient and feeble, yet are looked after by their great-grandchildren rather than being eliminated by younger rivals.

It has been suggested that pseudosaurs possess a form of psionic empathy, and are bonded to their patriarch by this method. There are even rumours that some psionic indivuduals have been welcomed by packs rather than eaten, though claims of telepathic cavalry riding furry dinosaurs are almost certainly nothing but invention.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Pseudosaur	65	9m
SKILLS	Melee (bite) 2, Recon 1, Surival 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (4D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+6), Large (+3)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Killer	

BOROZNIN

The boroznin is a large, omnivore native to warm forests on several worlds. Roughly the size of a bear, the boroznin is covered in tan or light green scales. It has a narrow, reptilian head but, despite its appearance, it is a mammal. Boroznin are not especially sociable with others of their kind, tending to be solitary except when accompanied by 1-4 young. Their social interactions are a little complex, with females seeking out a male that is not the father of her young and transferring them to his care when they are weaned. The foster-father then teaches the young to hunt and make their own way in the world. Those that are weak or incompetent are killed by the foster-father, ensuring only strong and well-prepared boroznin reach adulthood. Boroznin are not especially territorial, but will attempt to drive off anything that seems like a threat to their food supply. It is thus possible to pass through their forests without incident, but this requires avoiding any activity that a boroznin might construe as hunting or gathering food.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Boroznin	28	5m
SKILLS	Melee (claws and bite) 1, Recon 1, Survival 3	
ATTACKS	Claws and Bite (2D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+2), Camouflaged	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Hunter	

CONDUIT SNAKE

The conduit snake is a six-limbed belly-crawling reptile which can deliver a savage bite which injects a mild venom. Travellers envenomed by a Conduit Snake tend not to be too badly harmed, but are considered Fatigued until they make an Average (8+) END check. The check can be made after 24 hours, and every 8 hours thereafter.

The conduit snake's legs are extremely short, causing it to push itself along in a slithering motion rather than raising itself off the ground, but is strong enough to climb most surfaces and can wriggle into very small spaces. This is the source of the conduit snake's popular name, as it is notorious for getting into air or wiring ducts, and will happily crawl aboard spacecraft. If a snake gets into an area that is exposed to vacuum, the resulting frozen pulp has to be hosed out of the conduit. Snakes will also sometimes chew through seals or wiring. More than one starship has suffered serious damage from a conduit snake seeking warmth and making itself more comfortable with a bit of nibbling.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Conduit Snake	3	4m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Recon 2, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (1D)	
TRAITS	Poison (Average/1D/1D rounds), Small (-3)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Hunter	

DART

The dart is a reptiloid pouncer native to several worlds with extensive forests. It is a solitary creature which attacks its prey by springing from a high place, delivering a nasty wound using its spiked front claws. The vaguely pointed head of the dart has led to many apocryphal tales of darts impaling Travellers, hence their popular name. In reality, a dart will 'spring and cling' as the saying goes, savagely biting the victim in a frenzy of hunger. The range of a dart's spring is about 10 metres, depending on its starting elevation.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Khta	28	10m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Melee (natural) 1, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (2D), Hooves (1D+2)	
TRAITS	None	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Chaser	

Darts are well camouflaged and extremely hard to see, especially in thickly wooded areas. They are also aggressive and territorial, and will fight one another to the death if they encounter a rival. Darts have been known to attack and wound a passer-by, then withdraw and scamper up a tree, waiting to see if the victim collapses. If not, more attacks might be made, and upon occasion a dart has followed Travellers for several days seeking an opportunity to bring someone down.

FARADAY BEETLE

The faraday beetle is an insectoid with a strong outer carapace and powerful mandibles. It is about the size of a domestic cat, and typically advances slowly across the landscape eating whatever food can be found. The faraday beetle gets its name because it can sense electromagnetic fields. This trait is used to navigate for the most part, but does cause faraday beetles to be attracted to electronic equipment. A beetle will typically try to investigate an electromagnetic signature, which normally means pushing the device around and attempting to bite it with its mandibles. That can be fatal to fragile devices.

