

Edna/Exocist's *Starfinder* 2e Pre-Playtest Prep Report

[Edna's Battlecry! Test](#), [Edna's SF2e Pre-Playtest](#), [Edna's 1st-Level Party](#), [Edna's 5th-Level Party](#), [Exocist's Screenshots of Positioning](#), [Exocist's Perspective](#)

I played through **twenty-six (26)** battles using the *Starfinder* 2e pre-playtest material. I controlled the entire party throughout all of these combat encounters. My GM went by the username "Exocist."

This is not a playtest document. This is, instead, a pre-playtest document. Its purpose is to compile a list of **potential issues to watch out for**, which you can find [at the bottom of the document](#).

Procedure

- A 1st-level party consisting of a Field Test #1 soldier, a Field Test #2 mystic, a Field Test #4 envoy, and a guisarme fighter play through four encounters in the same workday.
- Then, the party swaps the melee fighter for a shortbow ranger, and replays the day. **The original party's initiative rolls' natural results, including those of the enemies, are copied over.**
- Next, a 5th-level party consisting of a soldier, a mystic, an envoy, and a guisarme fighter play through four encounters in one workday, and then four encounters in a second workday.
- Finally, the party swaps the melee fighter for a ranged fighter, and replays both days. Again, the original party's initiative rolls' natural results are copied.

Policies

- The allowed character creation sources are simply the *Player Core*, the *GM Core*, *Guns & Gears*, and the *Advanced Player's Guide*. (The latter is a substitute for the *Player Core 2*, which was not available at the time of the pre-playtest.) A *Starfinder* 2e player should not have to rummage through a pile of *Pathfinder* 2e books to play an effective character.
- Dual-class characters, free archetype, ancestry paragon, and similar variant rules are **not** in use. If a class needs a variant rule to truly shine, then once again, the class deserves to be upgraded.
- The 5th-level characters use the wealth of PCs [midway into 5th level, which is to say, they have a free 5th-level item](#).
- Full mechanical transparency applies on both sides. The player knows all of the enemy statistics and can make decisions accordingly. However, the monsters know all of the PC statistics and can make decisions accordingly as well.
- The player can choose the party's starting positioning for each encounter, so long as it falls within the deployment zone drawn out by the GM.
- **For whatever reason, the edges of each map are treated as hard, impassable barriers.**
- PCs and enemies alike can start combat with weapons and shields in hand. PCs and enemies are **unaware** of what they will be facing until the battle actually begins (i.e. a ranger cannot start off with [Hunt Prey](#) already active, an envoy cannot begin with *Size Up* already used, and characters start with their default weapons on hand rather than any backup weapons). Unless otherwise noted, no pre-battle buffs whatsoever are allowed on either side.
- **Each** PC has a Hero Point to use during each combat. Each of these Hero Points is on a use-it-or-lose-it basis, resetting to 1 at the start of each battle.
- Initiative is always Perception, except for PCs [Avoiding Notice](#), who can use Stealth. If an encounter allows otherwise, it will be stipulated.
- Reactions are available before a combatant's first turn, unless the scenario specifically couches the combatant as being ambushed. (None of these battles couched any combatant as being ambushed.)
- ["Your GM might let you reduce or negate cover by leaning around a corner to shoot or the like. This usually takes an action to set up, and the GM might measure cover from an edge or corner of your space instead of your center."](#) Yes, this takes an action to set up.

Rulings on Unclear Rules

- **Specific Pre-Playtest Ruling #1:** The soldier's [primary target](#) is resolved after Area Fire or Automatic Fire. It is treated as a regular ranged attack in all ways, including tracing cover between the soldier and the target, and contending with range increments. It does **not** consume any extra ammunition. It does **not** apply to a Warning Shot.
- **Specific Pre-Playtest Ruling #2:** The envoy's Get Em! [penalty applies to Reflex](#). The [damage bonus for the envoy \(and just the envoy\) is increased by half Charisma modifier](#), and it applies on the Strike that activates lead by example.
- **Specific Pre-Playtest Ruling #3:** The Field Test #1 laser pistol and the *Second Contact* laser rifle are in use, but the latter's price is assumed to be a misprint and should be normalized to 60 for commercial, 410 for tactical, and 1,060 for advanced. Additionally, a variant of the laser rifle is available: the ballistic rifle, which deals piercing damage instead of fire damage, has the analog and [concussive](#) traits, and has -20 range increment.
- **Specific Pre-Playtest Ruling #4:** Since *Starfinder* 1e PCs can spend one-fifth of their starting credits at 1st level to [purchase darkvision](#), so too can 1st-level PCs here spend 30 credits to purchase darkvision in the form of infrared sensors.
- **Specific Pre-Playtest Ruling #5:** If a monster or an NPC lacks a DC for Automatic Fire or Area Fire, they use the [high DC for their level](#).
- **Specific Pre-Playtest Ruling #6:** The glass serpent's Strike attack modifier is [reduced to +16, and its damage dice are reduced to 2d10](#).

Tactical Style

The player and the GM know the statistics of everyone on the battlefield, and take actions accordingly. The player and the GM both try to focus fire on the opposing force's most important linchpins (e.g. the party's mystic).

The Current State of the "Ranged Weapon Meta," Just Before the Playtest Proper

Here is the current state of the "ranged weapon meta" as of the time of this writing, a couple of days before the *Starfinder* 2e playtest proper, taking into account Field Tests #1 to #5 and *Second Contact*.

- At the lowest of the levels, ranged weapons are tepid. They are greatly overshadowed by Strength melee weapons, which offer a full attribute modifier to damage. A guisarme fighter is swinging at 1d10+4 with an extra +2 attack bonus (and thus critical chances) and [Reactive Strike](#), a guisarme fortune dragon instinct barbarian is dealing 1d10+8, a guisarme giant instinct barbarian does out a whopping 1d10+10, and these bruisers can close the distance with [Sudden Charge](#). In contrast, a *Second Contact* laser rifle deals a flat 1d8 fire damage with no attribute modifier, which can lag behind even with external increases such as [gravity weapon](#) and the [precision](#) edge; the rifle's only hope at vindicating itself is exploiting its 100-foot range increment.

