

METAMORPHOSIS **ALPHA**

TM

Roleplaying Game



Preview

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BALE



WARDEN



PULL

HAND

A half-naked barbarian warrior wanders the land with only his brawn, wits, and blade to keep him alive. A feline beast with glowing red eyes prowls the shadows, ready to fight or flee, since she only survives by making quick decisions and acting without hesitation. A living tree shambles from place to place after its original grove was burned, quiet and gentle until its inner rage is unleashed. Their land is a dangerous one, but also filled with tremendous rewards. Artifacts from the old times can be found by those determined enough to look, strong enough to seize them, and clever enough to discover their secrets. There is safety in numbers ... if you decide anyone is worthy of trust. It is a world in which survival is no small victory, yet it is never enough.

Something has been forgotten. If it cannot be remembered, perhaps it can be rediscovered.

There is a word. Its meaning is known but within hides a secret. If understood, explored, controlled ... the word could change everything:

WARDEN

METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA

Welcome aboard the starship *Warden*! This volume contains everything you need to experience the unique genre-blending adventure of METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA. You can select pre-made characters and jump right into the action or your group can create a collection of mutants and misfits from scratch and write scenarios wholly your own. The game is designed so the basics are quite easy to learn but have enough depth to keep experienced gamers engaged. Exploring the *Warden* offers the action and adventure of fantasy, the environment and technology of science fiction, and the bizarre powers of superhero comics.

Science Fiction

METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA is all about science fiction. Characters can discover suits of powered armor, blaster rifles, and artificial intelligence gone haywire. The action takes place aboard a generation ship carrying thousands of colonists in suspended animation, set to travel for countless years until the ship reaches its destination. Mutagenic energy has given humans, animals, and even plants altered appearances, strange

powers, and horrible defects. Creatures run wild aboard the *Warden*, either roaming its decks or staking out territories and defending them without mercy. Computers, robots, and androids all follow programming which may aid or destroy the beings who encounter them. Discovering high-tech artifacts in the bowels of the ship is incredibly rewarding but also fraught with danger.

Exploration & Discovery

METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA is all about exploration. The *Warden* has levels seventeen miles long and up to nine miles wide; some areas are open and vast, while others are crammed with tight corridors and maintenance hatches. Most aboard the ship don't understand the true nature of their world, but for the curious and determined there are countless secrets to uncover and technology to master. Understanding mutant breeds can make the difference between life and death, as can understanding your own mutant powers. In the future the true secrets of the ship will be uncovered and the keys to its control might be mastered.

Action & Adventure

METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA is all about action and adventure. Danger can be found on every deck and around every corner. The small white rabbit in your path could be a tasty morsel; however, it might generate a life-leeching energy field and evade your attacks with mentally-projected illusions. It isn't easy to predict what might happen next or a given enemies' weaknesses. Your group might be running toward something—or just as likely—away from it. Seemingly ordinary situations suddenly present unexpected challenges. Combat is swift, chaotic, and deadly. Life aboard the *Warden* is never dull.

A History of METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA

METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA is the original science fiction roleplaying game, created when DUNGEONS & DRAGONS was still new and growing in popularity. The game was designed by James M. Ward in southeast Wisconsin and published by TSR, Inc. in 1976. The original book was a slim 32 pages and packed with information. It

enjoyed support from the fans and in early issues of *Dragon* magazine, eventually inspiring an entire world filled with mutants and technology. In the 1990s, TSR published *Metamorphosis Alpha to Omega*, marrying the concept to a new set of game rules.

In 2002, the Starship *Warden* was launched again with its original creator at the helm. Fast Forward Entertainment published a third edition in hardcover, which marked a return to a system closer to its original game rules. Those ideas were pushed forward in 2006 with the fourth edition published by Mudpuppy Games. Fourth edition pushed the story of the *Warden* forward when the vessel crashed into an asteroid possessed of a fungus-based intelligence, and alien life began to invade the ship.

WHAT YOU NEED

Besides the copy of the game you're reading right now, you only need a few things to get started. Roleplaying games are a hobby that need only some basic investment and offer years of fun! Be sure to have:

☛ **A group of friends to play.** One takes the role of the referee—the person who will describe the action and encounters and is the final judge of the rules in a given situation. Everyone else is a player, taking the role of one character each. The ideal group size is three to six players and one referee.

