

ALL TOMORROW'S ZOMBIES



A Sci-Fi Sourcebook

All Flesh Must Be Eaten

**"My God, these things are dead!
They're already dead!"**

Noise erupted directly into Jamie's brain from every channel of her transmitter — a cacophony of blaster fire squeals, frantic cries of terror, and inhuman groans. She screamed one name after another into her comlink, to no avail. Suddenly, just behind, a wet smack sounded. It was right on top of her . . .

Welcome to flesh-eating sci-fi. It doesn't get more intense than this!

All Tomorrow's Zombies is a supplement for the All Flesh Must Be Eaten roleplaying game, adding the undead to various styles of science fiction, and featuring the most dangerous zombies ever! In it, you'll find:

- Guidelines for creating alien races.
- New skills tailored for sci-fi play.
- Rules for cybernetics, biotechnology, nanotechnology, and robotics.
 - New zombie Aspects.
 - Streamlined psionics rules.
- New equipment and weapons, from energy swords, blasters and pulse rifles to motion trackers and environmental suits.
- Complete starship rules, including building ships and expanded vehicle combat rules.
 - Rules for cyberjacking and net running.
 - Environmental rules.
- Complete guidelines for structuring a sci-fi campaign.
 - Seven complete Deadworlds, ready to play or for use as examples in your own work.



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ALL TOMORROW'S ZOMBIES



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Based on the Original Concept by

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Reader discretion is advised.

Comments and questions can be directed via the Internet at www.allflesh.com, via e-mail at edenprod@aol.com or via letter with a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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ZOMBIES

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CHAPTER ONE





INTRODUCTION

All Flesh Must Be Eaten™

They clung together, and watched the sun rise beneath their feet.

There was soft music playing—Kate Gibson, Michelson thought—and the vast room was dim. As the first real arc of sun appeared, diffusing crazily through the Earth's atmosphere, the bay doors on which they were standing polarized automatically, cutting the glare. It was very beautiful, and even the Earth looked clean from this distance, all primary blues and greens and streaks of white cloud tinted with crimson and gold.

Sakura moaned softly in Michelson's arms as he kissed her forehead, feeling the slickness like a sheen of sweat. "It won't be long," he murmured. "We'll be a shooting star."

They swayed together, and he waited for the end.

Then the music stopped, and LANA's voice sounded clearly around them. "Sorry guys, but we have a problem."

* * *

Taan and Vas had been playing poker by the inner door. Taan was still re-buttoning his shirt as Michelson jogged up, Sakura in tow.

"Can't hear any of the bastards," Vas reported, more out of protocol than to convey any useful information. No noise softer than a full brass band would get through these bulkheads.

"How many are there between us and the bridge?" Karim asked, the last to arrive. He had been praying, no doubt. Getting a bead on Mecca, as he'd once described it.

"They are wandering erratically, but based on their previous behavior and your usual speed, twenty-four will be able to attack you, including seven that are currently on the bridge," LANA said.

Taan was already shaking his head. "No way, no how," he said. "We got three guns, but we can't guarantee a kill in less than," he shrugged, "fifteen seconds maybe. We'll be dead before we got a quarter way there."

Vas held up a frag grenade. "Found this somewhere, too," she said, not sounding at all innocent. "But it'd probably just attract more of 'em."

Karim spoke again. "If we take them on one at a time... separate them somehow. LANA, can you just open some doors, wait till the cats go through and isolate them from our route." He called the zombies "cats," after Schrödinger—both alive nor dead.

"No can. It'd work, but take far too long." LANA was sounding apologetic, which was a bad sign. She was usually more of a smartass than Karim was. "We have less than seventeen minutes before the Narcissus hits atmosphere."

They took that in. "But not hard enough to wipe out the contagion?" Michelson said, trying to think.

"No. Up to 30% of the pathological agent on board will survive reentry. I have no data to calculate its behavior after the ship breaks up, but judging by its resilience in the lab, I think we're about to spray zombie juice over a significant portion of the Americas."

Michelson slammed his pistol into the door, hard. "So, just take us in more steeply. Bigger fireball, less scatter, it'll kill everything down to the microbes. Override your safety limits and fry this mother."

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Dave."

He laughed, in spite of himself. Freaking smartass computers.

* * *

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The Earth was larger now, a great silhouette filling up half the area of semi-transparency beneath them. The Narcissus' bay was empty. There had been a smaller ship in here earlier, the shuttle Valeria, but it had left in a hurry. In theory that had been a mutinous act, but after hearing the screams that had come over the radio, he could feel no anger towards the mutineers. It had been a bad seven hours all over. And if they didn't do something soon, it might get a lot worse for a lot more people. "You've told all this to LAX?" Michelson asked.

"Yes, David. They were the ones who worked out the pathogen survival percentages. We have an escort, but shooting us down now will only break the ship up sooner, spreading the debris wider. I can patch you through to someone if you want."

He waved his hand impatiently at the suggestion. He had Sakura and the remains of the crew. That was all he wanted.

"OK," he said. "You can't reprogram your course without human intervention, so we have to get to the bridge. What can you do?"

The computer was mercifully silent. She could recognize a rhetorical question. Seconds ticked by. "Thirteen minutes," she eventually said.

"I've got it," said Karim, and bounced slightly up and down on the spot. Michelson and Taan stared at him blankly (and Sakura did not react at all). It was Vas who understood first. "Hell yeah," she said. "Taan baby, me and Mike go skating. Karim can stay here with the... with Sakura." This from the woman who had suggested not long ago that they "shoot the bitch". Her tone implied she hadn't really changed her mind.

But it was the plan, and there was no time for anything else. Michelson nodded and held Sakura to him, hard, hoping she could feel his goodbye through the silver corona that twisted and flowed over and beneath her skin. He directed her unresisting body towards Karim. "Let's do it. LANA, open the door and cut gravity... two... one..."

The three of them rocketed into the short corridor in almost perfect g-skate formation. They weren't near professional standard, but they'd done enough time in the Titan circuits to launch smoothly. When they hit the surface—which had been a ceiling moments before—they twisted expertly, so instead of rebounding back into the middle of the corridor they slid down instead. There were three zombies waiting for them (one had been Regan Pickering, the best damn independent xenobiologist in the system, using the Narcissus as a way home), and all three were flailing about comically. Whatever residue of human instinct remained in the desiccated creatures, micro-gravity coordination was not part of the package. They slipped past the three, and Vas laughed maniacally, spraying flechettes from her pistol upwards (by convention, the orientation of all g-skate circuits was down towards the finish line).

"Stow it," Michelson ordered, and Vas stopped firing. The tiny slivers of metal played hell with human anatomy, but you had to pump an awful lot into a zombie before it even noticed.

"Two zombies," said LANA calmly, as they fell into a T-junction. Taan and Vas actually tried a combo-move to land properly, but there was not enough room, and they landed badly. It didn't matter. Michelson avoided the brief sprawl, and then they were up again. One of the zombies they'd been warned about was floating harmlessly away from any surface. The other must have got some brief purchase, because it was turning slow somersaults towards them, flailing madly. Getting very close. They tried to judge an opening to get past it, then Michelson shouted an order, and they simply jumped up out of its way.

"That bastard owes me money," Vas said, as they balanced in a horizontal doorway, and watched the thrashing corpse spin slowly by.

Michelson motioned, and they continued on.

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Last corridor. It was a bad one. "Seven," LANA reported. "And ticks are tocking."

"Seven?" Taan said in disgust.

"Are those the ones that were on the Bridge?" Michelson asked.

"A bit of both. They're getting closer."

They stuck their head round the corner. There were enough of the dead men and women that they blocked the corridor, and the combination of them pushing against the walls was propelling them along in a strange wave-like fashion. It was not fast, but had a strange sense of purpose.

"Vas, first door, go now."

The woman twisted and launched herself with a sudden grace that was breathtaking. It was almost fifty feet, and the pack immediately expanded out, as if to catch her in a net, but she had their measure. A zombie on the very edge of them grappled her briefly, but she used it to make that final turn and disappear from sight.

The gestalt was turning now, following Vas, and its control and speed was obvious. It had achieved enough group intelligence to negotiate the new conditions—and to be fooled by a decoy. This might work. Michelson suddenly hoped there weren't more of them down that corridor.

The last few disappeared, and the two men launched themselves down the corridor, angling straight for the opening at the end. Almost simultaneously the dull roar of a frag grenade went off and a wash of blood and body parts blew out the side corridor where Vas had disappeared.

It looked like the zombies in the back of the pack had been disintegrated. A huge splash of bodily remains hit the back wall, and more blood followed, already slowing, forming into floating spheres that filled the corridor like a curtain. The two men screamed at they headed towards that

poisoned flow, with nothing to push against to stop their movement. "Gravity!" Michelson yelled, and suddenly they were in Earth normal again and down was in a different direction, and they were rolling.

Michelson stopped himself, scrambling backwards to avoid the splash from all that blood hitting the floor. Taan kept right on going, into the mess, through it. He didn't stop screaming, and Michelson saw the blood eating into his skin like acid.

He wanted to turn back then, or just stop and wait those few more minutes. He was very tired, and he didn't care about the Earth. What had the planet ever done for him, except drive him away? Out to the emptiness, out to witness slow death, and violent death, and now death by horrors. He just wanted to crawl away into Sakura's arms, safe from the screaming.

"Stop it," he said, and it stopped.

He looked up into the silence. Taan was still yelling, still flailing, but Michelson couldn't hear a thing. He tapped the floor, to prove he wasn't deaf. "I've phased out the sound waves," said LANA conversationally. "There's less than five minutes left, so I suggest you stop screwing about."

He nodded wearily, and put a quick burst of flechette's through Taan's brain. The soldier collapsed like lead.

He jumped, and as he did so gravity disappeared again, and he sailed past the now rising slick of blood and flesh, the twitching body of Taan, and right through (down) into the bridge.

"Two zombies," said LANA.

"I'm sorry, David. I... just can't."

The Bridge was a large room, as were most of those throughout the Narcissus. With a cargo

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capacity of however many tens of thousands of tons, and no need for aerodynamics, you didn't need to skimp on space. Compared to the vista surrounding the ship—the slowly lightening Earth under a radiant sun, the silver darts of the trans-jets keeping pace with their fatal descent—it all seemed somewhat cramped. David Michelson ignored it all, as he ignored the pair of corpses sprawled unmoving beside him, along with his pistol. He just stared at the console, blinking. His left hand hurt like crazy, but he tried to put the pain aside. He rubbed fitfully at the bite mark, and started the sequence again.

"You have been classified as an infected individual with a high probability of cognitive impairment. I do not have authorization to accept your orders."

"You accepted Sakura's. That's why we're on this half-baked suicide mission to start with." The pain was spreading now, up his arm.

"She was Captain, and the risk was not yet fully identified."

"Half-baked," he said. "That's pretty funny. Considering. Where is Sakura-sama?"

"Here," said a voice from behind him.

Michelson turned to face his lover and Captain. She looked bad. Beneath the silvery glow of the field that surrounded her, her flesh was melting away to sinew, as with all the other zombies on board.

"I killed Karim," she said. "I wanted to eat him, but I came here first. He was right, in the end. The field didn't stop the infection after all, just slowed it." She was walking with a stagger, one arm outstretched, and both hands clenching and unclenching erratically. The ripples across the corona seemed to match the rhythm of her fists. "Slowed it enough to... talk. If that's the word. It's through the blood-brain barrier. It has shown me strange and wonderful things."

"Thirty seconds," said LANA softly.

Sakura smiled, a bit of the old Captain beneath

the rictus. "LAX, you're listening in, aren't you? You have authority to transfer captainship of the Narcissus to an entity that passes all criteria of Stage 4 intelligence. Do it now."

There was only silence. Sakura shuffled closer, arm reaching higher, to the level of his eyes.

"Done," reported the familiar voice of LAX command. Sakura jumped forward, Michelson yelled, but the woman was diving at the controls, her hands moving through familiar sequences in a blur. "Do it," she shouted. "Fry us all."

And the ship started shuddering, as engines fired with explosive force.

They clung together, watching the vista disintegrate beneath a sheen of superheated air.

"Stupid computer," said Sakura, in a faint, exhausted whisper. "It's only a virus. Stage 4 intelligence my ass."

Michelson only clung to her. The pain—the virus—was almost all of him now. It didn't seem to matter. He leaned forward to kiss his lover one final time, and even he could not tell if it became a bite, as the ship melted around them.

INTRODUCTION

“To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death. I became acquainted with the science of anatomy, but this was not sufficient; I must also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body... I paused, examining and analyzing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me.”

—Dr. Victor Frankenstein

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was published in 1818, and is recognized by many as the first science fiction novel. The story tells how Doctor Frankenstein gives life to a creature stitched together from the dead, and is punished for his sins with torment and death. Technology has come a long way in the last 200 years. We have taken organs from the deceased and given them to the living, mapped out the blueprint of creation, swapped genes between species and started cloning pets.

Beyond that, science has transformed our lives and opened up the world. We can now travel across the planet in only a day or two, and communicate effortlessly continent to continent (without which, this book could not have been written). We can map every foot of coastline from orbital satellites, and record the echoes of the universe's creation. For all these wonders, there are dangers as well—weapons that can rip apart the globe, new diseases and new prospects of tyranny.

And don't forget the zombies.

Welcome to *All Tomorrow's Zombies*, the science fiction source book for **All Flesh Must Be Eaten**. Here you'll find rules for high adventure among the stars, and grimy horror in the cyberpunk ghettos. Aliens, spaceships, nanobots and digital landscapes will be laid out before you, and it wouldn't be sci-fi without some technobabble to explain away those hordes of undead.

Like Mary Shelley, we're going to look at what might soon be possible, and imagine terrible things

happening. It's not that we're anti-science, it's just that in the midst of disaster there is drama and excitement. That's our light in this darkness.

But even if we were trying to warn you of the dangers ahead, it wouldn't do any good. Scientific progress is only getting faster, as we try to manipulate atoms and rebalance ecosystems. For all our gadgetry and insight, we haven't yet changed the nature of humanity—but even that might not be far away. Maybe for a new generation, the mindless, shambling horde will be us.

Chapter Summary

Chapter One: Introduction includes the fiction piece preceding and these opening remarks.

Chapter Two: Starship Shamblers gives new rules for character creation, including new skills, Qualities and Drawbacks, and body modification technology like cyberware and nanotech. There are also new weapons, expanded rules for hostile conditions, a detailed starship creation system, and guidelines for designing sci-fi games.

Chapter Three: The Cybered Dead presents a “classic” cyberpunk Deadworld, then slaps a Mad Max-style post-apocalyptic landscape between the megacorporate-controlled cities. It's designed as the “kitchen sink” chapter, making the majority of the new rules available in one setting.

Chapter Four: The Cycle of Death looks at a world transformed by nano-technology, the fall of nations and a resurgence of religion throughout pub-

lic life. Great power and prosperity is available to most people, but there is also the risk of great danger if things go wrong—as they inevitably do.

Chapter Five: Cyber Marines and Death Scenes is *Aliens* meets *Resident Evil*. The Cast is sent to investigate the eerie radio silence emanating from a colony on a remote world. What they find when they arrive will send them spiraling into a waking nightmare beyond their wildest fears.

Chapter Six: Virtual Armageddon takes the action inside the computer. In the digital realm of Neutopia there is unlimited potential, but even here a terrifying species of zombie is threatening disaster. The chapter includes rules for uploading characters.

Chapter Seven: Death of the Alliance looks at the classic space opera genre, where science isn't nearly as important as laser swords, starfighters, and big explosions. The Twin Empires have fallen into chaos. For years the war remained a stalemate, until on a night that would forever change the fate of the galaxy, a mysterious and unkillable army swept through Thraxia and left their Mystic Knights all but extinct . . .

Chapter Eight: Future Shock contains a number of mini-campaigns that can be expanded upon by creative ZMs, or used for smaller, more focused games.

How to Use All Tomorrow's Zombies

All Tomorrow's Zombies is structured like the rest of the *All Flesh Must be Eaten* supplements. The first two chapters are for both players and Zombie Masters, giving them new options and rules to expand the horizons of their game. Chapters Three through Seven are full size Deadworlds that provide different settings for running sci-fi adventures. Lastly, chapter Eight provides a few additional settings that can be fully fleshed out if desired. Some of the



material in these last six chapters is good background for everyone in the game, but there are also many potential spoilers that the Zombie Master may want to keep secret. Players should check with their ZM before taking a peek.

Conventions

As with every *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* sourcebook, *All Tomorrow's Zombies* uses the following conventions.

Text Conventions

This book uses different graphic features to identify the type of information presented. This text is “standard text,” and it is used for general explanations.

Certain text is set off from the standard text in this manner. This is sidebar text and it contains additional, but tangential information, or supplemental charts and tables.

Other text is set apart in this way. It details Supporting Cast or Adversaries that may be used in Stories at the Zombie Master's discretion.

Dice Notations

This book uses several different dice notations. D12, D10, D8, D6, and D4 mean a twelve-sided die, ten-sided die, an eight-sided die, a six-sided die, and a four-sided die, respectively. A number in parentheses after, or in the middle of, the notation is the average roll. This number is provided for those who want to avoid dice rolling and just use the result. So the notation $d6 \times 4$ (12) means that players who want to skip rolling just use the value 12. Some notations cannot provide a set number because their result depends on a variable factor. For example, D8 (4) \times Strength is used because the Strength value to be plugged into this notation varies depending on who is acting.

Gender

Every roleplaying game faces a decision about third person pronouns and possessives. While the male reference (he, him, his) is customarily used for both male and female, there is no question it is not entirely inclusive. On the other hand, the “he or she” structure is clumsy and unattractive. In an effort to “split the difference,” this book uses male designations for even chapters, and female designations for odd chapters.

Measurements

This book uses U.S. measurements (feet, yards, miles, pounds, etc.). Conversions to metric can be made using the following rough guidelines: miles are multiplied by 1.5 to get kilometers (instead of multiplied by 1.609), meters are equal to yards (instead of 1.094 yards), pounds are halved to get kilograms (instead of multiplied by 0.4536), and so on. If a Zombie Master feels she needs more precision, she should take the U.S. measurements provided and apply more exact formulas.

Source Material

Science fiction is a vast field, so here is just a sampling of inspirational material for your game. These are sci-fi with strong horror overtones (or vice versa), stories that helped inspire the various Deadworlds in this book, or just fine storytelling.

Novels

The Caves of Steel by Isaac Asimov, *Blood Music* and *Queen of Angels* by Greg Bear, *The Demolished Man* by Alfred Bester, *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card, *Prey* by Michael Crichton, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick, the *Gap* series by Stephen Donaldson, *Permutation City* and *Distress* by Greg Egan, *Neuromancer* by William Gibson, the *Deathworld* series by Harry Harrison, *Dune* by Frank Herbert, *The Running Man* by Stephen King, *Sabella* by Tanith Lee, *Terminal Café* by Ian McDonald, *1984* by George Orwell, the *Mars* series by Kim Stanley Robinson, *Hyperion* by Dan Simmons, *Day of the Triffids* by John Wyndham.

Stories and Collections

Nanotech edited by Jack Dann and Gardner Dozois, *Minority Report* by Philip K. Dick, *Our Lady of Chernobyl* by Greg Egan, *Burning Chrome* by William Gibson, “Nightfall” by Isaac Asimov, “I Have No Mouth & I Must Scream” by Harlan Ellison, “The Cold Equations” by Tom Godwin, “The Jaunt” by Stephen King, “On the Far Side of the Cadillac Desert With Dead Folks” by Joe R. Lansdale, “Meathouse Man” by George R. R. Martin.

Comics

The Dark Knight Returns, *Fray*, *Judge Dredd*, *Transmetropolitan*, *Zero Assassin*.

Movies

Alien (Ridley Scott), *Aliens* (James Cameron), *Alien³* (David Fincher), *Astro-Zombies* (Ted V. Mikels), *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott), *The Cell* (Tarsem Singh), *The Chronicles of Riddick* (David Twohy), *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick), *Cube* (Vincenzo Natali), *Dark City* (Alex Proyas), *Day of the Dead* (George Romero), *Ghosts of Mars* (John Carpenter), *Hellbound: Hellraiser II* (Tony Randel), *I, Robot* (Alex Proyas), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978, Philip Kaufman), *Jason X* (James Isaac), *Mad Max* (George Miller), *The Matrix* (the Wachowski Brothers), *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg), *Phantasm* (Don Coscarelli), *Pitch Black* (David Twohy), *Resident Evil* (Paul W.S. Anderson), *The Road Warrior* (George Miller), *Star Trek: First Contact* (Jonathan Frakes), *Star Wars I to VI* (George Lucas, Irvin Kershner and Lawrence Kasdan), *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick), *Terminator 1 and 2* (James Cameron), *Undead* (the Spierig Brothers), *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg), *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg).

TV Shows

Babylon 5, *Battlestar Galactica* (classic and 2004 revival), *Doctor Who*, *Edge of Darkness*, *Firefly*, *Harsh Realm*, *Star Trek* (Original, TNG, DS9, *Voyager*), *Ultraviolet*, *V* (various series), *VR 5*, *The X-Files*.

Non-fiction

The Spike and *The Last Mortal Generation* by Damien Broderick, *Engines of Creation* by K. Eric Drexler.

About the Authors

Jason has been writing stories as long as he can remember, from superheroes to swords and sorcery to space ships to Gothic horror. Telling tales that evoke emotion in other people is his passion. He has been gaming since the age of five, and actually *understanding* role playing games since the age of seven or eight. This is his second full book for Eden Studios, and he looks forward to future endeavors. He is 30 years old and lives in Pittsburgh, PA with his girlfriend and their crazy cat, Seamus. His website can be found at www.grey-elf.com

David is a mathematician by training, and a computer programmer by vocation. By night, he writes all sorts of crazy things, including roleplaying games about demons, Angel, and now zombies. He has also written extensively on the history of horror literature, and has had a number of short stories published. This year sees the publication of his first (co-written) novel, *Prismatic*, under the pseudonym Edwina Grey. He lives in Sydney with fellow Eden author Kyla Ward. Check out www.tabula-rasa.info for more.