- The combination of [Sudden Charge](#) (or simply high Speed), [Reactive Strike](#), and reach can be greatly oppressive towards ranged characters, who have difficulty escaping from such a warrior. However, importantly, we do not know what will happen to Sudden Charge and Reactive Strike in the playtest proper.
- While ranged weapons struggle during the beginner levels, they slowly catch up as the levels rise, thanks to *striking* runes (or the *Starfinder* 2e equivalent), weapon specialization, and energy damage runes (or, again, the *Starfinder* 2e equivalent).
- [Take Cover](#) tends to be a rather niche action. An entire action is often a significant commitment. There are only three scenarios wherein Take Cover actually generates a net benefit of +2 AC: (1) you are already benefiting from standard cover, which likely means that your own attacks are being impeded by cover, due to the way the cover rules work, (2) you are prone, which tends to be a poor position that you want to rectify, and (3) you “are near a feature that allows you to take cover,” something that Paizo adventures have seldom ever bothered to specify. **Remember that it is virtually impossible to shoot around a corner without your own attacks being degraded by the cover rules (short of GM discretion and potentially spending another action)!**
- The Field Test #1 and #5 weapons have rather poor range increments. An aeon rifle has merely range increment 60 feet. The one notable exception appears to be the *Second Contact* laser rifle, with range increment 100 feet.
- The Field Test #1 weapons have strange, inconsistent scaling of range increments and effective-number-of-shots-before-a-reload. Why do the simple weapons’ range increments stay static, while the martial weapons’ increments increase by 10 at 2nd-level tactical? The laser pistol has 5 shots-before-a-reload, then 10, then 10 again. The scattergun and the stellar cannon have 4, then 6, then 4 again. The rotolaser has 10, then 20, then 10 again. I cannot see the rhyme or reason to these patterns. (As a minor note, the Field Test #1 weapons add their base price to their 2nd- and 4th-level versions. Why do they do this, when [Pathfinder 2e’s magic weapons](#) never add in the weapon’s base price?)
- Ammunition and reloading can be an annoying, unfun mechanic. The single-shot crossbows and firearms of *Pathfinder* 2e can be tracked easily enough, since they are either loaded or unloaded. *Starfinder* 2e ranged weapons, on the other hand, require nitty-gritty counting: which might be a hassle for a GM who has to **track ammunition for half a dozen enemies or more!** Additionally, since reloading requires an action, it is yet another action tax that makes [Take Cover](#) even less likely to be used.

I am genuinely of the opinion that ammunition and reloading should simply be dropped as mechanics altogether in *Starfinder* 2e. This way, players do not have to worry about nitty-gritty counting, the GM never runs into a scenario wherein they have to track ammunition for plenty of enemies, and more actions are freed up for [Take Cover](#).

All Maps Are Official *Starfinder* Poster Maps

If Paizo is still selling *Starfinder* poster maps, and if Field Test #5 uses two such poster maps for its encounters, then *Starfinder* poster maps should be fair game for pre-playtesting.

Fire Resistance

We specifically made it a point to take [Nephilim Resistance](#) (fire) on the 5th-level PCs just to see how much havoc it would wreak on the laser-slinging enemies of *Field Test* #5 and *Second Contact*.

Importantly, [since information is transparent on both sides](#), **the enemies are aware of the PCs’ fire resistance** and therefore avoid wasting attacks on it.

Introducing the Guisarme Fighter

Thurston Hillman [suggested](#) that Field Test #5 be played with “soldier + mystic + envoy + PF2 PC.” What better candidate could there be for the last slot than the iconic guisarme fighter? Across both the [1st-level party](#) and the [5th-level party](#), the guisarme fighter was built in a rather standard manner.

Between reach, [Reactive Strike](#), [Sudden Charge](#), and [Lunge](#), the melee fighter successfully served as a mobile main-damage-dealer who could also oppress anyone reliant on ranged Strikes. Due to the abundance of high Reflex saving throws across Field Test #5 and, to a somewhat lesser extent, *Second Contact*, the guisarme fighter seldom ever attempted a Trip action; this was merely a minor downside in the grand scheme of things.

Introducing the 1st-Level Shortbow Ranger

A [gravity weapon](#), [precision](#) edge ranger can shore up a ranged weapon’s weak damage, and even eke out some extra effective range thanks to [Hunt Prey](#). Unfortunately, if such a character also wants to use Hunted Shot, they must settle for a reload 0 shortbow instead of a (technically) reload 1 laser rifle, which is exactly what happened with the [1st-level ranger’s character sheet](#). Unfortunately, a [composite shortbow](#) would have cost 140 credits, which is outside of the character’s price range.

The shortbow ranger did about as well as expected: a respectable damage-dealer, but nowhere near as much of a menace on the battlefield as the guisarme fighter.

Introducing the 5th-Level Ranged Fighter

Since the envoy could provide circumstance bonuses to damage with Get ‘Em!, and since the soldier could enter Dread Marshal Stance to confer a status bonus to damage, a ranged fighter with a [laser/ballistic] rifle seemed like a natural fit. Point Blank Stance was there simply because no other feat was as useful for a ranged fighter.

The ranged fighter, again, did roughly as well as anticipated. They could deliver decent damage, but not to the extent of a dedicated melee bruiser. The one, **one** combat in which the ranged fighter proved more valuable than their guisarme-swinging counterpart was the battle against the [emganats](#).

Introducing the Field Test #1 Soldier

I took bombard because it appeared to be far and away the most useful soldier fighting style, especially with Warning Shot as a 1st-level class feat. The stellar cannon had better damage, range, and targeting than the rotolaser, so that was an easy choice as well.

None of the 2nd- and 4th-level class feats seemed as good as taking Marshal Dedication and Dread Marshal Stance to shore up the soldier’s damage; and this was **before** the *Player Core* 2 upgraded these very feats. The *Starfinder* 2e playtest [discourages](#) taking non-*Starfinder* class feats, though, so Dread Marshal Stance should not be factored in when assessing the soldier as a class.

The soldier struggled somewhat due to high Reflex saves being ubiquitous across Field Test #5 and *Second Contact* monsters. However, setting that aside and trying to envision a set of scenarios wherein high Reflex is not as common, I can assess the Field Test #1 soldier to be **slightly below** a [gravity weapon](#), [precision](#) edge ranger at the lowest of levels, and **roughly on par** once PCs receive a second weapon damage die. A soldier at the very low levels has poor damage, but can still offer [primary target](#), suppression, an incidental amount of AoE (it was rare to catch more than one enemy). Once that second damage die comes around, a soldier doubles their damage output and thus becomes significantly better. I think that -10 Speed becomes less and less relevant as the levels rise and monsters become faster and faster, and would appreciate some scaling on the Speed debuff.

In terms of how the soldier **felt** to play, it was disappointingly repetitive. The soldier was heavily pressured to spam Area Fire and [primary target](#) every single round. As a small silver lining, the soldier's first/third action was negotiable, so I used it for either Stride/Step, a Constitution-based Demoralize, an Interact-based reload, or, at 5th level, Dread Marshal Stance. There was no room for [Take Cover](#). At no point whatsoever did the soldier feel like a "tank," because the soldier had no way to draw attacks towards themselves. Although the soldier ultimately pulled their weight, the AoE aspect of Area Fire felt incidental, and bombard's protection against friendly fire was relevant exactly once across all of twenty-six (26) battles.

Introducing the Field Test #2 Mystic

I selected the healing connection because *vitalize* looked like such a fantastic focus spell compared to *song of the spheres*, which required a Charisma-based check on a Wisdom-based class and lasted only for a round.