Faraday beetles that sense a strong electromagnetic signature such as machinery or a communications array will usually be compelled to get to it. They will tunnel through loose ground or bite through conduit casings, and have been known to crawl all over spacecraft, vehicles and buildings, seeking a way in. If they do gain access, faraday beetles can be extremely destructive in their efforts to get at electronic equipment, and will thoroughly smash the internal systems of a ship or installation.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Faraday Beetle	4	6m
SKILLS	Athletics (strength) 1, Recon 2, Survivial 2	
ATTACKS	Bite (1D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+2), Small (-3)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Eater	

An infestation of faraday beetles can be responsible for making an installation unviable or at least putting it out of use for a time. The need to constantly repair or replace equipment drains resources and creates a never-ending threat of disaster if a vehicle is left unsecured or sensitive items become damaged. It has even been suggested that faraday beetles might be deliberately introduced into an area to prevent exploitation or to drive off rivals, though there is no solid evidence that this has ever been done.

GRASSBUG

The grassbug is a large beetle-like creature which makes its home in grasslands and similar vegetation. It is omnivorous, and will attach itself to the flesh of passing creatures – or a Traveller's boot. Grassbugs are normally found in groups of several dozen, spread out over a distance of a few metres, and when not clinging to an animal's leg to eat its flesh they will scavenge almost anything edible. Grassbugs can digest virtually any organic material, and can detect food from a considerable distance. Travellers making camp in an area where grassbugs are active may wake to find their food supplied full of voracious beetles. Putting a boot on with a grassbug in it is pretty disgusting; feeling a sharp pain and finding one trying to eat your big toe is much worse. Ultimately, these creatures are little more than pests, but can make life unpleasant for those who live around them.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Grassbug	2	1m
SKILLS	Recon 1	
ATTACKS	Tiny Bite (1)	
TRAITS	Small (-4)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Reducer	

HORSE

The Terran horse is used as a beast of burden and riding animal on many worlds, especially in frontier areas where complex vehicles are difficult to maintain. Most working horses are large and strong, though not very fast on their hooves, whilst riding animals are generally lighter built but with good stamina, capable of bearing a rider for long hours. On many worlds, horses have become wild and semi-native, and tend to become smaller over the generations. Tough ponies can be found running wild on many worlds, and are sometimes hunted for food in places where they are not ridden.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Horse	34	8m
SKILLS	Athletics (strength) 2, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Kick (2D)	
TRAITS	Large (+1)	
BEHAVIOUR	Herbivore, Grazer	

KIAN

The Kian is thought to be native to Prilissa in the Spinward Marches sector, but can be found on many worlds where it serves as a riding animal. Although lighter than a Terran horse, the Kian is more agile and has excellent eyesight and hearing. Kian are often described as resembling tall flightless birds like ostriches, but are in fact bipedal mammals. Kian have fur and, in some cases, vestigial forelimbs. This characteristic is common for Kian originating on some worlds and totally absent in others.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Kian	30	9m
SKILLS	Athletics (endurance) 1, Recon 1	
ATTACKS	Kick (1D)	
TRAITS	Heightened Senses, Large (+1),	
BEHAVIOUR	Herbvivore, Grazer	

MINDWHACKER

Mindwhackers are ambush predators of a sort, using what is sometimes described as a 'psionic lance' to kill unsuspecting prey. A typical mindwhacker is a large grey-green blob of flesh, with highly dispersed organs and no discernible weak point or vital location to attack. Mindwhackers have the psionic Assault ability, and anyone rendered unconscious by a mindwhacker will be enveloped as the creature slurps slowly over to him and begins the process of digestion. This inflicts one point of damage every 3D minutes. An unconscious target may wake up during this time, in which case he will be telepathically assaulted again. A conscious Traveller may make a Very Difficult (12+) STR check to drag himself free of the mindwhacker.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Mindwhacker	26	1m
SKILLS	Recon 1, Telepathy 1	
ATTACKS	None	
TRAITS	Psionic (5)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Trapper	

PLAINS RUNNER

The plains runner (variously also known as a plains chaser or pack mauler) is a quadruped hunter which operates in packs of up to thirty individuals. Runners are about the size of a large dog, but with very long – almost spindly – legs. They use a combination of frightening snarls and loud howls to channel their prey, which is usually run down but occasionally driven into an ambush laid by other members of the pack. Although highly aggressive, plains runners are also very sociable. This does not, however, translate to any chance of domestication. For reasons that remain unclear, plains runners hate humans and most other biped sophonts, and will attack on sight unless badly outmatched. This behaviour has been observed even in groups that have had no contact with people, and may be tied to behavioural cues rather than physical characteristics.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Plains Runner	7	7m
SKILLS	Athletics (endurance) 3, Recon 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (1D)	
TRAITS	Small (-2)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Chaser	