CHAPTER TWO





STARSHIP SHAMBLERS

"There are five more of them out there!" Alexis shouted.

"Relax, we got it covered," Max called from his gun pod. One, two, three, BLAM! Another fighter down.

"Now there's four!" Jimmy quipped.

"Don't get cocky," Max snapped. "Just shoot."

Four snub fighters, but fast and deadly snub fighters with zombies wired directly into their computers, screamed around Max's freighter like gnats, except that these gnats had a nasty sting. The ship rocked with laser fire for the fifty-third time (Max was counting), and he thanked any gods listening that these things didn't have room for ordinance. A couple missiles could've finished them off right quick.

"Shields are down to 20%," Alexis reported.

"Then I guess we'd better knock 'em out fast, shouldn't we?" Max was quickly getting into a very bad mood.

Two explosions rocked the ship from the port side.

"Take that, you undead sons-of-bitches!" Jimmy had nailed two fighters with one barrage of fire from his cannon. Max had to give it to him, the kid had talent.

In another couple minutes it was all over, and the ship was quiet again. Now to begin repairs. "Hey kid, you okay over there?"

Jimmy unplugged his cyberjack from the targeting system and emerged from the turret, all smiles. His left arm was sparking and smoking and he looked at it with mild concern. "Slight short in my servos, but I think I'll live."

Alexis came running from the cockpit, looking worried. "We're not done, yet," she said. "I can sense it."

"Look, Alexis, I don't buy your psionic powers, so give it a rest. If I have to—!"

Suddenly, the airlock door swished open, and they shambled in: six fetid corpses, decked out with shining cybernetics, and all wielding heavy blasters.

"I have a bad feeling about this," Max said, drawing his own blaster.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the meat (pun intended) of the *AFMBE* science fiction rules. Herein players and Zombie Masters will find everything related to creating and equipping characters, building worlds and settings, and tweaking the core rules for sci-fi play.

Technology Type

This book covers a wide range of possible futures, which means not all of the options will be appropriate for all games. To help sort things out, we have divided technology into a number of types, as shown in the table. This is only a rough guide to help the Zombie Master think about making his game world consistent—your group doesn't have to choose one type and stick with it. **Chapter Three: The Cybered Dead** shows almost all the options in one place, for example.

Likewise, even if your campaign uses a particular technology, this doesn't mean it has to use every piece of it mentioned in this book. For example, you could be using a setting based on nanotech that doesn't allow modification of brain structure, perhaps for technical or cultural reasons. In that case, the characters can't use nanotech enhancements to increase mental Attributes, and items like the Crown of Thorns (see p. 40) won't exist. However, increasing physical stats and utilizing nanogel would be possible.

Each of these technology types has been assigned a code, for quick reference in later tables, especially in the equipment and weaponry sections. For more information on Bio-tech, Cyberpunk and Nanotech, see the Quality descriptions (see pp. 24-31).

While bio-tech, cyberpunk and nanotech can be seen as near-future, space expansion as medium-future and space opera as far-future technology, that doesn't automatically mean that equipment from a later period is more powerful than that which (theoretically) came before it. For example, a lot of equipment in Space Opera is fairly conservative, and may even be deliberately modeled after a historical period—medieval sword and sorcery or an old west fron-

tier—with flashier special effects. Those things can't compare with the modern fantasies of nanotech that can rebuild things from the molecular level upward. This should be kept in mind when designing the background of a game, and choosing equipment from the tables later in this chapter.

Tech	Technology
B	Bio-tech
C	Cyberpunk
E	Early space expansion (usually includes everything from B, C, and N)
M	Modern day
N	Nanotech
S	Space opera (usually includes a few select examples from all other categories)

Character Types

There are no new character types necessary for role playing in a science fiction setting. Most sci-fi characters should be created using the Survivor character type found in the core rulebook (*AFMBE*, p. 28). Those wishing to create psionic, cybernetic, or other types of powered characters should use the Inspired Character Type (re-named "Powered"), and may use points in the Metaphysics pool towards the purchase of Powers as well as for Supernatural Qualities and Metaphysical abilities. In general, Cast Members should choose one area of extraordinary abilities in which to excel; this helps to keep costs down and



encourages focus on the part of players during character creation. However, it is possible for players to combine different types of abilities and enhancements at the ZM's discretion.

Not Enough Metaphysics Points?

If players and *Zombie Masters* wish to have more points available for the purchase of Powers and other extraordinary abilities, modify the Inspired Character Type so that Cast Members receive 20 points for Attributes, 10 points for Qualities (and up to 10 in Drawbacks), 20 points for skills, and 20 points for Metaphysics/Powers. It is also possible, though not recommended, to allow Cast Members to have up to 15 points in Drawbacks.

Nonhuman Races

Nonhuman and alien races use Quality packages representing the various special abilities and drawbacks of being a member of that race. Creation of such a package is standard and formulaic; Drawbacks and penalties cancel out Qualities and bonuses, and what's left is the final cost or bonus of the Quality or Drawback. Generally, the ZM should create package Qualities. At the ZM's discretion, certain zombie Aspects as described in the *AFMBE* core rulebook and supplements make good "otherworldly" abilities for aliens. As a guideline, Aspects whose cost is listed as equal to an attribute should cost two points as part of a racial package, and Aspects that cost double an Attribute should cost three points. Generally, such powers are available only to nonhuman Cast and Supporting Cast.

Remember; if it can be done without a Quality, then don't make a Quality for it. Only races and unique professions should be modeled with Qualities. Here's an example to work with—a psionic reptilian race.

Start with Benefits: Reptiles are often sleek and fast. That means +1 to Dexterity. The race might have hard scales or bony plates as well, granting it a sort of natural protection from attacks. D4x2(4) AV against all physical attacks. Here we have to make a judgment call, since there's no set value for this ability, a nice benefit, but not incredibly unbalancing. Call it worth four points: one point for each point in the average value. Since the race is psionic, include the Psionic Quality, and one level in Mesmerism (p. 28). Finally, reptiles often have the means to sense and track heat emanations. It is appropriate, therefore, to grant access to the Zombie Aspect of Infravision (*AFMBE*, p. 154). The Aspect lists cost as "Perception x 2," but we'll round that out to three points for a Cast Member (the Infravision Power (p. 27) does exactly the same thing). So far that's 15 points of benefits (one to attributes, four for the AV, two for the Psionic Quality, five for a level of Mesmerism, and three for Infravision).

On to Downfalls: Reptiles are terrifying to most Terrans, and humanoid ones are even worse, so a level 3 Charisma Drawback (but applied only when dealing with non-reptilian races) isn't out of the question. Since this Drawback doesn't apply to relations with other reptiles, make it worth two points rather than three. Members of this race are usually superior and harsh in their dealings with others as well; they come with a two-point Delusions of Grandeur Drawback and a one-point Cruel Drawback.

Adding these together, the result is a ten-point reptilian alien Quality; a bit high priced to be practical. Generally the best bet is to try and keep packaged Qualities such as this to five points or less, or things can get cumbersome. One solution is to simply remove some of the benefits, like Attribute bonuses or packaged abilities, but that will lead to something less than the original idea. A better solution is to make the Psionic Quality a Prerequisite rather than part of the package. This reduces the overall cost to eight points. Still slightly too expensive. Unfortunately, at this point the only remaining solution is to remove one of our benefits. The +1 to Dexterity and AV are each worth one point per level, but reducing the natural AV of the race to D4(2) is probably the most logical reduction in terms of keeping the concept intact.

That reduces our cost by two points. We still need one more point removed somewhere. Adding another Drawback might work. Given the basic concept we're going with, it is safe to assume that these creatures come off as caustic and very cold. Thus, a one-point Humorless Drawback would fit in well.

Thus, the final result of the racial quality requires the purchase of the Psionic Quality as a prerequisite, and provides +1 to Dexterity, natural armor that provides an AV of D4(2), Infravision, and a level of Mesmerism. These creatures also suffer from a three-point Charisma Drawback when dealing with members of other races (for a net value of 2), a two-point Delusions of Grandeur Drawback, a one-point Cruel Drawback, and a one-point Humorless Drawback. The overall cost of the Quality is five points. Note that the downfalls packaged in don't count against the 10 points allowed for Drawbacks during character creation, though at the ZM's discretion they can be "bought off" with character or experience points to further customize the character. Using this method, it is possible to work out any alien race desired.

Skills

Skill Defaulting

In a science fiction game (particularly one with cinematic overtones), some skills may be similar enough to others that characters trained in one skill can perform certain tasks in related skills, albeit at a penalty. In game terms, this functions the same as using Improvised Weapons in combat (*AFMBE* p. 101). A Cyberdoc, for example, can perform medical treatments on a non-enhanced human, but suffers a -2 penalty because his training in regular medicine is not complete. Likewise, a starship pilot has some rudimentary training in operating ships' sensors, though not as much as someone with the Systems Operations skill. Thus, a Cast Member with Piloting (Starship) can attempt Systems Operations (Starship) tasks, at a -2 penalty. Defaulting to another skill is always at the discretion of the ZM, but suggestions are included for individual skills in this section.

Defaulting and Unskilled Attempts

When a character performs a Task by defaulting to a functionally similar skill (such as Systems Operation (Starship Sensors) to Piloting (Starship), for example; see below), he suffers a standard -2 penalty for defaulting. At the ZM's option he can also be limited to only ever achieving 2 success levels due to his incomplete training in the skill, no matter how high his actual roll, just as if performing an Unskilled Attempt (AFMBE, p. 92).

New Skills

Cyberdoc (Special)

Cyberdoc is a specialized skill covering the repair, implantation, and functioning of cybernetics and nanotechnology. Since this skill is so difficult and unique, involving a degree of computer technology as well as standard medicine, it is a special skill, costing two points per level up to level five, and five points per level thereafter. Cyberdoc can be used as a default for Medicine (AFMBE, p. 57) or Engineer (Robotic) Tasks, though generally not the other way around (a Robotics engineer can't successfully install a cybernetic implant due to a complete lack of training in living anatomy).

Engineer (Robotic)

Robotic engineers are skilled at building and repairing robot technology. This skill is used with Intelligence when attempting to build, modify, enhance, or repair a robot. It is used in conjunction with Computer Programming for purposes of designing an AI.

Engineer (Starship)

Starship engineers are intimately familiar with the technology and workings of all types of spacefaring vehicles. This skill is used with Intelligence when attempting to repair or modify a vessel, or when trying

to puzzle out the systems of a ship that uses alien technology. Starship Engineers can default to (and from) Engineer (Mechanical) or Engineer (Electronics).

Microgravity Control

This skill represents the character's ability to cope with zero- or microgravity environments. It covers being able to adapt perspective changes to avoid confusion, using solid objects to move in the right direction, use propulsion aids properly, and make it look easy. It's particularly important in microgravity combat (see pp. 65-66).

Navigation

This skill covers knowledge of map reading and plotting, course calculating and the like. It is common amongst scouts, pilots, and communications and sensor operators. Use Navigation and Intelligence to plot and calculate a course or flight plan, and Navigation and Perception to examine someone else's course or coordinates for mistakes.

Piloting (Starship)

Piloting a starship is simply an expansion of the existing Piloting (Type) skill (see AFMBE, p. 58).

Systems Operations (Type)

This is the skill of operating and understanding complex devices—radar sets, advanced communication systems, sonar devices, and the like. Each Type must be learned separately: Communications, Encryption, Starship Sensors, and Weapons Systems. Operation Tasks use Intelligence and the System Operations Skill. Systems that require a fine ear or eye (sonar, for example), use Perception and Systems Operations instead. Using an unfamiliar system (anything the character has not trained with) incurs penalties of -1 to -4, depending on the differences between the systems. Systems Operations can default to (and from) Piloting (Starship).

New Qualities and Drawbacks

Bioware

1-point Physical Quality

Prerequisite: 1 level Resources, Adversary (corporate), or Obligation (specific corporation) Drawback

The character has been augmented by genetics or some other sort of “natural” enhancement. Bioware enhancements are generally the least powerful type of human enhancement, but are also generally the least expensive to attain. This Power grants +1 to any Attribute, and is a prerequisite for Bioware enhancements in humans.

Cyberware

3-point Physical Quality

Prerequisites: Resources (Middle Class), Adversary (corporate), or Obligation (specific corporation)

Cyberware is the most powerful of all the types of human enhancement in terms of raw abilities granted, but it costs the most to obtain and in some settings (like the Cybered Dead, p. 80) can lead to a loss of humanity. This Power grants +1 to any two Attributes and one level of Hard to Kill, and is a prerequisite for other cybernetic enhancements in humans. Physical Qualities purchased are generally presumed to be cybernetically-enhanced versions rather than natural.

Emotionless

2- or 3-point Mental Drawback

Those with this drawback go far beyond the inability to laugh at life. They utterly lack the ability to express any emotion whatsoever. At the lower level, such characters are not incapable of *feeling* emotion, but they cannot open up enough to express it (though acting on impulse or “from the heart” is not verboten to such Cast Members; they will just attempt to rationalize such acts afterward). Such characters suffer a –1 penalty to social situations.

In more acute cases, however, feeling may be impossible as well. Emotionless characters at the three-point level view the world in a cold, analytical, and completely logical fashion, which can lead to harsh, dangerous, and sometimes brutal decisions.

These characters suffer a –2 to social situations in which emotions or an understanding of human nature are important.

If you have either level of this Drawback, you cannot also take Humorless.

Gravity Tolerance

3-point Physical Quality or Drawback

This character has grown up in an environment with different gravity from normal. It has two distinct effects, and no character may have both.

Low Gravity Tolerance (Drawback): The character was raised in a low gravity environment, is more easily fatigued, and has a problem with some physical actions in Earth-like conditions. Double Endurance loss for fatigue in Earth-like gravity, and suffer –2 to hit with thrown weapons, and –1 to physical actions like Hand Weapon or Dodge.

High Gravity Tolerance (Quality): The character was raised in a high gravity environment. He is less fatigued under normal conditions, but might have trouble with the use of some skills. He adds +1 to Strength-related rolls and suffers only half Endurance loss from fatigue in Earth-like conditions. He takes a –1 penalty to all Tasks related to throwing.

Nanotech

2-point Physical Quality

Prerequisite: Resources (Middle Class), Adversary (corporate), or Obligation (specific corporation)

Nanotech is more powerful than Bioware, though its applications are still somewhat limited in terms of what it can do. Nanotech requires only one implant; future enhancements are achieved through reprogramming of existing nanobots, which reproduce themselves in the bloodstream of the user. This Power grants a +1 bonus to any two attributes at no cost, and is a prerequisite for nanotech enhancements.

Obligation (Type)

Variable Social Drawback

Some rights are accompanied by duties. An Obligation must be followed to various degrees, and grants a number of points depending on the strictness of its dictates.

This Drawback is especially relevant to corporations in a Cyberpunk-type future, but could also be taken for religious sects, government agencies or many other groups. Normal obligations to friends and family are worth no points.

Important: The character is expected to routinely risk herself for the cause, and go above-and-beyond the normal call of duty. An Important Obligation is worth one point.

Major: The character is expected to put the welfare of the group or cause above her own. She is always on call, and does not have time to pursue such activities as a normal job, or have much of a personal life. The penalties for disobedience or selfishness are severe, and may include death. This is worth two points.

Total: The character is expected to die for the group or cause, if need be. Missions are generally extremely hazardous, and the character is constantly in danger of imprisonment, torture, or execution. This is worth three points.

Psionic

2-point Supernatural Quality

This Quality is a prerequisite for purchasing psionic powers. It is a sort of “lesser” version of the Gift Quality. This Quality does not grant the ability to see and detect the flow of Essence or to manipulate one’s own Essence pool as does the Gift. Psionics can, however, sense other psionic individuals with a difficult Perception Test.

Gifted characters need not purchase this Quality in order to buy psionic powers. For more information on psionic characters, see p. 31.

Rank

1-point/level Quality or Drawback

The character is a soldier in some military force, be it the U.S. Army or the Interplanetary Starfleet Defense Force. High rank has privileges-officers, agents, or soldiers obey your character’s orders. On the other hand, low rank certainly has its downside; these folks get ordered around and disobeying can carry serious consequences, from a simple dressing-down to a full-on court martial. The value of a Rank

ranges from –1 to +9, and costs one point per level (or grants one point at the lowest level). Keep in mind that high Rank also entails numerous duties that may restrict your character’s actions even more than very low Rank. The Ranks Table nearby shows some sample law enforcement, government agency and U.S. Army ranks. Rank titles in other organizations vary and may be determined by the Zombie Master as best suits his game. Characters with Rank 4 or higher may due to their clout gain bonus Build points to customize a starship, if they have levels in that Quality. Note that these are 1:1 bonus Build points, *not* bonus levels in the Starship Quality.

Rank Table

Rank Level	Description	Build Point Bonus
-1	Rookie Cop, Private	0
0	Beat Cop, Corporal	0
1	Agent, Sergeant	0
2	Detective, Senior Agent, Sergeant First Class	0
3	Agent in Charge, Lieutenant	0
4	Bureau Chief, Captain	5
5	Commissioner, Major	5
6	Lieutenant Colonel	6
7	Colonel	6
8	Major General	8
9	General	10

Robot

Variable Physical Quality

The character is a robot, superior to human beings in many respects, though he lacks even the most basic understanding of their ways and means. The base cost for the Robot Quality is five points. This grants the ability to purchase any Nanotech or Cybernetic human body enhancements (limited accordingly), complete immunity to Essence and Endurance loss (Robots do not have an Essence or

Endurance score), the Iron Mind Power (three levels), and the three-point version of the Emotionless Drawback (though they gain no points for this drawback). For each additional point spent on the Quality, Robots gain a +1 bonus to any attribute. Robots have the full range of normal Qualities and Drawbacks available to them, representing technological enhancements or faulty parts, but may never purchase any Metaphysics or Supernatural Qualities. At the ZM's option, Robots may sometimes have abilities that mimic certain Zombie Aspects (AFMBE, p. 146).

The downside to being a robot is that natural healing is impossible; whenever a robot takes damage, repairs require a Robot Engineer. Successful Intelligence + Engineer (Robotic) Tasks heal damage equal to the Robot's Constitution score per success level on the Task. Alternately, a robot can purchase

Nanotech and the Regeneration Power (p. 28), representing microscopic robots living within the larger robot that repair damage as it is inflicted. This is the sole exception to the rule forbidding the combination of nanotech and cybernetic technology.

Starship

1-point per level Quality

A Cast Member with this Quality either owns a ship of his own, or has a share in a ship the Cast owns. The number of points in this Quality represents the stake in the ship's ownership. Each level in this Quality grants five Build points to spend on the ship (see p. 48).

Robots as Zombies

Zombie Masters may wish to have players build Robot Cast Members using the Zombie Creation rules as an alternate approach to the Robot Quality presented here, thus determining the overall cost of the robot package and the number of character points left over (from a standard 70-point pool) for additional Qualities and Skills. This method, while providing a bit more customization, is not recommended, as it creates a slight imbalance between standard Cast Members and Robot Cast Members. A more balanced method for creating robot or zombie cast members in this way can be found in the AFMBE sourcebook *Enter the Zombie*.

Robots, however, can take the place of standard zombies in a game, which makes for a nice change of pace simply by "flavoring" the game differently. A good example of such a setting is the film *I, Robot* (loosely based on an Isaac Asimov collection). In this case, robot hordes should be created per standard zombie creation rules.

Bigger, Better, Faster

Some players with the Resources or Status Qualities may want to use those to improve their vessel. At the Zombie Master's option, Cast Members with these Qualities can add one Build point per level of Resources and/or Status that the character has, so long as the character has at least one level of the Starship Quality. By the same token, Resources or Status Drawbacks would subtract one point per level of each Drawback.

Likewise, if the ZM wants more powerful ships in his game, he should feel free to increase the number of Build points granted by each level of the Starship Quality. We recommend caution before taking this approach, as even one additional point per level can result in some seriously pumped-up ships, particularly if combined with the Resources and Status option above.

Cybernetics, Bioware, and Nanotech

Now it is time to cover all those gadgets and do-dads that pepper sci-fi novels and films, from bionic arms to nanobots that transform normal humans into walking, mindless juggernauts, to hopped-up lunatics tripping on adrenal sprays. In this section we'll examine cybernetics, nanotechnology, and bioware enhancements. The abilities in this section can all be applied to both humans and aliens (Cast and Supporting Cast), and to zombies. Thus, to differentiate them from standard Qualities and Aspects they are referred to as Powers. These abilities can universally be purchased with Quality or Power (Metaphysics) points, or applied to zombies as though they were standard Aspects, increasing the zombie's power level accordingly. If used for zombies, these abilities are still limited by the maximum listed bonus for Cast Members, as these limits are on the technology, not the body it is attached to.

Types of Enhancements

There are three basic types of artificial enhancements to the human body, each represented by the purchase of a physical Quality (p. 21). They each come with their own set of benefits and drawbacks, and they cannot be combined (except in the case of Robots, which may combine nanotech and cybernetics). The three types of enhancements are as follows:

Bioware: Bioware is the most “natural” of the three types of bodily enhancement, and represents genetic engineering, adrenaline treatments, organ transplants, supervitamin therapies, and other such biological modifications to the human body. While bioware is perhaps the weakest of the three types of enhancement in terms of overall power gained, it is the least expensive in terms of character points to attain. The most common and least expensive (but most dangerous) form of bioware is “dosing up,” or injecting oneself with genetically engineered adrenaline compounds to temporarily increase physical or mental prowess.

Nanotech: Nanotech is a form of human enhancement whereby a swarm of microscopic robots (often referred to as “nanobots”) are injected into the blood stream of the subject, where they live and act in symbiosis with him. Since nanoprobes or nanobots are super-efficient worker drones, they can accomplish such incredible feats as building and deconstructing dermal armor, healing wounds and other damage, stimulating areas of the brain to assist learning, calculation, and analysis, and skeletal reinforcement. While the effects nanobots can achieve are more spectacular than those accomplished by Bioware alone, nanotechnology does make its user dependent upon artificial means of survival, and is slightly more expensive to attain. Once implanted, Nanotech breaks down and overrides any Bioware installed in the user.