At 2nd level, I took Scout Dedication to help the party's initiative; and this was before the *Player Core 2* upgraded it. At 4th level, I considered taking Spot Healing, but worried that the range of 15 feet would be inconvenient. I also thought about taking Memory Bank, but was concerned about the action economy necessary to do so. I thus settled for Divine Disciple to gain an extra Focus Point and an offensive option in the form of [fire ray](#).

Politely discounting the guisarme fighter, **the healing connection mystic was probably the single strongest party member here**. The class is a 4-slot spontaneous caster, Transfer Vitality is a strong healing mechanic, and *vitalize* is a fantastic focus spell. Depending on the flow of the adventuring workday and how much it taxes resources, a healing connection mystic can be either somewhat worse, on par with, or slightly better than a healing font cleric; the very fact that a healing connection mystic comes close to a healing font cleric is a great testament to just how competent it is as a sustainer.

The mystic **felt** decent to play. Between all of the slotted spells at my disposal, Transfer Vitality, *vitalize*, and *fire ray*, I was never lacking in options: though the most common turn by far was Transfer Vitality and *vitalize*. The action economy was tight enough that there was never room for [Take Cover](#).

Introducing the Field Test #4 Envoy

I selected guns blazing as a leadership style because it was the most relevant to a combat-only playtest. I was tempted by the melee build, called simply "from the front," but discarded it due to action economy concerns. I settled for Watch Out! as a 1st-level feat and found it decent enough, though it was annoying that it did not stack with cover.

I instantly settled on **Danger Sense** as a 4th-level class feat due to the sheer initiative advantage it offered. With that in mind, Rogue Dedication seemed like a natural synergy, and a good fit for the 2nd-level slot.

The envoy is a strong ranged striker and offensive support leader at the lowest of levels, but the "ranged striker" part drops off once PCs receive a second weapon damage die. During the beginner levels, the envoy's power level is **roughly on par** that of a thaumaturge: a Charisma-based skill monkey who can deliver good personal damage while also buffing the party. Unfortunately, "half Charisma modifier to personal damage with Get 'Em" is stuck at merely +2 until the highest of levels. Once that second damage die comes around, an envoy dips **slightly below** a thaumaturge, but can still contribute with the other aspects of Get 'Em, and with **Danger Sense**. I hope that the playtest proper will give the envoy better scaling for personal damage.

I also dislike how the penalty to AC from Get 'Em is a circumstance penalty, thereby preventing it from stacking with [off-guard](#) (e.g. from [flanking](#), [grabbed](#), or [prone](#)). I do not think that Get 'Em is so strong that it deserves to not stack with these tried and true tactical debuff options.

The envoy **felt** rigid and repetitive, to an even worse degree than the soldier. Get 'Em and a Strike (to lead by example) were so important to the envoy's playstyle that the character was virtually obligated to do so every single round. Their first/third action was most frequently a second Strike, simply to make the most out of Get 'Em, but it was occasionally Stride/Step or Demoralize. The envoy never had the action economy left to [Take Cover](#).

Monster Analysis

Computer Glitch Gremlin, Creature -1

- **Perception:** +5, moderate
- **AC:** 14, moderate
- **Average Saving Throws:** +6.(3), above moderate, Reflex peak
- **Hit Points:** 8, moderate, with weakness cold iron and fire 2 and resist cold and electricity 1
- **Melee Strike Attack Bonus:** +7, between high and moderate, with agile
- **Melee Strike Average Damage:** 4.5, above extreme
- **Ranged Strike Attack Bonus:** +7, between high and moderate
- **Ranged Strike Average Damage:** 3.5, between extreme and high

This is one of, if not **the**, most dangerous -1st-level creature in the combined mass of *Pathfinder 2e* and *Starfinder 2e*. Its aura can be an annoyance to characters reliant on tech-trait items, but where it really shines is its spellcasting at DC 16. It can hurl out a 1st-level [thunderstrike](#) once per day and a 1st-level [electric arc](#) at will, either at Reflex DC 16. This is extraordinarily good offense for a lowly -1st-level creature.

Corpse Fleet Infantry, Creature 1

- **Perception:** +5, above low
- **AC:** 15, moderate
- **Average Saving Throws:** +7.(3), slightly above moderate, Reflex peak

- **Hit Points:** 26, with undead immunities and weakness slashing (i.e. **hacked down in melee**) and vitality 3
- **Melee Strike Attack Bonus:** +7, moderate
- **Melee Strike Average Damage:** 4.5, between moderate and low
- **Ranged Strike Attack Bonus:** +9, high
- **Ranged Strike Average Damage:** 3.5, slightly below low, plus 1d4 with Fusillade

This appears to represent a basic rifleman grunt spraying around an assault rifle, except undead. I think it does a shoddy job, though. The autotarget rifle's range increment is a measly 40 feet. The Corpse Fleet infantry can spend two actions on Automatic Fire to lay down a 20-foot cone of... exactly 1d6 damage, with an unprinted and unknown basic Reflex save DC.

Fusillade exists to salvage the infantry's ranged Strikes. Even then, it imposes strict positioning requirements, which are not ideal for mobility.

I think that the [elf ranger](#) from the *Monster Core* is a much better basis for a trooper with an assault rifle. An elf ranger can Stride/Step into the open, use Double Shot to attack two PCs with a respectable attack bonus and decent damage, and then Stride/Step back into cover or around a corner.

Cybernetic Zombie, Creature 1

- **Perception:** +3, between low and terrible
- **AC:** 15, moderate
- **Average Saving Throws:** +5.(3), above low, Reflex peak
- **Hit Points:** 40, with mindless undead immunities and weakness electricity and slashing (i.e. **hacked down in melee**) 10
- **Melee Strike Attack Bonus:** +7, moderate
- **Melee Strike Average Damage:** 5.5, between high and moderate
- **Ranged Strike Attack Bonus:** +9, high
- **Ranged Strike Average Damage:** 5.5 fire, between high and moderate

This is more effective than the Corpse Fleet infantry simply due to **not** being bound by strict positioning requirements. It compares favorably to a [plague zombie](#), too: more AC, fewer Hit Points, no Slow, ranged rather than melee. I would not call this strong or exceptional, but I would not call it bad, either.

As a zombie, a cybernetic zombie can receive [standard zombie abilities](#), such as the remarkably strong Rotting Aura.

Aeon Guard Soldier, Creature 3

- **Perception:** +6, low
- **AC:** 20, above high
- **Average Saving Throws:** +8.(6), slightly below moderate, Reflex peak
- **Hit Points:** 40, below moderate
- **Melee Strike Attack Bonus:** +9, between moderate and low, plus +2 circumstance with Coordinated Fire
- **Melee Strike Average Damage:** 4.5, **significantly** below low, plus +2 circumstance with Show No Mercy
- **Ranged Strike Attack Bonus:** +11, between high and moderate, plus +2 circumstance with Coordinated Fire
- **Ranged Strike Average Damage:** 4.5 fire, **significantly** below low, plus +2 circumstance with Show No Mercy

This is among the weakest 3rd-level creatures out there. The Aeon Guard soldier's baseline damage is so low that it is a non-starter, and above-high AC is counterbalanced by below-moderate Hit Points. Elusive Maneuver, Coordinated Fire, and Show No Mercy are simply insufficient as special abilities to compensate for such low damage output. It does not help that the aeon rifle has merely range increment 60 feet.

