

“UFOs have started appearing with disturbing regularity in the night skies. Reports of violent human abductions and horrific experimentation struck terror into the hearts of millions. The mass public hysteria has only served to expose Earth’s impotence against a vastly superior technology.

Representatives from the worlds most economically powerful countries gathered secretly in Geneva. After much debate, the decision was made to establish a covert independent body to combat, investigate and defeat the alien threat. This organization would be equipped with the world’s finest pilots, soldiers, scientists and engineers, working together as one multi-national force. This organization was named the Extraterrestrial Combat Unit.”

I’m a huge fan of the XCOM video games from back in the nineties. As the franchise is being revived, it has sparked in me a great anticipation for the game which lead me to write down this hack.

You’ll be playing XCOM operators, a unit of special commandos that tries to stop the alien forces invading Earth. Your squad will be sent on missions to uncover alien secrets, save citizens from terror sites, recover artefacts from crashed UFOs and eliminate alien threat.

Death and dread is part of the setting and you’ll probably have a lot of your characters killed or mind broken. Fortunately, character creation is really fast in FU. Keep a few spare character sheets closeby, you’ll probably need them sooner than you think!

DESCRIPTORS

The Role descriptor represents the position of your character inside the XCOM organisation. Classic combat roles are “assault”, “gunner”, “recon”, “sniper”, “demolition”, “medic” or “leader” but you can be an attached element or consultant specialist like “scientist”, “reporter”, “engineer” or just about anything that could be a usefull asset for the mission. By definition, it is more broad than other descriptors as it could be useful for any situation where your speciality is involved. For example, a recon would add a bonus die when trying to stealth, spot enemies or navigate with a map, compass and GPS while an assault trooper would add a bonus die when shooting guns, sprinting and lobbing grenades.

The Edge descriptor is a skill, knowledge, personality trait or special feat your character has. It should be something that defines your character and makes him original and memorable. Also, try to choose something that isn’t already covered by your role. Choosing “steady aim” when you role is “sniper” is kind of redundant. Making him a “natural sprinter” and “animal lover” will make him stand out more.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

Everytime your character comes back home after a mission, he gets back with new experience, tricks and knowledge about the aliens that could save lives on their next missions. This is what differentiates elite XCOM operators with fresh rookies.

Each time your character gets back alive to the XCOM base after a mission, he gets a new Edge descriptor (using the empty spaces on the top right of the character sheet). Your character should gain a descriptor related to something he learned on the last mission or aquired in his sparetime or at a training course attended between two missions. Unlike the starting descriptors, those are meant to represent specialisation and you are encouraged to pick up a descriptor that will enhance your Role. For example, it is perfectly appropriate to choose “Burst shot” for your assault specialist, granting him 2 bonus dice when firing his gun.

Any time you get an advancement, especially once all the available slots are filled, you can change one of your Edge descriptor to best fit your character personality and skills. Again, it should be tied to the actions taken by the character in-game. It would be wierd to have an impetuous gunner suddently becoming a zen buddhist after butchering dozens of sectoids barehanded.

HEALTH & MORALE

Health & Morale are special conditions that are tracked apart. They work as worsening conditions. It means that you cannot get a condition as long as you don't have the previous. Each condition will give you a penalty die to all your actions. Those are cumulative, so if you have "Injured", "Crippled" and "Stressed" conditions, you'll get 3 penalty dice. Your GM is still free to give additional conditions like "Bleeding" or "Scared" depending the situation and check result.

If your character gets the "Dying" or "Panicked" condition, you still keep playing him until the end of the scene (so you don't just hang back watching others having fun without you!). Obviously, he's nowhere as helpful (and not only because he has a lot of penalty dice). He's probably crawling in his blood or chickening out in fear. There's no limit in what action he may undertake but keep in mind that he's already considered out of the game and can't be of much help. Seize this opportunity to play out a dramatic moment, something like Boromir's death in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The "Injured" condition represents small bruises and minor injuries that are painful but usually don't impair a trained soldier much. Using a medikit on an injured character removes the condition if the check generate at least a yes. Otherwise, a character staying at the base's medbay for a day will be healed. The "Crippled" condition represents a severe wound that isn't fatal but that incapacitate the character in some way. The crippled character will need medical attention at the base's medbay and a few days of recovery before being allowed to go back on the field. The "Dying" condition is lethal most of the time within few minutes but a rare few stubborn commandos survive if treated in time.