Cybernetics: The ultimate in man-machine combination, cybernetically-enhanced subjects wield parts, organs, or enhancements that are entirely artificial in nature. Cybernetics offer the most power the fastest of all the different types of enhancement, and the most diverse range of special abilities, but are also the most expensive type of implants to attain in terms of character point cost. Cybernetics, once implanted, break down and override any Bioware installed, and nanobots will graft themselves into the cybernetics, becoming part of the implants. Thus, cybernetics cannot be combined with bioware or nanotech. “Cyberjacking,” or connecting one's consciousness into the cyberweb, requires a cybernetic implant called a *data jack*.

Gaining Enhancements

Bodily enhancement of any sort is dangerous and expensive. Thus, Cast Members who wish to begin play with any sort of enhancement must have levels of the Resources Quality or an equivalent Obligation or Adversary Drawback related to the sponsor who provided the implants (listed as prerequisites in the base Qualities).

In addition, Cast Members who acquire new *cybernetic* implants and/or body modifications in the course of game play are subject to painful and dangerous surgical procedures. The surgeon performing the procedure must pass both a Intelligence + Cyberdoc *and* a Dexterity + Cyberdoc Test to suc-

cessfully implant the devices. Both of these Tests suffer a -1 penalty per implant already possessed by the Cast Member. Bioware enhancements, by comparison, require only a Dexterity + Medicine (Surgeon) check to implant, and nanotech enhancements require a Intelligence + Cyberdoc and Intelligence + Computer Programming Test to install or upgrade.

All this, of course, is dependent upon the Cast actually having access to a surgeon or cyberdoc.

Finally, while Metaphysics points can be used to purchase enhancements at character creation, these abilities are not supernatural in nature, and thus can be purchased by Survivors and non-supernatural Character Types at the ZM's discretion, using Quality or experience points.

Artificial Enhancement and Essence

In many sci-fi stories, nanotechnology and cybernetics mean sacrificing part of one's humanity in exchange for technological power. In AFMBE, this could mean that artificial enhancements don't get along with the Essence matrix of living beings. For those wishing to play with this idea, at the Zombie Master's option, Cast Members with such enhancements may never have levels in Increased Essence Pool (AFMBE, p. 48), though Cast Members who purchase levels in this Quality, then in the course of play gain cybernetic or nanotech enhancement, keep all purchased levels of Increased Essence previously bought.

In addition, if this concept is used, Zombie Masters are encouraged to disallow robots or characters with nanotech or cybernetic implants from gaining access to psionic or other types of supernatural powers.

In general, since cybernetics and nanotech are artificial enhancements, attributes increased through these means should not add to a Cast Member's Essence pool.

Human Enhancement Powers

Below are listed a number of possible enhancements, their effects as bioware, cyberware, and nanotech, Cast Member point cost to gain the enhancement, and any prerequisites for such implants. This list is by no means exhaustive, and Zombie Masters should feel free to create or adapt their own types of enhancement from other sources. These Powers can be purchased with Quality, Drawback (character) or Metaphysics points and are available to both Cast Members and to zombies in addition to regular Aspects.

In keeping with the fast-play spirit of the **Unisystem**, Cast Members do not need to purchase cybernetic limbs separately; rather, Powers are purchased individually and Zombie Masters should encourage or require players to note on their Cast Member sheets exactly which body parts have been replaced.

Bio Filter

Variable Power

Prerequisite: Bioware, Cyberware, or Nanotech

The Cast Member has some sort of alteration that allows the filtering of harmful substances in the blood (bio and nanotech) or in the surrounding atmosphere (cyberware). This modification at its base level costs two points, renders the user immune to toxic substances in the air, be it atmospheric impurities, gas attacks, or something else, and provides a +2 bonus on Constitution Tests against injected or contact poisons. For three points the power includes a self-contained air supply, enabling the user to survive in completely inhospitable environs, such as the atmosphere of non-Earth-type planets. Self-contained air supply lasts approximately five hours; each additional point spent on this Power increases the available supply by five hours; a maximum of twenty hours can be installed at any one time (though it is possible to carry refills).

Limitations: Bioware and Nanotech versions are incapable of providing a self-contained air supply.

Data Chip

2- or 4-point Power per chip

Prerequisite: Data Jack

Data chips are basically USB flash memory that plugs into a cyberware data jack. These chips can store up to half a terabyte of data on a single chip, which the user can upload and download directly into his own brain, allowing access to skills, knowledge, and recollection of detail that most folks do not have. The availability of these chips is dependent upon the individual Deadworld; check with the ZM before purchasing one.

In game terms, a data chip grants a base three ranks in any single skill, but only one chip can be used at any one time and uploading the memory takes D6(3) Turns. These ranks represent the first three levels of training in a skill, and are not cumulative with ranks already possessed by characters. A character with two ranks in Electronic Surveillance, for example, does not see his skill increased to five, but to three. A character with three or more ranks in Electronic Surveillance would get no use out of a chip whatso-

Expert Data Chips

At the ZM's option, higher function chips may exist that supplement existing skills at any level, but should cost commensurately more than the base chip: 5 points per additional level of the skill. Thus, a chip that adds +2 levels to Medicine (rather than provide a base 3) costs 10 points, but could improve an existing Medicine skill from 3 to 5, or 5 to 7, or . . . you get the idea. This restriction is, we admit, for game balance. ZM's who don't mind the potentially large power boost involved with adding skill bonuses of this level can feel free to relax restrictions on basic Data chips by allowing them to supplement existing skills at the base three-point cost, allowing more than one skill to be stored in a chip, or allowing physical skills as well as mental ones.

ever, as the information contained would be mostly redundant. Finally, these chips contain *data*. They do not provide muscle memory or reflex training. Thus, they cannot be used to provide access to physical skills such as Hand Weapon, Brawling, or Martial Arts. Blank chips are also available that can be used to store any data the user wishes.

Data chips cost two points each, unless they contain a Special Skill, which costs four points.

Data Jack

2-point Power

Prerequisite: Cyberware, Robot, or Zombie

Data Jacks allow a Cast Member to plug his mind directly into a computer to upload and download files and data, and to connect directly to the Cyberweb via his own mind. Data Jacks grant a +2 bonus to all computer-related rolls while plugged into a terminal.

Dermal Armor

1-point per level Power

Prerequisite: Bioware, Cyberware, Nanotech, Robot, or Zombie

Some street samurai possess extraordinarily tough skin or the equivalent of a suit of armor grafted onto their bodies. Others possess nanobots with the ability to race to the surface of the skin, interlocking like a complex building block kit to form an armored shell resistant to attacks.

Dermal Armor subtracts its value from any damage your character takes (just like regular armor, see *AFMBE* p. 138). The biggest difference between normal armor and armor from enhancements or implants is that implants provide a "flat" AV rather than a variable one. The damage is reduced before any modifiers (for slashing weapons or bullets for example) are taken into account. Dermal Armor 10, for example, would subtract ten points of damage from every attack that hits the character.

Limitations: Bioware is restricted to a +3 bonus, Nanotech to +6, and Cyberware to a +10 bonus.

Enhanced/Reduced Attributes

Variable Power or Drawback

Raising an attribute with artificial enhancement costs one point per level, until the enhanced attribute(s) reaches level five. Thereafter, each additional level costs three points.

Example: *Joe, with Strength 4, has cyberware, and wishes to purchase three levels of Enhanced Attribute (Strength). Going from level four to five costs Joe one point. Going to levels six and seven cost three points each. Thus, Joe spends seven points to get the +3 bonus to Strength. Had Joe's strength started at two, this +3 bonus would've only cost three points, and the total Strength score would've been five.*

Limitations: Biotechnology can only provide a maximum of two levels in this Quality. Nanotech can provide a maximum of three levels, and Cyberware can provide up to four levels, total. These levels may be applied to one attribute or any combination of

Enhanced Attributes and Power

As written, Enhanced/Reduced Attributes has some severe restrictions built in, purely as a game balance issue to curb the power levels that can result from this ability. At the Zombie Master's option, the limitations listed above can apply to the maximum number of points that can be spent on any one

Attribute, rather than in total. If the ZM feels particularly brave (or wants very powerful characters in his game), he can feel free to remove restrictions on this power altogether, though this is not recommended.

In addition, ZM's who want grittier, lower-powered games should feel free to impose harsher restrictions, or to disallow this Power altogether. We recommend a maximum level of eight (after any bonuses from this Quality) in any attribute for human characters. Non-human Quality Packages that modify attributes also modify this maximum level.

attributes, but the technology imposes limits on the maximum total augmentation.

As a Drawback, each level taken reduces the attribute in question by one level and provides one Drawback point.

Extra Life Points

1-point Power

Prerequisite: Robot, or Zombie

The character is sturdily built, and gets +10 Life Points (or Dead Points). In *AFMBE*, this power cannot be purchased more than once.

Holovid Camera

5-point Power

Prerequisite: Cyberware, Robot, or Zombie

The character has a camera built into his cybernetic eye, with a linked audio receiver in a cybernetic ear. This device is capable of capturing and playing back a holographic recording up to 30 minutes in length. The image can be any size from six inches tall, to six feet tall, and volume can be adjusted from the level of a human whisper (or muted), all the way up to 100 decibels. Cast Members with data jacks who hack into computer systems can translate computer data into visual and audio representations using this device as well. Personnel files, for example, can be projected as a holographic image of the subject with an audio reading of the data contained in the file.

Infravision

3-point Power

Prerequisite: Cyberware, Nanotech, Robot, or Zombie

This power works identically to the Infravision Zombie Aspect (see *AFMBE*, p. 154).

Iron Mind

3-point per level Power

Prerequisite: Bioware, Cyberware, Nanotech, Robot, or Zombie

Your character has a powerful resistance to all forms of Telepathy (see p. 38) and Mesmerism (see p. 28), as well as all spells or powers that seek to read or

control his thoughts or emotions. He can still be struck by magic or slammed by Telekinesis, but no one can get into his head. Each level of this Power grants a +3 to resist all attempts at Mesmerism or telepathic readings. Zombies with Iron Mind may attempt to resist the commands of Zombie Lords or other beings with the power to control the undead by making a Resisted Simple Willpower Test with the full bonus granted by the Power.

Limitations: Bioware one level, Nanotech two levels, Cyberware three levels

Leaping

3-point per level Power

Prerequisite: Cyberware, Robot, or Zombie

This Power is exactly the same as the Zombie Leaping Aspect (see *AFMBE*, p. 150) except that cybernetic versions of this power (including those purchased by robots) can increase the distances jumped; for six points, the range of the power doubles. For nine points, it triples, and for 12 points, the base values quadruple. Purchasing more than four levels in this power is impossible.

Mesmerism

5-point per level Power

Prerequisite: Cyberware, Robot, or Zombie

Cybernetic eyes can be implanted with the ability to project a carrier wave with subliminal messages attached, granting the user the power to control the minds of others. This ability comes in levels, at increasing point and Essence cost, and functions identically to the psionic power of the same name (see p. 35)

Physical Qualities

Variable Power

Prerequisite: Cyberware, Nanotech, Robot, or Zombie

Users of nanotechnology or cybernetics can be implanted with artificial versions of any physical Quality found in the *AFMBE* core rulebook or supplements. These abilities work identically to the Qualities of the same name, but are artificial in nature. Those Cast Members with nanotech or cyber-

netic implants are generally assumed to have artificial versions of any Physical Qualities they possess, as the mechanisms in their body alter its basic functionality. Likewise, the Cast Member may have been fitted with defective implants that hinder his functionality, acting as Physical Drawbacks.

Expansions: Cyberware and Nanotech allows a Cast Member to purchase up to ten levels of Hard to Kill.

Artificial Qualities

For ease of bookkeeping, we assume here that physical Qualities purchased by characters with cyberware or nanotechnology are artificial versions. However, this may be too "blanket" for some players (why is my Enhanced Vision artificial if I only have a cybernetic arm?) At the ZM's option, players can purchase the "normal" version of Physical Qualities when appropriate. Regardless, normal versions of these Qualities do not combine or stack with cybernetic or nanotech versions.

Regeneration

1-, 3-, or 6-point Power

Prerequisite: Bioware, Nanotech, Robot, or Zombie

Some enhancements enable the subject to heal very rapidly. The amount healed is equal to the Constitution Attribute of the character. The faster that amount heals, the more expensive the power is. Healing Life Points per hour costs one point. Healing every minute costs three points. Regeneration every Turn runs six points.

Regeneration does not convey immortality or invulnerability. No matter how fast a character heals, if he gets into the negative Life Points and is forced to make a Survival Test and fails, it's curtains for the mug.

Limitations: Bioware Regeneration is limited to per hour, while Nanotech can have per minute or per turn regeneration. Zombies can have any level of

Regeneration; this is improved from the Zombie Aspect (AFMBE, p. 159) and should not be combined with that ability. Robots using Nanotech Regeneration have reduced levels of healing; for one point the robot heals per day, for three points the rate of healing doubles, and the six-point Regeneration heals damage per hour.

Starlight Vision

1- or 2-point Power

Prerequisite: Bioware, Nanotech, Cyberware, Robot, or Zombie

Starlight vision amplifies existing light sources, no matter how dim, to provide relatively normal vision in areas where most people can't see at all. The major drawbacks to starlight vision are that the vision is not color, but is generally viewed in shades of green and white, and that in areas of absolute darkness, with no ambient light whatsoever, starlight vision is still blind. Worse, sudden flashes of bright light can blind those using starlight vision; however, most cybernetic implants have light filters that automatically adjust to changes in ambient light to prevent this. Bioware versions or Lesser quality modifications which suffer from blindness due to light changes would be a one-point Power, otherwise it is worth two points.

Stimmed

1- to 5-point Power

Prerequisite: Bioware or Zombie

Dosing up is a sci-fi version of steroids, the cheapest form of Bioware available, but in many ways is the most dangerous as well. Stimmed characters are fitted with an injection apparatus that when activated fires a stream of supercharged adrenaline into the character's system. This chemical stimulant provides a pool of bonus points that can be distributed among physical attributes equal to the level of the Power plus two. Bonuses last for one scene or combat, and bonuses to Strength and Constitution temporarily add Life Points and Endurance as appropriate. However, when the Stim wears off, these bonus Life and Endurance Points are subtracted and if this takes the Cast Member's Life Points to zero or below, he must pass survival and consciousness tests as standard.

Example: *Sugar has Stimmed at level 5. When activating his apparatus, he gains seven points that he may freely distribute among his various physical attributes. He allocates three to Dexterity, two to Strength, and one to Constitution. This results in 12 bonus Life Points. These bonuses last for an entire combat or scene, as do Life Point bonuses from Strength and Constitution enhancements. The bonus 12 Life Points are subtracted from his total when the stim wears off, regardless of how much damage Sugar has suffered, meaning that if Sugar takes enough damage during combat, it is possible for him to drop dead when he calms down.*

The downside to Stimmed is that after every use, the Cast Member must pass a Difficult Willpower Test or suffer a level in the Addiction Drawback (AFMBE, p. 36) related to the chemical stimulants. Worse yet, every so often the chemical needs to be replenished, and "pushers" tend to jack up their prices for addicts. In game terms, the character's juice must be refilled after a number of uses equal to the character's Constitution minus the level of any Addiction Drawback he possesses (once Addicted, the Cast Member begins using the stuff just to remain normal). The minimum for this is every two uses; some addicts buy in bulk to have a stash for when they run out.

Last but not least, once the Addiction Drawback reaches level five or higher, the Cast Member must also make a Survival Test with a penalty equal to the levels in the Addiction Drawback every time the drugs are used. Failure indicates an overdose that renders the Stimmed user comatose and in dire need of medical attention. Zombie Masters should adjudicate overdosing as they see fit.

Stat Bumps from Dosing

Generally, bonuses may be freely reassigned each time the character doses up (depending on the drug cocktail he uses), but ZMs for some settings may require Cast Members to choose set stat bumps at character creation.



Target Link

3-point Power

Prerequisite: Data Jack

Cast Members with a Target Link are crack shots. This ability enables the Cast Member to improve hand-eye coordination by providing a range finder and pinpoint sight with crosshairs in the user's field of vision when firing a ranged weapon. In game terms this provides a +3 to all ranged attack rolls with jacked firearms (see p. 45).

Vacuum Sealed

3-point Power

Prerequisite: Zombie, Robot, or Dermal Armor

The character remains conscious and mobile even in hard vacuum, and do not suffer normal damage in that environment (see p. 64).

Although robots and most zombies are assumed to have this Power because of their nature, they only need to pay points for it in campaigns in which they have some chance of needing it.

Weapon Graft

1- to 10-point Power

Prerequisite: Cyberware, Robot, or Zombie

This covers razor-sharp claws, gnashing jaws, arm spikes, and other close combat weapons. The more deadly the implement, the more it costs in both Essence and character points. Those given below assume that the weapon causes slashing or stabbing damage. If bashing damage is imposed instead, lower the cost by one. If the weapon is retractable, increase the cost by one. If the weapon is detachable and throwable or launchable (arm-mounted guns) instead, double its total cost. Such missiles have normal throw or pistol ranges (*AFMBE*, p.134) depending on how they are used, and require ammunition clips to function just as standard guns. If the weapon is an energy weapon that recharges itself, increase the cost by two. Also note that the list-

ed costs are *per weapon*. If a Cast Member wishes to have claws or arm blades on both arms, he must purchase this Power twice, paying full cost both times.

Delivering damage with a Weapon Graft requires an appropriate Hand Weapon or Guns skill. So, a claw could use Brawling, a forearm blade Hand Weapon (knife) or Hand Weapon (sword), and a forearm-mounted shotgun Guns (shotgun). See *AFMBE* (p. 55) for descriptions of these skills.

Small (one point): Damage is D4 (2) x Strength for melee, D4 x 3 (6) for ranged.

Medium (two points): Damage is D6 (3) x Strength for melee, D6 x 3 (9) for ranged.

Large (three points): Damage is D8 (4) x Strength for melee, D8 x 3 (12) for ranged.

Extra-Large (four points): Damage at D10 (5) x Strength melee, D10 x 3 (15) for ranged.

X-Ray Vision

3-point Power

Prerequisite: Cyberware or Robot

This Power works exactly like the Zombie Aspect of the same name (see *AFMBE*, p. 153).

New Aspects

The following are new zombie aspects uniquely suited to a sci-fi game. The first two fall under the category of The Weak Spot, while the second two are filed under Sustenance.

Disruption Field

Power: Varies

Because their flesh has been so traumatized by death, yet is still made of the same basic matter, zombies receive half damage from disruption field guns by default (see p. 45). Complete immunity can be bought for Power +3, while taking full damage is Power -3.

Stun

Power: -5

Zombies are usually unaffected by stun guns (see p. 45). Those with this weakness lose Dead Points instead of Endurance when shot by one. The ZM can decide that stun fields cannot kill the zombie, just incapacitate it.

Radiation

Power: +2

A zombie that feeds on radiation needs at least 200 rems for a full meal (see p. 67).

Solar Powered

Power: +5

Some zombies don't need meat at all, just the feeling of warmth on their hides. It takes two hours of strong sunlight to make up a complete meal, or one hour if the zombie can receive the light unshielded by atmosphere or glass (in which case, the Vacuum Sealed Quality would be useful).

Being further away or closer to the sun, compared to Earth's orbit, might require more or less hours spent sunbathing, but that is left to the Zombie Master's discretion.

Psionic Characters

Psionic power is a mainstay of science fiction, and of the Unisystem in general. However, as several other books already present the full psionic power system, no reason to reprint large blocks of text. Still, it did not seem appropriate to expect consumers to purchase entire separate books (although we do appreciate the business) just for psionic rules. Therefore, a streamlined version of the psionic power system found in *Pulp Zombies*, *WitchCraft*, *Armageddon*, and *Terra Primate* is presented. All of the powers below require the purchase of either the Gift Quality or the Psionic Quality as a prerequisite (but not both).

Psionic Powers

Each psionic power is a branch of the same tree. All the powers are related, and all psionics have the potential to develop all such abilities. They include telepathic abilities (the power to directly communicate with and control other minds), psychokinetic powers (the power of the mind over matter and energy), and the ability to see into places and times where the normal senses cannot reach.

To gain psionic powers, the Cast Member must first possess either the Gift or Psionic Quality. Each psionic ability is then purchased in levels, costing five points per level at character creation, and 10 points per level thereafter. The level of the ability represents the raw power the psionic has and the degree of expertise the psionic has in using his powers. This governs how far away the psionic can reach others with his abilities, the amount of damage he can inflict, and how lasting the effects he creates are.

Power Costs, Strength, and Art

Those players familiar with the Unisystem psionic power rules from other books will note that the rules herein do not present Strength and Art as separate abilities. Rather, in an effort to streamline the system, we have combined these two aspects into a single power. In addition, due to space concerns, many of the details, such as defensive use of psionic powers, have been excised from this text. Players and Zombie Masters who prefer the detail and customizability of the full versions of these rules are encouraged to use that more expansive system. Playability should be unaffected either way.

Defenses Against Psionic Powers

Mundanes can resist some psionic powers with a Difficult Willpower Test, at the ZM's option.

Gifted and psionic Cast Members may use their powers to resist intrusion. Most psionic powers can be used defensively against mental intrusions or

attempts at Mesmerism. The Inspired can resist any psionic powers with a Simple Willpower Test.

Essence and Psionics

Most psionics do not use Essence directly, but their powers have the side effect of strengthening their spiritual energy. A psionic's Essence Pool gains two additional points for every level in any and all psionic powers that he possesses. For example, a psionic with a Telepathy 4 and Mesmerism 3 would add a total of 14 Essence points to his Pool.