☛ **Six-sided dice.** The dice can show pips or actual numbers—it doesn't really matter. While a group could theoretically make due with a single die, it is really best if there is at least a big handful to share if everyone doesn't have their own.

☛ **A play space.** A big table often works best, but anywhere that is comfortable, offers a place for dice to be rolled, and is reasonably free of distractions will do the job.

☛ **Odds and ends.** Character sheets (which can be downloaded and printed from our website or photocopied from the back of this book) or at least blank sheets of paper are a must, as are writing utensils. Other game enhancers—such as caffeinated drinks, pizza, and chips—are completely optional.

What's In This Book?

While you may read this book cover-to-cover if you so choose, you can also jump to whatever chapter you need. This is a reference volume and set of tools for you to have fun with your friends. Here's what is waiting for you:

☛ **Chapter One** introduces the starship *Warden* and provides the kind of information that characters in the game will most likely know. It gives an idea of the tone and theme of a typical *Metamorphosis Alpha* game.

☛ **Chapter Two** offers the basic rules, so you'll know what dice to roll and how to understand the results when your character performs actions.

☛ **Chapter Three** teaches you the steps to create a character in the game—whether it is a human, or mutated human, mutant animal, or mutant plant.

☛ **Sample Characters** show you the kinds of characters you can generate and offers some pre-made if you want to start playing right away!

☛ **Chapter Four** defines traits and qualities, so they can be referenced easily.

☛ **Chapter Five** lists the many beneficial and debilitating mutations that can be found among the life aboard the *Warden* and offers detailed descriptions of how they all work in the game.

☛ **Chapter Six** presents some of the gear characters might possess and tech they may acquire—everything from a dull knife to a laser pistol.

☛ **Chapter Seven** is the meat of the game—the rules. While it's useful for players to be familiar with this material, it's important for the referee to be able to quickly reference this section during play.

☛ **Chapter Eight** details the role of the referee and offers advice on how to run everything from one-shot adventures to full-length campaigns.

☛ **Chapter Nine** contains some of the mutant and artificial life that might aid, or more likely endanger, a group as they explore the *Warden*.

☛ **"The Petting Zoo of Death"** is an introductory adventure for *Metamorphosis Alpha*. It offers a great starting point to get a group of diverse characters together and shows how scenarios are presented in the game.

BAF 31



WARDEN ► ► PULI HAN

The shaman told Scar-lock that to prove his worth as future leader of the tribe, he must journey far—past the wolfoid packs, through the field of leechvines, and risk unknown dangers—to reach the Great Eye. Looking into the Eye is to risk madness as a price for wisdom. Scar-lock was young, brave, and foolhardy; of course, he agreed. He only needed to know where it was he could find this Great Eye. The shaman gestured with withered, webbed fingers and said in a harsh whisper, “At the wall at the end of the world.”

The world of METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA is the starship *Warden*, or at least what’s left of it. Constructed and launched as a vast colonization ship, the *Warden* left Earth in search of a new planet. With all environments and life of Earth held inside its hull, the *Warden* was ready to populate a new world full of hope and promise. However, something happened. Something bad. Perhaps no one truly knows the answer, or maybe the secret is hidden somewhere within the ship waiting to be found. Whatever disaster befell the *Warden* killed many of the humans, plants, and animals living on its many decks. Of those who survived, most were forever mutated, with each subsequent generation evolving stranger and stranger. While horrible defects continue to crop up, many mutations offer fantastic powers that help the mutants survive on a tiny world of decreasing resources and increasing danger.

The disaster left the computer systems malfunctioning and the *Warden* adrift. Artificial intelligence still maintains the primary life support and auxiliary systems aboard the ship, but it is unable to properly identify mutant life—making encounters with robots and androids unpredictable at best and a brush with metallic, laser-wielding death at worst.

Somewhere within the bowels of the ship, military personnel and supplemental crew are held in cryogenic stasis, intended to be awakened in the event of emergency. If those systems were damaged or mishandled by the computers, the humans inside could be dead or suffer serious problems when roused from their long slumber.

