

THE HAUNTED ORCHARD

By: Russ Westbrook

This adventure is set in the campaign world described in the **Alternity Gamma World** rulebook. It is balanced for 2-4 lightly experienced PCs with some sort of good reputation in the town of Ent. In the author's campaign it came right after the "Young Heroes" adventure, and one of the PCs was a PSH MindWalker. . It utilizes several other Alternity references, but lists where these can be found at the appropriate places. It also has strong connections to the "**Dark Matter**" game setting.

HOOK:

In the ruins of Ancient Ent northeast of town, a small corporation of 21 Vrusk live near and at peace with the human settlement of Ent proper. These strange insect men keep their distance most of the time, only dealing with the men while trading in Ent's market the vegetables and other goods they grow in plots among the fallen stones. One such commodity are E'leck tree seed pods the Vrusk harvest from a small grove of E'leck trees which grow in the ruins of the old foundations of a house in Ancient Ent. As this clump of E'leck trees are intermixed with a growth of three Woolly Nay-Palm Etto trees, the humans to the south are more than happy to allow the strange "mutants" to be the ones to harvest them.

Lately however the Vrusk have developed a problem. The harvesting and care of the E'leck trees have always had to be at night as the Nay trees are far too dangerous during the daytime. In the last two weeks this care has been disrupted by the ghost of a Vrusk female preying upon lone Vrusk moving about the grove. She never appears in daylight or to groups of more than two individuals, but when she does she viciously attacks them. Two Vrusk have died. The one Vrusk to spot the ghost and live describes the entity as a blue glowing agonizingly beautiful Vrusk female with clawed appendages. This Vrusk (named "**Nivkrikik**") says the woman first attempted to sweet talk his friend who was with him in the grove, but when he was too scared to respond she contemptuously ripped into him with her claws, removing his heart. The Vrusk are now all too frightened to go near the trees, but as the PCs have gained somewhat of a reputation of being able to deal with such matters, the Corporate Director of the Vrusk Conglomerate (an aging silver chittened male named **Klik**) approaches them to see if they might be for hire in a little ghost busting operation. Price of course is negotiable.....(the Vrusk will start with 25 Domars but can be worked up to 500 Domars, a pocket CD Audio-recorder with three CDs and three rolls of duct tape, but only if the PCs roll well on their Personality Skills and role play well to boot. The Vrusk have no weapons except spears and staffs; also, they are out of E'leck tree pods, having just sold their last load.) Klik is unaware of any Vrusk female to have died in the grove; on occasion a female has been shocked or burned, but the women folk of the conglomerate are seen as too valuable to work them in such a dangerous environment.

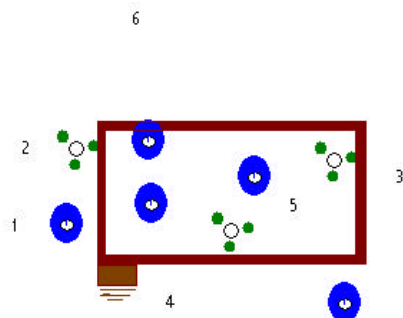
THE VRUSK CONGLOMERATE: These unfortunate descendants of mankind's old galactic allies have little clue as to their actual heritage. The Corporate Chaplin (a young male named **Nixlix**) teaches an ancient tradition that the Vrusk are a chosen race, untainted by the Original Sin of mankind which caused the gods to become angry and destroy their world. This chosen race is to wait for "Evack"- the time of the gods in which the Vrusk will be lifted into the heavens to dwell as workers in the Celestial Bureaucracy. Until then the Vrusk are being tested by contact with this broken and illogical race, which they must endure with compassion to demonstrate their worthiness for Hire. This theology doesn't encourage a lot of contact between the two races, and most Vrusk will tend to talk down to humans out of pity.

Vrusk are detailed in *Dragon Magazine Annual 1998* in the Article "Alternate Frontiers". This article is reprinted in .PDF form at *alternity.net*, the official Alternity website. Of course, the GM could just design his own mutant crickets and exchange them for these Star Frontiers critters. The author is a hopelessly nostalgic paleo-gamer.

LINE:

THE MAP:

The Haunted Orchard



— = 25 ft

1. These blue trees are **E'leck trees**; they aren't very large, only about 5-8 ft. tall, as the grove isn't all that old. The first tree began growing only four years ago, although it was fallowed quickly in short order by the other growths. The behavior, stats, and description of E'leck trees can be found in *Action Check Magazine 4*, p.13-14 at *alternity.net*

2. These green trees are **Woolly Nay-Palm Etto trees**, a derivative branch of the family which has mutated in such a way as to survive in Ancient Washington's cold climate. The Trees are covered in a prickly bright green and yellow fuzz which is painful to the touch and keeps the tree warm year round. Other than this mutation they are exactly like their warmer weather cousins described in *Action Check 2* p. 13-15. The trees are terrified of the "ghost", being able to sense her deep seated hostility and otherworldly evil, but they also know they aren't the target of that hostility so they don't react to her with their flames. They DON'T know exactly what she is however. A MindWalker PC might be able to gain so interesting clues from these sentient trees, although for the incautious they might mean a flaming death. The Vrusk will warn the PCs as to the danger these trees represent, although they don't know the trees are sentient. The Vrusk don't harvest these trees. These trees are quite high, between 13-20 ft. in size, being an old growth. The Nay-Palm Etto trees like the warmth the E'Leck trees provide, from both their wired root system and the lightning strikes they incur.

