Horror and the Supernatural in the ALTERNITY® Game

No One Can Hear You Scream

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illustrated by r k post

Horror comes in many flavors:

the classic Gothic horror of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, the slasher horror of *Psycho* or *Halloween*, and the supernatural horror of Cthulhu and the Living Dead films. Just as horror comes in many forms, it easily crosses literary and roleplaying genres—from medieval horror like the Ravenloft® campaign, through Victorian (*Masque of the Red Death*) settings, to modern-day or futuristic settings like the Star*Drive® campaign.

The Alternity® *Gamemaster Guide* discusses horror as a science-fiction genre, giving some sense of the many possibilities that exist in this broad description: "The premise of horror SF centers on the presence of dark creatures and phenomena inimical to human life" (page 181). From *Day of the Triffids* to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* to *The Twilight Zone*, science-fiction films and books offer a wealth of ideas to inspire an Alternity adventure or campaign tinged with horror. The game rules already offer some mechanics to make such a campaign work.

Mental Resolve: Resisting Horror

One game mechanic that helps to facilitate the introduction of horror to an Alternity campaign is the Resolve–*mental resolve* skill. As described in the *Player's Handbook*, this skill measures "a hero's ability to cope with emotional or mental stress of all kinds … emotional trauma, fear, panic, madness, insanity, mind control techniques, and mental powers" (page 94). In other words, the stuff of horror! The *Gamemaster Guide* expands on this description, suggesting that Resolve–*mental resolve* is especially appropriate to determine a hero's reaction to events in a horror campaign, from the "death of a friend or companion" to "invasive mental assault" or "hideous, frightening, or disgusting aliens" (page 79).

With a few adjustments, a Resolve–*mental resolve* skill check is a versatile way to ensure that heroes react appropriately to a confrontation with their worst nightmares. The Ravenloft campaign setting introduces three kinds of die rolls to measure these reactions: fear, horror, and madness checks. These checks are required whenever characters face an especially fearsome enemy (fear check), confront the scene of a grisly murder (horror check), or probe the depths of an alien or undead mind (madness check). By treating each of these checks as a specialized form of the Resolve–*mental resolve* skill check, this mechanic can be easily introduced into the Alternity game.

Remember, however, that Alternity is a roleplaying game. If a player adequately roleplays his hero's reactions to the horrific events of the game, there is no need to use fear or horror checks. They are intended, here as in the Ravenloft campaign, as tools to nudge players toward good roleplaying, not as substitutes. Madness checks, on the other hand, are best rolled, as it is difficult to roleplay the mind-shattering effects of insanity.

The following guidelines are based heavily on the *Domains of Dread* book for the Ravenloft campaign setting.

Fear Checks

Fear is, essentially, the human mind's reaction to danger. It is the rush of adrenaline, the "fight-or-flight" response, that surges through the body when something threatens one's existence. When confronted with a powerful opponent, when stumbling upon the remains of an obviously deadly encounter, when

Table 1: Fear Check Situation Modifiers

+3	Extremely terrifying
+2	Moderately fearsome
+2	Hero has already suffered any mortal damage
+1	Slightly frightful
+1	Hero has been defeated by a similar danger in the past
+1	Hero is alone
+1	Hero is in open space
+1	Hero is suffering from wound damage
−1	Hero has overcome a similar danger in the past
−1	An innocent, friend, or ally is in clear danger from the threat
−1	Hero or group possesses something they believe will help them overcome this danger
−2	Hero or group possesses something that has proven to help overcome a similar danger in the past

Table 2: Fear Check Results

Amazing or Good Success	The hero conquers his fear and continues normally with his actions.
Ordinary Success	The hero is startled. He pulls away from the source of his fear and fumbles with items in his hands. He must roll a Dexterity feat check for each held item, with failure indicating that he drops the item. In addition, all of the hero's actions in this round are delayed by one phase. Actions that would have taken place in the Marginal phase are forfeited.
Failure	The hero is fearstruck. He screams and stumbles backward. He must roll a Dexterity feat check, with failure indicating that he trips and falls. He can take no actions in this round.
Critical Failure	The terrified hero seeks to hide from the danger, either looking for reliable cover in the immediate area or fleeing if no such cover exists. The hero begins to recover his senses in ten minutes, assuming the source of the fear is no longer present. In the absence of the fear-causing situation, another hero can use the Leadership broad skill to shake the hero out of his panic.

left alone in an unfamiliar place, when faced with something new and unknown, the natural reaction is fear.