Have a look at a [weak qarna archon](#), straight from the *Monster Core*, with all of the numerical disadvantages of the weak adjustment already factored in. A weak qarna has just as much AC as an Aeon Guard soldier, a +12 Strike attack modifier, and a composite longbow with 1d8+5 damage and range increment 100 feet. Counterbalancing their volley 30 feet is their Archon's Protection reaction, which can significantly inconvenience anyone attempting to harass a group of qarnas in melee.

Swarm, Emganat, Creature 3

- **Perception:** +10, above moderate
- **AC:** 18, moderate
- **Average Saving Throws:** +9, moderate, Reflex peak
- **Hit Points:** 38, slightly above low, with resist acid 5
- **Melee Strike Attack Bonus:** +10, moderate
- **Melee Strike Average Damage:** 6.5, below low
- **Ranged Strike Attack Bonus:** +12, high
- **Ranged Strike Average Damage:** 6.5 acid, below low, with 1d4 persistent acid and a partial persistent-acid-damage-stacking mechanic

If a GM fights fairly as a group of emganats, by using Burrowing Reveal and by **not** [Burrowing](#) back down, then this monster is a rather weak ranged attacker. The persistent acid damage, even with its partial stacking mechanic, is insufficient to compensate for an emagnat's low damage.

On the other hand, if the GM **ignores** Burrowing Reveal, has the emagnats begin combat in the ground, and has each emagnat perform a routine of Burrow up (and diagonally, so as to emerge outside of melee PCs' reach), ranged Strike, Burrow back down, then the party is in trouble. Since the emagnats have motion sense and can pop up outside of melee PCs' reach, the only way for low-level PCs to fight back is by [Ready](#)ing ranged Strikes: which a soldier could very well struggle with, since unwieldy weapons cannot be used as part of [Ready](#), much like spells.

I get the feeling that Burrow cheese is not the intended playstyle of the emagnats.

Tashtari, Creature 3

- **Perception:** +10, above moderate

- [AC](#): 19, high
- **Average [Saving Throws](#)**: +8.(3), slightly below moderate, Reflex peak
- **[Hit Points](#)**: 42, moderate, with resist fire (e.g. **laser weapons**) 5
- **Melee [Strike Attack Bonus](#)**: +10, moderate
- **Melee [Strike Average Damage](#)**: 6.5, below low
- **Ranged [Strike Attack Bonus](#)**: +12, high
- **Ranged [Strike Average Damage](#)**: 7.5 fire, slightly below low, plus 1d4 persistent fire

The tashtari is unremarkable in power level as a ranged attacker, except that fire resistance impedes laser weapons, and Bristle Flash is a single action for an outstanding 40-foot emanation. Bristle Flash can have a non-negligible impact on an entire party's offensive output. (Also, Bristle Flash has no immunity clause in *Second Contact*.)

I take issue with the tashtari's design because it works better as a solitary predator than as a pack hunter, contrary to its lore. Persistent fire damage does not stack, so it is hard for tashtaris to focus their (very literal) fire and bring down a single target at a time.

Corpse Fleet Officer, Creature 4

- **[Perception](#)**: +8, low
- [AC](#): 21, high
- **Average [Saving Throws](#)**: +11, moderate, Reflex peak
- **[Hit Points](#)**: 55, below moderate, with undead immunities and resist cold, electricity, fire (e.g. **laser weapons**), piercing, and slashing 5
- **Melee [Strike Attack Bonus](#)**: +14, high
- **Melee [Strike Average Damage](#)**: 14, high
- **Ranged [Strike Attack Bonus](#)**: +14, high
- **Ranged [Strike Average Damage](#)**: 10, above low

This is a strong, reasonably menacing opponent, though not to an overwhelming degree. Undead immunities and skeleton resistances can give a party pause, particularly since laser weapons deal fire damage. Bolstering Aura confers a decent chunk of durability to the officer and its allies (though it should really say that it applies only during a combat encounter, or else the one-hour immunity clause makes it difficult to reliably avail of during battle). [Reactive Strike](#) threatens ranged PCs. Lead Salvo and Unrelenting Flurry give the officer **two** special attack options on its turn. The officer can Stride twice to threaten a ranged PC with Reactive Strike and then use Unrelenting Flurry to perform two MAPless Strikes with respectable damage.

In terms of mechanical design, this is my favorite monster across Field Test #5 and *Second Contact*. It is a major threat, yet not overtly overpowered.

As a skeleton, a Corpse Fleet officer is eligible to be upgraded with [standard skeleton abilities](#).

Crest-Eater, Creature 4

- **[Perception](#)**: +11, moderate
- [AC](#): 23, almost extreme
- **Average [Saving Throws](#)**: +11, moderate, Fortitude peak
- **[Hit Points](#)**: 65, above moderate
- **Melee [Strike Attack Bonus](#)**: +17, above extreme
- **Melee [Strike Average Damage](#)**: 14, high
- **Ranged [Strike Attack Bonus](#)**: +15, between extreme and high
- **Ranged [Strike Average Damage](#)**: 8, below low, plus 1d6 persistent acid and an additional poison

This is arguably the single most powerful 4th-level creature in *Path/Starfinder 2e*. With Speed 45 feet, the ability to ignore many types of difficult terrain, reach 10 feet, [Reactive Strike](#), and devastating melee attacks, a crest-eater can easily close the distance and oppress the party's ranged attackers and spellcasters. This would be nightmarish to fight in *Pathfinder 2e*, let alone in the "ranged meta" of *Starfinder 2e*, unless the ranged party can start literally hundreds of feet away.

I really, really do not think that the crest-eater should be this strong, unless it is only ever to be encountered at extreme distances in an open field.

Tashtari Alpha, Creature 5

- **[Perception](#)**: +13, above moderate
- [AC](#): 22, high
- **Average [Saving Throws](#)**: +11.(3), slightly below moderate, Reflex peak
- **[Hit Points](#)**: 75, moderate, with resist fire (e.g. **laser weapons**) 5
- **Melee [Strike Attack Bonus](#)**: +13, moderate
- **Melee [Strike Average Damage](#)**: 11, low
- **Ranged [Strike Attack Bonus](#)**: +15, high
- **Ranged [Strike Average Damage](#)**: 11 fire, low, plus 1d6 persistent fire

This is the upgraded version of the tashtari: which is to say, it is still unremarkable in power level as a ranged attacker. While its Solar Cry recharges other tashtaris' Bristle Flashes, its Reflex [DC is merely moderate](#), and its area damage is only [two-thirds of the normal amount](#) for a limited-use ability. Just as with the regular version, the tashtari is probably more optimal as a solitary predator, simply because persistent fire damage does not stack.

