

ALTERNITY

Science Fiction Roleplaying Game

Player's Handbook



by Bill Slavicsek and Richard Baker



ALTERNITY[®]

Science Fiction Roleplaying Game

PLAYER'S HANDBOOK

Rules for modern to far-future
roleplaying games

by **Bill Slavicsek and Richard Baker**

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FOREWORD

As we write this, the final pieces of the ALTERNITY® Science Fiction Roleplaying Game are coming together in grand fashion. To be honest, we're extremely excited and terribly proud of the work we've done. Many, many people pooled their efforts to help us produce this new roleplaying game. Some, like Lester Smith and Jim Ward, had moved on long before the final product took shape. Others, whose names appear in the credits below ours, added their own special touches to make the ALTERNITY game what it is. We'd especially like to thank our editors, Kim Mohan and David Eckelberry, who helped turn raw text into this exciting package.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to the subscribers to the ALTERNITY Internet mailing list. Many of them spent a lot of time examining the *Limited Edition Player's Handbook* that was released last August. Their suggestions helped to further improve this final version of the book.

Way back at the beginning of this project, our fundamental approach to designing a new roleplaying game system for TSR, Inc. was simple: We looked back at what has made this company the giant of the roleplaying game industry and borrowed the best parts. Of course, that meant examining the company's flagship line—the *ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*® game.

Just as the AD&D® game provides the framework for playing great fantasy roleplaying adventures, we set out to make the ALTERNITY game do the same thing for modern to far-future roleplaying campaigns. From the beginning, we dedicated our resources and energy to designing a game that would cover all aspects of science fiction in two hardcover rule books. This is the first of those books, written especially for players. To these core rules, we'll add various campaign settings, accessories, and adventures as time goes on, following the model of support provided in all of the AD&D product lines.

However, we were also dedicated to creating a new, dynamic set of rules built specifically to handle science fiction—and we succeeded. The ALTERNITY game isn't the AD&D game with spaceships and rayguns. It's brand new.

Our philosophy, at its core, was to provide a set of game mechanics that allow you to play any type of science fiction story, from contemporary technothrillers to far-future space opera and everything in between. The rest is up to you. We hope you have as much fun playing the ALTERNITY game as we had creating it. It's been a blast!

Bill Slavicsek, Richard Baker
January 21, 1998

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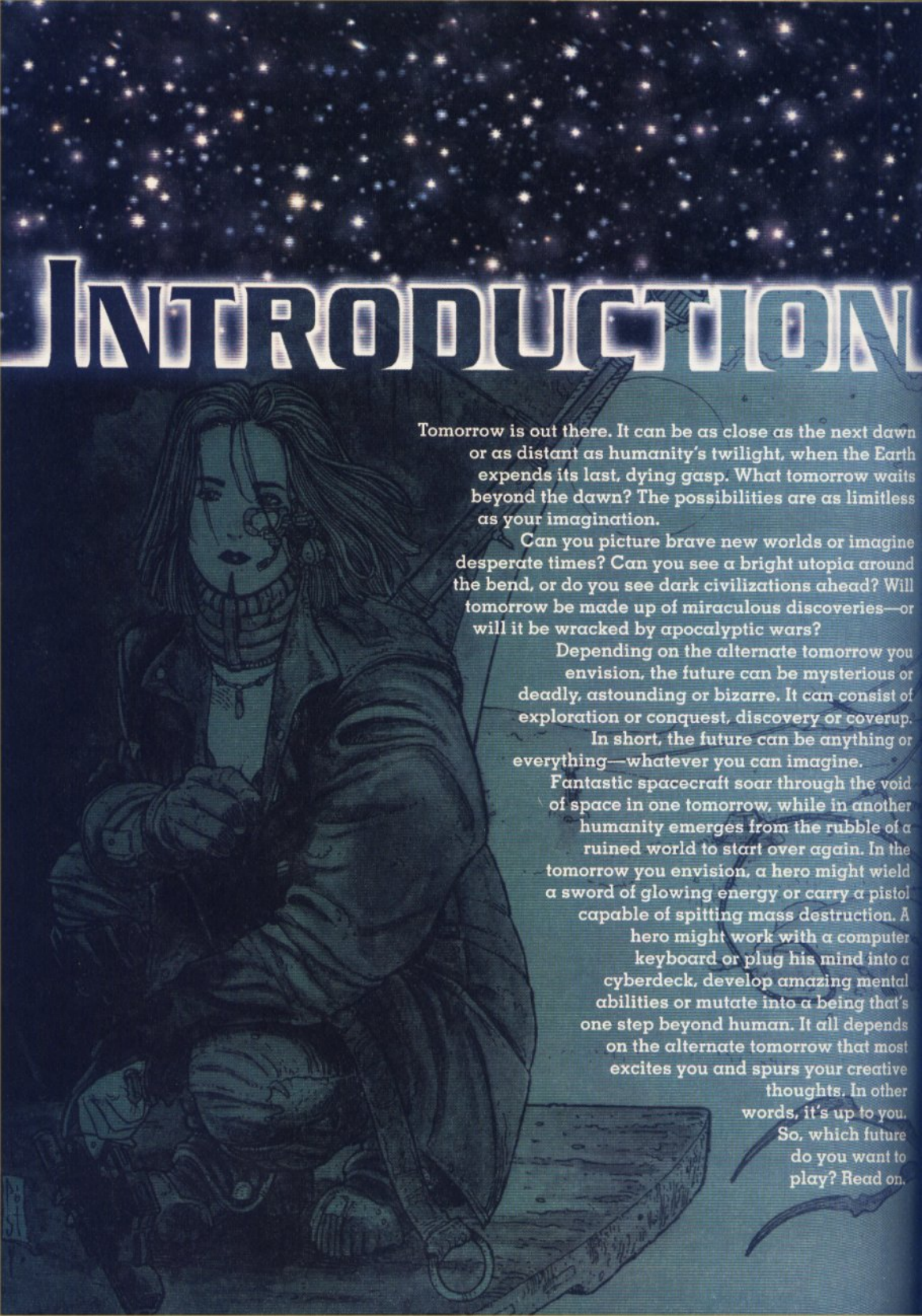
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INTRODUCTION