Psionic Powers List

The following list has the most common psionic powers, their advantages and limitations, and some of the things a skilled user can do with them. Most of the powers also have a table (a few have two) to determine the results of successful Tasks. A higher-level psionic may choose to use lower-level effects.

Biokinesis (Type)

Biokinesis is the ability to exercise control over the human body. It can be used to heal wounds, cure diseases, restore use to crippled limbs, or even perform surgery without ever cutting the subject. On the other hand, it can be used to destroy, cripple, or break another's body, causing heart attacks, embolisms, even exploding heads! There are thus two types of Biokinesis, each purchased as a separate power. These abilities should be designated as Biokinesis (Harm) and Biokinesis (Heal) on a character sheet.

Using Harm

The target must be within line of sight of the psionic. A Biokinesis attack is resolved as a Resisted Task, using the psionic's Willpower and Biokinesis against the victim's Willpower and Constitution. Biokinesis can also be resisted by any power that heals damage, obstructs mental probes or restricts the flow of Essence. The psionic can opt to inflict Life, Endurance or Essence point damage; the degree of damage is determined by the Biokinesis level (see the Harm Table nearby).

The psionic, however, feels some of the pain inflicted, and may lose Endurance and Essence as a

Harm Table

Level	Abilities
1	Inflict one point of Life, Endurance or Essence damage (pick one or split among the three) per level of Biokinesis.
3	Inflict pain which drains Endurance normally (determined by Biokinesis levels) and gives a Task/Test penalty of -1 per point of Endurance damage. The pain lasts for one Turn for every three Success Levels in the Task (rounded up).
5	Inflict D4(2) times Biokinesis level in damage, allocated among Life, Endurance or Essence points as desired.
8	Stop the victim's heart, doing no actual Life Point damage, but victim is incapacitated and will die in (D10(5) + Constitution) minutes unless CPR (Dexterity + First Aid Task) is administered in that time.
10+	Life Point damage (D6(3) x Biokinesis Strength) manifests as burst blood vessels, torn flesh and even exploding heads if enough damage is inflicted to kill the victim!

result. The psionic must pass a Difficult Willpower Test or lose one Essence and one Endurance for every two points of damage inflicted (round down). Multiple attacks do not incur cumulative penalties, but if the attack kills the victim, the Willpower Test suffers a -3 penalty.

Using Heal

When curing a wound or disease, the psionic must be in physical contact with the patient. Healing somebody is a Willpower and Biokinesis Task. The degree of healing possible is determined by Biokinesis levels (see the Heal Table).

The healing process is extremely painful, however, because the healer must feel the agonies and suffering of the victim, even if the patient is sedated. After the

Biokinesis Task is concluded, the character must make a Difficult Willpower Test or lose one Essence and one Endurance per two points of damage healed (rounded down). Each additional healing attempt on the same person within a 24-hour period adds a cumulative penalty of -1 to the Willpower Test.

Curing a disease also requires this Willpower Test. Mild diseases (a cold, the flu) can drain two points from both Essence and Endurance. Moderate diseases (smallpox, simple pneumonia) drain five points from each. Serious diseases (tuberculosis, malaria) drain 10 points from each. Finally, Terminal diseases (cancer, ebola) drain 20 points from each. These losses are recovered normally. Healing oneself is also possible, but the Willpower Test to resist draining incurs a -2 penalty.

Heal Table

Level	Abilities
1	Heal one Life or Endurance Point per Biokinesis level. Cure minor diseases.
4	Heal D6(3) Life/Endurance Points per Biokinesis level. Treat and cure moderate diseases. Heal recently crippled or disabled limbs.
8	Heal D8(4) Life/Endurance Points per Biokinesis level.
10+	Complete cellular reconstruction is possible. Bring crippled limbs (regardless of when they were injured) to full use, though missing ones cannot be regrown. Resuscitate the recently dead (see <i>AFMBE</i> p. 113).

A character with Biokinesis and other medical skills can use his powers in more subtle and indirect ways. A Perception and Biokinesis Task adds a +1 to any medical skill Task for every Success Level achieved.

Biokinesis-Created zombies

Especially cruel Zombie Masters may wish to have failed resuscitation attempts result in the creation of new (and extra-hungry) zombies. To that we say, "go for it!" No better way to push your Cast's buttons than to force them to re-kill the person they just tried to save.

In addition, those killed by Biokinesis (Harm) could experience an unusual side effect: several Turns later (or even the following Turn), they get up, hungry for warm, soft flesh!

Regardless of which type is purchased, characters with ESP are often referred to as Seers or ESPers, and are prone to flashes of insight and visions of doom, danger, and horror. These flashes of insight are often referred to as the Sixth Sense and are a powerful Zombie Master tool in guiding the characters. Visions may alert the Cast Members to possible threats and enemies, and, if interpreted correctly, may provide valuable clues and information. Random flashes are also a burden, as the character is often plagued by visions of vicious crimes and disasters. As they are occurring as the character sees them, often he can do nothing to prevent them. Treat these flashes exactly like those an Inspired with the Visions Miracle gets (AFMBE, p. 65).

The future is not immune to change; precognitive flashes only show the most likely future, and fast thinking and acting can change the course of things to come. Also, Seers can sense the flow of Essence and detect (if not see) the presence of supernatural and incorporeal entities, such as spirits and undead.

ESP (Type)

ESP stands for "Extrasensory Perception." Psionics are particularly valued for their ability to peer into the past or future, or view events happening beyond the range of their physical senses, be they in the next room or miles away. The ESP power lets the Psionic see past the barriers of time and physical space. As with Biokinesis, ESP has two types, each purchased separately. These types are Clairvoyance and Remote Viewing.

Using Clairvoyance

Many uses of Clairvoyance are spontaneous and not under the control of the psionic. Thus, Zombie Masters are advised to make a special note of any characters with this ability. Typically, the Zombie Master tells the player to make a Perception and Clairvoyance Task (or the ZM can make this task in secret). The level of success of the Task and the power's level determines how much detail is available to the player. If the Task fails, the Zombie Master simply says that the character has a feeling of déjà vu.

Clairvoyance Table

Level	Abilities
1	Vague premonitions or feelings about important events or objects and places where memorable events took place.
3	Short flashes of future events or flashbacks about the recent past (one week for each Perception level).
5	Visions are more detailed and last longer; images make more sense and are easier to interpret. Visions of the past reach back one month per level of Clairvoyance plus Perception.
7	Visions of the past reach back one year per Clairvoyance plus Perception level.
9	Clear visions that replay past or future events with crystalline detail.
10+	Visions of the past reach back up to one century per Clairvoyance plus Perception level.

All Flesh Must Be Eaten™

Remote Viewing Table

Level	Abilities
1	Only brief glimpses of events, equivalent to the blink of an eye. Range is one yard per level of Perception plus Remote Viewing.
3	A few seconds (one Turn) of the scene or vision. Range is 10 yards per level of Perception and Remote Viewing.
6	A whole scene, lasting a few minutes.
8	Range 100 yards per level of Perception and Remote Viewing.
10	Detailed, extended visions possible. Range is equal to 1 mile per level of Perception and Remote Viewing.

Sometimes, the character attempts an active use of the power, trying to force a vision about the past or the future. Those attempts use the same rules above, with the power's level and Success Levels on the Task determining the outcome.

Looking into the past is easier than looking into the future. The Zombie Master may impose penalties on attempts to see the future, depending on how inevitable the future is. If the issue hangs in the balance, the future vision might only reveal uncertainty.

Using Remote Viewing

Remote Viewing Tasks use Perception and Remote Viewing Art. There are two types of activities possible, visions and viewings.

Visions are flashes of insight about ongoing events controlled by the Zombie Master. Often, the character sees through the eyes of a victim or perpetrator, or from a worm or bird's eye view. Each vision works differently, but the point of view is often confusing, and most visions are short. Typically, the character gets multiple related visions each adding a little more

information to the overall puzzle. The range of the visions is irrelevant; if the Zombie Master believes the character is in a position to be involved in the related events, the vision could be of events occurring halfway across the world.

Viewings are attempts to see past barriers or beyond the range of the normal sense of sight—looking inside a safe, or a place the character has never seen but knows about. The range of viewings is based on the level of the power.

Mesmerism

Psionics with Mesmerism can command others to do their bidding, and even force people to do things they would never normally do. At higher levels, Mesmerism allows the psionic to completely take control over the target, becoming his puppet master.

Using Mesmerism

Mesmerism is a Resisted Task, using the psionic's Willpower and Mesmerism against the victim's Difficult Willpower Test, though Gifted may be able to replace the defensive Test with a psionic or

Mesmerism Table

Level	Abilities
1	Cause victim to hesitate for a few seconds, or make a fairly reasonable suggestion.
3	Stop the person from doing something, or issue a simple command like "Freeze!" "Run away!" or "Don't bother me!"
5	Victim will follow a one sentence command to the letter.
8	Issue detailed instructions.
10+	Take total control of the victim for one Turn, completely dictate the words and actions of the victim. Each Turn, another Resisted Task is needed to maintain control.

Essence defense. If the orders are totally contrary to the victim's nature (commit suicide or attack a friend, for example), the victim gets a bonus of +3 to +7 to the Willpower Test. This is left to the Zombie Master's discretion. The power's level determines how extensive the control is (see Mesmerism Table).

Pyrokinesis

This power converts the inner strength of the subject into heat energy and fire. Cases of spontaneous combustion have been the result of malicious psionics using this power on their enemies, or psionics who misjudged their abilities and accidentally set themselves on fire.

Using Pyrokinesis

Pyrokinesis Tasks use Willpower + Pyrokinesis. If the Task is successful, flame manifests itself somewhere within line of sight of the psionic. If the psionic uses the power extensively over a short period of time (continually over a minute or so, for example), he must pass a Simple Willpower Test to make sure the fire does not run rampant. Add the Success Levels of the last Pyrokinesis Task to that Test. On a failure, a random flame effect occurs, with a Strength level of 1-4 (roll D4 or Zombie Master's determination). If the failure occurred as the result of a roll of one, the random effect affects the psionic directly.

The psionic can make the fire he manifests appear right on top of a victim. No Dodge is possible, but tar-

gets of such an attack can use a Difficult Willpower Test to resist the effects. If the victim wins the Resisted Task, the Pyrokinesis power fails—pushed away by the latent psionic powers that exist in every human. Igniting something near a target cannot be resisted, but the victim may try to dodge away. Dodges are possible against jets or balls of flame.

Telekinesis

A character with Telekinesis can move, throw, and manipulate objects with his mind. The most powerful psionics can casually toss cars around, crush objects and people with “invisible hands” and bring down houses.

Using Telekinesis

Moving an object in a relatively straight line uses Intelligence and Telekinesis. Any object within line of sight can be grabbed by Telekinesis. Telekinesis levels determine the maximum weight that can be (slowly) lifted and moved. In this case, the levels of the power work just like the Strength Attribute (*AFMBE* p. 30).

Hurling objects uses Dexterity and Telekinesis. Thrown objects can be dodged normally. Most small objects (hand-sized or smaller) inflict D4(2) x Telekinesis in damage. Long distance throwing is subject to range penalties (use pistol ranges, *AFMBE*, p. 134). Massive objects do D6(3) to D12(6) points of damage multiplied by Telekinesis level, minus the

Pyrokinesis Table

Level	Abilities
1	A small flame, about the size of a match or lighter.
2	A torch-sized flame inflicts D4(2) per Pyrokinesis level. It can ignite anything that a torch would ignite.
4	Jet of flame, doing D6(3) damage per level of Pyrokinesis. Range is equal to Willpower + Pyrokinesis in yards.
5	Hurl a ball of fire doing D4(2) damage per level of Pyrokinesis. Use Pistol range modifiers (<i>AFMBE</i> , p. 134).
7	Engulf a person in flames, doing D6(3) damage times Pyrokinesis level.
9	Ignite anything vaguely flammable (wet wood, flame-retardant fabrics), melt metal.
10+	Ignite fires over a radius of one-yard per Willpower level. Anybody in the area is engulfed as per level 7.

Telekinesis Thrown Object Damage Table

Object Weight	Base Damage	Minimum Level
Less than 10 lbs.	D4(2)	0
Up to 50 lbs.	D4+1(3)	1
Up to 100 lbs.	D6(3)	2
Up to 250 lbs.	D8(4)	3-5
Up to 650 lbs.	D10(5)	6-7
Up to 1,250 lbs.	D12(6)	8-10
Above 1,250 lbs.	D12+1(7)	11+

Strength Level needed to lift the object. See the Telekinesis Thrown Object Damage Table for damage inflicted by objects of a given weight, and the minimum Telekinesis Strength needed to lift them.

Inspired and creatures capable of channeling Essence can resist being picked up through a Resisted Task using Willpower plus a bonus equal to the Essence released. The psionic uses Willpower and Telekinesis.

It is possible to use Telekinesis to manipulate weapons and machinery at a distance, but it requires a high degree of concentration and proficiency. The character uses Telekinesis and an appropriate skill, with a penalty of -1 to -6, depending on how complex the Task is. Using a weapon, for example, would require Telekinesis and the weapon skill, at a penalty of at least -2 (for a hand weapon like a sword) to -4 (for a gun or similar firearm).

Telemagery

Psionics with this power can create illusions, form a mass illusory image or just a projection of a sight that the psionic wishes others to see. This can range from disguising the psionic's appearance to creating illusions so realistic that they cause real harm.

Using Telemagery

The simplest use of Telemagery is to disguise the psionic's appearance, or make him invisible. This requires a successful Willpower and Telemagery roll. Mundane characters who pass a Difficult Perception Test notice something strange but are unable to tell what. Gifted characters and other psionics can see through the illusion with a Resisted Simple Perception Test against the psionic's initial roll. The psionic has to concentrate on the image constantly and is only able to walk or hold minimal conversation. This can be exhausting and each minute that the image is maintained drains the psionic of D4(2) Endurance Points. Fighting or any other distraction

Telemagery Table

Level	Abilities
1	Visual illusions only, change small details only, or their own facial appearance.
3	Illusions are also audible, change entire appearance, vanish from sight, or create a convincing illusion of human size.
5	Illusions are completely realistic, fooling all senses except touch, create illusions one cubic yard (meter) for each level of Willpower plus Telemagery Strength.
7+	Illusions are so realistic that they cause the mind to believe the image is real. Flames burn, and damage inflicted seems real.

causes the psionic to lose his concentration, requiring a Difficult Willpower Test each time the psionic engages in potentially distracting actions, or the illusion vanishes.

The maximum number of people that can be affected by the illusion is equal to the psionic's Willpower plus Telemagery. Generally, targets must be within visible range of the psionic.

At higher levels, the psionic develops the ability to create more complex illusions such as creatures, flames or buildings. The stronger the psionic, the more convincing the mirage is, becoming more than just visual. Sound, odor and heat can be simulated so convincingly that the victim's mind can cause physical harm to his body. Psychosomatic burns and cuts appear on the skin, the victim taking real damage if he fails to see through the illusion!

Telepathy (Type)

Characters with Telepathy have the ability to see the thoughts of others and project their own thoughts into the minds of others. As with Biokinesis, Telepathy is purchased as two separate powers: Telepathy (Reading) and Telepathy (Sending)

Using Reading

Reading is used to peer into the minds of others. The target of the mind probe must be within range (see Telepathy Range Table, p. 39) and within line of sight, unless previously contacted (see Sending). This Task uses the psionic's Perception and Reading level. The Success Levels of the Task determine how deep the psionic sees into the target's mind.

Mundanes who pass a Difficult Perception Test can sense something strange, a feeling of being watched or a disturbance at the back of their minds, but unless experienced and knowledgeable about psionic phenomena, do not know what is happening. Gifted and supernatural beings may be able to resist the intrusion. In such a case, this involves a Resisted Task, with the target using psionic powers or other abilities to fight off the mind probe.

Reading generally produces brief flashes of information, images and words from the subject's mind. Prolonged contact can be attempted, but is exhausting. To maintain mind-to-mind contact, the psionic must succeed at a second Willpower and Reading Task. Each Success Level allows for one minute of constant supervision. During that time, the psionic can peruse the target's thoughts and memories at will. Each minute of mind contact drains the psionic of D4(2) Endurance Points, and requires a great deal of concentration. Should the psionic be attacked or distracted, contact is lost.

Using Sending

Sending a mental message uses the character's Intelligence plus Sending level. The psionic can converse mentally with the target for one minute per Success Level. Once contact has been established, the psionic can also hear any mental reply from her target (only thoughts deliberately "sent" to the psionic can be perceived). The Sending level determines range of this power. Sending uses the Telepathy Range table.

Sending can be used for more than simple communication. By making the mental "voice" sound strange or unearthly, the psionic can scare those who

Reading Task Table

Level of Success	Result
1	Sense emotions only.
2	Sense surface thoughts (whatever the subject is thinking at the moment).
3	Delve deeper into the mind of the target. "Ask" any one simple question (one sentence answer). Each additional Success Level adds one more answer.
4+	Get a clear picture of the subject's personality, find memories, and get any information the target has, provided the psionic specifically asks for it.

Telepathy Range Table

Level	Abilities
1	Physical contact required.
2	Range of one yard per level of Willpower plus Reading.
3	Range five yards per level of Willpower plus Reading.
5	Range 50 yards per level of Willpower plus Reading. Line of sight no longer necessary. The Psionic can “scan” for a particular mind, as long as he has telepathically contacted that mind in the past.
6	Range 100 yards per level of Willpower plus Reading.
10	Range one mile per level of Willpower plus Reading.
15+	Range 20 miles per level of Willpower plus Reading.

do not know about psionic abilities. Some evil psionics have also manipulated disturbed and weak-willed humans by telling them to commit crimes repeatedly, until the victim finally decides to do what the “voices” tell her.

At Strength 4 or higher, the psionic can use Sending to send a “psionic scream” that inflicts damage and overloads the victim’s mind. This attack drains the psionic of one Essence point every time it is used and inflicts D4(2) points of damage for every four levels of Sending (rounded down). Further, the victim loses all of her actions for one Turn, and suffers a penalty of -4 on all Tasks and Tests for one additional Turn per Success Level of the attack. Range is limited to two yards per Strength level.

A psionic scream requires a Resisted Task, using the psionic’s Willpower and Sending against a Difficult Willpower Test (for mundanes). Gifted characters and supernatural beings can resist this power in a variety of ways. At worst, they gain a +2 bonus to the Difficult Willpower Test.

Sci-Fi Equipment

One of the great things about sci-fi games is the variety of wonderful toys you can play with. This section gives you some examples of what might be available in a number of different futures. It is not exhaustive, so you should expand the lists as much as necessary to fill out the details of your world.

Each piece of equipment includes an Encumbrance Value, Cost, Technology Type and Availability.

Encumbrance Level (EV) and Availability (Aval) are the same as they are in *AFMBE* (see p. 126). Cost is given in dollars, just as it is in the core rules. However, this amount assumes that the technology that allows the creation of that item is relatively common, even if the item itself is not. Different settings will likely have different currencies, rampant inflation or, perhaps, no currency at all. The Zombie Master has the final say regarding what is available and how hard it is to get, depending upon such things as the maturity of the technology, and the mindset of the culture.

Technology Type (Tech) indicates the most likely technology that will create the item in question (see p. 17).

Tech is flexible, as different technologies try to tackle the same basic problems. Even if a piece of equipment is listed as Common for a technology type, that does not guarantee it will even exist in a particular campaign.

All the equipment listed in *AFMBE* is likely to be still available, although probably in a more convenient and longer lasting form (or just cheaper). For example, flashlights might last for months if not decades, and have a bundle of other tools built in, whereas a camouflage option might simply be a stylish extra in nanoweave clothing.

Miscellaneous Equipment Table

Equipment	EV	Cost	Tech	Aval
0G Stick	2/1	\$1,000	C	C
Body Suit	25/12	\$2,000	N	C
Crown of Thorns	1/1	\$15,000	N	R
Medpack	2/1	\$200	B, C	C
Motion sensor	2/1	\$700	C, N	U
Nanogel	10/5	\$1,000	N	C
Nanogoo	1/1	\$10,000	N	R
Scanner	1/1	\$500	S	U
Spacesuit	40/20	\$5,000	M	U
Teleport Anchor	1/1	\$3,000	S	U

0G Stick: This is a specialized piece of equipment for moving in microgravity, looking like a baton about two feet long. It is held in one hand and can send out a thin wire which attaches itself to nearby surfaces for as long as necessary, allowing anchorage or swift turns in midair. It also contains a propellant gas that can change the direction of the user (with 20 charges). Use of the stick gives a +2 bonus to the Microgravity Control skill. It is pronounced “oh-gee.” Some 0G sticks have clips that enable them to be attached to the belt or arm of a space suit, allowing for both hands to remain free, though using a stick in this manner halves the provided bonus.

Body Suit: This is your basic spacesuit, but less restrictive and more secure than modern versions. It is similar to Nanoweave armor (see p. 47), but has an AV of (D8 x 3) + 6(18) and can quickly heal damage to itself (it takes one Turn to heal the damage created by each 15 points of damage that get through to the wearer). Note that this healing only applies to the actual armor; it does not heal damage suffered by the wearer. It blocks 100 rems of radiation, and has a 60 hour oxygen supply (although extra hours are easily carried).

Crown of Thorns: Although this could come in many shapes and sizes, the most common form is a simple circlet that can be placed on somebody’s head. When it is activated, the circuitry sends nanobots into the brain of the victim, looking for patterns of emotional trauma and stress lines. It then constructs a vir-

tual hell based on past experiences and direct manipulation of the brain’s receptors, creating agony more intense than anything that can be experienced through physical nerves. Such torture is usually *very* illegal, but just the threat of it is enough to break most people.

Medpack: This is the first aid pack of choice for near future settings. It provides a variety of shots, including efficient pain relief, anti-addict effects for dampening the neurological effect of drugs, and vector agents for channeling natural hormones. There is also synthflesh for providing a structure for healing wounds, and pro-sterile bandages. Use of this pack conveys the equivalent of Resistance (Poison and Disease) 2, can heal 10 Life Points per person per day (additional packs do not help), and multiplies the speed of natural healing five times. Each pack can be used for tending a person for five days.