3. This brown rectangle represents the crumbling foundation of an ancient house. At its highest these old bricks only rise up to 3 ft., but much is lower due to decay. Within these confines is the collapsed ruins of the house, having caved into its basement. Any MindWalker or mutant with appropriate mental mutations should get a creepy feeling about these stones and the ruins they contain, beginning at the base of their spine and rising to the hairs on the back of their neck (physiology permitting of course; this is Gamma World after all!)

4. This entry porch is made of stone and has survived the years mostly intact, although the old outdoor carpeting on it is now corroded and moldy. It is also hollow, covered over by a broken rusty metal lattice, with several holes. Living in the interior is a family of **Timber Rattlers**. **These 2 serpents** will not be immediately visible to those with only normal eyes, as the coloration and current lack of movement cause the snakes to blend into the rest of the debris filling this hole. What CAN be seen however is a nice shiny metal object: a Neural Whip still clutched in a boney hand and arm. This intact artifact still has 7 uses left on its battery; but reaching into the hole will set the invisible serpents to biting..... for the snakes, use the stats for venomous snakes on p. 235 of the *Alternity Gamemaster's Guide*. The mummified hand still wears a silver ring emblazoned with a skull and crossbones, with small ruby chips for eyes. This ancient ring is worth 500 GP, but any MindWalker who sleeps near it will find his sleep always troubled by twisted and disturbing nightmares.....

5. The interior of this ruin is a packed pit of debris, broken ancient timbers, shattered glass, odd bits of brittle plastic, rusty nails, and bric a brac. If the PCs wish to explore this ruin, it will have to be with scoops, shovels and picks; which the PCs will probably not start out with, so they will have to return to Ent, buy them and return. While this is going on the GM can spring Event 1 on them (see below). While digging, the party will have to be VERY cautious of the native plant life, and avoiding shock or burning should be QUITE difficult. Each hour the party spends digging and sifting, they should find 0-2 bits and baubles of the GM's devising (make these up or roll randomly on one of the junk charts every edition of Gamma World has included). It should take 8-10 hours of excavation before the PCs find what they're looking for- an extremely well preserved laptop computer buried in the rubble near the base of one of the E'Leck trees with an extremely dangerous occupant living in its circuitry. This is a **Cyber Demon, a Seductrix named "Trixie"**. This computer has remained in good shape because of her presence, but long ago depowered from lack of a power source to energize its internal battery. A particularly powerful burst of lightning drawn by the tree however recharged the unit, and Trixie's black powers- specifically her "black warding"- has shielded the machine from being drained by the E'Leck root net. It has power now to keep it going another two years (those ancients had really advanced in their battery technology!) Trixie is aware of all that is happening around her, but she won't reveal herself to the PCs unless one separates himself widely from the rest or they discover her home. (She will summon a servant to defend herself though- see Event 3 below.....) Should the PCs eventually purge the laptop of its possession they will be in possession of a typical computer, which has 5 computer games, Microsoft Word and Office 7, Outlook Express, Several work related files (its owner was an accountant for an insurance company based in Uganda) TONS of pornography (most of which features bondage and torture) , and a .PDF Necronomicon. If the pornography and ancient evil text are left on the machine for any length of time, it will "grow" another seductrix.

Cyber Demons in general, and seductrices in particular, are detailed in *Action Check 13 p. 14-22*. It is up to the GM to decide the nature of this creature (see the note at the end of the article on p. 22). In the writer's campaign the computer and the house had once belonged to a member of the Skull and Bones Society (see *Dark Matter p.158-159*). This modern day necromantic cultist perished in the Apocalypse (which, again in the authors campaign, was caused by the Etoile: hence the invaders being PSH- they were Sandmen). His fiend companion and lover did not however; she has remained buried and dormant until just a few weeks ago. Ultimately she would

lust to re-enter whatever passes for a powerful computer net on this ravished world to renew her career here. Woe be unto the town of Redman if Trixie survives the PCs and ever learns about them! The "Followers of the Voice" might become a Dark Brotherhood indeed!

6. The ruined house sits near the middle of Old Ent. It is surrounded by other ruined buildings and houses (some of which still "stand"; albeit REAL unstably) and several clumps of other plant life. Most of this is non-mutated, but the GM has a duty to see that unwary should suffer their foolishness..... Visibility is small however, and allows for menaces to sneak around really well- such as bears and Willowisps (See "Events" below).