Heroes should make a fear check whenever they face an enemy in combat who is obviously too powerful to resist. Even outside of combat situations where the heroes' lives are in obvious danger, circumstances can dictate a fear check. If a hero is faced with isolation in an unknown or alien environment (especially in space), or if the heroes happen across some scene that suggests the terrible nature of the situation they are in without directly confronting them with a physical threat (such as the

Table 3: Horror Check Situation Modifiers

+3	Extremely horrifying situation
+3	A relative or fellow hero participates in the scene
+2	Moderately horrific situation
+2	Hero has suffered any mortal damage
+2	An innocent, friend, or ally participates in the scene
+1	Slightly horrible situation
+1	Hero has been horrified by a similar scene in the past
+1	Hero is in close quarters, with no room to run
+1	Hero's moral attitude is Ethical, Gallant, or Virtuous
+1	Hero is alone
+1	Hero is in open space
+1	Hero is suffering from wound damage
–1	Hero's moral attitude is Pathetic, Corrupt, Despicable, or Unscrupulous
–1	Hero has overcome a similar scene in the past
–1	Hero has room to run away
–1	An innocent, friend, or ally is in clear danger

Table 4: Horror Check Results

Amazing or Good Success	The hero suppresses his revulsion and continues normally with his actions.
Ordinary Success	The hero flees the scene in profound fear. He moves at full speed away from the source of his horror for ten minutes. The effects of his horror linger far beyond that time. For the next month, he cannot bear to return to the place where the incident occurred, or anyplace like it. Anything reminiscent of the horror he faced fills him with renewed revulsion. He suffers a +2 penalty to all his actions while in the presence of something that reminds him of the horror scene. After two weeks, he can make another horror check, with success indicating that he has gotten over the ill effects of his horror. If this check fails, he must wait another two weeks before trying again.
Failure	The hero becomes obsessed with the cause of his horror. His sleep is plagued by nightmares—he awakens every half-hour or so with a scream. After every sleepless night, he must make a Stamina–*endurance* check. A Critical Failure on this check indicates that he suffers 2 points of fatigue damage, while a Failure indicates a loss of 1 point of fatigue damage. Without rest, the hero cannot recover from fatigue or any other damage. During the day, he can think of nothing but the horrific event. Due to this obsession, he suffers a +1 penalty to all his action checks and surprise rolls. After each month that passes, the hero can attempt a new horror check to see if he can escape the memory of the horrific event.
Critical Failure	The hero's mind threatens to collapse under the weight of the horror that has engulfed him. The hero enters a state of mental shock, staring blankly at the cause of the horror. He is unable to take any action, even in self-defense. He can move only if dragged from the scene. He returns to some semblance of normality when removed from the presence of whatever caused the horror, but subsequent exposure to the same or a similar scene forces him to make a new horror check, with a +1 step penalty. Anything less than a Good success on this check indicates that he enters a state of shock once more. After each month that passes, the hero can attempt a new horror check with a +1 step penalty to determine whether he can recover from the lasting shock of the event.

remains of the alien's latest victim), a fear check is in order.

To make a fear check, a player rolls a Resolve–*mental resolve* skill check, applying situation modifiers from **Table 1**. Remember that if a hero does not possess the specialty skill, he must use his Resolve broad skill, if he has it (with a base situation die of +d4), or use his untrained Will score (half his Will, rounded down) and start with a base situation die of +d4.

The results of a fear check depend on the die roll and the degree of success or failure achieved, as shown on **Table 2.**

Once again, note that these extreme results are intended to encourage players to roleplay their heroes' reactions to fear-inspiring situations.

Horror Checks

Horror is a more intense and far-reaching state than fear. Horror is, at its core, the mind's outright refusal to accept what a person sees or experiences. It is a reaction of profound revulsion or anguish that haunts a person for hours or even days. Facing a gibbering, drooling alien might cause a hero to run in fear, but realizing that his wife is actually a sinister, insidious invader has a much deeper impact. While a swinging scythe might inspire fear, it is the tiny needles that cause horror.

It is difficult to specify when heroes should make horror checks. Generally, supernatural experiences, those that defy categorization or even description in the language of normal experience, provoke horror checks. Combat specs and similar types are generally hardened to scenes of carnage that would horrify other heroes, but even so, watching a young alien erupt from the stomach of a companion can fill even hardened warriors with dread.

As with a fear check, a player makes a horror check by rolling a Resolve–*mental resolve* skill check, applying situation modifiers from **Table 3**. Again, if a hero does not possess the specialty skill, he must either use the Resolve broad skill, if he has it (with a base situation die of +d4), or use his untrained Will score (half his Will, rounded down) and start with a base situation die of +d4.

The results of a horror check depend on the die roll and the degree of

success or failure achieved, as shown on **Table 4.**

Madness Checks

Madness is more than an emotional reaction or a deep-seated revulsion; it shakes the foundations of human personality and reason. While fear results from the immediate or implied threat of danger, and horror is the consequence of an upset in one's view of reality, madness comes about when one's sense of self and the world are brought under a thorough and repeated assault.