Tomorrow is out there. It can be as close as the next dawn or as distant as humanity's twilight, when the Earth expends its last, dying gasp. What tomorrow waits beyond the dawn? The possibilities are as limitless as your imagination.

Can you picture brave new worlds or imagine desperate times? Can you see a bright utopia around the bend, or do you see dark civilizations ahead? Will tomorrow be made up of miraculous discoveries—or will it be wracked by apocalyptic wars?

Depending on the alternate tomorrow you envision, the future can be mysterious or deadly, astounding or bizarre. It can consist of exploration or conquest, discovery or coverup.

In short, the future can be anything or everything—whatever you can imagine.

Fantastic spacecraft soar through the void of space in one tomorrow, while in another humanity emerges from the rubble of a ruined world to start over again. In the tomorrow you envision, a hero might wield a sword of glowing energy or carry a pistol capable of spitting mass destruction. A

hero might work with a computer keyboard or plug his mind into a cyberdeck, develop amazing mental abilities or mutate into a being that's one step beyond human. It all depends on the alternate tomorrow that most excites you and spurs your creative thoughts. In other words, it's up to you.

So, which future do you want to play? Read on.

WHAT'S THE GAME ABOUT?

The **ALTERNITY**® game is TSR's role-playing game of modern action to far-future adventure. It's science fiction, in so much that it draws upon the speculative storytelling style that deals with the future, space, and scientific breakthroughs yet to be made. It's a game of "what ifs."

What if . . . humanity develops a means to travel among the stars? What if . . . we aren't alone in the universe? What if . . . we can link directly into our computers and let our minds wander on electronic streams of data? What if . . . the world we know ends tomorrow? What if . . . alien entities invade our world?

No matter what supposition or speculative leap of imagination you come up with, as long as it's founded in a scientific (or quasiscientific) theory that's internally consistent, you're in the realm of science fiction. From a modern world that looks like today but features a technological twist that makes it a very different place (like a new weapon, computer, or other device), to a far-future era where humanity has moved to other worlds, any setting and level of technology is easily adaptable for play.

The **ALTERNITY** game, then, is a game of unlimited possibilities, exciting potentials, and imaginative "what ifs." The game system allows for many styles of play, though it never lets you lose sight of the fun of roleplaying. The rules are presented in the time-tested format that has made the **ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS**® game the best-selling role-

playing game of all time—two hard-cover rules books, one for players and one for game referees (called Gamemasters in the **ALTERNITY** game), that combine to create a complete and dynamic roleplaying game.

What Is Roleplaying?

If you're familiar with other roleplaying games (like the **AD&D**® game), you might want to skip to the next section, "Roleplaying Alternate Tomorrows," because we're about to provide a quick overview of what a roleplaying game is. If you're new to the hobby, get ready to enter an exciting new world.

Remember when you used to play **Make Believe**, when you pretended to be "Cops and Robbers" or "Cowboys and Indians"? For a few hours on a summer afternoon, you played the role of a police officer or a cowboy or some other hero from comic books or television. You created props and settings from your imagination, and you and your friends made up stories that everyone contributed to. It was lots of fun, but it was also totally free-form—there were no rules to speak of, and sometimes disagreements cropped up that ended a game before a full story could be told.