Motion Sensor: This handy device detects movement within a 50-yard radius, even behind walls. It must be operated within an atmosphere, and can be programmed to ignore the sources of friendly movement.

Nanogel: Although described as a gel, this can be as hard (or as soft) as required, and can assume almost any shape or color. It is usually bought as a grey block of one cubic foot volume, and can be combined with other blocks to produce conglomerates of nanocells as large as required. Using a specialized control pad, the user can reshape the gel as desired—even into complicated mechanical and electrical

equipment, although pre-built programs are needed to recreate these complex devices. Chemical reactions and more advanced technology cannot be replicated, and technical limitations mean the electrical flow can never be particularly strong. For example, it could make a gun (but not working bullets or a pulse rifle), or a car (as long as its power source was provided separately), but not a forcefield generator. Some designs might be the subject of government control (or the black market). Most nanogel constructs have some sort of security, so they cannot be reprogrammed without a special override code.

Nanogoo: This is illegal technology specifically designed to break down nanogel structures, created by anarchic individuals called goo-hackers or nackers. When at least half a gram of nanogoo is attached to nanogel, it tries to insinuate itself like a prion, riddling the system with errors. Of course there is security against this happening, but a continual arms race between manufacturers and nackers keeps things interesting. Roll resisted Intelligence + Engineer (Nanotech) between the creators of the two substances. Most commercial nanogel has a base value of D10+8(13), as the creator can be generally assumed to have Intelligence 3 and Engineer (Nanotech) 5; beware of cheap imitations.

Scanner: This is a very useful device for performing scientific and medical analysis, and also gives its owner access to a large database of knowledge. In theory it can perform a vast array of functions, such as scan objects for their chemical composition, analyze the atmosphere, calculate longitude, detect radiation, scan for signs of life, and so on. What it can actually do is usually left up to the Zombie Master, depending on the sort of information he has prepared for his game. At lower technology levels, it will become a more specialized device, detecting one or two things only.

Spacesuit: This is your basic spacesuit without the advantages of nanotech. It acts as armor with an AV of (D8 x 2) + 5(13), and can seal minor cuts (under 10 points of damage to the wearer), but nothing greater. It has a six-hour oxygen supply.

Teleport Anchor: This is usually carried around as an amulet or badge, and acts as a reference point for a teleportation facility. It might be attuned to a particular spaceship, for example, to give crewmembers

exploring a planet a fast getaway. Some models will only work for their designated owner, while others teleport whoever is wearing them.

Weapons

Here we get to the sharp end of the stick. A lot of scientific progress is all about finding better ways of killing your neighbors, so some of these weapons can raise the lethality of the game quite a bit—but then, some sci-fi weapons seem no more effective than a medium caliber pistol, so we cover that as well.

The ZM should consider carefully the effect of futuristic weaponry in his game, and balance that against the defenses that might exist, and in particular the abilities of zombies in the setting. Having a gun that practically guarantees an instant kill can take a lot of the horror out of a game (although we have seen many times in the movies that those who rely on their weapons can be in for a nasty surprise).

Special Weapon Types

This weapon types should be added to those in the corebook (see *AFMBE*, p. 105).

Explosive Bullet: These nasty pieces of ammunition triple any damage that gets through the usual Armor or Barrier Value.

Flechette Bullet: Instead of bullets, flechette weapons fire bursts of tiny, razor-sharp shards that spread out similar to a shotgun blast. All damage that gets through any Armor or Barrier Value in the way is tripled. Since flechette rounds are jagged, they tend to tear up the rifling on the inside of standard projectile weapons; as such, these rounds can only be fired from specially designed “flechette guns.”

Flower Power: This is similar to flechette damage, except a single projectile bursts into a hemisphere of shards when it hits its target. A character hit in the chest will end up with metal flying through his groin and skull, and all the organs in between. Double any Armor and Barrier Value between the target and the bullet, but any damage that gets through is quadrupled.

Energy: This represents damage inflicted by high-powered energy weapons. The Armor and Barrier Value of any physical protection is halved, and any damage that gets through is doubled.

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Close Combat Weapons Table

Weapon Type	Damage	EV	Cost	Tech	Aval
Energy Sword	D10(5) x (Strength+3)†	1/1	\$30,000	S	R
Monofilament Flail	D10(5) x Dexterity*	1/1	\$2,000	N	R
Vibroaxe	D12(6) x (Strength+1)‡	4/2	\$1,500	C	R
Vibroknife	D6(3) x (Strength+1)‡	1/1	\$400	C	C
Vibrosword	D10(5) x (Strength+1)‡	2/1	\$1,000	C	U

* Inflicts slashing/stabbing damage. Any damage that penetrates armor is doubled.

† Inflicts energy damage. The Armor Value of physical armor is halved, and damage is doubled.

‡ Vibro weapons halve Armor Value and double damage that gets through.

Note that since much of the damage inflicted by these weapons is from energy, using them two-handed does not inflict extra damage as described in *AFMBE*, p. 132.

Flechettes and Zombies

Flechette attacks are designed to injure large areas of the body simultaneously. Against zombies with a vulnerable area such as the heart or brain (see AFMBE, p. 148), the weak spot is more likely to be hit, but with less than the full impact: non-targeted shots do one quarter damage. If a flechette bullet is aimed successfully at the weak spot, it does half damage. If a flower power attack is aimed successfully, it does full damage.

Zombies with weak spot None are undamaged by flechette attacks.

Extra Lethality

When you look at the weapon tables, you might wonder about the point of energy weapons, since they only do about the same amount of damage as their modern equivalents. Part of the answer is that they provide greater capacity and the ability to avoid some armor, and part is because they don't have the sheer kinetic shock of a bullet. Mostly it's a genre convention—you don't usually see blaster pistols disintegrate chunks from the enemy, though it might make sense for them to do so.

If you do want a grittier and perhaps more realistic campaign, feel free to increase the multiplier of energy weapons to x3 (or even x4!).

There is another aspect in which energy weapons might be realistically improved upon. Since they are usually not subject to gravity or much interference from the atmosphere, their range and accuracy could be greatly increased. In theory, if you can see something (even using a telescopic lens), you can probably hit it—even if it's miles away. This obviously changes the nature of ranged combat, and again the ZM should consider if he wants to explore those ramifications in his game.

Energy Sword: This weapon achieves the impressive trick of constraining an energy field into the length of a sword blade.

This weapon requires its own skill to use, Hand Weapon (Energy Sword), which is a Special Skill (see *AFMBE*, p. 50) because of the rarity of the weapon. However, it can do more than just inflict damage. The skill can be used to parry missile weapons, including energy rays (but not big projectiles like boulders, or dispersed energy fields like those produced by EMF weapons). If attacked with a blaster, the wielder can attempt to deflect the beam back from where it came from (or at another target in range). He must get three more Success Levels on his parry roll than the attacker got on his attack roll to succeed. If so, he gets a free attack, rolling *Dexterity + Hand Weapon (Energy Sword)* -3 to hit.

Monofilament Flail: This weapon consists of a monofilament wire stretched between a hilt and a small weight, usually about one yard in total length. When not being used, the wire is drawn into the hilt for safety. The width of the wire is almost infinitesimally small—measured in nanometers—and thus is so sharp it cuts through almost any material as if it wasn't there. This weapon ignores all physical armor, though force-fields remain effective against it. If two monofilaments cross, one is cut (determine randomly).

Unlike most close-quarter weapons, it is not the strength of the user that is important, but the deftness with which he wields it (since the wire has almost no momentum of its own). That property also accounts for the flail's greatest drawback—it is very difficult to control. If its wielder ever gets no successes on an attack roll (regardless of what he needs to hit his opponent), he gets the full damage inflicted on himself.

The monofilament cannot cut into something that it cannot leverage into. Thus, it can't cut through a flat wall unless it starts at a corner or similar protuberance.



Vibroaxe: A vibro-weapon is like a chainsaw in miniature. Its blade vibrates several hundred times a second, giving it considerable penetration, and a characteristic hum. It halves the value of any physical armor.

Vibroknife: Like a vibroaxe, but a lot more discreet.

Vibrosword: Like a vibroaxe, but more stylish.

Watch that Arm

These close combat weapons tend to cut bits off opponents very easily. As an optional rule, anyone that takes more than half their total Life Points in damage from one of these weapons automatically loses a limb. This rule does not count if the wielder is aiming for specific body parts (see AFMBE, p. 104).

Ranged Weapon Table

All of these weapons are handguns (except the pulse rifle), and so many have the same range, and very similar capacities. If you want to increase these values, look to the rifle modification rules in the next section.

Weapon Type	Range	Damage	Cap	EV	Cost	Tech	Aval
Flechette Gun	4/15/30/50/100	D8 x 4(16)*	10-15	2/1	\$1,000	C	C
Blaster	4/15/30/100/200	D6 x 5(15)†	50	1/1	\$800	S	C
Heavy Blaster	4/15/30/100/200	D8 x 5(20)†	70	2/1	\$1,200	S	U
Disruption Field Gun	4/15/30/100/200	D10 x 4(20)†	100	2/1	\$1,500	B	U
EMF Gun	4/15/30/100/200	D10 x 4(20)‡	100	2/1	\$2,000	C	R
Pulse Rifle	10/70/200/800/1200	D8 x 5(20)**	30-40	2/1	\$6,000	E	U
Stun Gun	4/15/30/100/200	D10 x 4(20)&	50	1/1	\$600	E	C
Sonic Blaster	10/30/40/60/80	D10 x 4(20)††	50	1/1	\$800	E	U

* Inflicts flechette or flower power damage, depending upon the ammunition used.

† Inflicts energy damage (which halves the value of physical armor, and then doubles the damage).

‡ Inflicts energy damage, but only affects robots and those with cyberware or nanoware.

& Inflicts energy damage, but Endurance is affected, rather than Life Points. Does not affect robots or zombies.

** Uses explosive bullets. Can be single-shot or fully automatic.

†† Inflicts bashing damage

Flechette Gun: This gun can be loaded with normal flechette ammunition, or the special Flower Power variety for extra damage.

Blaster: This is the classic weapon of space opera, producing brightly colored rays to zap the enemy with. You can also use these stats for a more realistic

laser weapon which is more subtle, producing an almost invisible pulse of energy.

Heavy Blaster: A more powerful version of the above weapon, for use by elite troops and devil-may-care smugglers.

Disruption Field Gun: This gun produces a field that has a devastating effect on living flesh. It breaks down cellular walls, scrambles nerves and might even liquefy someone with a big enough dose. Natural healing is halved when recovering from this damage. Robots are unaffected.

EMF Gun: EMF weapons produce a field of high-energy microwaves that can disable electronic components, in much the way disruption fields affect flesh. The damage only affects robots (including injected nanobots) and those with significant amounts of cyberware. Against enhanced characters, this does not affect Life Points, but for each 15 points of EMF damage, one power shuts down until repaired (determine randomly).

Pulse Rifle: This high powered rifle uses magnetic fields to fire explosive bullets at incredible speed. In addition, it is equipped with advanced recoil inhibitors which make automatic fire more controllable. Each Success Level on the attack roll means two bullets hit.

Stun Gun: This weapon produces an energy field that overloads the signals traveling through the target's nervous system. Damage is calculated normally, and taken off Endurance instead of Life Points (see Endurance Point Loss in *AFMBE*, p. 114). Robots are unaffected.

Sonic Blaster: This is a rare weapon that uses sound waves traveling through the air to create Bash damage. It might be used in a setting where energy weapons are rare, and inertia shields disable many projectile weapons. It doesn't work without atmosphere.

Other Modifications

These modifications can be added to most weapons on the Ranged Weapons Table, usually making them even more dangerous.

Modification	Cost	Tech	Aval
Final Refusal	\$1,500	E	R
Jacked	\$200	C	C
Rifle	\$100	M	C
Security Setting	\$200	B, C	U
Self-Aiming	\$1,000	E	U

Shooting Aliens and Zombies

Disruption and stun fields have been designed specifically to affect the human metabolism. Some alien races might have some immunity to the effect at the Zombie Master's discretion (although they will likely have their own energy weapons calibrated specifically for them). Likewise, other species from Earth can be affected in different ways. Mammals might get the full effect, other animals might get only half, and plants none at all.

By default, zombies are unaffected by stun guns, and receive half damage from a disruption field. See p. 31 for Aspects that change this behavior.

Final Refusal: This setting means the gun itself can decide whether it will shoot a particular target. For example, in a human/alien war, guns might be created that will not fire when pointed at a human. Likewise, the government might require all guns to become inactive when trained on police officers. Exactly how good the gun is at recognizing its target is up to the ZM, as it can allow for all sorts of interesting plot points.

Jacked: The weapon is able to be connected into its user's neurosystem, using his own eyesight to help aim. This allows the +3 bonus of the Target Link Power to be used for the attack roll.

Rifle: All of the weapons in the Ranged Weapons Table are hand guns, except for the Pulse Rifle. Making the hand guns into rifles does not increase their damage, but does increase the Capacity and Range (since range is more about ability to aim than the distance the effect travels). Double each of the five numbers for range, and triple the capacity.

Security Setting: The weapon can only be fired by a particular person (or type of person). How easy it is to circumvent that security depends upon the circumstances, although a suitable Engineer roll (or access to somebody's thumb) might work. If the gun is also jacked, the security becomes harder to overcome.

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Self-Aiming: These extremely effective weapons have their own sensors to determine what they are being pointed at, and can control the direction of their own fire to an extent. A user only has to point it in the right general direction, and it does the rest, giving a +4 bonus to the attack roll. If the sensors could be

fooled, the bonus is removed (or perhaps even turned into a penalty, if the gun tends to shoot at the wrong target). This type of modification does not combine with bonuses from Jacked weapons, as the “smart” technology overrides an aiming accuracy bonus.

Variations on a Theme

Because this book has to cover such a wide range of tech levels, it concentrates on broad effects rather than specific examples of equipment. We encourage the Zombie Master to think about the technology used in your game, and fill in the gaps that we can't anticipate. It's just a part of the normal business of building a background to your world, and when it comes to weaponry, you know your players are likely to be paying attention!

For example, if vibroweapons are popular, then there are probably all sorts of makes, models and weird variations. You can use our three examples and extrapolate them to katana, halberds or throwing stars. There might be cheap mass-produced brands, expensive brands that aren't much better, and a few special companies or artisans who can make you a weapon to out-shine the rest.

Likewise, you can come up with a concealable mini-blaster and mono-filament bolas, or you can combine forcefields with the shield rules from Dungeons and Zombies if it is sociological appropriate (or just looks cool).

Grenades

Just as with personal weaponry, on-going research will create some nasty improvements to explosive devices. Unlike the equivalent tables in *AFMBE* (p. 136), the range and capacity is not listed here. These

weapons may all be thrown or launched in a grenade launcher as normal (although for some of them, throwing them is a dangerous option).

Explosive Areas of Effect Table

Weapon Type	Ground Zero	General Effect	Max. Range	Tech	Aval
Flechette Grenade	1	3	5	N	R
Antimatter Grenade	10	30	80	E	R
Thermal Detonator	3	10	20	S	R

Explosive Damage Table

Weapon Type	Ground Zero	General Effect	Max. Range
Flechette Grenade	D8 x 5(20)	D8 x 4(16)	D8 x 2(8)
Antimatter Grenade	D10 x 10(50)	D10 x 8(40)	D10 x 6(30)
Thermal Detonator	D10 x 8(40)	D10 x 6(30)	D10 x 2(10)

Body Armor Table

Here are some of the protections that might exist against all that lethal firepower.

Armor Type	Armor Value	EV	Cost	Tech	Aval
Inertia Field	(D10 x 10) + 20(70)	4/2@	\$3,000	E	U
Nanoweave Armor	(D8 x 5) + 20(40)	4/2	\$1,000	N	U
Personal Forcefield	(D10 x 2) + 15 (25)	2/1	\$8,000	S	R
Reflective Body Suit	(D8 x 3) + 8(20)	20/10@	\$2,000	S	S

@ Regardless of EV, this item lightly encumbers a character when worn.

Inertia Field: This projects a field around the user that dissipates momentum from all moving objects. The faster the object, the more drastically it is slowed; bullets fall from the air, whereas a thrown knife slows enough to dodge. Energy, flame and even sonic weapons completely ignore the Armor Value of this protection. Although the field is designed to let its user move normally, there is still some residual drag, accounting for the light encumbrance. People using hand weapons against an inertia field can learn a specialization to ignore the Armor Value, although they are at -2 to attack, because of the slower speed they must use.

Nanoweave Armor: This is similar to the Class I and II armor as mentioned in *AFMBE* (see p. 138), except made from a much strong and lighter material, which efficiently dissipates shock and may even heal itself.

Personal Forcefield: This device, usually worn on the belt, generates a forcefield as a vertical shield in front of the user. No weapon can reduce the Armor Value of this protection.

Reflective Body Suit: Body armor for Space Opera games has been especially crafted to provide protection against energy beams. The Armor Value is not halved when applying energy damage.

Attack versus Offense

Normally, if a particular weapon is widely used, the protection against that weapon will also be popular. However, it doesn't have to be that way. While each of the weapons listed in the previous tables has something which counters it (forcefields help protect against monofilament, and reflective suits protect against blasters, for example) that doesn't mean you have to automatically introduce both into your game together.

If a weapon is new or powerful enough, the necessary defenses may be rare, restricted or technically impossible in your own version of reality. Guns provide a good historical example: the firearm made armor obsolete, and effective personal defenses were not developed for a very long time. Similarly, if skilled "mono-cowboys" roam your setting, able to carve up both people and architecture with little difficulty, society may react in strange and interesting ways.

Starships

Sci-fi wouldn't be what it is today without spacecraft traveling between worlds and galaxies, and spectacular aerial dogfights wherein the brash young pilot destroys a massive space station with one lucky shot of his energy missiles. This section deals with creating spacecraft of all sizes and shapes, from ultra-fast fighter crafts to mother ships.

Spacecraft are created with their own character points, by buying the Spacecraft Quality. The total levels the players purchase in this Quality represent the number of Build points they may spend on their ship. The Spacecraft Build points represent the money, time, or training each character invested in the ship. In addition, there are several Builds below that can actually be taken as *Hindrances*, due to inferior quality, low tech levels, etc. Spacecraft Hindrance points can only be used to purchase other Spacecraft Builds. They may not be used as general Drawback or Character points.

Spaceships use the same rules for vehicles as found in *AFMBE* (see pp. 115-117). Some of the Attributes have changed meaning because of the larger scales involved.

When to Buy Spaceships

These rules have detailed guidelines for how much various aspects of ship design cost, but you don't always have to worry about that. If a spaceship is just background detail, the setting of an adventure, or a plot device, the players don't have to spend points on it. Likewise, the ZM doesn't have to worry about cost if he wants to design an enemy battle cruiser.

However, if a spaceship is a tool useful to the characters in their adventures, such as a fighter craft or a small freighter in an on-going game, it becomes a feature of the character(s), providing advantages and benefits others don't have. In this situation, it is appropriate to charge them points for the use of it.

Power Armor and Battlemechs

Power armor and battlemechs aren't covered in our standard rules, as the variety inherent in these things is so large that it would take a full sourcebook just to deal with them. Rather, we suggest modifying the starship construction rules to simulate battlemechs (most battlemechs, for example, would be size 0 or 1 ships with ordnance and several main guns), and using the Robot Quality to create powered armor.

If creating battlemechs, keep in mind that vehicles with both ground and aerial capability generally see their speed and acceleration tripled when airborne (thus, ground speed and acceleration would be 1/3 of total spaceship speed and acceleration as defined on pp. 49, 51). Halving the cost of the speed and acceleration Builds could yield a mech that has no aerial capability.

If simulating power armor with the Robot Quality, the base cost of the Quality should be reduced by two, to represent the fact that the construct is in fact a shell worn by a human and not an intelligence unto itself. The suit also provides a base AV of D4(2); bonuses beyond this are purchased with the Dermal Armor Quality.

Ship Size

2-point per level Build

The first thing to spend points on is the size of your ship, represented by a Size Level. Size Ratings cost two Build points per Size Level. This does not determine the amount of cargo or passengers the ship can carry (there's a separate Build for that), so it really reflects the size and power of vital areas such as the bridge, engine rooms and gun emplacements (if any). These are the targets that will be targeted in a fire-fight, and so Size determines base Damage Capacity.

Other aspects that are based on Size include the minimum amount of crew required for normal operation (including fighting), the maximum amount of Extra Space available, the maximum amount of guns

that can be bought, and how fast the ship accelerates and turns. Some of these aspects are covered in the table, others are described under the appropriate Attribute.

Ship Size Table

Size	Base DC	Extra DC	Crew	Extra Space	Max. Weapons	Notes
0	200	40	1	0	3	Snub fighter or one-man shuttlecraft
1	300	60	1	1	6	Small transport shuttle or twin pilot fighter
2	400	80	2	1	8	Medium transport shuttle
3	500	100	3	2	10	Average Cargo ship
4	800	150	4	2	14	
5	1,500	300	8	3	20	Large freighter/Attack Ship
6	2,000	400	10	3	30	
7	3,000	600	15	3	50	Large Cruiser/Battle ship
8	4,000	800	20	4	100	Battle Cruiser/Destroyer
9	5,000	1,000	30	4	150	Moving Starbase/Carrier
10	7,000	1,500	40	4	200	Town-sized mother ship

Base DC: The base Damage Capacity of any ship of the Size.

Extra DC: The amount of DC each level of Toughness is worth.

Crew: The minimum crew needed to fly the ship effectively in a battle situation.

Extra Space: The maximum levels of the Extra Space Build able to be purchased without incurring penalties (see p. 52).

Max. Weapons: The maximum number of guns and missile ports that can be built into the ship.

Spaceship Attributes

These Builds allow you to purchase levels in the Attributes of vehicles.