This is the world of the starship *Warden*. Within its walls are all the hopes, dreams, and wonder of mankind and life on Earth. However, danger, madness, and death are dealt with equal measure.

Introducing the Warden

by James M. Ward

Far from being just a science fiction experience, a METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA campaign is a combination of the future and the past. Primitive tribes with bone spears and mutated turtle shell shields live alongside advanced robots with integrated blaster rifles and laser welding torches.

Players must solve puzzles as they explore a gigantic environment. Each of the ship levels has unique dangers and encounters. As a colonization ship, there were many ecological levels vastly transformed by the terrible accident that stopped the starship in its path to an Earth-like planet many light years from home. Learning that the characters aren’t on a normal world is the first of many surprises. After years of exploration they might learn a bitter truth: Something happened to the *Warden*, and they have no idea or control over where they are going until the ship is repaired.

Players usually start as primitive tribesmen, exploring the ship and learning how to use the fantastic technology they find all around them. Experienced groups can start out as military personnel coming alive from a cryosleep, as they were put to sleep only be used in case of deadly emergency. Other player groups may begin as robots or androids with their own unique agendas, options opening up in future supplements for this core game.

On reading this for the first time, a player might not realize that discovery and exploration are key features to playing METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA. The game may begin in the strict confines of the walls and floors of a spaceship, but there is a huge campaign’s worth of enjoyment to be had by players and referees alike in playing this game.

LIFE ON THE WARDEN

Warden, the first colonization starship, left the Trans-Plutonian Space Yards with tremendous fanfare. The biggest structure ever built in space, the enormous vessel was hailed throughout the solar system as an achievement equal to the pyramids on Earth.

At the beginning of its voyage, the starship *Warden* perfectly reproduced life on Earth. Many of the ship's levels duplicated environments found on the home planet. There were areas for forests, plains, swamps, mountains, deserts, and an ocean, as well as a large city area, a huge section dedicated to the vessel's massive engines, and other levels for engineering. The *Warden* originally had supplemental ships attached to be used as needed—a battleship, three destroyers, a battle cruiser, and five frigates. If those vessels are still functioning after all this time, much information and equipment might be recovered from them or even a means of escape.

Many colonists, military personnel, and crew were placed in cryosleep. Robots and androids helped with the daily operation and maintenance of the ship. A series of artificial intelligence modules linked to the central computer system, independently running the operation of each deck of the ship.

There were large numbers of Earth animals placed on board the *Warden*, and each was treated to be extremely fertile. When the cataclysm struck, the atmosphere of the ship was radically changed. The fertility of all creatures on the ship was increased an even greater amount, and massive mutational forces changed the animals forever. Some wolves became eight foot tall, intelligent humanoid creatures retaining a savage nature. Simple robins became large savage killers, striking from the ceiling and swooping down to attack with surprise. Many plants became mobile and predatory, some fully sentient and highly dangerous. Small venus fly-traps grew to massive killers, able to scoop up human-sized victims and dissolve them in caustic acid-pods, turning the bodies to mush in short order. Dandelion weeds grew to tremendous heights, and each leaf became a razor sharp cutting machine suitable for spilling blood.

When the reactors malfunctioned, high intensity radiation leaked on to different areas of the ship. Automatic safety protocols turned off the systems, but



the damage was done; pools of steaming, hot liquid burned through the decks and splashed into many levels of the ship.

Survival is the first order of business on the *Warden*, as the ship is filled with vicious and powerful potential enemies. Some are feral and attack only by instinct, while others might prove valuable as allies, if you can break through barriers of paranoia and xenophobia.

Tribes of mutants and even rare, pure humans have carved out small territories on the different levels of the ship. There is little communication and trade, as hostilities and the needs of day-to-day survival have long ruled. However, some have realized the value of discovery. The secrets, technology, and other forms of life out there are prizes waiting to be claimed by the daring, strong, and clever. A rare few have realized that knowledge is power. The unknown represents terrifying potential danger, as isolated tribes and bands of explorers never know if powerful enemies might be around the next corner until they dare to step around it.