Make Believe has come a long way. It has matured and developed into modern roleplaying games such as this one. In a roleplaying game, every player takes on the role of an imaginary character. These player characters are the heroes of the story the group is collectively going to tell.

One member of the group acts as the referee, or *Gamemaster*. This person uses the rules of the game along with his judgment to decide the outcome of every hero's actions, usually by applying the results of dice rolls or by gauging the heroes' reactions to specific situations.

The Gamemaster sets up the overall plot of each story, also called an *adventure*. This includes creating the background, developing the characters who make up the supporting cast and villains, planning key events that propel the story forward, and establishing the opening scene that gets the action moving. From that point on, the Gamemaster acts much as the director of a movie or the narrator in a novel, showing the heroes the world around them and describing the action as it unfolds.

The Gamemaster is the person in charge of the game. He gets it started and keeps it going. When a simple game of **Make Believe** comes to a halt, it's usually because the players couldn't agree on what just happened or what was going to happen next. That disagreement doesn't occur in a roleplaying game, because the Gamemaster has the final say in any situation that isn't covered by the rules.

However, the Gamemaster doesn't dictate everything that happens. Unlike the characters in a novel or a movie, the players' heroes don't just do what an author decides they will do. The players take an active role, describing how their heroes react to the events going on around them.

When players, characters, plots, rules, and imaginations get together,

the resulting swirl of interaction and participation is called *roleplaying*. Through roleplaying, the group tells a story that's started by the Gamemaster and expanded on by the players—a *group story*. These group stories can be more fun and rewarding than the static stories found in books and on the big screen because they're interactive—everyone participates in their creation.

Who Can Play?

Anyone can play the ALTERNITY game, though the recommended starting age is 10. In addition to the Gamemaster, as few as one and as many as ten players can participate, but game sessions work best with groups of four to six players.

How Do You Win?

Roleplaying games aren't about winning and losing. The goal of a roleplaying adventure is to create a group story. In an ALTERNITY game, the Gamemaster doesn't try to defeat the players' heroes (although he will put challenges before them), and the players don't try to outdo one another. Instead, they interact to advance the story and to solve the problems or mysteries the Gamemaster sets up at the beginning of each adventure.

Technically, a roleplaying game doesn't have to end. As long as the participants are enjoying themselves, the game can continue over any number of playing sessions.

Each of the Gamemaster's adventures can be a story in itself, with no connection to other adventures, or the adventures can be tied together in an ongoing story, which is also referred to as a *campaign*. If a single episode of a TV show is an adventure, for example, then the entire run of episodes is a campaign. During a campaign, characters grow and change. The players' heroes learn from their experiences and become able to handle tougher challenges.

If the heroes achieve some sort of ultimate success (defeating the archvillain and saving the world), that success could mark the end of the current series of adventures—but it isn't the end of the *game* if you don't want it to be. If everyone in the group wants to keep playing, all you have to do is start fresh with a new series of adventures (and perhaps a group of newly created heroes, if you want to try roleplaying a different kind of character).

Roleplaying Alternate Tomorrows

The ALTERNITY game is a comprehensive roleplaying game that has a foundation of core rules that can be used in a variety of settings. Each of these settings is referred to as an *alternate tomorrow*. Your Gamemaster's campaign might revolve around heroes in a modern-day world who work as high-tech espionage or antiterrorist agents. Or it might be set 500 years in the future, when your heroes explore the galaxy in vessels capable of crossing the vast distances of space in relatively short spans of time. Both of these settings can be used for an ALTERNITY game, but they take place in vastly different alternate tomorrows.

The *Gamemaster Guide* includes instructions for creating your own alternate tomorrow campaign, or you can use one of the official campaign settings specifically designed for the ALTERNITY game.

How to Use This Book

The ALTERNITY *Player's Handbook* is specifically designed for players, providing all the rules needed to create heroes and to roleplay those heroes in any ALTERNITY campaign. Are *all* the rules in here? No. Some have been reserved for the Gamemaster, and these can be found in the other half of the rules package—the *Gamemaster Guide*. But you'll discover that the *Player's Handbook* doesn't keep too many secrets from players when it comes to the all-important matter of what heroes can do and what happens to them as the result of their actions.

If you intend to be a player in a campaign that's run by someone else, you only have to concern yourself with what's in this volume. If you also want to try running the game, you'll need a copy of the *Gamemaster Guide* as well. Bear in mind that much of the material in the *Gamemaster Guide* isn't meant to be shared with players (although they might discover some bits of information during a campaign), and a lot of it isn't much use to them anyway. In addition to rules designed only to be known by the Gamemaster, the

Gamemaster Guide has sections on creating alternate tomorrows, keeping a campaign alive and growing, and creating good adventures.