There are few circumstances that require heroes to make madness checks. The most obvious of these is when a human (or near-human) mind comes into direct psionic contact with a completely alien intelligence. In a horror game, any alien mind can qualify as "completely alien"; if you are injecting horror into a lighter space opera setting, only contact with rare and unusual alien species should force madness checks. Such species would definitely include non–carbon-based lifeforms (such as the fluorosilicate life of Polyphemus in the Lucullus system, in the STAR*DRIVE setting). Direct psionic contact includes the use of the following psionic skills: ESP–*empathy* and

mind reading, and Telepathy–*contact* and *suggest*. It does not matter whether the hero or the alien initiates the contact; the hero's mind is in equal danger either way.

Other circumstances might also warrant madness checks, but they are much harder to define. In general, if a hero seems to be reaching a breaking point—when even the player is having a hard time dealing with the hero's situation—it is probably time for a madness check. Unlike fear and horror checks, madness checks should always be rolled, since it is difficult to roleplay insanity without the assistance of game mechanics.

Table 5: Madness Check Situation Modifiers

+3	Extremely insane situation
+2	Moderately maddening situation
+1	Slightly unbalancing situation
+1	Hero has been horrified by a similar scene in the past
+1	Hero has failed a fear, horror, or madness check in the past 24 hours
+1	Hero is in open space

Table 6: Madness Check Results

Amazing or Good Success	The hero retains his sanity and continues normally with his actions.
Ordinary Success	The hero's mind shuts itself off from the outside world, causing the hero to slip into a catatonic trance. The hero sits motionless and does not respond to any outside stimuli. He is unable to defend himself from any form of attack, so his resistance modifiers do not apply; however, his Will resistance modifier becomes +5, reflecting his mind's powerful defenses against any further intrusion. A character with the Medical science–*psychology* skill can treat the hero; the illness is considered Moderate, requiring 5 successful skill checks to treat; each check is made with a +2 penalty and represents a week of elapsed time.
Failure	The hero's mind begins to splinter, causing unpredictable swings in his mood, even complete changes of personality. His entire moral outlook can change from week to week or alter in an instant when the hero is under stress. At the start of every week, or in situations of stress, the Gamemaster should roll 1d12 and consult **Table 7** to determine the hero's new moral outlook.

Table 7: Schizophrenic Moral Outlook

1	Anti-authority
2	Apathetic
3	Corrupt
4	Despicable
5	Ethical
6	Gallant
7	Honorable
8	Just
9	Selfish
10	Unscrupulous
11	Virtuous
12	Worldly

Like fear and horror checks, a madness check is simply a Resolve–*mental resolve* skill check, with situation modifiers applied from **Table 5.** If a hero does not possess that specialty skill, he must either use the Resolve broad skill, if he has it (with a base situation die of +d4), or use his untrained Will score (half his Will, rounded down) and start with a base situation die of +d4.

The results of a horror check depend on the die roll and the degree of success or failure achieved, as shown on **Table 6.**

A character with the Medical Science–*psychology* skill can treat the hero. The illness is Extreme, requiring eight successful skill checks to treat; each check is made with a +3 penalty and represents a month of elapsed time.

Critical Failure: Sometimes a shock to the mind can overwhelm the most basic mental functions, even those that keep the body alive. If a hero rolls a Critical Failure on a madness check, he must immediately make a Stamina or Stamina–*endurance* skill check with a +2 step penalty. Failure indicates that the hero dies from the overwhelming shock. Even if the skill check is successful, the hero's Constitution score is permanently reduced by 1, and he is knocked out, suffering enough stun damage to mark off all his stun boxes.

Horrors of Space

The mechanics of fear, horror, and madness checks can help to build an atmosphere of horror in an ALTERNITY campaign, but the key element is the creature or situation that prompts heroes to make such checks. As horror/sci-fi movies are often named after the featured antagonist (*Alien, Predator,*

Terminator, Invasion of the Body Snatchers), so can a horror campaign take much of its character from the alien or other horrific creature that dominates it. A number of appropriate alien lifeforms are described in published material for the STAR*DRIVE campaign. These creatures, and the others described below, can serve as the driving force behind a horror campaign.

Horror is a broad genre, and elements of horror can creep their way into many different campaign styles. An entire campaign can be based around themes of the macabre, but techniques of horror can also enrich a campaign based in another science fiction genre, be it colonization, combat, or space opera. The specific alien threat that forms the basis of a horror campaign or adventure helps determine which genre the game tends toward.

Teln

The teln, an alien creature described in the STAR*DRIVE Campaign Setting (pages 186–187), is a parasitic creature that infiltrates and dominates a human host. An infestation of these creatures could be the hook for an adventure or a whole campaign based on an *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* theme.