PONI

The poni is a large creature resembling an eight-legged horse, which was used as a beast of burden on several worlds in the Sylean Federation and has since spread to many other systems. Poni are well suited to carrying a rider at considerable speed over long distances, and can handle rough terrain that would defeat a horse or kian. Poni are not so much agile as stable, however, and do not turn quickly. An unwary rider who begins a turn on 'on the wrong leg' can bring his mount down hard enough to inflict serious injury to both. More experienced riders can read their mount's complex gait and use it to 'smooth out' rough ground and guide the animal through quite complex evolutions that would confound a less skilled poni-wrangler.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Horse	34	8m
SKILLS	Athletics (strength) 2, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Kick (2D)	
TRAITS	Large (+1)	
BEHAVIOUR	Herbivore, Grazer	

ULTRAFAUNA

The term Ultrafauna is a misapplication of what should be a general type (like megafauna). It has instead been applied to a particular creature of immense size. Ultrafauna have sixteen legs, eight on each side of a broad central body which is topped by a thick shell. From this a primary head extends on a short neck, flanked by two smaller 'feeding heads' on much longer necks. The feeding heads contain nerve complexes which are not brains as such but instead assist in balance and the detection of food. A third minor-brain is located at the point where the spine becomes a tail.

Ultrafauna are grazers, trundling slowly across the countryside in groups of up to ten adults. They tend to cut a swathe across the countryside, destroying crops as readily as small stands of trees. They are not malicious or aggressive, but sometimes knock over buildings in passing or take a speculative bite out of one. Ultrafauna can defend themselves by biting with the feeding-heads, or using their tail to strike a blow that can overturn ground vehicles. More commonly, they will just wander off, oblivious to an attack that is failing to do them any real harm.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Ultrafauna	200	4m
SKILLS	Athletics (endurance) 4	
ATTACKS	Bite (2D), Tail Lash (6D)	
TRAITS	Armoured (+18), Large (+8), Slow Metabolism (-6)	
BEHAVIOUR	Herbivore, Intermittent	

AVIAN CREATURES

Flyers, except perhaps on a strange planet where there is thick air yet little gravity, need large wings and muscles to move them, yet a light body structure that enables the creature to lift its own weight. There is an upper limit to how big and heavy a flyer can be before it needs more wing and muscle than it can carry. Some creatures can become airborne without the use of flapping wings. These include floaters, which use gas bags to provide a modicum of lift, and gliders – which do not fly as such but can glide a short distance.

ARGEVENNY'S PSEUDOBIRD (CARRION JACK)

Better known as carrion jacks, pseudobirds resemble brightly coloured crows whose raucous call carries a surprisingly long distance. Pseudobirds are scavengers for the most part, preferring to pick over the decaying remains of something else's kill. They are usually encountered in small numbers, typically around 4-6, but range widely and will sometimes descend in large jabbering flocks on a large kill. Pseudobirds are not dangerous to humans, but can be a nuisance as they follow Travellers, trying to steal food whenever they can.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Pseudobird	3	5m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Recon 3	
ATTACKS	Peck (1)	
TRAITS	Flyer (slow), Small (-3)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Carrion Eater	

LI'L DRAG'N

The annoyingly named Li'l Drag'n is a non-feathered flyer, using large skin flaps spread by hollow bones to remain aloft. The central body is vaguely serpentine, with vicious teeth and a whip-like tail. Li'l Drag'ns can spit venom over a short distance – typically 3 metres or so, and prefer to attack in this manner. Venom spitting is also used to drive other creatures away from a kill, enabling the Li'l Drag'n to land and feed.