Safety

In brief, the *Warden* is not a safe place, but it was designed to be. Much like the *Titanic* of long-ago Earth, the colony ship was purported to be impervious to the dangers and energies of interstellar space. Much like the mighty ocean-going vessel, pride in mankind's achievements is always trumped by the forces of nature. Like the *Titanic*, the *Warden* was doomed to suffer tragedy that no planning committee or engineer could have foreseen.

While a cataclysm did kill most life aboard the ship and forever mutate the rest, the *Warden* did fulfill its purpose to keep the cargo inside its massive duralloy walls alive and maintain its own crucial systems to sustain that life.

Though filled with danger, there are pockets of respite and safety on the ship. Some compartments designed for storage have remained sealed, and clever explorers might discover the secrets to unlocking them. Friendly tribes could be bartered with for shelter and sustenance, though explorers must guard against deception. Powerful tech can be uncovered and deciphered, giving adventurers access to sturdy protection, portable shelter, and devastating weapons that would deter all but mindless foes.

Artificial life maintains the ship and guards protected sections. These systems recognize humans and respond to them according to their primary programming, though mutant life is not in the computer's data banks. Robots and computer systems might react in unpredictable ways.

Some sections of the ship were flooded with radiation, gaining reputations as zones of death. Sometimes these areas clear on their own or because of long overdue robotic repair, leaving areas feared by most to be quite safe—assuming a party is daring enough to confirm these facts for themselves.

Risk & Reward

A character may well begin as a tribesman from a dirt-hut village, ignorant of the dangers and treasures awaiting discovery. As he explores his own level, he will encounter wonders he cannot possibly understand. He may fight monsters and mutants firing weapons

Tech

by James M. Ward

If the characters are pure strain humans, robots and androids are often respectful and very willing to help, so there is little risk. If the characters are mutants of any type, the robots and androids can be deadly and instantly attack, so there is great risk. Either way, new weapons must be found or taken from others who clearly don't need them enough.

One of the great fun elements of the game is learning how to use ultra powerful weapons and equipment. Clearly a primitive tribesman doesn't know how to use a self-contained toaster, and they may end up believing this toaster is a deadly heat ray device. The same situation can happen as a character picks up a powerful fusion blaster rifle. Taking a risk on learning how to use this weapon can have the adventurer shoot himself in the chest or have him figure out a way to send a beam of energy through a twelve inch wall of steel.

Even when the tribesman has learned how to use the most dramatic of power armor with massive energy weapons, it may not be enough. In *METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA*, you could be destroying whole jungles full of creatures and be instantly laid low by a seven foot tall rabbit that turns all of your armor and fine equipment to soft gray rubber.

that can only be magic and deal with powers he is ill-equipped to face. His flint-tipped spear may not keep him alive past the next hill.

Through discovery, trade, combat, and sheer luck, a character might acquire fantastic tech weapons and the know-how to use them properly. As she advances

in skill and equips herself for exploration and battle, she might become just as feared as that first pack of wolfoids. But one should never get cocky, for the next mutant could have powers that reduce her mighty arms to rubber and leave her mind a quivering mass of jelly. Sometimes the smartest thing to do in a fight is to turn and run hard and fast in the opposite direction.

Adventuring

For those with the ambition and fortitude required to journey beyond the safety of their own village, tribe, pack, or grove, the dangers ahead are almost always beyond the scope of any individual. Friends, or at least allies, are needed to watch your back, guard your sleep, and fight at your side. Trust is established, earned, and easily broken.

Exploration will reveal new habitats, frightening enemies, puzzling mysteries, dark secrets, and incredible treasures. You only have to decide which direction you wish to go and temper inquisitiveness with caution. A simple field of mushrooms might pose horrible risk, while a giant tusked sloth may be a tough but ultimately gentle creature—though it would be dangerous indeed to assume this fact from the start.

Artificial life is not well understood by most, and it is also unpredictable and often fraught with danger. A robot may ignore or assist a human while attempting to cage or kill a mutant animal. Approach with caution.

New tech may present powerful possibilities, but unlocking its secrets may involve a fair bit of danger or leave you completely clueless as how to turn the damn thing on. Some folk aboard the ship have learned much tech lore and are valuable in dealing with the many artifacts found on the *Warden's* levels.