XCOM operators are exposed to a lot of terrible and traumatic experiences and are constantly under heavy combat stress. Their minds are put to the test every time they set foot on the field. Loosing a comrade in battle, seeing experiments on civilians and getting his mind influenced by alien's psionic powers are all situations that could decrease one's morale.

The "Stressed" condition represents a small mental weariness. It is in no way insignificant but most of the time is healed with simple means like taking a hot shower or reading a good book, as long as you can get away from the battlefield and relax. On the other hand, a character getting the "Psychosis" condition could be struck with delusions, paranoia, hyperactivity, depression or other mental disorders. Healing from this condition takes time and psychiatric consultations. The "Panicked" condition is one of the worst squad's bane. A panicked soldier is very dangerous as you can never predict his actions. Some drop their weapon and make for a run, others empty their mags screaming like madmen or paralyses in terror. Most of the time soldiers don't recover from this condition and those who survives are relieved of their duty.

RANK

Your character's rank represents his level of experience with the XCOM organisation. He may have served in the regular army as a squad leader for years, once he gets recruited by the XCOM, he'll still be considered a green.

When you create a character, he starts as a Rookie. If he survives his first mission, he'll get promoted to Squaddie. After a few more missions, once he have proved his skills, he'll get promoted to Trooper. Those few who survived many missions are granted the honorary title of Veteran and are shown great respect.

BACK TO THE BASE

Between missions, XCOM operators go back to their base to rest, resupply, train, get treated and other activities of such. Normally, your squad don't go on a mission every day. Most of the time you'll have several days off between missions but there are times where you could get called out more often than others.

In game terms, this is a good time to introduce new members of the squad (either a player wants to change his character, he got killed or is convalescing). Also, use this downtime to advance your character if he survived the last mission. Furthermore, if there's a new technological breakthrough, you can upgrade some of your gear (see Technology & Gear below).

TECHNOLOGY & GEAR

Each time XCOM operators bring back alien artefacts to the base, a plethora of scientists and engineers work hard to try to understand and copy highly advanced alien technology. There's no strict rules to manage how those research advance in the game but the GM should include new breakthrough events from time to time that make some special gear available or alien items usable, especially if the team manage to bring back a rare alien artefact or better, a live specimen.

What it means is that characters start out their adventure with standard issued gear but could acquire new and better gear as scientists unfold alien secrets. To represent the disparity between highly advanced alien technology with human's, all pieces of gear the characters start with confers no bonus when used against aliens while they get a bonus die against them. Items characters use that aren't listed on their sheet like sidearms, for example, have a penalty die when used against aliens. When more advanced versions start to appear, characters can update their gear and have items that grant a bonus die.

Since gear is a very important part of the XCOM setting, this hack enables characters to have up to three pieces of gear. Usually, XCOM operators carry a weapon, a body armor and, depending their role, can carry grenades, a rocket launcher, NVG, taser, motion sensor, medikit, explosives or other usefull tactical tools. Each one carries more than three things, though. Normally, every operator have a sidearm pistol, a combat knife, a multitool, a communication device, a lot of ammunition, a taclight and/or headlight, recons and squad leaders carry a map, a compass and a GPS, etc. These items never give bonus dice. They nearly enables the character to do the task the item is made for.

UFOPEDIA

The XCOM franchise bears a rich setting, thanks to the in-game Ufopedia and game manuals. Most can be found on this website : <http://www.ufopaedia.org>.

Feel free to use information tied to the game setting or to make up your own, even mix and match elements from different XCOM games.