Glass Serpent ([Hotfix](#)), Creature 5

- **[Perception](#)**: +14, almost high, but more likely to use its Stealth +15 for initiative
- [AC](#): 21, moderate
- **Average [Saving Throws](#)**: +9.(3), slightly above low, Reflex peak
- **[Hit Points](#)**: 85, above moderate

- **Melee [Strike Attack Bonus](#):** Either +16, above high, or +15, high
- **Melee [Strike Average Damage](#):** 19, almost extreme

Even after the hotfix, this is probably the single strongest 5th-level creature in *Path/Starfinder 2e*. Speed 45 feet and reach 15 feet help it close in. While a glass serpent **could** [Swallow Whole](#), it (optimally) does not want to, because it instead wants to exploit its permanent invisibility and the [Sneak](#) rules. If a party lacks a countermeasure against invisibility (and no, [flour is not good enough, rules-wise](#)) and the GM refuses to have the glass serpent Swallow Whole, then the PCs are likely to be trounced by the hard-to-find, hard-to-hit, hard-hitting beast.

The glass serpent is in dire need of rethinking, in my opinion.

Nihili, Creature 5

- **[Perception](#):** +10, above low
- **[AC](#):** 19, low
- **Average [Saving Throws](#):** +9.(3), slightly above low, Reflex peak
- **[Hit Points](#):** 82, above moderate, with undead immunities
- **Melee [Strike Attack Bonus](#):** +15, high
- **Melee [Strike Average Damage](#):** 16, high
- **Ranged [Strike Attack Bonus](#):** +15, high
- **Ranged [Strike Average Damage](#):** 12.5 fire, almost moderate

This is likely one of the weaker 5th-level creatures available. Poor Perception (and thus default initiative) and low AC make a nihili rather susceptible to being alpha-struck-down by martials. Decompressing Glance and Decompressing Gaze are not that debilitating; their DCs are merely [above moderate](#), [fatigued](#) is a minor debuff, and it takes two failed saving throws to initiate [suffocation](#), which only really affects spellcasters. A nihili's Strikes are its most threatening form of offense, really, given that they are high/high in melee or high/moderate at range.

Swarm, Bastorox, Creature 6

- **[Perception](#):** +14, moderate
- **[AC](#):** 23, moderate, but can Raise a Shield for a +2 circumstance bonus, Hardness 5, 30 HP, 15 BT
- **Average [Saving Throws](#):** +14, moderate, Fortitude peak
- **[Hit Points](#):** 110, almost high, with resist acid 10
- **Melee [Strike Attack Bonus](#):** +15, moderate
- **Melee [Strike Average Damage](#):** 17, almost high

This is a rather unremarkable opponent. The only offensive option that stands out is a single-action, 30-foot line for 6d8 electricity damage (basic Reflex DC 22, [merely above the moderate DC](#)), with the usual 1d4-round recharge. There are many more significantly more threatening 6th-level creatures out there, such as the [aapoph granitescale](#), the [ankylosaurus](#), the [cave bear](#), and the [iron hag](#), all from the *Monster Core*.

Individual Battle Reports

Please refer to [Exocist's screenshots of positioning for greater context](#).

These battle reports focus less on what the [guisarme fighter](#), the [shortbow ranger](#), and the [ranged fighter](#) were doing, and more on what the soldier, the mystic, and the envoy were doing. Unfortunately, as [previously mentioned](#), the soldier and the envoy had rigid, repetitive routines.

Unless otherwise noted, the soldier spams Area Fire and [primary target](#) during every turn. Their first/third action is either Stride/Step, Constitution-based Demoralize, Interact-based reload, or, at 5th level, Dread Marshal Stance.

Likewise, unless otherwise noted, the mystic's mainstay turn is Transfer Vitality and *vitalize*.

Also unless otherwise noted, the envoy uses Get Em! and Strike to lead by example during each of their turns. Their first/third action is usually a second Strike, Stride/Step, or Demoralize.

There was virtually never any room for [Take Cover](#) in the characters' routines.

1st-Level: Encounter #1 (Start of Workday), 120 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** 1st-level [Corpse Fleet infantry](#), 40 XP each × 2 = 80 XP total; 1st-level [cybernetic zombie](#), 40 XP.
- **Initiative Results:** Party except for soldier, left infantry, zombie, soldier, other enemies.
- **[Soldier's](#) Warning Shot:** On the infantry.
- **[Soldier's](#) Deviation from [Usual Routine](#):** None.
- **[Mystic's](#) Deviation from [Usual Routine](#):** On turn #1, Stride and [vitality lash](#) the Corpse Fleet infantry to exploit vitality weakness.
- **[Envoy's](#) Deviation from [Usual Routine](#):** None, except that the Corpse Fleet infantry's Fusillade lets the soldier actually land some AoE damage.

• **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** Thanks to some good attack and damage rolls, the party simply runs roughshod over the encounter, especially the fighter, whose guisarme triggers slashing weakness. The zombie explosions did not inconvenience the fighter too much.

• **Course of the Battle (with [Shortbow Ranger](#)):** Same as the guisarme iteration, except that the party is a little slower due to the shortbow **not** triggering weakness.

1st-Level: Encounter #2, 80 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** –1st-level [computer glitch gremlin](#), 20 XP each × 2 = 40 XP total; 1st-level [Corpse Fleet infantry](#), 40 XP.
- **Initiative Results:** Party except for [fighter/ranger], bottom gremlin, [fighter/ranger], other enemies.

- **Soldier's Warning Shot:** Decline due to high initiative.
 - **Soldier's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
 - **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine:** On turn #1, Stride and [vitality lash](#) the Corpse Fleet infantry to exploit vitality weakness.
 - **Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** The gremlins bring the fighter to low Hit Points with [thunderstrikes](#), but it is nothing that the mystic cannot patch up. The party simply brute-forces the combat.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Shortbow Ranger](#)):** Same as the guisarme iteration, though again, a little slower due to lacking the raw damage from Strength.
- The envoy might have had trouble had we not allowed laser rifles to be [mechanically adjusted into "ballistic rifles"](#) with the analog trait.