Where To Next

It's recommended that you learn the basic nuts and bolts of the SYSTEM 26 rules to help you understand what's found in the rest of the book, so proceed to **Chapter Two: Basic Gameplay**. If you'd like to understand more about the setting and the role of the referee, check out **Chapter Eight: Storyteller & Referee**.

PLAY C&R



WARDEN

PULI HAN

You want to fire a laser pistol at the charging wolfoid and then use your mutant levitation ability to escape before the rest of the pack tears you to shreds. Action is often fast and furious aboard the *Warden*, and the SYSTEM 26 game rules are designed to reflect that. The basics of the game are easy to learn, and it doesn't take long to resolve actions quickly and get on with the adventure.

Whether the actions are taken during the heat of combat, the tension of negotiations, or the frustration of puzzling out tech artifacts, the basic rules of the game are the same. You'll be grabbing some dice and using the rolls to determine success or failure. In a moment you'll know whether you blasted your enemy's face off, won over a potential ally, or accidentally detonated an explosive. Uncertainty is part of the fun, and failure can often be as interesting—and potentially hilarious—as success.

Only one person at the table is required to have a detailed knowledge of the rules, the Referee. While being a game guru is never a bad thing at the table (unless you try to be an obnoxious know-it-all), if you learn the material in this chapter you'll be prepared to adventure aboard the *Warden*.

The main elements to learn are how to interpret the information on your character sheet, how many dice to roll for an action, and how to read success or failure so the referee can tell you what happens next. Once you learn the basic game rules, you can either jump right into playing with your friends or read other sections of the book. If you want to create your own character, that information is in the next chapter.

PLAYERS

There are central characters at the heart of any good movie, television show, or book—the people that the audience is following and rooting to succeed (or at least survive) against all odds. In our game, these are the **player characters** and, like the name suggests, these are the characters controlled by the players. Their decisions, successes, and failures are what drive the story and keep the group entertained. If they screw up, the characters are the ones who will have to live with the consequences.

In the METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA RPG, the player characters are humans, mutated humans, mutant animals, or mutant plants with a variety of skills, special powers, and acquired tech artifacts. They survive the dangers of the starship *Warden* while exploring its mysteries and uncovering its secrets. They win by surviving and succeeding in their goals as a group, as well as individual agendas, and lose when they are defeated or even die facing the many hazards aboard the ship.

REFEREE

While each player usually has only one character, the **referee** plays literally everyone and everything else—including the environment the player characters are exploring and every living and nonliving thing they run into along the way. He has to know the rules well enough to both explain and arbitrate them for the players, be able to adjust the ongoing story to react to new decisions and situations, and bear the responsibility for keeping the game fun for everyone.

The referee may feel like an adversary to the players, since he spends a lot of time throwing enemies and danger their way, but it's ultimately a referee's job to keep things fun and fair—or at least as fair as things get aboard the *Warden*.

Anything a player character sees, hears, or even perceives through mutant powers comes from the descriptions of the referee. Whether he's got a detailed adventure plan or is making things up as he goes along, the referee must think on his feet and keep the action moving. The referee interprets the game rules for the entire table and is the ultimate authority on how things resolve.



DICE

The SYSTEM 26 rules that power the METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA RPG use six-sided dice, the kind you can pull out any family board game or purchase from a hobby game store. It doesn't matter if the dice have pips or actual numbers, so players should use whichever they prefer. While a desperate group could share one die and roll it repeatedly, that would be time-consuming and slow down the pace of the game. Also, players tend to get picky and even a bit superstitious when it comes to their dice. There are smartphone apps to simulate dice, and chits of paper in a jar can substitute in a pinch.

The shorthand for rolling dice in this game puts the letter **d** behind the number of dice rolled. Therefore ...

2d

...indicates rolling two dice. The dice you roll to generate results in the game are called a dice pool, even if you only use one die for a particular action.

Basic Roll

2d is incidentally the default roll that a player uses for character actions during the course of the game. If a character is neither good nor bad at something, the roll is assumed to be 2d. It allows the information on the character sheet to focus on strengths and weaknesses instead of spelling out every possibility and allows everyone to focus only on the most interesting details about any given character.

If any circumstances reduce the number of dice rolled to less than one, the action is an automatic failure or cannot be attempted, as determined by the referee. And for standard actions attempted by a character, the number of dice cannot be greater than five—though it can go as high as six dice if advanced tech or mutations are involved.