EVENTS:

1. While in town buying shovels and picks (or some other appropriate time), the PCs are accosted by the proprietors of a merchant cart pulled by a thin, sick looking Rakox. The cart is both rickety and gaudy, and covered with various Jewish symbols. The proprietors are selling ancient hula hoops, pet rocks (and in fact have ancient documentation on them to prove "The Ancients really raised them!") a variety of broken watches, some vary cheap Hoop cloth, and one cybernetic Game Boy machine with 5 cartridges (3 of which even work!)- although they will not let this one real actual treasure they have go for less than 700 Domars. One of the merchants is also a Jewish Rabbi, and offers discount prices for circumcisions (this is Ephod Libowitz- see below). The pair are harmless but annoying, refusing to take "no", "I hate you", or "cursed be your ancestors" for an answer. If these two really bother the PCs they could become reoccurring NPCs.....

Ephod Libowitz:

Ephod is statistically a typical Orlen as described in the rulebook. His personality is unique as any to be found in Gamma Terra. One of his heads is a throwback hippy, ever looking for a harder liquor or cuter girl. The other is a Reform Rabbi and devious merchant, ever looking to make a conversion or a quick buck. The two heads ever argue, although the hippy is prone to falling asleep at odd moments. The one thing they have in common is a total cowardice when it comes to physical danger. They are easily intimidated. Ephod carries a dagger (naturally) but his cowardice means he will probably never use it except for work.....

Giligan:

Giligan is Ephod's attractive and smart PSH girlfriend. She is blonde and dresses "blonde", but her Int. is 14 as is her Wis. Her Per. is 12. otherwise she is 9. She is a solid negotiator, having Culture, Diplomacy- 4, Deception, Bluff-2, Interaction, Bargain-3, Charm-3, Seduce- 4, Leadership, Command- 1. She carries a Light Revolver (Range Weapons, Pistol-2)with 24 bullets and a dagger (Melee Weapons), and is less of a coward than Ephod- although not by much.

Babe:

Babe is a typical Rakox, although he looks like he's going to keel over any moment, smells like a garbage dump, and attracts flies like nobody's business. Babe will nuzzle up on one of the PCs, probably knocking them over into a pile of Rakox droppings unless they make some sort of appropriate Dex. skill roll. From then on Babe will "Love" this PC whenever they meet, being as annoying and problematic as possible.....

2. While the party is busy digging around in the rubble, **a curious bear** lumbers up into their midst. This bear is not all that hungry at the moment, having just had Badder for breakfast a few hours ago (a small scouting party from Blue was spying on Ent) but it is curious and fearless nonetheless. It should represent a dangerous nuisance to the PCs, rummaging about in and destroying their base camp, intimidating them with growls and standing on its haunches, and maybe even chasing them up a (hopefully non-mutated) tree, but only really attacking if hurt. If the

PCs do really well being intimidating back to the creature, it will eventually lumber off. For statistics, use those for bears found on *pp. 232-233 of the Gamemaster's Guide*. Around the bear's neck is an old tattered leather spiked collar with seven inches of rusty chain still attached; on it dangles a rusty tag which declares this creature to be "**BoBo**", although "BoBo" won't respond in any way to his name. BoBo is a normal black bear in all respects, not mutated in any way.

3. When the PCs are near to discovering her home (and hopefully at night for maximum effect), Trixie will use her "Tongue of the Damned" ability to sweet talk a nearby **Wilowisp** to come and attack the party. This ghostly visage will emerge from nearby ruins and attempt to drive the PCs away, taking obvious great delight in any torments they undergo. It is not under Trixie's thrall though and has no desire to die. It will flee if the encounter begins to go against it. Stats and a description of Wilowisps can be found in *Action Check 7, pp. 27-28*. The party may interpret this creature as the ghost; the GM should emphasize that the white glowing ball doesn't match the descriptions given by Nivkrik and Klik, but if the PCs continue in their ignorance and leave once done with this menace that's fine- Trixie will continue her reign of terror and within a few days an angry Klik will be in the PC's faces demanding their payment back and accusing them of being charlatans. This ought to bring them back shovels in hand/tentacle/paw, Etc.

SINKER:

Before her computer home is discovered Trixie will appear to the party in the form of physical perfection situated to the tastes of the obvious leader- although always glowing blue. She has no desire to die, and will be as cunning and devious as the GM can pretend to be. If hard pressed she might return to the laptop (which is a PL-7 unit) in an attempt to corrupt the PCs with her shadow and programs when they use it. Remember that Trixie wants to seduce and taint, not go down in a blaze of glory. She is vain, sensual and arrogant- as any sex demoness could be expected to be- but not stupid. If possible, she will utilize PC thralls to bear her to a new, more exciting hunting ground. This should be a terrifying encounter, and once the party has won they should feel a real burst of accomplishment!