In a contemporary campaign: A meteor crashes in the Nevada desert, carrying a colony of teln. Spreading quickly into human hosts, the teln take over a city, corporation, or military base. The heroes could be the last remaining uninfected humans, or they might be outsiders wandering into the teln colony after the takeover is complete.

In a near-future campaign: Humanity's first colony on the Moon or Mars sends back the earth-shaking news that life—tiny wormlike creatures—does in fact exist on this barren satellite. However, leaders of the colony start exhibiting strange behavior, and the colonist heroes must determine why.

In a far-future campaign: In the course of exploring the galaxy, the heroes' starship welcomes an alien ambassador aboard. A few days later, the ambassador dies of mysterious causes. The ship's doctor performs an autopsy and soon starts acting strangely herself. The teln spread like an epidemic throughout the closed environment.

Cykotek

Cykoteks are the perfect antagonists for a horror campaign with a cyberpunk theme. As described in the STAR*DRIVE ALIEN COMPENDIUM™ book (pages 23–24), cykoteks are cybernetically enhanced humans who have sacrificed their sanity and something of their humanity in exchange for more and better cyber gear. Driven by a pseudo-religious fervor intensified by cyber-induced madness, cykoteks are rampaging killers best suited to a slasher-film type of horror game. Taking Freddy Krueger's knifed glove to its logical extreme, cykoteks are literally killing machines.

In a contemporary campaign: Without extensive cybertechnology available, a cykotek is impossible. A cykotek could appear in a contemporary setting, however, as a time-traveler (as in the *Terminator* movies), or—with very limited cybernetic enhancement—as a sort of rogue bionic man who escaped from a top-secret government laboratory.

In a near-future campaign: The cykotek embodies all that is horrific about the cyberpunk genre. A rampaging killer haunts the filthy streets of 21st-century Manhattan—a gritty metropolis where the rich never leave their sky-high penthouses for fear of encountering the gangs that rule the ground. The cykotek could be a killing machine or a Grid-stalking madman. Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the chat room …

In a far-future campaign: In a future where cybernetic enhancement is widespread and accepted, a galactic megacorporation installs fast chips in all of its employees on a certain space station, unaware of or unconcerned with the consequences. One by one, the station workers fall over the edge of sanity, creating a virtual epidemic of cykosis. The heroes are soon surrounded by madmen on an isolated space station, faced with the knowledge that their own fast chips might soon claim their sanity as well.

Spikespore

The spikespore (ALIEN COMPENDIUM, book pages 107–108) bears a certain similarity to the namesake of the *Alien* movies and works well in exactly such a scenario. Whatever the time frame of

the campaign, a spikespore larva attaches itself to a space vehicle (a contemporary NASA space shuttle, a near-future slower-than-light exploration ship, or a far-future starship) and implants its young in the inhabitants, who die horrible deaths as the hatchlings emerge. For the heroes, it's all downhill from there.

Dimensional Horrors

Dimensional horrors, aptly named, are described in the *ALIEN COMPENDIUM* book (pages 110–111). Created by an ancient Precursor race as guardians, they are ferocious and tireless fiends with the ability to shift into an alternate dimension. From there they stalk their prey unhindered by physical barriers. Whether the heroes are contemporary troubleshooters, near-future colonists, or far-future explorers, a basic scenario involving these creatures looks much the same: Deep under the Antarctic ice or Martian soil, or hidden in the swamps of Yellow Sky, a scientific probe uncovers the remnants of an ancient alien colony. Unwittingly triggering a portal to another dimension, the scientists investigating the site unleash a dimensional horror, which quickly exterminates the team. The heroes are sent to investigate the missing scientific expedition.

Gardhyi

The gardhyi (*ALIEN COMPENDIUM* book, pages 119–121) are a mysterious and apparently malign alien race with extensive psionic and quasi-magical powers to supplement their advanced alien technology. Cloaking their alien features with human clothes and dark glasses, these aliens move undetected among humankind, pursuing their nefarious goals.

In a contemporary or near-future campaign: The gardhyi can appear in a contemporary setting in the same fashion as the fraal (as described in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook*). If humanity is already interacting with the fraal, then the gardhyi can appear in the background of these negotiations, attempting to sabotage the collaboration between the two species. If the fraal are left out of the campaign, then the gardhyi make a more sinister first alien

contact. Alien abduction, sinister experiments, even genetic manipulation—the heroes would be investigators trying to track down the cause of these horrors, as in *The X-Files.*