Acceleration

2-point per level Build or Hindrance

This Attribute represents how much a ship can change its speed per Turn in normal conditions. The base value is $(11 - \text{the Size value})/2$ (round down). Each level bought increases that by one (or decreases it, as a Hindrance). See Space Combat (p. 57) for more about acceleration in the game, such as the units being used.

For convenience, assume that any ship that can enter the atmosphere has an acceleration of 20 mph times its normal Acceleration in those conditions.

Accuracy

1-point per level Build or Hindrance

This determines the sensitivity of the ship's sensors and weapon systems. The default Accuracy value is zero, and each level bought adds one (or subtracts, in the case of a Hindrance).

When a spaceship pilot (or navigator, or similar officer) has to make a skill check based on Perception, he uses either his own Perception or the ship's Accuracy score, whichever is lower.

Armor Value (AV)

Variable Build

This determines how much damage is deflected from attacks on the ship. Two types of AV work slightly differently from each other. A ship can spend points on both types of protection (if Shields technology is available in the campaigns).

Hull: This determines how much protection the hull itself provides. Every ship has a base AV of 150, because of the construction methods required to protect against radiation, minor asteroids and the lack of pressure. For one Build point, the ship gains an extra D10 times its Size in AV. Each extra point spent increases the multiplier by the Size of the vessel. For every point spent on Hull over five, Handling decreases by one. The minimum multiplier for AV enhancements is one. This means that one Build point adds D10(5) points of AV even to a Size 0 ship.

For example: A Size 3 ship with two points of Hull has an AV of $150 + D10 \times 6(180)$, since $3 \times 2 = 6$.

Shields: These forcefields absorb some of the damage before it gets to the hull. Unfortunately, they have limited capacity. For three Build points, the shield provides an AV of 100, and a DC based on the Size of the vessel (the same as the base DC of the ship). For each extra three Build points, AV increases by 50, and DC increases by the base DC. More than five levels of Shields cannot be bought.

For example: A Size 4 ship with six points of Shields (two levels) has an AV of 150 ($100+50$) and a DC of 1600 (800×2).

A shield's AV and DC work in the same way as that of the ship. Any damage not absorbed by the AV is removed from the DC. Once a shield's DC has been reduced to 0, the shield provides no more protection (and the AV of the hull then becomes relevant).

Damage Capacity (DC)

Damage Capacity is an Attribute that cannot be changed directly with Build points. Instead it is determined by the Size of a ship, modified by its Toughness.

Note that Damage Capacity does not indicate how much damage is required to completely destroy a vessel. For some of the bigger ships, that value might run into the millions. DC measures how much damage a vessel can take before its engines and internal systems (like power and air pressure) stop functioning.

Handling

2-point per level Build or Hindrance

This describes the maneuverability and responsiveness of the ship. The base level is $(1 - \text{the Size})$ (so for most ships, that is a negative value). Each level bought adds to the Handling value (or subtracts, in the case of a Hindrance). More than five levels of Handling cannot be bought.

When a spaceship pilot has to make a skill check based on Dexterity, he uses either his own Dexterity or the ship's Handling score, whichever is lower.

Note that Handling is a relative value, depending upon the scale of combat. The penalties for large ships facing each other cancel each other out, leading to a roughly equal (if slower) fight. See the Space Combat rules on p. 57 for more details.

Range

Variable level Build

This determines how far the ship can travel, and how often it must stop for supplies.

By default, any vessel can make two trips without stopping for supplies at a space station, mothership or similar facility. For every additional two Build points, the number of trips that can be taken doubles. See the

Spaceship Range Table

Cost	Range	Notes
2-point Hindrance	Short Range	Orbit to surface, or ship to ship.
—	Medium Range	Inner-system cruiser for short hops between adjacent moons and planets
2-point Build	Long Range	Travel anywhere within a solar-system
4-point Build	Interstellar	Can travel from star to star

Self-Sufficient Build (p. 55) for a way to make the ship less dependent on a friendly harbor.

Speed

2- or 4- point Build or Hindrance

The Speed Attribute measures the maximum velocity of a vehicle, but this isn't relevant in space combat, because there is nothing stopping ships accelerating indefinitely (at least, nothing short of the speed of light, but that is covered with the Range and FTL Capability Builds). For the purposes of dogfights and other precision piloting tasks, Acceleration and Handling are more important.

However, Speed is still needed when the ship enters an atmosphere, since it represents the aerodynamics of the design. By default, any ship of Size 0-2 has a Speed of 600 mph, whereas those of Size 3-5 have a Speed of 300 mph. For two Build points maximum speed doubles, for four points it quadruples. Not being able to fly in atmosphere at all is a two-point Hindrance for these ships.

Ships over Size 5 cannot usually enter an atmosphere, unless they spend two Build points, in which case their Speed Attribute is 300 mph.

Toughness

1-point per level Build

This represents the ship's ability to keep functioning under adverse conditions. It has two effects in game. Each level adds a certain amount to the DC of the ship (see the Size table to determine exactly how much), and it also makes mishaps less likely after sustaining serious damage. See the Ship Damage table on page 58 for more information.

Weight

Although a normal Attribute of vehicles, weight (or, more accurately in space, mass) does not matter much in these rules. If you want a value, simply estimate one based on the size and purpose of the ship. Assume approximately 20 tons for a small fighter craft, 200 tons for a small freighter, 1.5 million tons for a large battle ship, and more for the really big cargo haulers.

Toughness cannot be bought above level five.

Starship Equipment

Here are more things on which to spend your spacecraft Build points. Players building ships should always check with their Zombie Master before purchasing any of these, as the ZM may veto certain Qualities if they do not fit the Deadworld, or may rule that the ship is just not big enough for such equipment.

Crew

2-point per level Build

The minimum crew needed to run the various types of spaceships is listed on the Size table (although artificial intelligence can reduce that, and more people are usually on board, regardless). This Build represents the average quality of the crew, and affects tasks that are not performed directly by Cast Members (if all the crew are in the Cast, this Build is not necessary).

The level in Crew acts as both the Attribute and skill of characters performing tasks (limited, as usual, by the ship's Handling and Accuracy).

For example: When a "random crew member" fires a fixed gun in a ship with a Crew of 4 and a Handling of 2, the attack roll has a bonus of 6. That is 2 (the Handling, since it is lower than Crew level) + 4 (the Crew level) = 6.

More than five levels cannot be bought.

Crews can be individualized to an extent. For example, they might have a +1 on piloting tasks but -1 on gunnery, though the ZM should approve any such changes. Also, remember that the higher the competency of the Crew, the more respect and money they will consider themselves worth. Taking a crew for granted can lead to big trouble.

Emergency Measures

2-, 4-, or 6-point Build

Disasters happen, no matter how good or valiant a crew is. This Build describes what (if any) advanced emergency measures are aboard a vessel. It is understood that all space vessels have rudimentary disaster equipment, such as fire extinguishers and basic life pods (or ejector seats). For two points, there are extra life pods and environmental suits for survival on hos-

tile worlds. For four points, the ship has automatic fire suppression systems and fully equipped escape pods with rations and environmental suits. For six points, the ship is truly state-of-the-art, with an advanced AI that adjudicates tasks, automatically moves to quell disastrous situations, backup systems and generators, and even extra environmental suits and rations. The six point version of this Build is only available to vessels with a Size 5 or larger.

Extra Space

1-point per level Build

This Build represents how much room is available for carrying passengers or cargo, and is measured in tons (not the unit of weight, but of volume. There are 100 cubic feet to the ton).

In addition, you can buy hidden compartments (equivalent to 1% of your total cargo space, or one ton, whichever is greater) for one Build point each. Anyone searching for them is at -4 to their roll.

Extra Space usually does not affect the operation of a spaceship. However, for every level of Extra Space over the maximum (determined by Size), Handling decreases by two, and Acceleration by one.

Exactly what can be stored in that extra space is up to the crew and the original design specs. It might have large cargo holds, bays for carrying smaller ships, passenger quarters, or whatever. Assume about 100 tons to dock a shuttle or snub fighter internally, about 40 tons per person for luxury accommodation, or one ton per person for conscript troops.

FTL Capability

Extra Space and Docking

A docking bay on a ship can only hold other ships that are at least three sizes smaller. Generally, only ships of Size 7 or greater have docking bays, while smaller vessels require external docking clamps, hatches, and airlocks. Special cases can be made for purpose-built transport freighters or similar, at the Zombie Master's discretion.

Extra Space does not need to be bought to contain a Shuttle (see the Build of that name).

2-point per level Build

Prerequisite: Interstellar Range

This Build determines how fast a ship can move between star systems, and is only relevant if the Interstellar Range has been bought (see p. 50).

With at least one level, the ship has some sort of space warping technology or other method for traveling faster-than-light, such as the activation of a wormhole or "jump gate". Even if all ships in a campaign have access to that technology, some are better than others at achieving warp speed and navigating hyperspace. Hence, the different levels in this Build become relevant. Rules on jumping to hyperspace, and interstellar chases appear later (see p. 56).

For an additional two Build points, the hyperdrive is shielded so observers are at -4 when trying to determine the destination of the jump.

Spaceship Extra Space Table

Build Level	Cargo space	Notes
1	1 ton	enough for a few big trunks
2	100 tons	equivalent to a small cargo freighter
3	1,000 tons	a medium to large commercial freighter, can hold a few small ships
4	100,000 tons	bulk ore transport
5	10,000,000 tons	enough to transport planetary terraforming machinery

All Flesh Must Be Eaten™

Relativity and Time Dilation

A ship that has Interstellar Range but no levels of FTL Capability is confined to traveling under the speed of light, which means that it takes years (if not centuries) to get anywhere interesting. For example, it would take about 4.3 years to get to Alpha Centauri, 310 years to get to Betelgeuse, and 30,000 years to get to the galactic center.

In addition, when traveling that fast, weird things start to happen. We have no room (or much ability) to explain the theory of relativity, but one consequence is that speed and time become strangely linked.

If you want to use this effect, but don't want to worry about the math, assume that each trip is ten times faster than usual—but only for the people on board. Traveling to Alpha Centauri still takes 4.3 years, but the crew only age about 5 months (that's an average velocity of 99.5% light-speed, for you physics buffs). This time dilation can have strange psychological effects, as people and culture back on the home world age a lot quicker than space-farers.

This is not usually a problem for hyperspace drives, since they create a shortcut from one part of the galaxy to another. It is a potential problem if the crew is placed into cryostasis during lengthy trips (hyperspace or not). Whether or not cryostasis is needed isn't a matter of Build points, but the technology level of the setting.

The classic novel of war at relativistic speeds is Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*, while *Aliens* showed some of the effects of being away from Earth too long. Ripley is also a good example of another way a character can return after a lengthy time period—cloning (the animated bodies of previous attempts, as seen in *Alien Resurrection*, would make a great zombie menace).

Duncan Idaho from *Dune* shows that if you clone somebody once, you can clone him many times.



Starship Gun Table

Gun	Cost	Damage	Minimum Ship Size
Fixed, light	3	(D10 x 20) + 200(300)	0
Fixed, heavy	4	(D12 x 20) + 280(400)	2
Fixed, massive	8	(D12 x 30) + 420(600)	7
Turret-mounted, light	4	(D10 x 20) + 200(300)	2
Turret-mounted, heavy	5	(D12 x 20) + 280(400)	2

Guns

Variable level Build

This Build allows the ship to hold its own in dangerous territory (the Ordnance Build helps too).

Each gun must be bought separately, and comes with several options. A gun can be light, heavy or massive, which changes the amount of damage it can do, and it can be fixed or turret-mounted, which changes what it can shoot at. A summary of the costs is in the table:

Heavy weapons impose a -1 penalty on the Task to hit, while massive weapons impose -3 to hit.

In addition, each heavy gun counts as two light guns for purposes of maximum weapons allowed, and each massive gun counts as four light guns. See Ship Size Table (p. 49) for maximum weapons.

Fixed weapons are dependent on the skill of the pilot to position the ship correctly. In a dogfight, his job is split between dodging his enemies and trying to get a bead on them. Turret-mounted weapons are fired by a separate gunner who has a lot more freedom of movement. This makes the pilot's job easier, and also means that the ship's Handling modifier doesn't affect the attack roll.

Intellect

5-points per level Build

This represents a ship that can think for itself—either it has an AI built in, or perhaps there is an undead brain attached to its systems. Each level of Intellect reduces the minimum crew for a ship (see the Ship Size Table) by one. Intellect also acts as the skill used when the ship itself attempts maneuvers in combat (adding onto its Handling or Accuracy score), and the ship is considered to be Jacked, giving itself a bonus (see the Jacked Build).

For example: A ship with Intellect 4 and Size 2 can fly itself without assistance (since it has a minimum crew of two), and has enough processing power left over to operate two turret-mounted guns. When attacking, it rolls Handling + Intellect + 3, and when calculating interstellar routes, it rolls Accuracy + Intellect + 3.

This Attribute is similar to Intelligence, but is used differently. If the ship does have an AI, you might want to calculate mental stats for it, just like other characters.

Jacked

3-point Build

With this Build, the ship's crew can plug themselves directly into the system, allowing for quicker and more accurate responses (assuming they have the Data Jack Power). It gives a +3 bonus to relevant rolls.

Arrgh! Thar Be Zombies! has rules for ghost ships that include giving them zombie Aspects. These can also be used for space-ships, to give a more mystical feeling to the game (although they are not balanced for ships owned by Cast Members). One change that should be made is to substitute energy attacks for fire in the Arrgh! Thar Be Zombies! rules.

Medical Facilities

2-point per level Build or Hindrance

This Build determines the extent of medical care available to the ship's crew. In game terms, the level of Medical Facilities is added to Medicine Tasks while using the ship's facilities.

Ordnance

4-point per level Build

The ship has some sort of explosive projectiles in addition to its gunnery. These projectiles have some armor piercing ability (they halve the AV of hull armor, but not shields), and do $(D8 \times 30) + 180$ (300) points of damage. Each level purchased in Ordnance represents a single torpedo bay, which can be fired once per Turn. The maximum number of guns plus torpedo bays is determined by the Size of the ship; ordnance counts as two weapons when determining Maximum Weapons allowed (see Ship Size, p. 49) and ships of Size 3 and lower are restricted to a maximum of two levels of Ordnance.

Spending an additional two points per torpedo bay yields homing missiles, which means that Handling modifiers no longer affect the attack roll, and enemy pilot suffer a -3 to all evasive maneuvers when trying to dodge the missile.

Each ship is assumed to begin with a full complement of four torpedoes per bay. Additional missiles (extra ammo) can be stored at three to the ton (see Extra Space, p. 52).

Self-Sufficient

4-point Build

This represents a ship that can refuel and take other resources from the natural environment, such as a planet or asteroid belt. It doesn't need the full facilities of a shipyard or similar harbor between journeys. In addition, the crew can repair up to half its DC given enough raw material. Beyond that, more advanced facilities are needed.

Shuttle

2-point Build

Any ship of Size 5 or above comes equipped with two free shuttles for ship to ship or ship to ground transport. These are basic small spaceships of Size 1, Handling 1, and Accuracy 2. Any other improvements must be made with Build points as usual.

Shuttles are emergency and exploratory vehicles. All ships of Size 3 and above are assumed to have enough Size 0 escape pods to accommodate the minimum crew.

Additional shuttles may be purchased for two Points.

Stealth Technology

5- or 10-point Build

The ship has some sort of cloaking technology that renders it invisible to sensors or the naked eye. At the base, five-point level, this cloaking field merely obscures the sensors of other ships. At the higher, 10-point level, the ship is invisible to the naked eye as well. However, cloaking fields use a great deal of energy and thus cloaked vessels must de-cloak in order to use shields or weaponry.

Teleporter

2-point Build

The ship has a teleport bay to beam people up and down to a planet, or transport them between ships. It has a range of about ten thousand miles (which is not far in space), and requires a minimum Size 3.

Expanded Vehicle Rules

Combat between spaceships is potentially very complex. Even ordinary movement, like a simple jaunt between one planet and the next, has a lot more complications than a plane trip, thanks in part to differing orbital speeds. We are going to simplify all that down to emphasize the fast and fun aspects of play.

Ship Speed and Chases

As explained in the Speed Attribute section, you don't need to worry about maximum velocity in space, until you get close to light speed. While the ship building rules cover Acceleration, they don't tell you what units that acceleration is measured in—it's a relative value for comparing spaceships, not for calculating exact travel times. It is up to the Zombie Master to say how long it might take to travel from one planet to another, or one star system to another, depending upon the level of technology and the needs of the plot. A near-future campaign might see a ship taking months to get to Mars, and years to get to Jupiter, but with better technology, those values could turn into days and weeks, or even hours.

If you want to see if a ship can make a trip faster than usual, or stage a chase between two ships (say the Cast have to get to a planet to stop a zombie infection in time, or an enemy cruiser is trying to shoot down the Cast Members before they can jump to hyperspace), the pilots roll Acceleration + Piloting (Starship). This is either a simple roll (if trying to beat the clock), or a resisted roll (in a chase). The ZM can extend the number of rolls if necessary—see *AFMBE* (p. 116) for a detailed example of how a chase might work.

Ships' Sensors

In a sci-fi game, operating the sensor systems of a ship is a function of the Systems Operations (Starship Sensors) (p. 20) skill. Note that Piloting (Starship) can at the ZM's discretion default to and from Systems Operations for this purpose, but at a -2 penalty. Navigation (p. 20) is used to plot a course across or between solar systems.

Any Perception-based Tasks may in certain situations use the vehicle's Accuracy rather than the Attribute, just as Dexterity-based Tasks may use a

vehicle's Handling. See the rules on ship to ship combat (p. 57) for more details.

Hyperspace

Just because a ship can travel faster-than-light doesn't mean it's easy (it isn't like dusting crops, after all). Before a vessel can safely jump, the pilot must be well clear of nearby planets (possibly the whole solar system), and achieve a total of ten success levels on a series of Perception + Navigation Tasks in order to map out the coordinates. These success levels need not be obtained on one single roll; rather, they are cumulative over a series of consecutive Tasks, each Task requiring one Turn to complete.

If a pilot decides to jump to FTL speeds without first properly calculating the flight path, the Zombie Master should require a Perception + Piloting (Starship) Task, with a negative modifier equal to 10 – the Success Levels achieved on the navigation Tasks; failure means something disastrous occurs. Perhaps the ship is lost beyond the limit of its navigation charts, making further calculations almost impossible. Maybe the ship itself is destroyed. Whether or not the crew survives is at the tender mercy of the Zombie Master.

When trying to speed up a trip through hyperspace, use the rules for chases, but use FTL Capability instead of Acceleration. It might also be possible to follow a ship that is jumping to an unknown destination by analyzing their engine emissions. Someone must make a Perception + Navigation roll to make the

A Reminder

When someone makes a skill roll to maneuver a spaceship, or interpret data from ship's sensors, he usually uses his own Dexterity or Perception. However, if the ship's Handling or Accuracy is worse than that value, the ship's Attribute is used instead.

The exceptions to this rule are turret-mounted guns and guided torpedoes, which are not modified by Handling. However, they can be affected by other factors, such as the defensive roll maneuver.

calculation. If successful, the ship can follow, and so use the chase rules as usual. In a setting where this is possible, ships often make a series of “zig-zag” jumps to try and lose a tail, and might shield their engines (see p. 55).

Combat Basics

During space combat, the pilot uses Dexterity + Piloting (Starship) to attempt various maneuvers, and Perception + Systems Operations (Weapons Systems) to fire fixed weapons. Gunners use Dexterity + Systems Operations (Weapons Systems) to fire turret-mounted weapons (if there are any).

Handling and Turn Length

As seen in the sidebar, a ship's Handling can have a big effect on skill rolls. However, this is a relative value to compare spaceships (just like Acceleration). In combat, every ship gets a bonus to Handling equal to the highest penalty of all ships in the fight. If no ships have negative Handling, don't apply any bonus. The bigger the bonus, the slower the fight takes in game-time (since bulky ships can't act as fast).

For every 3 points of Handling above 0, after temporary bonuses are factored in, a ship can take an extra action per Turn without penalty. This does not affect Acceleration.

These combat rules are designed for spaceships fighting each other. If a spaceship is trying to shoot at a car-sized vehicle, it gets -2 to its Handling. If trying to shoot a human, it's at -4. In either case, no temporary Handling bonus is awarded (and the same penalty is applied to turret-mounted guns and guided torpedoes).

For example: *A space freighter (Size 4, Handling -2) is trying to out-maneuver a big battle cruiser (Size 8, Handling -4). Both ships have purchased extra Handling, but they still have negatives because of their size. Because the smallest Handling is -4, add four to both ships, giving them a Handling 2 and 0 respectively, just for this fight.*

If the cruiser releases some snub fighters (Size 0, Handling 3) to hassle the freighter, they also get the +4 bonus, giving them a temporary Handling 7. They each get two extra actions per Turn.

If one of those snub fighters was attacking a jeep (Handling 3—see AFMBE, p. 140), it would have a Handling 1 (3-2) for that fight. If the battle cruiser was trying to strike the jeep (assuming it could get close enough), it would have a Handling -6.

Initiative

The pilots of all opposing ships roll Dexterity + Piloting (Starship) to see who maneuvers first, possibly modified by the ship's Handling.

Actions

Actions in dogfighting work like actions in regular combat, but are resolved using either Dexterity + Piloting (for maneuvers) or Perception + Systems Operations (Weapons Systems) (for firing). Each Turn a ship gets a defense action and an attack action, and possible extra actions (attack or defense) based on their Handling score. Unlike normal combat, additional attack actions cannot be performed at a penalty, but are limited to those granted by the ship's Handling (see above; all weapons can be fired each attack action).

Pilots may attempt certain combat maneuvers to put them in a better spot to do battle. If a pilot does not fire at any time in a Turn (the only weapons that are fired are turret-mounted or homing torpedoes fired by specialized gunners) he gets a +3 to any defensive maneuver. This is similar to Defensive Posture as described in the AFMBE core rulebook.