MISSIONS

If you're the GM, try to be inventive with missions. Here's some ideas of missions the characters could be tasked with : save civilians from alien abduction, escort a VIP from a major city under siege to a XCOM base, investigate a crash site, take photos of a new alien life form recently discovered, bring back a special alien artefact, capture a live alien, scout a region suspected of alien activity, attack an alien outpost, clear a zone of all hostilities, defend a specific zone, uncovers and arrest a mind controlled member of the government, hunt down a group of aliens trying to hide in a city, disperse a crowd of alien supporters, and many more.

Also, mission objectives should be clear. Try using explicit and precise verbs : "We have to FIND the downed alien vessel, SECURE it and DESTROY its remains." If there's secondary objectives, it should be clear what is primary and what is secondary. In the example below, bringing back any intact alien artefacts could be a secondary objective.

SAMPLE ALIENS

SECTOIDS

Descriptors : Smart, Feeble, Bad Aim

Gear : Plasma pistol

Health & Morale : Panick or die on the first hit.

Notes : Sectoids are not really good fighters but they carry deadly weapons. Some may also carry Sonic Pulser grenades.

MUTONS

Descriptors : Strong, Fast, Stupid

Gear : Heavy plasma, Elerium reinforced armor

Health & Morale : Panick or die on the third hit.

Notes: Mutons are aliens' elite soldiers. Despite their relatively low intelligence, they have a strong team spirit and use well coordinated tactics.

Hack designed and written by Jean-Baptiste Breton.

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INTRO ADVENTURE

The invasion have just started few months ago. Small size UFOs have been spotted over the contry-sides of all major countries and animal and human abductions are increasing exponentially. The XCOM organisation is all new and have just started responding to UFO sightings. Little is known about the aliens and for now the primary mandate of XCOM is to gather informations on them.

FIRST MISSION - CRASH SITE

It's the first time a UFO is shot down! It's a small vessel, probably a reconnaissance ship of some sort that crashed over Nevada. It's the first ground misison for XCOM. A small squad of 5 rookie operators is sent on the crash site to recover alien artefacts and bodies and secure the craft for pickup.

The squad leader, Sergeant Taylor, is an ex-member of the Australian SASR. He served there as a recon specialist for 5 years (after serving in the regular army for 6 years) before being recruited by the newly formed XCOM. Like everyone in the squad, it is far from his first mission but it's his first XCOM assignment. While the Skyranger flies to the crash site, the sergeant explains the mission to the team.

"A'right, listen up! We're going to land 2 klicks east of the crash site. We'll make our approach through rocky arid terrain. The UAV didn't spot any activity but we're not sure if the greys are showing up on thermal. It's a night op so don't forget to set your NVGs. Once we secured the vessel, we take all alien stuff we can get, including bodies, and we make for the exfil 600 meters south of the UFO position where the Skyranger will meet with us. An engineer team will pickup the craft later, so make sure you don't leave any hidden hostile behind. Any questions?"

Right after Taylor answer any question the PC might have, a radio transmission from the pilots gives the ETA 30 sec. warning.

Scene : Rocky desert, somewhere in Nevada.

Descriptors : Big rocks, Night mission.

SECTOIDS

Descriptors : Smart, Feeble, Bad Aim

Gear : Plasma pistol

Health & Morale : Panick or die on the first hit.

Notes : Sectoids are not really good fighters but they carry deadly weapons. Some may also carry Sonic Pulser grenades.

BACK TO THE BASE

After this mission, the team will have 2 weeks of free time before being tasked again. Players should tell what they intend to do for the next few days. Award a FU point to players who take the opportunity to RP with the other PCs to get to know them. Also award players who share interesting background elements for their character.

Just before the next mission, scientifics will have made interesting discoveries about alien weapons, understand how they work and how to use them. The PCs will be able to use alien plasma weapons from now on. They also be given each an intact plasma weapon (+1 die) with ammunitions.

SECOND MISSION - RECCE

This time, the squad is called upon for a reconnaissance mission. The Funding Council wants to know why the aliens are abducting people. The team will be sent in the farmlands of Crippsdale, Alberta, where a lot of UFO activity have been sighted over the last days.