The venom is not especially toxic to humans, at least on skin contact, but it has a neurotoxic effect that produces disorientation. Once this takes effect, remaining upright becomes difficult and fine motor tasks like shooting are virtually impossible. A Li'l Drag'n that bites someone injects a much greater dose of its toxin, which will incapacitate the victim unless they make a Difficult (10+) END check to resist the poison.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Li'l Drag'n	6	5m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Gun Combat (venom) 1, Persuade 2, Recon 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (D3)	
TRAITS	Flyer (slow), Poison (Average/1D & nauseated/1D seconds), Small (-2)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Intimidator	

MOBBER

Mobbers are rather nasty flying creatures which hijack the kills of other predators by mobbing them (hence the name), inflicting many small wounds by biting and clawing at the victim's flesh until it flees in fear and pain. Mobbers will feed off a live target they are attacking, mainly by inflicting pecking bites which bleed profusely, and ripping at the edged of the wound with their toothed beaks. Mobbers typically flock in groups of about 20-30 individuals and are highly territorial. They prefer freshly killed and non-struggling prey, but are not particularly choosy. Indeed, sometimes a group of mobbers will turn on their own and rip them apart. This may occur when there is little food, but occasionally it seems to take place out of sheer bloodlust.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Mobber	8	3m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity) 1, Recon 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (D3)	
TRAITS	Flyer (slow), Small (-1)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Hijacker	

WINDBAG

The rather flippantly named windbag is a floater, consisting of a central gasbag and collection of thin tendrils that hang downwards. There are no discernible organs; all neural and digestive functions are carried out by specialised cells within the tendrils. Windbags drift on the breeze, sometimes in quite large numbers, and will occasionally anchor themselves to a branch or rock for a while. Their tendrils are mildly venomous, and are used to incapacitate prey which is then slowly digested. However, these attacks are largely passive and unless a Traveller goes within a metre of a windbag or one floats overhead, they cannot be stung.

Windbags are more or less trappers in behaviour, only the trap is their tendrils which move as they drift along. Windbags pose a threat mainly to livestock and inattentive people, especially at night when their silent approach may not be noted. Fire is a useful tool against windbags, but since they float using a mildly flammable gas produced in their outer membrane this can have unexpected consequences. A windbag that is hit by any form of incendiary weapon or otherwise exposed to fire will begin to burn, drifting as it does. It is possible to set a group on fire, and then to have to deal with the result of floating bags of burning gas creating secondary conflagrations.

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Windbag	12	1m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity) 1	
ATTACKS	Venomous Tendrils (1D, Stun)	
TRAITS	Flyer (very slow)	
BEHAVIOUR	Carnivore, Trapper	

C H A P T E R - F I V E

THE CHAMAX: DESTROYERS OF ECOSYSTEMS

The creatures known as Chamax are a classic *Traveller* enemy, featuring in the adventures *The Chamax Plague and Horde*. A lone Chamax is a serious threat to Travellers; an infestation is a threat to all life on an entire planet. Chamax thus should be used judiciously by the referee. Perhaps a scientist wants to study the creatures and requires some to be captured and transported… or maybe one escapes from a laboratory somewhere. A handful of Chamax might be dropped on an enemy colony as biological weapons, or kept as perverse status symbols by a pirate lord. Or perhaps an infestation might occur on a previously habitable world, threatening to turn it into a barren wasteland if desperate measures are not taken. Any world infested with Chamax will rapidly cease to be a garden world at all, whatever its trade code might say.

ORIGINS OF THE CHAMAX

The world of Chamax was once home to an intelligent and cultured species of pseudo-crustaceans who somewhat resembled the 'bugs' or Chamax as they are now known. These intelligent pseudo-crustaceans built cities, which were mostly underground, and spread out across the more habitable parts of their world. Life for these people was a constant struggle against their inhospitable planet, and they sought new places to live as their population expanded.

This caused them to try to settle a remote sub-continent which had been isolated for millennia. There, they came into conflict with a local species who bitterly resisted the pseudo-crustaceans' incursion. These creatures attacked food supplies and burrowed into underground settlements, killing the inhabitants and collapsing sections of the city. Needing the relatively habitable sub-continent for their expanding population, the pseudo-crustaceans would not withdraw and eventually won their battle by means of a targeted poison.

What the clever people of Chamax did not know was that this sub-continent was the last refuge of an almost extinct species, which was being driven into oblivion by the predator they had just exterminated. These were of course the bugs that would come to dominate Chamax, and they were not grateful for their reprieve.

Within just weeks the bugs had become a severe nuisance. Within months they were a threat. The decision to abandon the sub-continent was made, and the remaining population evacuated, but some cities were overrun and the population massacred before they could be brought to safety.