Firing Position

Space combat takes place in a full 3D environment. It is hard to keep track of that sometimes, but one consequence is that not all of a vessel's guns can fire at once, because they are facing in the wrong direction. Unless ship design dictates otherwise, assume that if there is only one opponent (or more that are keeping close together), only half the guns (round up) can be used in a Turn.

Multiple Attacks

Because of their size, some ships can bring a lot of guns to bear. If a ship has more than five guns firing at once, use the Automatic Fire—Bursts rule in AFMBE (p. 102). With five or more guns, roll as usual, and each Success Level indicates a hit. Each additional five guns adds +2 to the attack roll.

Maneuvers

Below is a list of several maneuvers a pilot might try to outwit his opponent. This list is by no means comprehensive, and players and Zombie Masters should feel free to create more as ideas strike them. Unless otherwise noted, these maneuvers are all opposed by the opponent's Perception + Piloting (Starship) roll.

Bearing Down

This is also sometimes known as "playing chicken." The pilot turns his ship around and flies a collision course directly at his opponent. The rules for playing chicken (see *AFMBE*, p. 117) apply, with the following modifications. During this action, as long as the ships head towards each other, both pilots must make Difficult Willpower Tests to stay on course (Nerves of Steel bonuses apply); failure means "chicken" and the failed pilot must veer off. If one pilot veers off, the other can make one free attack Task at no penalty. So long as both pilots are maintaining their collision course, they may freely fire upon one another, at a +2 bonus to all attack Tasks. Performing a defensive maneuver while bearing down means breaking off the charge, though in this case the opponent doesn't get a free attack Task.

The Defensive Roll

This maneuver is when the pilot puts his ship into a spin, hoping to provide a more difficult target for his opponent. Roll Dexterity + Piloting (Starship) against the opponent's Perception (Starship) + Piloting; if successful, the opponent suffers a penalty to his next attack roll equal to the successes on the pilot's Dexterity + Piloting (Starship) Task. However, any attacks by the spinning ship for the rest of that Turn and all of the next Turn suffer the same penalty, even if the maneuver fails (either way, the pilot must concentrate on getting his ship stabilized and back under control).

Dropout

This maneuver results when the pilot cuts in his top and reverse thrusters to slow suddenly, and drop below his opponent. The theory is that the opponent will overshoot the pilot, who will then come up behind at an advantage. Make an opposed Task as

normal. If successful, the opponent loses their attack this Turn and Initiative next Turn.

Loop the Loop

In this maneuver, the pilot attempts to maneuver behind his opponent by rolling his ship high in the air and coming back down behind. Make an opposed Task as normal. If successful, the pilot gains one additional attack on the opponent at no penalty.

Damage

Whenever a ship takes fire, damage occurs, though both shields and hull armor help to offset this. Once Shield DC is zero, and the ship's DC is reduced to half its usual value, things start going badly wrong.

Each hit after that point can cause a critical system to fail. Use the Ship Damage Table by rolling D10, adding the Success Levels of the hit, and subtracting the Toughness of the ship. The area affected (if any) fails, and requires an engineer or technician to attempt an Intelligence + Engineer (Starship) Task to get it going again. However, each time the same system takes damage, the repair Task suffers a cumulative -2 penalty. If at any time the engineer's D10 roll comes up a 1 or nets a negative result due to penalties, the system is irreparable without new parts, time, and a complete overhaul in a spaceport.

Ship Damage Table

Roll 1D10 + Success Levels – Toughness

-5	no effect (apart from normal damage)
6	Food and Supplies storage (when "destroyed" there are none left)
7	Crew Quarters (destroys random possessions rather than requiring repair)
8	Cargo space (Zombie Master discretion about how much cargo is destroyed)
9	Weapons (or sensors if the ship is unarmed)
10	Drive Controls (Piloting)
11-12	Engines
13	Medical Facilities
14	Life Support
15 +	Hull breach

Once the ship reaches zero DC, continue making Ship Damage rolls for each hit, adding five to the value. Any system affected is destroyed, needing major repair work.

Ships up to Size 3 automatically lose all internal pressure with a hull breach. Bigger ships can be better protected by internal bulkheads. In that case, roll D10+4 on the Ship Damage Table twice, to see which additional systems are affected.

The Cyberweb

The Internet of the Cyberpunk future is called the cyberweb. In some ways it is just like the Internet people use in the modern day; there are thousands upon thousands of sites filled with fan fiction, information, hobbies, leisure, and less savory topics that parents don't want their children viewing. Access to the cyberweb isn't quite the same as it once was, however; there may not be simple, available, and unlimited Net access to every home, and a mouse and keyboard are generally not the preferred method of going live.

Cyberjacking

Those with data jacks (see p. 26) can plug their brains directly into the cyberweb, and those who know how to use this technology to its fullest are the hackers of the future, the cyber cowboys who ride the Virtual Range of the cyberweb. More commonly, however, these men and women are referred to as "cyberjackers," or just "jackers." The process of plugging into the cyberweb is called cyberjacking, and while connected, the person "jacked in" receives direct sensory input from the computer.

Information, it is said, is power, and cyberjackers use every scrap of information they can get their hands on. To the uninitiated, watching a jacker in action is disconcerting at best; he appears catatonic, staring blankly into space, often with a look of pure ecstasy on his face. The connection to the terminal results in the shutting down of most voluntary functions, such as speech and most aspects of muscle control—nobody who is jacked into a system is going to walk around. For all intents and purposes the jacker's consciousness becomes one with the web.

Basic Web Access

Accessing the web isn't difficult, requiring only a Willpower + Computers Task to connect, followed by an Intelligence + Computers Task to initiate a program or access a specific data stream. Locating areas or sites within the web requires a Perception + Computers Task, as does keeping track of the passage of time in the real world. If the jacker has a few hours to kill, he can set time perception to pass just as it does in the real world, so he can leisurely absorb a good book, or experience whatever game he wishes to play in real time. If he so desires, however, the jacker can attempt to absorb time more quickly in the web than in reality. Each success level on a Perception + Computers Task means that the jacker can absorb one hour of time within the web for every minute that passes in the real world, and still keep track of the separate passage of time. However, failure on this roll means that the jacker loses complete track of time and disconnects several hours before or after he intended.

Some jackers become addicted to the purity and intensity of sensation while jacked in, and deliberately shut off their perception of the passage of time so they can experience unfettered ecstasy within the web. This is dangerous and has resulted in many deaths; like any drug, a little grows into more and more as the initial dose wasn't enough to satisfy the user anymore. In many cyberpunk settings, the world is littered with Cyber-junkies who spend all the money they have on pleasure programs, and then engage in illegal activities for their next fix. Zombie Masters are encouraged to treat characters seeking pleasure within the web as possessing the Addiction Drawback, and to adjudicate the situation accordingly.

Cyber Cowboys

While it's easy for the average person on the street who has a basic datajack to access the web, this isn't the way it works for the "true" cyber cowboys. These are people who have more important things to do than waste their time in the web on cheap pleasures or reliving past experiences. Cyber cowboys are the hackers of the future and have established their own domain within the web, known as the Range, which could be thought of as a nexus point between the var-

ied dimensions within cyberspace. Most companies in the future, just like modern day, maintain their own self-contained Intranets, which are connected in turn to the cyberweb for greater worldwide access. In theory the web is infinitely large, since it contains every last byte of storage space in every last server everywhere, and new servers are wired in on a daily basis even as old ones vanish.

What exactly the Range is, varies from setting to setting. It can just be a slang by which jackers refer to the cyberweb at large, or it can be a sort of hidden space between used sectors on these servers, like a virtual “pirates cove.” In general, however, the Range should be thought of as anywhere online that is secured beyond the access granted to general web surfers. As such, accessing the Range for the first time requires a Willpower + Computer Hacking roll at a -3 penalty, though amateur surfers who succeed on a Willpower + Computers roll with more than six success levels may at the Zombie Master’s option “stumble” upon the gateway and project themselves in. Once he locates a gateway in, a skilled Cast Member can always find that gateway again with a future Willpower + Computer Hacking roll at no penalty (those who accidentally get in, however, generally find the gate closed on their next visit...if they survive their first).

Communicating with other cowboys is the real reason to access the Range. It’s a community of information trading, wheeling, and dealing. Obviously, such a community has its own dangers. One such danger is other cowboys, who don’t always want to deal or trade information, but would rather just kill for it. Battles can be brutal and quick, and can in severe situations bring entire Intranets crashing down. All the same, it is often safer and easier to deal with other cowboys than it is to risk trying to infiltrate a megacorp’s Intranet. This is because of firewalls.

Intrusion Countermeasures: Firewalls

Firewalls are exactly what one would expect: intrusion countermeasures set up to keep out hackers. Unlike modern day firewalls, however, the idea takes on a whole new meaning when the hacker’s own consciousness is the virus attempting to infiltrate the network. Firewalls are measured in terms of hardness,

expressed as a number between one and 10, with one being the weakest and most harmless, and 10 meaning instant death if the hacker fails to overcome it.

Cyber cowboys don’t fear level one and two firewalls much. Generally speaking, such firewalls are used to protect non-important and non-classified files. Firewalls of this level, if not properly bypassed, do little more than send an alert to the sysadmin, who may engage harsher measures or who may simply take note of the hacker, who he is, and what he views for future action.

Level three and four firewalls kick the cowboy out of the Intranet in question, generally after a brief but taxing battle of wills.

Firewalls 5-6 physically disconnect the cowboy from the web, often resulting in bioelectric feedback which can cause physical damage and/or render the cowboy unconscious.

Firewalls 7-8 are biofeedback programs that deal physical as well as mental damage, but are designed only to kill in extreme circumstances. Many a cowboy has wound up hospitalized for weeks after losing a battle with a level seven or eight firewall.

Firewalls 9-10 are the most feared and the ones most difficult to bypass. These firewalls will not only attack and cause physical damage, they cut off the cowboy’s ability to return his consciousness to his body (he cannot disconnect), and pursue the battle until the cowboy is dead or the firewall crashes.

Unless he succeeds at an Identification Task (Perception + Notice with Success Levels equal to half the levels of the firewall), a cowboy cannot identify a firewall’s level by looking at it. The best he can do is estimate based on the information he’s after, and thus, entering into combat with a firewall is tricky business.

Independent Artificial Intelligence

The final danger within the cyberweb is that of independent AIs. There are living within the web people who have permanently transferred their intelligences into the grid, cyber cowboys who have become trapped through forcible disconnects, and independent computer programs who became sentient on their own (see **Chapter Three, the Cybered**

Dead, for an example of this). Such programs are as individual as people are, and may be friendly, hostile, or indifferent; a cyber cowboy rarely really knows what he is up against until it is too late.

Gathering Information

Once a cowboy hacks into a server, he'll be looking for information, whether for his own purposes or to sell to other cowboys. What information is available on any given server is entirely up to the Zombie Master (who generally should prepare such things beforehand). Where there is uncertainty about what level of Firewall should guard what information, we suggest that over-secure is better than under-secure.

Cyber Combat

Inevitably, a cyber cowboy within the web must infiltrate an Intranet, do battle with another cowboy, or fend off an independent AI wandering the Range. When this happens, Cyber Combat comes into play. Cyber Combat is in most ways identical to physical combat, except that within the cyberweb, all physical attributes are replaced with mental ones. Strength becomes Intelligence, Dexterity becomes Perception, and Constitution becomes Willpower. Life Points, Endurance, and Essence Pool, however, remain unchanged.

The virtual weaponry available to a cyber cowboy within the web depends upon the mental fortitude of the cowboy in question. For close combat, average all mental attributes; an average of two means the cowboy has the cyber equivalent of a knife dealing $D4(2) \times \text{Intelligence}$ damage. An average of three grants a larger weapon dealing $D6(3) \times \text{Intelligence}$. An average of four grants $D8(4) \times \text{Intelligence}$, and so on all the way up to $D12(6) \times \text{Intelligence}$ for a Cast Member with obscene mental fortitude. These weapons are wielded using the jacker's Perception and highest Hand Weapon skill. Further, the cowboy can fire blasts of mental energy that inflict the Cast Member's Willpower in damage, multiplied by success levels on a Perception + Guns roll. These mental bursts are the only means by which



Jackers and Combat

Often, jackers don't think of themselves as "fighters" and may not have much in the way of combat skill ranks. While this works fine under normal circumstances, players may feel that a jacker should be more potent within the cyberweb, his home turf. At the Zombie Master's option, the jacker may at the start of combat make a single Intelligence + Computer Hacking Task. The Success Levels on this Task act as a bonus to all other combat-related Tasks for the duration of the battle, even if the jacker normally has no ranks in a needed combat skill.

Also, in a generic sense, The ZM may choose to have cyber cowboys engaged in combat view such scenarios as though playing an interactive console game (hackers are geeks by nature, after all).

As such, the weaponry wielded by the cowboy will always appear to either be one that the cowboy has skill levels with (regardless of damage dealt, as above), or from a weapon appropriate to the cowboy's game genre of choice, at the player's discretion.

a cyber cowboy can make "ranged" attacks within cyberspace and while the source of the blast can appear as anything the cowboy wishes (from a snub-nose pistol to a bazooka), the damage is always set. In addition, cyber cowboys have a flat virtual Armor Value equal to their Willpower.

Firewalls and Independent AI's work the same, except that while Independent AI's should be created as normal Supporting Cast or Adversaries, Firewalls have a set Attribute + skill level equal to the program's rating plus two (referred to as the firewall's Combat Score). In addition, firewalls have a flat virtual AV equal to half the firewall's level, virtual weaponry based on half the firewall's combat score, rounded up, and virtual Life Points equal to seven times the firewall's level.

Example 1: A firewall 10 always rolls $D10+12$ ($10+2=12$) for combat, has an AV 5 (half of its level), and has weaponry as a cyber cowboy with Attributes averaging six (half its combat score). It has 70 Life Points.

Example 2: On the other end of the spectrum, a firewall 1 rolls $D10+3$ ($1+2=3$) for combat, has an AV 1 (half of one, rounded up), and weaponry as though its attributes averaged two (half of three, rounded up). It has 7 Life Points.

Combat continues as normal until one party or another is defeated, with the consequences depending on the individual adversary. Independent AIs and rival cyber cowboys can determine whether or not they are using lethal or non-lethal force in battle, or a combination of the two; non-lethal force is represented through Endurance rather than Life Point Damage. Combination damage can be divided up as the attacker sees fit.

Metaphysics in the Web

Those who own other AFMBE supplements, such as Enter the Zombie or Dungeons and Zombies have access to other "special effects" a hacker can perform within the web. Using "virtual" versions of Invocations or Chi Abilities is possible with the permission of the Zombie Master. When jacked in, a cyber cowboy gains an effective Essence Channeling equal to his Computer Hacking skill, which can be used to activate Chi Abilities inside the web, or Invocation effects can be duplicated with a Willpower + Computer Hacking roll replacing the Invocation Task.

Cyber cowboys, as a rule, should have one or two Virtual Invocations that they "specialize" in, rather than having the full run of possible Invocations. See Chapter Six: Virtual Armageddon for more complete rules on mystical abilities on-line.

Firewalls, on the other hand, deal lethal and non-lethal damage according to their level. Firewalls 1-4 deal Endurance damage. Firewalls 5-6 deal 75% Endurance damage, 25% Life Points. Firewalls 7-8 deal 50% Life Point and 50% Endurance damage. Firewalls 9-10 deal full damage direct to Life Points.

Worse, when battling a firewall 9-10, the cyber cowboy must succeed at a Simple Willpower Test (the Nerves of Steel +4 bonus applies) against each successful attack made by the firewall (D10 + firewall level) or have his consciousness severed from his body for the duration of the battle. If he survives, the cyber cowboy may make a basic Perception + Computer Hacking Task to locate his body again and get out.

Once a firewall is “killed,” its code is scrambled throughout the web, leaving the server permanently defenseless (until the sysadmin realizes security protocols are down and programs a new defense application).

Disengaging

Disengaging from combat against another cyber cowboy or an independent AI within the cyberweb is standard; use the normal *AFMBE* chase rules when fleeing from combat, only substituting mental Attributes for physical ones. Disengaging from combat against intrusion countermeasures, on the other hand, is far trickier. Firewalls are designed to isolate and destroy malicious code, and when connected, a cyber cowboy is no different than any computer virus. Thus, once engaged in combat with a firewall, the cyber cowboy has effectively committed himself to battle, and disconnecting can be dangerous, or even deadly. Against lower level firewalls (1-4), there's little risk; the cowboy can simply allow the firewall to kick him out of the system. Against higher level firewalls, however, the cowboy must divide his concentration between the disconnect protocols and the onslaught of assault by the firewall. Disengaging from combat with a firewall higher than level four requires a Willpower + Computer Hacking Task to disconnect from the system. Against level five or six firewalls, the roll is at no penalty; against levels seven and eight, the cowboy suffers a -2 penalty to the Task, and against level nine and 10 firewalls, the penalty is -4. Worse, any time a cowboy breaks from

cyber combat, his opponent gains a free attack against which he cannot defend.

Forced Disconnect

Cowboys in cyber combat manifest physical symptoms of this combat, be it bleeding from eyes, nose, or ears; or spasmodic jerking at the terminal. When this happens, worried companions may simply try to unplug the jacker from the terminal. This is extremely dangerous and requires the jacker to immediately pass a Survival Test with a negative modifier equal to the Willpower of any AI or cowboy they are currently battling, or half the level of any firewall. Failing this Test means that the cowboy's body instantly dies, and his consciousness is trapped within the web (though at the Zombie Master's option and depending on the individual Deadworld, it might later be retrieved and downloaded into a new robot body).

Cyber Cowboy Zombies

At the Zombie Master's discretion, cyber cowboys who die through forced disconnects might rise again as zombies, forcing the Cast to once again deal with what they did to their companion.

Avoiding Firewalls

Sometimes the best offense is a good defense, and it makes more sense to avoid a firewall than to try and break it down. The best hackers become experts at avoiding high-level firewalls, which is generally a much healthier approach than battling them one-on-one.

Avoiding firewalls requires two steps. First, the Hacker makes a Perception and Notice Task, requiring a number of successes equal to half the level of the firewall, rounded up. If he succeeds, the hacker can detect and identify the firewall (knows exactly what level it is). Avoiding the Firewall then requires a Perception + Stealth Task opposed by the Firewall's D10 + firewall level Task. A second avoidance Task will be needed upon exit, and more Tasks may be required at the Zombie Master's option if the Cast Member engages in activities that could draw attention to his presence once inside the system.

Regardless of whether fighting or fleeing is the hacker's preferred choice, firewalls and intrusion countermeasures are not to be toyed with or taken lightly. This is generally quicker and safer than combating Firewalls directly; however, since this method leaves the Firewall intact, the avoidance must be performed upon each visit to the server. Also, some cyber cowboys are just too cocky to play stealth; they get off on beating down security systems.

Hazardous Environments

It's not just the walking dead that are dangerous, so here is a list of hazards the characters might find themselves encountering.

Vacuum

Surviving a vacuum isn't much like trying to breathe under water. A character can't hold his breath, or his lungs will burst with the violent decompression, and water vapor quickly forms in his flesh, causing considerable bloat (unless held firmly within a space-suit). His eyes bulge outward, and his heart is put under incredible strain due to changes in circulation. Every Turn he takes D10x2(10) damage, and must pass a Simple Constitution Test, with a cumulative -2 penalty for each Test beyond the first, or become paralyzed until the character is rescued or dies.

Explosive Decompression

This is an optional rule for *Zombie Masters* who want to make things even nastier. If a character is exposed almost instantly to vacuum (such as being swept away in the first Turn of a hull breach), the sudden change in pressure can be fatal just by itself. The character takes D10 x 4(20) points of damage from his lungs rupturing, and must make a Simple Constitution Test. Failure means his eyes explode outward, blinding him immediately.

Hull Breach

If a character is caught in a room that is suddenly exposed to vacuum, they have to struggle against the sudden rush of wind, or be ejected into the void (assuming they are not somehow attached to a solid surface). If there is something to grab, the character can make a Strength check every Turn to hold on. If it is a significant breach, like an open airlock or larger, make a Difficult Strength check, otherwise it is a Simple check.

The character does not start taking vacuum damage until swept outside, or the air around him dissipates (how long that takes depends upon how much there is to start with).

Resuscitation

Rules for reviving the recently deceased (in a non-zombie kind of way) are found in AFMBE (see p. 113). Future technology increases the time that can pass before that becomes impossible, although the *Zombie Master* still needs to consider the individual circumstances.

Biotech increases the safety margin by five, allowing a gap of Constitution x 10 minutes within which a character can be resuscitated. Nanotech increases the Biotech gap by three (or the base gap by 15), allowing Constitution x 30 minutes to pass.

In most cases, the brain is the vital organ when determining if a character can be brought back. Almost any other damage can be repaired, but the delicate structures of consciousness are less forgiving of blunt trauma or decomposition. Sometimes, the method of death can leave the brain intact for long periods. Exposure to extreme cold (including death by vacuum, as water evaporation cools the head rapidly) is a good example.

The ZM may allow specially programmed nanobots to preserve the structure of the brain indefinitely, even at normal temperatures. Then again, that sounds like a good rationale for the appearance of zombies.

A character whose body is wedged in a crack between air and vacuum takes D10(5) damage per Turn, because of the pressure difference.

High and Low Gravity

Different planets the Cast may visit might have gravity of different strengths, whereas aliens (or humans raised in an alien environment) might be used to different conditions. This is represented by Gravity Tolerance (see p. 21) and is also a consideration when creating a package Quality to represent an alien race (natives of a gas giant might have +1 or +2 to Strength, for example).

When a character leaves his comfort zone, a number of game effects come into play, depending on whether gravity in the new zone is higher or lower than the character is accustomed to. Earth values are presumed to be default.

Higher Gravity: Endurance loss is doubled. Any attacks made with a thrown weapon are at -2 to hit, while physical actions like using a Hand Weapon or Dodge are at a penalty of -1.