The mission objective is to gather as much information possible on the abductions, especially the reason they do it and their *modus operandi*. They also have a beacon they can fix to a UFO to follow its movement. The team will be dropped 12 km north of the Area of Operation. No need to say the team must not be detected but should it happen, they are to either fight or retreat, depending their situation. In any case, the organisation can't risk the Skyranger comming in hot. Thereby, the exfil LZ is set 10 km north-west of the AO.

While the PCs are moving within the area, they'll notice a medium sized craft passing above them and landing few hundreds meters away, near a farmhouse. When they get there, they'll see a large and thin disk floating out of the vessel and starting to patrol around the house, soon followed by sectoids who shoot down the house door and disappear inside. Screams can be heard from inside then suddenly stops. Moment later, after giving the PCs some time to make an action, sectoids and humans walk out the door and enter the UFO. The humans seemed to be following them willingly.

The aliens and the cyberdisk then walk to another house, about 100 meters west and the same thing happens. When they get back, they enter the UFO and the craft takes off and land to another house several hundred meters away, south of the first house. If the PCs managed to fix the beacon on the UFO, once they get back to the base, an intelligence officer will discover the aliens proceed following a Fibonacci spiral pattern to select the houses to stop to.

Scene : Rural farmlands in Alberta.

Descriptors : Crop fields, Irrigation ditch, Thickets, Wire fences, Isolated farmhouses.

SECTOIDS

Descriptors : Smart, Feeble, Bad Aim

Gear : Plasma pistol

Health & Morale : Panick or die on the first hit.

Notes : Sectoids are not really good fighters but they carry deadly weapons. Some may also carry Sonic Pulser grenades.

SECTOID LEADER

Descriptors : Smart, Psionic, Feeble, Bad Aim

Gear : Plasma pistol, Mind Probe

Health & Morale : Panick or die on the first hit.

Notes : Sectoid leaders have psionic powers that enable them to mind control individuals. Psi attacks target the Morale. Once the target reach the "Panicked" condition, they become the sectoid's puppet.

CYBERDISC

Descriptors : Hovering, Large, Armored

Gear : Plasma beam

Health & Morale : Self-destruct on the third hit.

Notes : This automated alien weapon has a powerful plasma beam weapon and strong armor. When badly damaged, it self-destruct, making it difficult to recover for study.

BACK TO THE BASE

After this mission, the team will have 10 days of free time. They'll also get a new scientific breakthrough that makes new advanced armors (+1 die) available.

THIRD MISSION - TERROR

An emergency siren starts screaming in the base. The team is mobilized. The aliens are attacking the city of Shanwei on the south eastern coast of China, not too far from Beijin. As far as we know, the aliens are killing all humans on sight. Images from the local news channel have revealed new alien species who seem a lot more combat focused than the Sectoids. The team objective is simple : eliminate alien forces in the city. The secondary objective is to protect civilians.

Scene : City of Shanwei.

Descriptors : Urban, Night mission, Panicked civilians, Fires.

MUTONS

Descriptors : Strong, Fast, Stupid

Gear : Heavy plasma, Elerium reinforced armor

Health & Morale : Panick or die on the third hit.

Notes: Mutons are aliens' elite soldiers. Despite their relatively low intelligence, they have a strong team spirit and use well coordinated tactics.

REAPER

Descriptors : Large, Strong, Reckless, Animal

Gear : Ferocious bite

Health & Morale : Panick or die on the sixth hit.

Notes: Reapers are big voracious bipedal carnivore that are controlled by aliens via brain implants. It has two brains and two hearts, therefore hard to kill.

NAME

RANK

ROLE

EDGE

EDGE

FLAW

GEAR

HEALTH

 INJURED CRIPPLED DYING

MORALE

 STRESSED PSYCHOSIS PANICKED

CONDITIONS

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DAZED | <input type="checkbox"/> BLINDED | <input type="checkbox"/> IMPEDED |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TIRED | <input type="checkbox"/> MOTIVATED | <input type="checkbox"/> CHOKED |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BLEEDING | <input type="checkbox"/> STOPPAGE | <input type="checkbox"/> SCARED |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

NOTES

FU POINTS

THE ODDS

ROLL	RESULT
6	Yes, and...
5	Yes...
4	Yes, but...
3	No, but...
2	No...
1	No, and...