With the ocean between them and the bugs, the people of Chamax thought that they were safe, and for a time they were. However, a few bugs got ashore somehow, perhaps hidden aboard vessels carrying refugees. Outbreaks were contained for a time, but finally the bugs got a toehold on the main continent. From that point on, civilisation on Chamax was doomed.

The people of Chamax fought hard for their survival. At first they aggressively counterattacked, accepting fearful losses as the price of dislodging bug infestations. Yet always there was another, and finally the bugs controlled entire regions. The people of Chamax went on the defensive; fortifying their cities and making the bugs pay a terrible price for each life they took. However, the bugs were mindless killers and their birth rate was astronomical. One by one, they broke the cities of Chamax and the city-builders faced extinction.

Still they fought to live, building 'sleeper' starships to escape the bug horde. With no jump drive, these vessels were programmed to travel for centuries through deep space, making an automated landing when they reached a habitable world. All systems were automatic, enabling a ship to be launched even if no trained crew were available. Records found aboard one of these ships, which crashed on a planet named Raschev, suggest there were dozens or perhaps hundreds of these vessels, and that some at least did get away.

The collapse of the last cities happened fast, in a floodtide of carnage that saw the bugs overwhelm the ability of Chamax to support life on land. They ate everything, plant and animal alike, and then went into hibernation for lack of food. Most died in the years after the devastation, but some survived long enough for a new ecological balance to be established.

Some met a different fate.

The automated escape ships stood open and ready, and the populace tried to flee in them. In cases where even one bug got aboard, there were no survivors. In others, large numbers of bugs boarded, and the automatic systems were then activated. The bugs were similar enough to the people of Chamax that the ships thought they were refugees, and many survived the freezing process. The ships were launched and set out for nearby stars. All carried records of the fall of Chamax. Some carried its last survivors and some carried bugs.

There may be many Chamax ships still en route, and prior to landing it is not possible to tell which contain the desperate survivors of a lost civilisation and which pose a lethal threat to all life on the planet where they land.

CHAMAX: PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL

The bugs, or Chamax, are not intelligent as such. They are animals driven to consume everything they can find and breed as fast as possible. This is partly due to their efforts to avoid extinction at the hands of predators. Most Chamax are hunters, vaguely spider-like creatures the size of great danes. Hunters are virtually mindless, but can communicate with one another in a rudimentary fashion and sense radio and other electromagnetic emissions. They will eat anything organic and can hibernate for long periods when insufficient food is available or temperatures drop too low.

Each Chamax nest is centered on a Maternal, a huge, slug-like creature that relies on hunters to bring it food. A Maternal has a ‘palace guard’ of typically 10-20 hunters and can direct others to defend or carry it to a new location. Maternals are somewhat cunning in an animalistic way, but are not intelligent in the problem-solving sense. Maternals are the only Chamax that breed, and they do it constantly. Once a nest is established, a Maternal will keep on producing hunters until the local food supply becomes too sparse to support any more.

The breeding instinct seems to be controlled by food availability, so a successful nest will often experience a population explosion. Abundant food also causes the Maternal to produce additional Maternals, which resemble small hunters with wings. Immature Maternals can fly, and it has recently been discovered that some hunters can do so too. An immature Maternal cannot breed, but will seek a new nest site and gather as much food as possible. Once settled, the Maternal will metamorphose into the larger, immobile form and begin producing young. The first offspring of a newly nested Maternal tend to be small and weak, but subsequent broods are full-sized Chamax hunters.

In cold conditions or when food is scarce, Chamax will hibernate. A nest may almost die off if no food is available, with just the Maternal and a few hunters remaining dormant for an extended period. It is not known how long a nest can survive in this manner. Hibernating Chamax are unresponsive to most stimuli until they start to wake; sometimes it is possible to kill a hibernating group of hunters one by one without waking the others, though attacks on the Maternal or the 'palace guard' will awaken the whole nest.

When awake, hunters spend most of their time in questing mode, seeking food. Their movements are slow and apparently automatic, but once food or a threat is detected the hunters go to an aroused state. Aroused hunters move fast and savagely attack anything that might be food or threat. Individuals are not important; at times hunters will ignore attacks on their comrades in order to get food to the Maternal, but if enough are killed to threaten the well-being of the nest then an all-out attack will be launched.