While dice are usually rolled in multiples, the results are not added together to create a total. Instead, each die is compared to the level of difficulty (defined as Easy, Average, or Hard), and achievements are counted to determine success. All of this is explained in greater detail below.

RULES, ACTION, AND RESULTS

This is a game of fast-moving action, combining elements from science fiction, sword-and-sorcery tales, and superhero comics. In order to keep that kind of excitement and pacing, the rules provide enough structure to resolve actions but enough freedom to keep games from becoming bogged down in endless details and constant page-flipping.

Most Important Rule: Keep things moving. If the rules don't seem to cover it, make it up. The firm-yet-loose structure of our game is designed to handle just about anything and make it easy for the referee to improvise. However, no game mechanics can cover every conceivable situation, nor are they meant to do so. If a situation comes up and you can't find it in the rules, the referee is encouraged to improvise and move on. The referee is the final word on rules in the game.

CHARACTER SHEET

We talked about characters a bit by discussing players and the referee above, but now we'll show how characters are defined in the game. The character sheet holds all of the game information and other notes about your character handy for reference during a play session. It can be the official sheet in this book or just a piece of paper with some handwritten notes.

Characters are defined by how they are special. A character is probably "normal" when attempting most types of actions, so rather than list everything, your character sheet only shows where she differs from the norm.

Stock

Usually, a character's **stock** can be determined at a glance. A pure human is easy to distinguish from a mutated human, which is even easier to tell apart from a mutant aardvark or pine tree. The stocks available to player characters are the following:

- ⊕ **Human**
- ⊕ **Mutated Human**
- ⊕ **Mutant Animal**
- ⊕ **Mutant Plant**

Traits

Now we learn what kinds of actions your character is good at and the tasks that should probably be saved as last resorts. **Traits** combine natural ability, aptitude, and training to highlight the actions in which a character varies from the norm. The actions defined by traits can be physical, mental, or social—almost anything a character can attempt.

Traits are listed as a modifier to the basic roll (2d), so traits listed as good (+2d) mean that 4d are rolled for that particular action. Traits in a character's weak (−1d) areas leave him with only one die to roll for an action; any that are hopeless (−2d) are automatic failures under most circumstances, since there is no chance of success with no dice to roll.

If it seems like too many traits to keep track of, keep in mind that most traits are assumed to be the average of 2d, so the only ones that need listing are the traits that are either better or worse.

Example: Scar-lock, a human, has amazing Discipline (+3d), good Leadership (+2d), competent Brawn (+1d), and weak Alertness and Dexterity (−1d).

Mutations

The starship *Warden* is an environment in which the vast majority of people, animals, and even plants are mutants. While some breeds of mutated life have established themselves over generations, there is no telling what strange powers or defects any given character might possess. **Mutations** generally break the standard rules, giving characters actions they could not normally attempt or situational bonuses. If the mutation is a defect, it's just the opposite and makes life a bit more interesting for the character—and by interesting, we mean difficult.

Mutations do not have a standard format, since they cover a wide range of possibility. Each mutation lists how it works in the game.

Example: Lock-scar, a mutated human, has Poison Bite (2d) and Regeneration (4d), which grant him advantages in battle. Unfortunately, he has defects in the form of Diminished Sense: Sight (1d) and Energy Sensitivity: Cold (2d).

Traits

Alertness, Artistry, Athletics, Brawn, Constitution, Crafting, Deception, Dexterity, Discipline, Influence, Leadership, Medicine, Melee Weapons, Performance, Ranged Weapons, Stealth, Survival, Tech, and Unarmed Combat.

Qualities

Your character could have a talent or liability in a particular area, a bad temper, or some other defining characteristic. Features such as these make each character unique. We call them **qualities**, and they generally offer action modifiers based on the situation.

A good quality that helps a character in certain situations is known as a **talent**, while one that's more of a disadvantage is called a **liability**.

Example: Scar-lock is particularly handy in dealing damage with his sword, so he has a +2d talent in Weapon Attack. Unfortunately he suffers from bad vision, and lists the −1d liability of Near-Sighted.