In a far-future campaign: As they are described in the *ALIEN COMPENDIUM* book, the gardhyi can add an element of intrigue to a far-future campaign. To bring that intrigue to the level of horror requires an unfolding revelation of the gardhyi's master plan—something less political and more horrifyingly personal—and a description of their awful methods of accomplishing that plan. While the apparent scarcity of female gardhyi immediately suggests a plot along the lines of *Mars Needs Women*, it's probably better to steer clear of bad taste. Instead, suppose that the gardhyi race faces a severe epidemic of mental illness—gardhyi above a certain age regularly fall into mental collapse, exhibiting severe symptoms ranging from total catatonia to violent psychosis. Gardhyi agents spread through the surrounding regions of space seeking to understand more about what makes the mind work—assuming some parallel between gardhyi and other sentient minds. Seeing humans and their allied

alien races as more appropriate scientific subjects than gardhyi (much the same way twentieth-century science viewed chimpanzees), these agents perform subtle experiments on the minds of their victims, exploring the edges of sanity through psychological and biological means. Some of their victims end up in the (admittedly advanced) asylums of the twenty-sixth century, while others end up dead, drained of cerebrospinal fluid through a tiny puncture mark in the back of the neck.

Magus

The magus is an enigmatic creature—whether it is alive or robotic in nature remains to be determined. It is literally or figuratively a killing machine, so far encountered in the Verge only in the role of a highly effective assassin. It lends itself easily to scenarios similar to the movie *Predator*, where an individual or group is hunted by a magus. It is possible that the magus is a creation of the gardhyi—either a purely robotic creation, the result of cybernetic modification of human or alien bodies, or even the implantation of a human mind (driven insane by the experience, of course) into a robotic body. Whatever

the time-frame of the campaign, the magus can be introduced as a silent hunter stalking the heroes or another important figure.

The Walking Dead

From *Dracula* to *Interview With the Vampire*, legends of the undead have spawned a vast variety of horror stories in every genre. Besides vampires, popular villains in this tradition include ghosts, mummies, and zombies. The AD&D® game, and particularly the RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® volumes, present scores of undead foes. While Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos pits the forces of science and deduction against creatures that threaten the foundations of reason and sanity, the undead represent a deeper conflict—between life and death, between a belief in an eternal soul and the void of the grave. Any of these undead creatures could be adapted into an ALTERNITY game with a little imagination, but one strand of the tradition survives the transition to science fiction particularly well—the tradition of necromancy, or black magic.

The necromancer is a human sorcerer who communicates with the spirits of the dead and also has the power to make the dead walk, usually as zombies. ALTERNITY's FX rules can cover the range of necromantic skills and spells, adding a unique flavor of supernatural horror to a sci-fi campaign.

Necromantic FX

FX powers usable by necromancers are all Arcane Magic FX, as described in the ALTERNITY *Gamemaster Guide*. A necromancer must pay 15 skill points for the Arcane Magic FX broad skill, which allows him only to learn the related specialty skill. No Arcane Magic specialty skill (spell) can be used untrained by a character with just the broad skill.

Each of the necromantic spells described below comes in three varieties, or strengths: Ordinary, Good, and Amazing. A necromancer can begin by learning only the Ordinary variety of a spell and paying the skill cost listed for that version. As he increases in level, he can improve his knowledge of the spell to the Good level simply by paying the difference in cost between the Ordinary and Good levels. For example, the base cost for Speak With Dead is listed as 4/8/12. A necromancer can learn the

Ordinary version of the spell for 4 skill points. When he wishes to learn the Good version of the spell, he must pay only 4 additional skill points (8 − 4). Likewise, when he chooses to learn the Amazing version, he need only pay 4 more points, assuming that he had already learned the Good version. If a necromancer knows multiple versions of a given spell, he may freely choose which version to cast at any given time—just because he knows how to cast an Amazing Sympathetic Curse doesn't mean he has to.

All of the spells described below require a complicated ritual, described in game terms as a complex skill check. The Ordinary versions of the spells require skill checks of Ordinary complexity, with 3 successful results needed to complete the ritual and rolls made every ten minutes. The Good versions require Good complexity checks, needing 5 successful results and rolls made every half-hour. The Amazing versions demand checks of Amazing complexity, with 8 successful results required and checks made every hour. In addition, all of these spells require components, usually the blood of a sentient or animal.

Four necromantic FX are described below: Speak with Dead, Animate Dead, Sympathetic Curse, and Sympathetic Enchantment. Others are certainly possible, subject only to the Gamemaster's imagination.

Speak With Dead

Arcane Magic, Augur spell: INT; base cost 4/8/12

This spell allows a necromancer to communicate with the departed spirit of a person (human or alien). In addition to the ritual (complex skill check) described above, casting Speak With Dead requires the necromancer to kill a chicken or other small animal, using its blood in the ritual.

Ordinary: The necromancer must be touching the corpse of the person he intends to contact, who must have been dead no longer than one week. The necromancer can ask one question for every two levels. The departed spirit answers only with "yes" or "no," so questions should be phrased appropriately.