1st-Level: Encounter #3, 160 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** 1st-level [cybernetic zombie](#), 40 XP each × 2 = 80 XP total; 3rd-level [Aeon Guard soldier](#), 80 XP.
 - **Initiative Results:** Party except for soldier, Aeon Guard, right zombie, soldier, left zombie.
 - **Soldier's Warning Shot:** Impossible due to no enemies in line of sight.
 - **Soldier's Deviation from Usual Routine (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** None.
 - **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine:** On turn #1, cast [runic weapon](#) on the [fighter/ranger]'s weapon and then Interact to open a door.
 - **Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** None.
 - **Soldier and Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine (with [Shortbow Ranger](#)):** On turn #1, drops firearm, Interacts to draw backup slashing weapon, and Strides. On subsequent turns, simply Strike at the zombies.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** The fighter, buffed up with [runic weapon](#), crits and one-shots each zombie by triggering their slashing weakness, and is once again only mildly inconvenienced by the subsequent explosions. The soldier and the envoy make no meaningful difference. The Aeon Guard soldier's offense was so feeble, even on a critical hit, that they were a non-issue.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Shortbow Ranger](#)):** Due to lacking a guisarme fighter's slashing damage, the soldier and the envoy take matters into their own hands. They forgo their Get 'Em and Area Fire gimmicks in favor of simply slashing apart the zombies, triggering weakness 10. The zombies get lucky and, despite the mystic's healing, force the envoy to [spend a Hero Point to stay alive](#) instead of [reaching dying 4](#). Fortunately, the soldier and the [runic weapon](#)'d ranger finish off the zombies, reducing the enemy side to just the one underpowered Aeon Guard. Cleaning up is trivial from this point: and this is against an enemy two levels higher and with one party member unconscious!

1st-Level: Encounter #4 (End of Workday), 160 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** 3rd-level [tashtari](#), 80 XP each × 2 = 160 XP total.
 - **Initiative Results:** Mystic, right tashtari, envoy, [fighter/ranger], left tashtari, soldier.
 - **Soldier's Warning Shot:** Impossible due to no enemies in line of sight.
 - **Soldier's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
 - **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine:** On turn #1, cast [runic weapon](#) on the [fighter/ranger]'s weapon and then Interact to open a door. On turn #2, [heal](#) is used in place of [vitalize](#).
 - **Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None, except that Get 'Em! has to be retried on a failed flat check against concealment.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** Given that tashtaris are not particularly strong for 3rd-level creatures, and that persistent fire damage does not stack, I think that the party had solid odds in this combat. Unfortunately, a 1st-level party facing an extreme-difficulty encounter is often at the mercy of the dice regardless. In this case, the party makes good progress and brings a tashtari down to 2 Hit Points, only for people to fail their saving throws against a Bristle Flash (with the envoy critically failing), and for the PCs to suddenly start rolling an ungodly string of 1s, 2s, 3s, and 4s on their flat checks against concealment. The two tashtaris roll very well and deal more damage than the mystic could heal up. **The party loses.**
- **Course of the Battle (with [Shortbow Ranger](#)):** This was a disaster for the party. Both tashtaris roll fantastically well, landing critical hits on both the ranger and the mystic, [also doubling persistent damage](#). The ranger is knocked out by persistent damage, while the mystic is instantly dropped by a high damage roll. **There is no way for the party to bounce back from such a tragedy.** Even if the tashtaris had rolled worse, I am fairly confident that the shortbow ranger would have struggled to contribute as much as their guisarme fighter counterpart, simply due to the shortbow's lower damage values.

- The envoy might have had even more trouble had we not allowed laser rifles to be [mechanically adjusted into "ballistic rifles."](#)

5th-Level: Encounter #1 (Start of Workday), 80 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** 3rd-level [Aeon Guard soldier](#), 20 XP each × 2 = 40 XP total; 5th-level [glass serpent](#) ([hotfix](#)), 40 XP.
 - The Aeon Guard soldiers are even more worthless than before due to fire resistance.
 - The GM plays the glass serpent "improperly," refusing to [Swallow Whole](#).
 - **Initiative Results:** Mystic, envoy, fighter, glass serpent, soldier, Aeon Guards.
 - **Soldier's Warning Shot:** Impossible due to no enemies in sight.
 - **Soldier's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
 - **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine:** On turn #1, practically metagame, cast [see the unseen](#), and [Point Out](#). On turn #2, cast [revealing light](#) and Transfer Vitality.
 - **Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None, except that Get 'Em! has to be retried on a failed flat check against hidden or concealment.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** Simply to stand a fighting chance against the glass serpent, the mystic metagames, immediately assumes that there is an invisible enemy present, casts [see the unseen](#), and then [Points Out](#). (I wanted to conserve 2nd-level spell slots, so I elected against casting [revealing light](#).) The party spends a full three rounds taking down the glass serpent, and even then, the mystic taxed their [vitalizes](#) and their vitality pool just to keep up with the serpent's sheer damage output.

- **Course of the Battle (with [Ranged Fighter](#)):** Just as the first battle, except slower due to the ranged fighter's weaker damage output. The Aeon Guard soldiers land two critical hits on the mystic, but between the enemy's low baseline damage and the party's fire resistance, the mystic takes only ~10 damage from the Aeon Guard.

- It bears repeating that the mystic essentially had to metagame their first round.

5th-Level: Encounter #2, 120 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** 1st-level [Corpse Fleet infantry](#), 10 XP each × 6 = 60 XP total; 4th-level [Corpse Fleet officer](#), 30 XP each × 2 = 60 XP total.
- The Corpse Fleet officers' ranged attacks are neutered by fire resistance.
- **Initiative Results:** Entire party, then enemies.
- **Soldier's Warning Shot:** Decline due to high initiative.
- **Soldier's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
- **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine:** On turn #1, Stride and then [fire ray](#).
- **Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.

- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** The party prioritizes the infantry, which they crit and mow down with ease. The enemies roll poorly, allowing a mostly unscathed party to confront the two remaining officers. The fighter has some trouble due to resist 5 slashing, but ultimately, the officers pose little threat by this point: their ranged attacks are infeasible due to fire damage, and Unrelenting Flurry would provoke a [Reactive Strike](#) from the fighter.

- **Course of the Battle (with [Ranged Fighter](#)):** Same as before, except that the Corpse Fleet infantry land many more hits. Unfortunately for the undead, their damage output is insufficient to pose a meaningful threat, once again leaving the party face-to-face with two doomed officers. While the officers no longer have to worry about Unrelenting Flurry provoking any Reactive Strikes, the ranged fighter's "ballistic rifle" bypasses their resistances.

- The envoy and the ranged fighter may have had trouble against the officers had we not allowed laser rifles to be [mechanically adjusted into "ballistic rifles."](#)

5th-Level: Encounter #3, 120 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** 3rd-level [tashtari](#), 20 XP each × 4 = 80 XP total; 5th-level [tashtari alpha](#), 40 XP
- Ranged attacks are neutered by fire resistance, forcing melee Strikes instead, potentially with [Knockdown](#).
- Black on the map indicates solid barriers.
- **Initiative Results:** Envoy, fighter, bottom left tashtari, soldier, mystic, other enemies.
- **Soldier's Warning Shot:** Bottom left tashtari.
- **Soldier's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
- **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine:** On turn #1, Stride and then [void warp](#).
- **Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.

- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** The party, spearheaded by the fighter, alpha-strikes the alpha before its first turn. The wolves fight back with Bristle Flashes, melee Strikes, and [Knockdown](#); the PCs succeed on their Fortitude saves, and the mystic heals up whatever damage gets through. Even if the party did not have fire resistance, the tashtaris would have had problems synergizing with one another due to persistent fire damage not stacking. I have trouble envisioning a scenario in which the tashtaris could have achieved victory here.

- **Course of the Battle (with [Ranged Fighter](#)):** Practically the same outcome as above, aided by some lucky critical hits during the fighter's first turn.

- The envoy and the ranged fighter would have definitely encountered trouble had we not allowed laser rifles to be [mechanically adjusted into "ballistic rifles"](#) with the analog trait.

5th-Level: Encounter #4 (End of Workday), 80 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** 5th-level [glass serpent \(hotfix\)](#), 40 XP each × 2 = 80 XP total.
- The GM plays the glass serpents "improperly," refusing to [Swallow Whole](#).
- **Initiative Results:** Mystic, envoy, serpents, soldier, fighter.
- **Soldier's Warning Shot:** Impossible due to no enemies in sight.
- **Soldier's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
- **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine:** On turn #1, practically metagame, cast [see the unseen](#), and Point Out. On turn #2, cast [revealing light](#) and Transfer Vitality. On turn #3, cast [revealing light](#) again and [shield](#). On turn #4 onwards, 3rd-level [heal](#) is used in place of *vitalize*.
- **Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None, except that Get 'Em! has to be retried on a failed flat check against hidden or concealment.

- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** During round #1, there is little for the party to do except roll flat checks against hidden and roll for the best. The party has good rolls during this round, while the serpents roll poorly. Even then, the combat drags out, and it gets close. If the party had rolled worse during the first round, or if the snakes had rolled better, then the party may have lost. The glass serpent is a crazily strong enemy.

- **Course of the Battle (with [Ranged Fighter](#)):** The same as the guisarme iteration, except that the envoy rolls tremendously well during the first and second rounds, defeating one serpent before its second turn. Even so, the remaining serpent very nearly knocks out the mystic before the mystic's third turn, which would have kept the serpent permanently invisible (and thus doomed the remaining party).

- It once again bears repeating that the mystic essentially had to metagame their first round, and even then, the victories were by a hair's margin.

5th-Level: Encounter #5 (Start of Workday), 120 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** 5th-level [nihili](#), 40 XP each × 3 = 120 XP total.
- The nihilis' ranged attacks are neutered by fire resistance.
- **Initiative Results:** Envoy, soldier, fighter, middle and right nihilis, mystic, left nihili.

- **Soldier's Warning Shot:** Decline due to high initiative.
 - **Soldier's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
 - **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine:** Due to the nihilis not outputting enough damage to warrant healing, on turn #1, Stride and then [fire ray](#).
 - **Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** The nihilis' ranged attacks are countered by fire resistance, and [Decompressing Gaze tends to be a poor use of two actions](#). Thus do the nihilis elect to fall back on melee Strikes, with the occasional Gravity Grab (e.g. to bypass [Reactive Strike](#)). The nihilis stand no chance, in part due to their low AC, and are rapidly torn apart by multiple hits and criticals from the party.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Ranged Fighter](#)):** Approximately the same as the guisarme version, except with the fighter dealing somewhat less damage, and with the fighter getting pulled into a flank with Gravity Grab. Even the aforementioned flank does not threaten the fighter that much.

5th-Level: Encounter #6, 120 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** 3rd-level [emganat](#), 20 XP each × 3 = 60 XP total; 6th-level [bastorox](#), 60 XP.
 - The emganats start Burrowing, and the bastorox starts with its shield lowered.
 - The GM plays the emganats "improperly," refusing to activate Burrowing Reveal.
 - **Initiative Results:** Envoy, fighter, bastorox, bottom emganat, soldier, mystic, remaining emganats.
 - **Soldier's Warning Shot:** On bastorox.
 - **Soldier's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None, but drops stellar cannon, draws rifle, and Readies with it once the slog begins.
 - **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None, but starts Readying with pistol once the slog begins.
 - **Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None, but starts Readying with rifle once the slog begins.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** The party focuses down the bastorox, brute-forcing through its shield and ensuring that the kucharn never gets a second turn. Naturally, the bastorox and its electricity line rough up the PCs in the process, but the mystic patches people up. From there, the slog begins. The party Readies ranged weapons to play *Whac-A-Mole*. It is grueling, but the emganats' damage output cannot outpace the mystic's healing (particularly since the vitality network slowly regenerates), and so the party wins **eventually**.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Ranged Fighter](#)):** Roughly the same as the guisarme version, helped by the ranged fighter landing some fortunate critical hits. This is, incidentally, the **one** battle wherein the guisarme fighter is outdone by their ranged counterpart: the ranged fighter is obviously better at playing *Whac-A-Mole* with the emganats.

5th-Level: Encounter #7, 160 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** 5th-level [nihili](#), 40 XP each × 2 = 80 XP; 7th-level [bastorox](#) with the [elite](#) adjustment, 80 XP.
 - The bastorox starts with its shield lowered.
 - The nihilis' ranged attacks are neutered by fire resistance.
 - **Initiative Results:** Bastorox, envoy, soldier, fighter, mystic, nihilis.
 - **Soldier's Warning Shot:** On bastorox.
 - **Soldier's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
 - **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
 - **Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine:** None.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#)):** Warning Shot successfully hinders the bastorox's approach, due to its Speed having been lowered to 15. The party falls back on its same old, same old routines, focusing fire on the bastorox until it dies. The mystic's top-quality healing keeps everyone patched up, and the nihilis flail away in melee only to be critted down.
- **Course of the Battle (with [Ranged Fighter](#)):** This time, the party starts further away from the bastorox. The kucharn finds it even harder to close the distance and perform offensive actions upon the PCs. The ranged fighter's lower damage output (compared to the guisarme fighter, that is) becomes a bit of a liability, and the bastorox stays up longer than expected. The kucharn drops the fighter drops to low Hit Points, the nihilis try and fail to make the mystic suffocate (middling DCs, two failed saves necessary), and the mystic patches the fighter right back up. The party finishes off the bastorox and mops up the nihilis in short order.