ACTIONS

Whether you're swinging an axe at a mutated razorback, trying to decipher the workings of a strange artifact, or using a mutant power to heal your own wounds, it's called an **action**. Most of the game is your character trying to accomplish things or, at the very least, survive them. The game would be tedious and boring if you had to roll for each and every mundane task over the course of your character's day. Most actions are automatically successful, so you don't have to roll to walk across the room. However, the moment there is both a chance of failure and consequences either way, the dice come into play. For example, walking across a minefield would be worthy of some dice-rolling.

Action Points

Characters possess action points to help them succeed, fail less spectacularly, and reduce damage to keep them alive. Every player character begins an

adventure with 2 points and spends them as chosen during play. They can be earned during an adventure by succeeding at impressive actions, coming up with crazy plans, great roleplaying, and other rewards as determined by the referee.

Traits & Dice Pool

When you declare an action, the referee determines if your character has any traits that apply to the situation. If so, you add or subtract the appropriate number of dice from the basic roll (2d). The referee might determine the situation warrants a bonus or penalty, further modifying the number of dice you have for the action. Once you have your fistful of dice, roll 'em!

Example: Spike has been cornered by a jackaloid, so she decides to take a swing at it with her heavy wrench. Spike is Good (+2d), but the wrench is not intended for combat; the referee penalizes her for the improvised weapon (-1d). Since everything modifies the basic roll, it comes out as 2d (the default roll) + 2d (for being good with melee weapons) - 1d (for the wrench as an improvised weapon). Spike's player rolls 3 dice for the action.

Difficulty & Achievements

Sad but true: Nothing is equal, let alone fair. Depending on the nature of the action and the surrounding circumstances, it could be a cake walk or nigh impossible. Slipping out of a loosely-tied rope is one thing, while escaping from a pair of plasteel handcuffs is another. The game has three levels of difficulty: **Easy**, **Average**, and **Hard**.

The difficulty is what sets the range of numbers needed on each die to score an achievement. The more achievements rolled for an action, the more successful.

Easy: 3+

Average: 4+

Hard: 5+

If the action is easy, any die roll above a 2 (i.e. 3 or higher) scores achievements. If it's average, a 4, 5 or 6 earns them. A hard action only gets an achievements when a 5 or 6 is rolled.

Example: Randall, a mutant wolverine, is attempting to rip open a secured door. Good thing he has amazing Brawn, granting him 5 dice for the attempt. The referee determines this to be a hard action, so at least one of those dice must roll a 5 or 6 for Randall to get the door even partially open. The dice comes up 2, 4, 4, 5, 6 — only two earning achievements for the action.

Success & Failure

It only takes one achievement for an action to be at least somewhat successful, but the more achievements rolled, the higher the level of success. A pile of achievements from a roll means the action went very well! As a rule, here is how the number of achievements measures an action's success:

1 Achievement: Minimum Success

The action is successful but just barely, and the results may be only temporary.

2 Achievements: Modest Success

It's nothing to write home about, but it gets the job done.

3 Achievements: Good Success

The action is handled successfully, even impressively.

Enhancements

Sometimes you do better than good—you succeed and then some. You don't just kick the ursoid, you strike with bone-crunching force that throws him back five feet and knocks over his denmate as well. These benefits of extraordinary success are called **enhancements**, and they occur when your action scores more than 3 achievements. Each achievement above 3 is an enhancement. They are counted separately and allow you to add additional effects to your planned action, effects that range from on-going conditions to bonuses on follow-up actions.

The referee determines the precise results of any enhancements rolled, but as a player you may give suggestions as fits the action. Here are some game guidelines:

1 Enhancement

- ④ Your opponent is penalized (-1d) on its next action.
- ④ You receive a bonus (+1d) on your next roll for a similar action.

2 Enhancements

- ④ Your opponent loses its next action, is disarmed, or is moved against its will.
- ④ You gain a temporary bonus (+1d) while continuing with a type of action.

3 Enhancements:

- ④ Your opponent gains a debilitating condition (dazed, blinded), or your attack also affects its allies or impacts the environment in your favor.
- ④ You make a discovery or change the situation significantly in your favor.

