

Under The Hood - Building Aliens

If there's one thing that can be said about Star Trek, it's that there's a ton of alien life out there. If there are two things that can be said, an awful lot of that alien life looks like humans with make-up and various rubber prosthetics.

As such, most other alien species in Star Trek tend not to vary too far from the human norm. Oddly shaped ears or strange skin colorations notwithstanding, they can often be treated as identical to human beings, with all the usual bonuses and limitations.

Quite a few of them vary enough from the human norm, though, that it sometimes pays off to make a new racial template. Here's how I went about designing the alien species in the main source book.

There are a few caveats to this process, though—I only accounted for up to LA +2, beyond that, anything goes. There are also a number of alien species that probably wouldn't work as playable races. The Borg, for example, probably would be unworkable with this system and should instead be statted up as monsters.

1. Concept.

This should go without saying. Figure out what the new race does, what it's there for, what distinguishes it in style and flavor from existing races. If it's an existing race from the show, read up on it in Okuda's Star Trek encyclopedia and on Memory Alpha as much as possible. Watch a few of the episodes it appears in. And so on.

Basically, get in their heads and figure out what makes them tick.

2. Base Stats.

Take a +2 to one or two different ability scores, while taking a similar -2 to one or two other abilities. Adjustments must balance out to 0.

Bonuses may not be combined to make +4 to one stat. Penalties, however, can be combined to one stat to make a -4.

If you plan on making your species LA +1 or higher, then bonuses **may** stack up to +4.

There need not be any racial adjustments at all if the race is comparable to humans in general capabilities.

My personal preference when statting up Star Trek aliens is to be on the conservative side and only give them bonuses or penalties for what appears on screen. Sure, Vulcans have a reputation for great physical strength, but you rarely see them use it in a fight. When you do see them show their strength, they tend to use it to manipulate their environment—bashing control panels and monitors, lifting gates, that sort of thing. A +2 (or higher) strength bonus would be inappropriate. The Alien Strength feat is more up their alley. Androids, however, are death incarnate in brawls, so they have a rather high strength bonus, in addition to their Alien Strength feat.

3. Special Abilities.

A LA +0 species may have two special abilities. A LA +1 species may have 4. A LA +2 species can have up to 8.

The sky is pretty much the limit as far as what these can be, but the following list provides some general guidelines of what's appropriate:

- One bonus feat, usually predetermined. **Note:** The Alien Strength feat is bought in levels, Alien Strength 1 counts as one special ability, Alien Strength 2 counts as two.
- +2 racial bonus to a predetermined statistic without the need for balancing (e.g. in order to allow a race to have +2 Str, +2 Con and -2 Wis). This can stack with the adjustments above (but never to more than +4 total) or be used to negate racial penalties. If the species is LA +1 or higher, then this bonus **may** stack to +4 or higher.
- +2 to a few related skills or a +2 bonus in a general category of skills (e.g. all rolls related to Engineering). If these skills are pretty narrow and/or useless, an additional minor ability can be added on as long as it's relevant (q.v. Andorians and their cold resistance).
- Innate armor (+2 Def).
- An enhanced sense.
- A +10' per round movement bonus.

And so on.

A special ability can exceed these guidelines in two ways: you can either limit it in some fashion (such as giving a movement penalty to increase innate armor to +4, when +2 is the norm) or you can use as many additional power slots as necessary to make it balanced.

For example, when I wrote up the Highly Evolved template, I decided that their access to advanced technology was worth 2 slots, if played properly. If the GM didn't use their advanced technology as much, he'd be justified in giving them another Psychic Ability or two to compensate.

Drawbacks

Giving a species a drawback gives one bonus special ability. Basically, anything that hinders or complicates the aliens' lives counts.

Some examples would be Xenophobia, a -2 stat penalty, one or more impaired senses, anything goes.

Unless there's a really good reason for it, there should be only 1 major drawback per species. Remember, this game and Star Trek in general, thrives on broad strokes.

Type

Sometimes changing a species' intrinsic type counts as a special ability. The default type is assumed to be humanoid. Anything with the same general scope of power as a generic humanoid should not cost special ability points or count as a drawback.

Some other types, however, do count as a special ability. Constructs are a prime example—they don't age, they don't need to eat or breathe, are immune to a large number of effects and get bonus hit points early on.

The Tholians' base type, by contrast, counts as a drawback. Even though their high temperature metabolism gives them many resistances, they tend to not do very well in the sorts of temperatures that other species enjoy...to the point where even being in most adventure settings could cause them to die very quickly.