Getting Started

Chapter 1 of this book—which you should read right after finishing this introduction—offers a set of fast-play rules. The chapter provides an overview of the game, teaches the basics of the game system, and gives you a selection of heroes to use in playing through your first adventure. Each succeeding chapter focuses on one part of the core rules and explains it completely.

Even if you're experienced with roleplaying games, we recommend that you *not* skip over Chapter 1. It's in the fast-play rules that the fundamental concepts and the essential structure of the ALTERNITY game are introduced—if you don't learn what those basics are, you might have difficulty understanding some of the material in the later chapters.

Adding Details

After the first chapter, this book goes into more detail about each of the game's concepts and adds more rules as needed. Keep in mind that you only need to use the rules you and your Gamemaster want. Some groups want more detail in their adventures, and for them the details are here. Other groups feel that too many rules get in the way of their roleplaying.

The ALTERNITY game's modular format allows you to add as much detail as you're comfortable with, once you've learned how the fundamental concepts are used and how the basic game mechanic works.

Toward the back of this book are three chapters that we define as optional rules: a set of rules for mutants, another one for psionics, and a third set for cybernetics. In the larger sense, however, many of the rules in the front of the book are optional as well; for instance, if your Gamemaster doesn't want to allow heroes to have perks and flaws (and you and your fellow players don't object), you can all enjoy the game just as much without that set of rules in place.

The *Gamemaster Guide* has additional information on ways for each playing group to tailor the ALTERNITY game so that the rules do exactly what everyone wants them to do—not too much and not too little.

Tables and Sidebars

In addition to regular text (like what you're reading right now), this book includes two other types of information: *tables* and *sidebars*.

Tables, most of which are made up primarily of numbers, are an efficient way to provide a lot of statistics in a format that makes each piece of information easy to find; you'll see what we mean when you start coming across tables as you read the rules. Many tables that you'll want to refer to during play are collected and reprinted on some pages near the end of the book, so you don't always have to leaf through the book to find the information you need.

This Is a Sidebar

A sidebar is a piece of text printed on a green background, separate from the regular text that runs continuously throughout each chapter.

Some information is presented in a sidebar because it's associated with aspects of the rules that pop up in more than one place (and we didn't want to waste space by saying the same thing two or three times).

At other times, a sidebar is used to make information easier to spot, so you don't have to scan through regular text to find it.

Finally, some sidebars present facts that aren't critical to the rules, but which we think are things you should know nonetheless.

It's All About Fun

Above all, the ALTERNITY game is designed so that you can have fun creating and playing adventures set in alternate tomorrows that range from the current day to the far future. Don't become caught up in trying to play it exactly as it's written, if that gets in the way of having a good time. This isn't a college textbook, and there's no test waiting for you when you've finished reading it. Take what's presented here, adapt it, make it work for your group and your playing style, and just have fun! That's what roleplaying is all about. Turn the page and let's get started!



The action starts now!

ALTERNITY[®]

Science Fiction Roleplaying Game

Player's Handbook

by Bill Slavicsek and Richard Baker

You're an explorer commanding the newest starship in the fleet, or . . . a brilliant scientist seeking a cure for a deadly alien virus, or . . . a battle-weary space marine fighting to protect the galaxy, or . . . any other SF hero you can imagine!

EXPERIENCE THE FUTURE—ONE ADVENTURE AT A TIME!

This roleplaying game provides a framework for all kinds of contemporary to far-future science fiction adventures. The *Player's Handbook*, the companion volume to the *ALTERNITY Gamemaster Guide*, contains everything players need to create SF heroes and play the *ALTERNITY* game, including:

- ▶ An easy-to-learn game system designed around a unique dice mechanic.
- ▶ A "Fast-Play" chapter that teaches the basics and quickly gets you into the action.
- ▶ Rules for generating a wide variety of unique heroes—including five alien hero species.
- ▶ Many distinct character professions and careers that allow you to further refine and define your character—from bounty hunters to computer hackers, starship pilots to interplanetary traders.
- ▶ Simple yet wide-ranging rules presented in a format that lets you add levels of complexity as desired.
- ▶ Optional rules for mutants, psionics, and cybernetics.
- ▶ Plenty of equipment covering a variety of technological levels—computers, vehicles, starships, armor, weapons, and assorted gear.
- ▶ A compilation of tables and forms that players need, plus a comprehensive index.

The Future Has No Limits.

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