Good: The necromancer must be within 10 meters of the corpse, which may be underground, or similarly interred. The person contacted may have been dead up to one month. The necromancer can ask up to one question per level. The spirit can answer with "yes" or "no," and can also choose between two options.

Amazing: The corpse need not be present, but the necromancer must be touching something that the deceased person once touched. The person to be contacted may be dead up to one year. The necromancer can ask two questions per level, and the spirit can answer with one or two words (which might be spoken in an eerie voice, spelled out on something like a ouija board, or perhaps written on paper with a pen).

Animate Dead

Arcane Magic, Transform spell: WIL; base cost 5/10/15

This spell allows the necromancer to breathe some semblance of life into a corpse, using it as a grisly undead servant to do his bidding. As long as bones remain, the state of decay does not affect the spell or the animated zombies. In addition to the ritual (complex skill check) described for each level of the spell, casting Animate Dead requires the necromancer to pour out a pint of human blood as a component of the spell.

Ordinary: The necromancer can animate one corpse for every 2 levels to do his bidding. He must touch the corpses to be animated. The zombies can obey only short, simple commands, which must be issued at the time they are to be performed—for example, "Kill him!" or "Lift that barrel." The zombies remain animated for one day, after which time the corpses crumble into dust.

Good: The necromancer can animate one corpse per level as zombies, again touching each one. The zombies can follow more complex commands, such as "Lift that barrel and set it down here," but the commands still must be issued at the time they are to be performed. The zombies remain animated for three days, then crumble to dust.

Amazing: The necromancer can animate three corpses per level, which must be within 10 meters. They can

push their way out of their own graves if necessary (saving the necromancer some dirty work). The zombies actually have a spark of intelligence, enough to class them as subsentient and allow them to follow complex conditional commands (for example, "If anyone comes through that door, capture them and bring them to me!"). The zombies remain animated for seven days, then return to inanimate corpses.

Sympathetic Curse

Arcane Magic, Conjure spell: PER; base cost 5/10/15

Using some item belonging to the intended victim, a necromancer can lay a powerful curse on another person with this spell. This curse can inflict damage, impose penalties to certain actions, and otherwise hinder the victim in ways limited only by the necromancer's imagination. The component required is either a part of the victim's body (hair, fingernails, or blood are the most commonly used) or a possession of the victim that has had extensive contact with the victim's body (a ring he always wears, for example, or the pillow he sleeps on every night).

Ordinary: At its most basic level, the curse of sympathetic magic can inflict damage of d6+4s, unaffected by armor. It can also impose a +1 step penalty to all actions, or a +2 step penalty to actions (including skills and feat checks) based on one specific ability

score. These and any other effects that might qualify as appropriately minor curses should naturally be described in a colorful fashion, rather than simply relating the game effects. For example, a +2 step penalty to Personality-related action checks could result from a hideous blemish on the victim's face, while damage might take the form of shooting pains in a specific part or parts of the anatomy (inflicted through a "voodoo doll," of course).

Good: At this level, damage inflicted by the curse increases to d6+4w, again, unmodified by armor. The curse can also impose a +2 step penalty to all actions, or a +3 step penalty to actions related to one ability score. Alternatively, one ability score can be permanently reduced by 1 point. Other effects are possible.

Amazing: At this level, damage inflicted by the curse is potentially lethal, rising to d8+4w. The curse can also impose a +3 step penalty to all actions, or reduce one ability score by 2 points. Again, other effects are possible.

Sympathetic Enchantment

Arcane Magic, Conjure spell: PER; base cost 4/8/12

This spell allows a necromancer to bend his victim's will to his own, using some object belonging to the victim. As with Sympathetic Curse, the spell requires a component that is either a part of the victim's body (hair, nail

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Zombie Game Data

STR	11	(2d6+4)	INT		1 or 5
DEX	6	(2d6–1)	WIL		0
CON	10	(2d6+3)	PER		0
Durability —/15/—/—			Action check: 6+/5/2/1		
Move: Walk 4			# Actions: 1		
Reaction score: Marginal/1			Last Resorts: 0		

Attacks

Claws ×2	12/6/3	d4+2s/d6+2s/d4w	LI/O

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
–1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

As undead creatures, zombies are unaffected by stun or fatigue damage. Mortal damage also does not apply, since there are no functioning arteries or organs in a zombie's body. Mortal damage is treated as wound damage, however. The only thing that can stop a zombie is the total annihilation of its body, either by inflicting at least 15 points of wound damage or by incinerating it, dissolving it in acid, or some similar method.

clippings, etc.), or a close personal possession such as a ring or pillow. The victim's Will resistance modifier applies to all skill checks made to cast this spell.