5th-Level: Encounter #8 (End of Workday), 120 XP

- **Enemy Composition:** 4th-level [crest-eater](#), 30 XP each × 4 = 120 XP total.
 - **Initiative Results (Attempt #1):** Three crest-eaters on the right, envoy, fighter, crest-eater on the left, mystic, soldier.
 - **Initiative Results (Attempt #2):** Envoy, soldier, fighter, three crest-eaters on the right, mystic, crest-eater on the left.
 - **Soldier's Warning Shot:** On rightmost crest-eater to impede its approach.
 - **Soldier's Deviation from Usual Routine:** No change, down to a willingness to provoke [Reactive Strikes](#); better for the soldier to take them than the mystic. Naturally, the GM occasionally declines to take a Reactive Strike against the soldier, so as to save it for the mystic, the party's linchpin for this battle.
 - **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine (with [Guisarme Fighter](#), Attempts #1 and #2, and with [Ranged Fighter](#), Attempt #1):** On turn #1, Stride while provoking Reactive Strikes, then *calm* once outside of the reach of any crest-eaters.
 - **Mystic's Deviation from Usual Routine (with [Ranged Fighter](#), Attempt #2):** On turn #1, Transfer Vitality to self and 3rd-level [heal](#), due to the GM deliberately spreading out crest-eaters to avoid a calm, thereby forcing the party to defeat the enemies manually.
 - **Envoy's Deviation from Usual Routine:** No change, down to a willingness to provoke Reactive Strikes, except that the envoy's turn is occasionally three Demoralizes against three separate crest-eaters, so as to lower their saving throws against [calm](#).
- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#), Attempt #1):** The unexpectedly poor initiative rolls make everything rapidly fall apart. The crest-eaters simply surround the party and beat everyone to a pulp. The mystic tries to salvage the situation with a [calm](#), which results in one critical failure... and three successes from the other crest-eaters. Early into round #2, the fighter is unconscious, and the other PCs are badly injured due to Reactive Strikes. **There is simply no way for the party to win by this point.**

Despite the mystic's best efforts, early into round #2, the fighter is unconscious, and the other PCs are badly injured due to Reactive Strikes. The successful or un-calmed with the fighter getting knocked unconscious early into round #2, despite the mystic's best efforts.

- **Course of the Battle (with [Guisarme Fighter](#), Attempt #2):** Thanks to a decidedly more favorable initiative outcome and some aggressive Hero Point expenditures, the party successfully alpha-strikes down a single crest-eater, with the guisarme fighter inflicting by far the largest share of the damage. The mystic casts *calm* on the remaining three crest-eaters, exploiting their low Will, and turns up two failures and a critical failure. The situation is thusly brought under control, though the fighter and the mystic did most of the work.

- **Course of the Battle (with [Ranged Fighter](#), Attempt #1):** The positioning this time around is rather funky, because the GM and I had agreed on a strategy to prevent the crest-eaters from Striking the mystic **too** much. It works; the mystic survives the initial onslaught, the three damage-dealers just barely eliminate one crest-eater, and the mystic lands three failures on *calm* against the crest-eaters' low Will.

- **Course of the Battle (with [Ranged Fighter](#), Attempt #2):** This time around, the GM has the crest-eaters maneuver themselves such that only two of them can be caught in a *calm* at a time. (This is bad, because if even a single crest-eater escapes being *calmed*, then it can break the others free simply by using [Demoralize](#) on them.) Thus, the party has to defeat the crest-eaters fair and square. Thanks to good initiative, a blocking formation to protect the mystic, usage of the fighter's [healer's gloves](#), a great deal of lucky critical hits from the party, several flubbed Strikes from the crest-eaters, and the GM awkwardly positioning the crest-eaters to avoid a mass *calm*, the bloodied and bruised party ekes out a victory against these dreadful beasts.

Things to Watch Out for in the Playtest Proper

The "Ranged Meta"

- Given how dominant Strength melee is at the lowest of levels, will Paizo find a way to make low-level ranged damage more competitive with Strength melee?
- Will Paizo find a way to make the combination of [Sudden Charge](#) (or simply high Speed), [Reactive Strike](#), and reach less oppressive towards ranged characters? Will *Starfinder* 2e classes have native access to Sudden Charge and/or Reactive Strike to begin with?
- Will Paizo find a way to make [Take Cover](#) more appealing? **Remember that it is virtually impossible to shoot around a corner without your own attacks being degraded by the cover rules (short of GM discretion and potentially spending another action)!**
- Will Paizo be more generous with ranged weapons' range increments? The *Second Contact* laser rifle boasting range increment 100 feet seems roughly fine, but other firearms appear to cap out at range increment 60 feet. An autotarget rifle having range increment 40 feet is particularly awkward.
- Will Paizo standardize the scaling of range increments and effective-number-of-shots-before-a-reload? (On a smaller note, will Paizo still charge the weapon's base price when buying higher-level weapons?)
- What will Paizo do about reloading, especially to assuage GMs who fear having to track ammunition across multiple enemies?
- Will Paizo revise its logistics for commissioning cartography in Adventure Paths, creating much larger maps? (For example, the final act of *Against the Aeon Throne* takes place in what amounts to [a series of interconnected broom closets](#), simply due to the logistics of fitting it all into the book.)

Fire Resistance

- Will Paizo crack down on access to fire resistance? It can trivialize many monsters reliant on lasers.

Classes and Class Ambiguities

- Will Paizo make the soldier and the envoy less rigid in their action economies, perhaps to the extent where these classes might even [Take Cover](#)?
- Will Paizo clarify precisely how the soldier's primary target functions?
- Will Paizo make armor storm and close quarters on par with bombard?
- Will Paizo let higher-level soldiers scale up the Speed reduction of the suppressed condition?
- Will Paizo make the rhythm connection on par with the healing connection?
- Will Paizo clarify whether or not the Strike that activates Get 'Em's lead by example is eligible for the additional damage?
- Will Paizo let the envoy's personal damage scale more aptly, instead of being respectable at the lowest of levels only to quickly drop off?
- Will Paizo resist the temptation to make melee class builds overwhelmingly strong, in a misguided effort to make them relevant in the "ranged meta"?

Monsters

- Will Paizo clarify Area Fire and Automatic Fire DCs on monsters and NPCs?
- Will Paizo have a decent spread of peak Fortitude, peak Reflex, and peak Will enemies, instead of gravitating towards peak Reflex? A soldier would find it rather irritating to be constantly faced with peak Reflex enemies.
- Will Paizo make ranged enemies decently strong and versatile, like the [Corpse Fleet officer](#), as opposed to woefully weak, like the [Aeon Guard soldier](#)?
- Will the 1st-level [elf ranger](#) from the *Monster Core* still be a better basis for a generic grunt with an assault rifle than actual *Starfinder* 2e enemies?
- Will Paizo find a way to ensure that monsters' optimal tactics are how monsters are "supposed" to operate in their lore? For example, [tashtar](#) are supposed to be more effective in a pack instead of overlapping on persistent fire damage, [emganats](#) are supposed to pop out of the ground rather than cheese the Burrow mechanics, [glass serpents](#) are supposed [Swallow Whole](#) and not exploit the invisibility and [Sneak](#) mechanics, etc.
- Will Paizo find a way to make the suffocation rules more broadly applicable and less all-or-nothing in combat? This matters for the [nihili](#).
- Will Paizo resist the temptation to make melee **monsters** overwhelmingly strong, in a misguided effort to make them relevant in the "ranged meta"? Judging from the [glass serpent](#) (even post-[hotfix](#)) and the [crest-eater](#), Paizo seems to be veering towards this temptation.