Sound vague? This is where the referee shines by interpreting the situation. It should never come out so dull as a mere game bonus or clinical status update. Enhancements are satisfying and fun, if they are delivered descriptively. In a fight, you might have delivered a wicked cut above an enemy's eyes, temporarily blinding him. When trying to decipher a keypad code for a door lock, you might stumble upon a passkey that works for the entire area. When negotiating with a potentially hostile mutant, you might say just the right thing to gain her trust and a potential new ally.

Some enhancements are specific to the environment, and pre-written adventures might have notes for possible enhancements based on the situation.

Botching

Sometimes you kick ass and take names, other times you just embarrass yourself. Sometimes the dice roll high, other times you get snake eyes. When this happens in the game, it's called a **botch**. A botch happens whenever all the dice you roll for an action come up as 1. You not only fail, but do so in spectacular fashion. Your blade slips from your fingers; you fall on your backside; you break the tech artifact you're trying figure out. The referee will describe your exact misfortune, though you can use an action point to turn your botch into plain old, mediocre failure. Note that



botching is far more likely when you are rolling only one or two dice, which make legendary goofs more of a habit when you attempt actions at which your character isn't very talented.

Complex Actions

Most of the time you're trying to do something relatively simple: hit a foe over the head, kick down a door, or fry a control panel with energy emanating from your mutant eyes. However, sometimes the action is more complicated, like performing battlefield surgery on a badly-wounded friend, solving a complicated puzzle, or figuring out whether a tech artifact was meant to project your thoughts into moving pictures or toast bread on both sides. Sometimes, the action may involve different steps, allowing for different traits to come in to play.

For a **complex action**, it's often an issue of how long something takes rather than if you will succeed or fail. You will eventually close your friend's wounds, but if she's bled to death that won't be very helpful. You make a series of rolls over a period of time to figure out just

how long it takes for you to succeed. Take too long and the point may be moot, or you could screw up so badly that you're forced to give up.

The **threshold** is the number of achievements necessary to complete the complex action. Once the threshold has been reached, the action succeeds—assuming you made it in time.

An **increment** is determined by the referee and represents how much time elapses with each roll. The increment could be a combat turn (3 seconds), a minute, an hour, or even longer for something truly complicated. Difficulty and the dice pool are determined the same way as with simple actions, but now achievements are tracked and accumulate with each increment.

If you botch during a complex action, your entire attempt is a failure. The referee will let you know the consequences and if starting over is even an option. Just like normal botching, an action point can transform the roll into ordinary, boring failure for that increment.

STAYING ALIVE

The starship *Warden* is a dangerous place. Fire, radiation, flooded areas, and malfunctioning robots are as dangerous as mutants battling over territory or just plain spite. The rules offer two ways to track damage, so you know when your character is down for the count or pushing up daisies.

Fatigue is a combination of bumps and bruises, exhaustion and stress, as well as luck being pushed to its limit. When a character suffers fatigue damage equal or greater than her limit, she falls unconscious. Fatigue recovers relatively quickly. Once per day a character may use an action to get her second wind and recover 1d fatigue immediately.

Wounds represent cuts, trauma, internal bleeding, and other serious injuries. If a character suffers wound damage equal or more than his limit, he is dying—unconscious and must make rolls just to cling to life in hopes of receiving aid. Wounds recover slowly on their own, but the process can be accelerated through medical care, mutations, and specialized tech.

NUTS & BOLTS

The basic gameplay here is just enough to get you started as a player with pre-made characters. The referee is the only one at the gaming table expected to have a thorough understanding of the rules, so don't sweat it if you only have the basic dice-rolling concepts down. The important thing is to have fun and be ready to figure out just how your character will survive the group's latest scrape.



Where to Next?

If you want to get started with creating a character, keep reading through **Chapter Three: Mutants & Mankind**. If you want a more thorough explanation of the rules and mechanics, flip ahead to **Chapter Seven: Rules**.

AFTER THE PREVIEW

The preceding pages are an early sneak-peek of the full **Metamorphosis Alpha Roleplaying Game**, coming soon from Signal Fire Studios! For more information, visit **our company's website**, follow our Twitter feed—**@sgnlfirestudios**—or Like the **Metamorphosis Alpha page on Facebook!**

We encourage you to purchase the book from your local game retailer. If you'd like to order the book directly from us, you may do so **right here!**

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