Ordinary: The victim is predisposed to be friendly to the necromancer when they meet. The necromancer's advice and suggestions carry much weight, but the victim will not obey them if they contradict good sense. The victim defends the necromancer in a reasonable argument, but not if the necromancer's position is completely unreasonable or loathsome to the victim's beliefs. The victim will not take the necromancer's side in a physical confrontation, unless he perceives the necromancer as an innocent victim of violence. The spell lasts for one day per level of the necromancer.

Good: The victim obeys the necromancer's direct suggestion, a complex command that can include conditional and time-sensitive clauses. The victim obeys the command even if it seems nonsensical, dangerous, or repellent. The necromancer must speak the command in a language that the victim can understand, and the victim must be able to hear it clearly, for the spell to be effective. However, the necromancer can issue the command at any time within twenty-four hours of completing the spell casting. Once the victim has carried out the command to the best of his ability, the spell is ended.

Amazing: The victim falls under the complete mental control of the necromancer, at a range of up to 1 km per level. The necromancer's body falls into a trance-like state, while his mind occupies and controls the victim's body. The victim's mind is effectively asleep. Anything that his body does while under the necromancer's control is at best vaguely remembered, as if in a dream. If the body is killed while possessed by the necromancer, both victim and necromancer perish. The possession lasts for up to one hour per level of the necromancer.

Black Magic in the Campaign

In a contemporary or near-future campaign: Black magic and necromancy are most commonly associated with the voodoo practitioners of Haiti, but similar sorcerers could appear anywhere in a contemporary campaign. You could postulate the existence of a human sub-species with a gift for black magic or make it available to anyone with the twisted desire to cross the barriers between life and death. Necromancers could even appear on Earth as members of an alien species. Regardless of their origin, they generally use their magic for their own selfish ends. Heroes in a technothriller campaign might find their most sophisticated scientific gadgetry is barely a match for the magical power of a necromancer and his zombie agents.

In a far-future campaign: Necromancy could be a manifestation of an alien species' native religious beliefs. Starfaring colonists might find a native rebellion led by necromancers threatening to drive them back to their starships, while explorers could meet a similarly hostile response from the apparently primitive natives of the planet they're exploring. Alternatively, an evil emperor might have a necromancer as his closest advisor—sort of a Darth Vader figure. Rebel heroes must contend with the necromancer's magic as well as the empire's troops in their adventures.

Evil Unleashed

Alien artifacts represent a third way to introduce themes of horror into an ALTERNITY campaign. As described in Chapter 12 of the *Gamemaster Guide*, alien artifacts are powerful scientific devices created by an advanced civilization. Heroes might possess an alien artifact as a perk or a flaw, or they might encounter them in the course of their adventures. In any case, these artifacts can be a vehicle for horror, simply by assuming that the alien civilization that created them was malevolent or misguided in their methods.

Even a malevolent alien race would not create devices that were harmful to the user—at least not if they intended to use the items. Still, enough of the creator's evil intentions might remain within the device that even a hero who intends to use the object for the noblest aims slowly becomes corrupted by its influence. Using such an artifact might slowly sap the hero's will, until he comes under the control of a malevolent intelligence that lives within the device. Or, he might slowly but inexorably find his moral outlook changing for the worse.

Misguided artifact creators might simply be unaware of the true nature of the forces they are dealing with. Scientific creations intended for good purposes can develop a life of their own and turn toward evil against their creator's intentions (Frankenstein's monster being the classic example). Or an alien artifact might simply work differently for a human hero than for the alien race that created it, based on differences in physiology or psychology. These differences can create a world of horror for the unfortunate hero.

A horror campaign can revolve around a single, incredibly malevolent alien artifact that is either in the possession of the heroes (for example, Tolkien's One Ring) or extending its malignant influence from afar. A campaign might involve a number of lesser artifacts with a single creator that have all worked their corrupting influence on unsuspecting members of the supporting cast. The heroes' ultimate aim will probably be to destroy the artifacts, but initially they could just be collecting them for study. (Studying such devices has its own perils, as the heroes will discover eventually—and then their goal should turn toward destroying them.)

The Temple of the Healer

This ancient alien temple lies on a remote planet—one of Saturn's moons, perhaps, or an alien world around a more distant star. Dedicated to a long-forgotten alien deity of healing, the temple is an odd assortment of monoliths in various shapes and sizes, all formed of a smooth green mineral akin to jade. An outer courtyard bounded by pillars surrounds the inner sanctuary, the entrance to which is only 1 meter in diameter. The inside of the sanctuary has barely enough room for a large human to lie down, and it feels rather like a coffin or cryogenic chamber.