The internal organs of all types of Chamax are heavily protected by spongy tissue, and hard to damage. It is possible to shoot parts of a hunter off without doing much more tha slowing it down; massive internal damage is the only way to kill a hunter, making it necessary to deliver enough damage to a hunter in a single attack to kill it. Lesser injuries are nothing but an inconvenience. This does not apply to mature or juvenile Maternals, which can be killed by cumulative damage.

Chamax have an acid sac that enables them to tunnel through rock (or starship bulkheads), and this is one of the ways they attack their foes. Chamax can also grab an opponent and secrete acid on them, but this is normally done only in direct defense of a nest or against a serious threat to the nest, such as a foe killing large numbers of hunters. More commonly, teeth are used. The target is grabbed and then eaten; at some point it dies, but to the Chamax the important thing is that it feeds. Some of the contents of its stomach are taken back to the Maternal and regurgitated for her to devour.

Mature Maternals do not secrete acid but juveniles do. Their jaws do not develop until they reach the nesting phase, so the juvenile Maternal relies on its brood of first-generation hunters to feed it. It can kill an enemy by secreting acid, but will not normally fight. It takes some time for the juvenile to metamorphose into a slug-like Maternal. This process seems to be triggered by hormones in food brought by the first-generation brood. The juvenile lays her first eggs in the mobile flyer form and then changes into a slug-like Maternal only if the brood proves successful in establishing a viable nest. Juveniles commonly flee, usually by flying, if the protection of their brood is insufficient. If the Maternal survives a threat, it will try setting up a nest somewhere else.

The acid sac of hunters and juveniles tends to rupture when their bodies take enough damage to kill them, which causes their corpses to rapidly dissolve pose a hazard to anyone nearby. There is little danger of acid splash unless a Traveller is within a couple of metres, though a big enough explosion can throw Chamax acid over greater distances.

CHAMAX IN COMBAT

A Traveller splashed with Chamax acid suffers 3D damage immediately, 2D the next round and 1D the round after that. If they are splashed again before the cycle is complete, only the highest damage applies.

A deliberate acid attack requires that the Chamax successfully grapple its target. In the next round, acid is secreted onto the target doing the same damage as a splash. If the Travelker is held in the grapple, the Chamax will continue to secrete acid every round.

Juvenile and mature Maternals can be killed by cumulative damage. The hits listed are average; some Maternals are much bigger and require far more damage to kill.

The Slow Metabolism trait applies only to Chamax that are in questing mode. Aroused Chamax ignore the effects of the Slow Metabolism trait

CHAMAX HUNTER

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Chamax Hunter	12*	5m
SKILLS	Athletics (endurance) 2, Melee (bite) 2, Recon 2, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (3D) or Acid (3D/2D/1D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+4), Small (-1), Slow Metabolism (-4)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Eater	

* This is the amount of damage that must be dealt in a single attack for the Chamax to be killed. Lesser damage is completely ignored. However, if a Chamax takes three times this much damage in one round from multiple sources, it will be ripped apart and killed.

FIRST-BROOD HUNTER

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
First-Brood Hunter	6*	4m
SKILLS	Athletics (endurance) 2, Melee (bite) 1, Recon 2, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (1D) or Acid (3D/2D/1D)	
TRAITS	Armour (+2), Small (-2), Slow Metabolism (-4)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Eater	

* This is the amount of damage that must be dealt in a single attack for the Chamax to be killed. Lesser damage is completely ignored. However, if a Chamax takes three times this much damage in one round from multiple sources, it will be ripped apart and killed.

FLYING HUNTER

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Flying Hunter	10*	6m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Melee (bite) 1, Recon 2, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Bite (2D) or Acid (3D/2D/1D)	
TRAITS	Flyer (Slow), Small (-1), Slow Metabolism (-4)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Eater	

* This is the amount of damage that must be dealt in a single attack for the Chamax to be killed. Lesser damage is completely ignored. However, if a Chamax takes three times this much damage in one round from multiple sources, it will be ripped apart and killed.

JUVENILE MATERNAL

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Juvenile Maternal	24	5m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Recon 3	
ATTACKS	Acid (3D/2D/1D), Acid Spit (1D, Blast 3)	
TRAITS	Slow Metabolism (-4)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Eater	

CHAMAX MATERNAL

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Chamax Maternal	120	0m
SKILLS	None	
ATTACKS	None	
TRAITS	Large (+6), Slow Metabolism (-4)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Eater