The temple's primary function, of course, is to provide healing. It possesses the Regenerator power at an Amazing level, healing anyone who lies in the sanctuary chamber at the rate of 1

stun, wound, and mortal point (as needed) per round for up to 12 rounds per day. In addition, it possesses the Resuscitator power at a Good level, allowing a dead person placed within the temple to attempt a Resolve–*mental resolve* skill check with a –2 bonus, with success indicating that he has returned to life. (See the full description of this power in the ALTERNITY *Gamemaster Guide*, chapter 12.)

Humans (and most aliens) who use the temple quickly notice a minor drawback to using the temple's power in this fashion: skin and tissue knit back together by the temple's healing ability are not human. When the temple heals wound points, the difference is primarily cosmetic: The skin over the wounded area grows back with a slight green tint, and the new skin is hard and cold to the touch. The healed person must make an immediate horror check upon discovering the difference in the new skin. In addition, he immediately suffers the effect of the Poor Looks flaw (but gains no bonus skill points): a +1 penalty to Personality-based skill checks when appearance could be a factor in the encounter. If the temple healed more than half of the person's total wound rating, the penalty increases to +2.

When the temple restores mortal damage, however, the alteration is more significant, as essential body processes are restored and changed in the process. The effects depend on the total number of mortal points the temple has healed in that person, in proportion to the person's total mortal rating. These drawbacks are derived from mutant drawbacks described in Chapter 13 of the ALTERNITY *Player's Handbook*.

Up to one-quarter of mortal rating: The healed person gains a slight environmental sensitivity, causing him to suffer a +2 penalty to all skill and action checks when operating in a light-gravity environment. His appearance is somewhat alien; he suffers a +2 penalty to all Personality-based skill checks. He must make a horror check with a +1 penalty immediately upon realizing what has happened to him.

Up to one half of mortal rating: The healed person develops a weak immune system, causing a +2 penalty to all Constitution feat checks to resist

disease or infection. (Again, see Chapter 13 in the *Player's Handbook*.)

Up to mortal rating: The healed person suffers from slow reflexes, inflicting a +1 penalty on all action check rolls. In addition, the person is now sufficiently inhuman that he inspires fear and loathing in everyone he meets. He makes Personality-based skill checks with a +4 penalty, and a Critical Failure on such a roll forces his intended target to make a fear check.

Up to twice mortal rating: The penalty for operating in a light-gravity environment increases to +3, and checks to resist infection are made at +3 as well. The healed person must also make a madness check as soon as he becomes aware of the changes to his system.

Over twice mortal rating: The person's system can no longer reconcile what are essentially the two halves of his body—human and alien. He dies a painful and horrible death, after sinking into utter madness.

The Seven Stones of Midnight

These artifacts are seven identical, midnight-blue spheres of unknown mineral composition. Each is roughly the size of a golf ball, harder than diamond, and light as a feather. They might be found separately or together. They could appear at the core of a meteorite, in the middle of a rock sample brought back from Mars, or in an ornate case on an alien world. Their origins are completely unknown.

Though they are identical in form and appearance, the Seven Stones of Midnight are varied in function. Each functions only when held tightly in the hand (or analogous appendage). Each has one Good primary power and one Ordinary secondary power, as shown on **Table 8.**

For all their incredible powers, the Seven Stones of Midnight each house a

malign and alien intelligence. Whatever its nature and origins, this intelligence clearly has the power to insinuate itself into the minds of those who use the stone. Whenever the user is in a situation where he could do something evil (intentionally causing pain and suffering, stealing something important, etc.), he must make a Resolve–*mental resolve* skill check to avoid doing it. He lies unscrupulously to cover his actions and even just to cause trouble. A week after using a Stone's powers for the first time, the user makes these Resolve skill checks with a +1 penalty. This penalty increases by an additional +1 for every week that passes.

In addition to this inexorable shift toward evil, the Stones all possess the Extreme drawback of Mental Instability. Also, they are Infamous Devices (as a Slight drawback), meaning that those who possess them are sure to find themselves targets for all sorts of villains who would love to get their hands on the power commanded by the Seven Stones.

No One Can Hear You Scream

Fear, horror, and madness checks can help to emphasize a horror mood in a science-fiction game. What creates the horror, however, is the situation the heroes face—as the *Gamemaster Guide* puts it, "It's your job to create situations in which the players would never want to find themselves" (page 181). Using aliens found in the STAR*DRIVE campaign or other horrors, such situations should be easy to create.

Whether it's the 19th century or the 26th, James has a taste for Gothic horror that won't go away. Lately he's been trying to figure out what the Red Death is up to in the Verge.

Table 8: The Seven Stones of Midnight

Stone	Primary power	Secondary power
1	Cybercontrol	Cyberconscious
2	Dark Matter Attack	Dark Matter Control
3	Energy Dispersal	Displacement
4	Healing Touch	Regeneration
5	Precognition	Postcognition
6	Stealth Field	Photonic Manipulation
7	Telepathy	Empathy