Lower Gravity: Endurance loss is halved. Character gains a bonus of +1 to all Strength-related rolls. Any attacks made with a thrown weapon are at -1 to hit.

A specialty can be bought for each skill to counter the penalty for changing gravity (whether higher or lower).

These are broad categories, and should only be used for big changes. For example, if humans visit a planet where the gravity is between 80% and 120% Earth normal, the rules aren't necessary. However, if one of the characters is from Mars (with only 38% Earth gravity), he will be under the effects of High Gravity a lot more often. In extreme environments, the ZM can decide to increase the effects beyond those listed.

Microgravity

Zero gravity (or microgravity, as it is more properly called) can be disorienting, but a character can get used to it reasonably easily. As long as he takes his time, and stops to stabilize himself whenever he starts spinning in the wrong direction, he will get where he wants to go.

If he is in the middle of combat, it becomes a lot more difficult. Perspective can change rapidly, there is often no firm footing, and a simple punch can send both attacker and defender flying in semi-random directions.

To reflect this, each character in a microgravity fight is said to be in one of four states. The states reflect how easy it is for the character to do what he wants to do.

Braced: The character is holding himself firmly to a solid surface, making it easier to use a weapon, but harder to dodge incoming attacks.

Unstable: The character is keeping himself in place against a solid object, and has to be careful or he'll start spinning away. The good news is that he is in the best position to dodge incoming attacks. He can spend a full Turn to automatically become braced (assuming there is enough surface to brace against).

Freefloating: In this state, the character is moving free of any solid objects. He might have launched himself deliberately from a stable position (in which case he can move Constitution + Dexterity yards per Turn), or been forced off, in which case he is floating gently away. If close enough to a surface, the character can roll Dexterity + Microgravity Control. With at least one Success Level he becomes unstable, with three, he becomes braced. Physical fighting and dodging are both very tricky without something to push against. Even if the character maintains control, fighting will most likely change his direction and speed, which should be taken into account.

Spinning: In this state the character can't perform any combat actions except grab for a solid surface (and try not to throw up). If he is in reach of a surface, he can roll Dexterity + Microgravity Control. With three successes he becomes unstable. With one or two successes, he becomes freefloating, moving slowly

Recoil and impact in Zero-G

The Unisystem Conspiracy X roleplaying game has more options for combat in OG situations, including dealing with recoil, spinning when firing and being struck by projectiles. Those who to incorporate these rules should consult that game.

Quick and Easy Weight Loss

If you don't want to worry about keeping track of everyone's state in a freefall environment, just assign a -2 penalty to all normal combat moves. Specializing in a skill for microgravity use removes this penalty.

away from the surface. With such erratic movement, he becomes harder to hit than a freefloating target.

The game effects of these states are summarized on this table.

Attack: Physical attacks, such as kicking or swinging a weapon, might be harder depending upon whether the character has a stable position. This penalty does not apply to the use of guns or other weapons that don't require significant movement to use, though projectile weapons do have recoil, which should be taken into account after firing.

Dodge: It's also more difficult to dodge when in freefall. This penalty is applied to dodge maneuvers.

Failed Attack: If the character attempts a Task to hit with a melee weapon (or a gun with recoil) and does not achieve at least one Success Level, his condition might deteriorate. He must attempt a Dexterity and Microgravity Control Task or his state drops one category as indicated on the table below.

Receives Damage: If a character receives at least 20 points of damage from a physical impact (before applying armor or weapon type multipliers), he has to attempt a Constitution and Microgravity Control Task or have his state reduced as indicated on the table below.

Two characters attached to each other (either because they are grappling or just holding on) share the same state. To improve their state (to stop spinning, for example), they have to work together. However, if their state might deteriorate, they both have to fail their control rolls.

If a character wants to destabilize another, he must make a Dexterity and Brawling or Martial Arts Task with all normal penalties. If successful, both characters must attempt a Resisted Task using Strength and Microgravity Control. The loser's state deteriorates one step (unstable to freefloating, for example). If the attacker wins and the defender starts spinning, the attacker can specify the direction in which the defender goes (especially useful if that's towards open space).

This system gives you a rough way to judge the chaos of micro-G combat. It is still up to the descriptions of the Zombie Master and players to give it excitement and tension, making use of the full 3D environment about the characters, just as you would with any other combat situation.

State	Attack	Dodge	Fail Attack	Receives Damage
Braced	0	-2	Unstable	Unstable
Unstable	-2	0	Freefloating	Spinning
Freefloating	-4	-4	Spinning	Spinning
Spinning	—	-2	—	Spinning

Radiation Dosage Effect Table

Dose (rems)	Effect
100-149	The character suffers a headache, nausea, vomiting or nosebleeds. Endurance is reduced by one third and, depending upon the amount of time exposed, he may have to spend weeks in hospital to recover. At this level, radiation exposure is completely survivable, if painful.
150-449	The character's skin begins to peel, and hemorrhaging occurs along the exposed areas. There is some hair loss, and the immune system begins to shut down. There is damage to the bone marrow. Immediately after exposure, the character loses one level of Constitution and five Life Points. Within six hours of exposure, the victim is totally incapacitated (reduce Life Points to zero), and requires blood transfusions and antibiotics to pull through (use normal healing rules).
450-999	Vomiting occurs, as does severe bleeding from all body openings. The character loses all his hair permanently, and the outer layers of damaged skin slough off as if severely burned. The victim loses one level of Constitution and is reduced to -20 Life Points (survival rolls, using the reduced Constitution are needed to survive). Recovery requires six months of hospital care. Recovery rolls can only be performed with medical care, and never result in more than one Life Point healed per day.
1,000-3,999	The victim suffers damage to the central nervous system. Within D10(5) minutes, the victim collapses with an extreme fever, and the whole body begins to bleed and swell. Even with survival, the character will never be the same again. He loses one level of Constitution permanently, and a second level that can only be recovered after six months of medical care. He is automatically reduced to -40 Life Points (Survival rolls use the reduced Constitution level).
4,000+	The character is probably fatally exposed. He suffers traumatic damage to blood vessels and the brain, and is reduced to -60 Life Points automatically.

Radiation

Radioactive particles cause damage both by direct collision with the tissue, and by long-term genetic damage to the cells of the body. Radiation damage is complicated and debilitating. For ease of play, various levels of exposure are detailed above. Any exposed Cast Member continues to suffer the effects at that level until decontaminated and given medical attention.

The normal unit for measuring the effect of radiation is the rem (or Roentgen Equivalent in Man). The table lists the consequences of exposure from one or more sources. If the character successfully resists the radiation (a Simple Constitution Test versus a Simple Strength Test of the radiation, Strength 6), the effect is reduced by one step on the chart above.

For example: *Jim suffers exposure to radiation when the shielding around his engine core fails. This exposure is 50 rems per day; over the next two days, Jim is exposed to 100 rems, and suffers damage to his Endurance if he fails his Simple Constitution test. On the third day, he gets another 50 from the core, and a nuclear explosion goes off 100 miles away from Jim's ship. He is as a result exposed to 350 additional rems, making a total of 500 rems. If he fails his Constitution test he gets the full damage from 500 rems, but if he makes it, he only receives the total of 150-449 level.*

Sources of Radiation

Source	Rems received
Nuclear power plant accident (at source)	2,000 + 2,000 per hour
Nuclear power plant accident (six-mile radius)	350 per year
Unshielded power plant core	500 per hour
Dirty bomb (one-third mile radius)	140 per year
Fallout cloud (large nuclear explosion)	1,000 per hour
Fallout cloud (two days later)	10 per hour
Unshielded spaceship core	50 per day
Contaminated crash site	500 per day

Shielding, such as radiation suits or walls, reduces exposure by a certain amount per hour, depending upon its effectiveness. For example, the radiation suits mentioned in *AFMBE* (p. 129) protect against exposures up to 2,000 rems per hour. More futuristic versions will be lighter and more resistant to being torn off by zombies. In addition, it should be noted that most of the radiation from a source such as a nuclear or dirty bomb explosion comes from fallout, which can be protected against by staying inside heavy shelter (at least a foot of solid concrete or stone, or several inches of lead). Radiation suits are also useful for moving about in fallout-afflicted areas.

Recovering Constitution Loss

Constitution loss from radiation poisoning is temporary, and can be recovered by removal from exposure to the radiation, medical care, and time. For each week spent under a doctor's care, away from the radiation source, make a Simple Constitution Test (using the modified Constitution score); a success restores a single lost level of Constitution. Only one level per week can be restored in this manner; exposure to radiation is nasty, and it takes time and care to fully recover. Even still, there may be long-term effects such as cancer or body mutations (or zombification, for that matter); these are left to ZM discretion. Higher tech levels may reduce recovery time, allowing Constitution recovery as quickly as one level per day in high-tech settings.

Future Diseases

The advent of genetic engineering and nanotech can open up a terrifying vista of dangerous infection. Man-made diseases might be designed to produce very specific effects, such as blindness, sterility, continuous nausea, a breakdown of the neural structures in the brain, or liquidation of flesh. Many may only be debilitating or designed to cause panic rather than death. This might be because the designer thinks he can extort money for a cure, or the more pragmatic reason that a disabled enemy is more of a drain to his own economy and war effort than a dead enemy. (The ability to turn enemy citizens into zombies may be particularly effective!)

Another aspect of targeted disease research is that it might be set up to only affect people matching a particular genetic pattern. In theory a particular race might be targeted, although this is not easy given that the genetic variation within races is as wide as between them. However, some might try to target particular genetic conditions that may be more widespread in particular areas (akin to targeting hemophilia so as to pick on the Russian aristocracy).

Even if a disease is specifically designed, there is likely to be unforeseen side effects, along with the vast amounts of planned misery. This becomes more obvious when different species are involved (either alien beings, or just a disease that can jump between animals and humans, such as avian flu).

The result of this is that the Zombie Master has a lot of freedom to create whatever diseases he wants in his game. Many Drawbacks can be used as the intended effect, and in theory some Qualities could as well (a radical sect could release a virus that rewires the brain to make the Gift more common, for example, which would no doubt cause great chaos).

Regardless of effect, the rules for disease remain the same (see *AFMBE*, p. 108). Each disease has a vector, Contagion Strength and Severity—although some might be designed so those values change over time. Also, a disease might be spread that has similar symptoms as the common cold (for example), but has a hidden payload that is only revealed months later, or under specific conditions like pregnancy.

While this seems all bad news, the same technology that can create diseases can also fight them. Governments (or corporations) can distribute protection to its citizens as required, or on a continuing basis. This is expressed in free levels of Resistance (Disease).

How much they supply (never more than +4 or so) or who they give it to depends heavily on the campaign background. Characters might need a particular Status, Resources or Obligation before gaining the advantage—or it might be distributed like fluoride in the water supply. There will no doubt be rumors that this very protection may have its own hidden surprise.

Sci-Fi Gaming

Science Fiction covers a lot of territory, from 1984 to *The Terminator* to *Star Wars*, Isaac Asimov to Philip K. Dick to Douglas Adams, and more besides. Some works are better than others for inspiring a game of rampaging zombies. This section will try to help you work out what you want to achieve with your game, and give you some pointers towards achieving it. Don't forget to look through the later chapters in this book for ideas and inspiration, even if they're not exactly what you want at the moment.



All Flesh Must Be Eaten™

This section is mainly for *Zombie Masters*, but players are welcome to read it as well.

The first thing to think about is what sort of sub-genre you are interested in. You probably already have a good idea, unless you want to experiment with something new. Do you want fast paced excitement, a growing sense of cosmic dread, or careful investigation of the undead menace? That depends upon the temperament of your group, and your own plot ideas, among other things.

Scale

One important thing to work out quickly is on what scale your game will be. Will it span different star systems, a planet and several moons, or New York in the near future? That usually depends upon what sort of genre you're interested in, but it doesn't have to. You can have a space opera game in which a diverse bunch of aliens gather in a single space station for climactic treaty negotiations, or a murder investigation spanning several worlds.

What is more important for scale is the length of the game you want to run, the number of different ideas you have, and how claustrophobic you want the game to be.

The longer the game, the more room you'll probably want to move around in. The players will want to encounter different characters and situations, and it is often more satisfying and believable if there is some traveling involved. It also makes it easier for the ZM to start small and expand as the game continues. Even if you just change cities between adventures, it means the ZM doesn't have to keep explaining how new people and dangers arise without any of the characters noticing them previously.

Sometimes you need the space just to fit in all the ideas you have. If they're too close, they may blur together, losing their effectiveness. If you want a background that includes dolphins up-lifted to human-like intelligence, aliens creating zombies for psychological experiments, and an exciting scene on a space elevator, then your characters are probably going to have to travel just to see the breadth of your vision. In that case, you can still start small, or you can hit the players with a lot of background material up front.

That depends on how much material you want to put together to start with, and whether you think too much detail at one go will only confuse people.

The last point, about claustrophobia, is very important for survival horror games (this is **All Flesh Must Be Eaten** after all). If characters can jump into their spaceship and zoom off to another planet, or just to another continent, then it can lessen the scares considerably. There are a couple of effective ways to minimize this problem. You can limit the scale to a small location, either by restricting the level of technology, or cutting the characters off from their usual resources (prison planets are popular). You can allow the players a wide freedom of movement, but face them with a problem that can reach them wherever they go. (If zombies crop up every time they land, they might start to wonder if they themselves are the vector of the contagion!) Alternately, they can move about, but are in a race against time to come up with a solution to a problem facing the folks back home. Any of these can keep the tension high.

Whether you are playing science fiction or anything else, the scale of the game determines how much detail you need to put into any one thing. If your game is set in one city, then you might need to know a fair amount about how it's organized. If it's set in multiple cities, you start concentrating on only the important points of each, such as the major differences between them. In sci-fi, the same logic applies to planets, alien races and lots more. If your game is set on Mars, you'll probably want a variety of locations, and a good idea about how to cope with the environment and other special conditions. In a long game, you might show the on-going affects of terraforming.

If you're in a space opera, and visit a new planet every couple of sessions, you only need to know a couple of things about each one. You'll likely end up with a desert planet, a city planet, and a jungle moon... That's not really realistic, but in this case, so what? If you and your players do want a bit more realism, we suggest you narrow your scope so you can fill it with interesting detail, rather than have your interesting detail spread about the universe.

Similarly, with one or two alien races, you can develop some intricate customs and theorize about how they have evolved under the particular conditions of their world. Or you can just choose a particular culture from Earth's history, combine that with an interesting animal for looks, and file off the serial numbers. It's been done before.

The AFMBE supplement *Dungeons and Zombies* includes a much more detailed look at world building. Though written specifically for fantasy games, many of its suggestions can be ported easily to sci-fi.

Technology

Technology is often much more important than science in sci-fi. Science is about how and why things work, which is interesting to some people, but not others. Technology is about what actually happens. We don't really care how a lightsaber works in *Star Wars*; we just know it looks cool. The same thing goes for transmat beams, hovercars, cyberspace or whatever. Throw in a few catchy phrases like morphic field resonator, platinum-iridium and dimensionally transcendental, and everything is fine.

Technology is usually the key to sci-fi gaming, not least to player characters, because it gives them things to do that they might not otherwise be able to. Tech, however, can set the scene in a number of ways. Sometimes it is just background. The more technology that is accepted as part of everyday life, the more futuristic things will seem. In many sci-fi stories, there is usually one or two bits of technology that are much more important, and which the plot revolves around. In *AFMBE*, it's usually either the thing that creates the zombies, or the thing that might be able to stop them.

The *Minority Report* movie is a great example of how sci-fi uses technology for both setting and plot. It has lots of little details to show the world has changed, and revolves around one strong idea—that criminal acts can be prophesied and stopped. It doesn't really matter how that works, but there is enough

detail to create a compelling mystery by looking at the ramifications.

7

Technology doesn't have to be about high-tech gadgetry. A lot of modern sci-fi is about biological adaptation and embedded systems that simply do their job without being obvious. Those fit nicely into an *AFMBE* game, since they can invoke body horror and paranoia. And sometimes, low-tech is better—because of limited resources, or because nature has already come up with the optimal solution. *Firefly* combines high-tech and low-tech in an interesting way.

Technology should also be consistent, at least within limits. If you have artificial gravity on a spaceship, for example, it will seem strange if the space station at which it docks doesn't have the same capability. This could lead to confusion amongst the players, and a breaking of the suspension of disbelief (or just heated arguments during game time). Alternately, it could be a plot point.

Consistent tech is, however, hard—especially when you take social change into account (what would teleportation do to economic infrastructure?). Fortunately, you don't have to worry about that too much. Just paint your particular society in broad brush-strokes, and the fiddly details can be glossed over. Near-future science fiction is the easiest, because there are usually only one or two cutting-edge elements, and everything else remains familiar.

We see enough in *Aliens* to know that life on Earth has probably changed a lot, but we don't find out how—it's irrelevant. Sometimes that means you have to limit the questions players can ask about their background, though it's better to leave a vague impression rather than refuse to describe something outright. In *Back to the Future II* we see a lot of high-tech, but it's all just a variation on familiar themes (though that is part of the somewhat goofy feel, which can be bad for a horror game).

Space opera often has a static technology level, or even a decaying one, but still usually manages a few surprises ("that's no moon").



The good news is that you can't go far wrong by just showing everyday people doing everyday things. Mobile holo-phones or self-assembling automobiles might be second nature to everyone, but they still act the same way when they're excited or scared.

Science

Sometimes we do care about how things work. There are two main ways science will probably be used in most sci-fi games. The first is to provide a more realistic background to the technology and situations in the game, either as a way of driving the plot (in which case the underlying science has interesting repercussions), or just because the players are interested in that sort of thing. Using modern ideas of astronomy to design your own solar system can indeed be fun, and is better if you are playing with people who appreciate the effort.

The second use is as a way of solving a problem—probably a big and dangerous one. An obvious example is that, if zombies are over-running the world, the characters are scientists who have to work out what is happening, and see if they can stop or even reverse the process. There are other possibilities, such as trying to utilize alien technology to stop the plague, or even training zombies for manual labor.

Scientists make good characters for a couple of reasons. They can approach most situations like a detective story, trying to puzzle out what is going on. They are usually in a good position to act, since they are one of those professions who stay around disaster sites. They are also likely to be given plenty of resources from the military or civilian authorities if they can convince someone they can be of help (although working with the military can cause its own problems).

Of course, the scientists may also have been involved with creating the problem in the first place, which provides more motivation for try-

ing to sort out the mess (or just evil cackling, depending on the scientist in question).

This has a good pedigree in zombie movies. Romero's *Day of the Dead* is all about the scientific method, and though Dr. Logan is obviously on the mad end of the scale, Sarah is a far more sympathetic protagonist. She cannot give up her training to the pointless aggression of the military, or John's contempt for all the useless record keeping of modern society. Even at the end she still keeps a count of the days. *Return of the Living Dead 3* is about scientists trying to utilize zombies for research purposes, and an infected heroine who tries to deal with her condition in a methodical fashion.

Language

Language is very important in the sci-fi genre—and sometimes language is all that separates it from other types of games. It might not matter to the plot if you have swords and monsters, or laser swords and aliens, but by naming them carefully, they take on a whole lot of cultural baggage that appeals to different people in different ways.

Although there is a whole branch of sci-fi that creates its own languages (which is double plus shiny if your droogs like that smeg), mostly it's just a matter of naming things appropriately. Sci-fi usually has

more descriptive and technical-sounding labels for its gadgetry, uses acronyms and other weird linguistic conventions (like Lady 3Jane from *Neuromancer*, not to mention R2D2), references theories and postulates, and throws around words like “quasar” and “tachyon” a lot. You can also give your setting a more lived in feel if technical names have been replaced by more common or mythological names. Planet S2232-11μ could be known to its inhabitants as Nilfheim, for example.

This is usually just a matter of instinct—choose what sounds good. But since you are describing almost everything to the players with words, appropriate names are worth thinking about.

Inspiration

Like all of us, you are likely to find most of your inspiration in the movies, books and other material you watch or read for fun. That will give you an idea of the sort of cool things you want your heroes to be doing, and the sort of background against which they can do it. The Source Material section in **Chapter One: Introduction** can give some extra things to look out for.

For sci-fi games, browsing through popular science journals is a great way to spark ideas. *New Scientist* is a good one, because it covers a lot of territory and doesn't flinch from more speculative stories, but *Scientific American*, for example, gives you a more a rigorous treatment if that's what you're after. Just because you use these magazines, doesn't mean you have to use the science, just the broad ideas. For example, picking two pages from a fairly recent issue of *NS*, we get a story about a boat sunk in the River Thames for the last sixty years, full of unstable explosive, and a planetoid called Sedna, said to be the darkest body in our solar system. That can inspire a plot in which a spaceship crashes on the planetoid. Nobody wants to salvage the wreck, because the experimental weaponry on board is too dangerous (it will create a black hole, endangering the entire solar system), so the story is covered up. A few months later, the ship starts broadcasting erratic messages. It seems the crew are now all zombies, and somebody has to save the day before the shambling dead set off doomsday by accident.

Investigation

Entire books could be written about running investigative games. In short, the players can try to solve their problem by reasoning through a series of clues that the ZM sets for them, or they put their Sciences and Research/Investigation skills to good use, rolling to solve a particular piece of the puzzle. It's often a good idea to combine the methods, using the dice rolling as a backup if the reasoning fails.

Although both methods can work well, neither is a substitute for dramatic pacing, shocks, desperate combat, and other staples of a good horror game. They should be in the mix as well.

Technobabble

One of the points of sci-fi is to see what wonders and dangers science might bring us, to various degrees of plausibility. Zombies are usually not thought of in those terms, traditionally being the product of foul magics or strangely undefined cosmic rays. For those who want at least the veneer of a scientific explanation, here are some suggestions. Some of the Deadworlds in later chapters give further ideas.

Zombi Powder

Tetrodotoxin is one of the most lethal poisons known to man, found in a range of venomous animals including the Japanese puffer fish, blue-ring octopus and California newt. The poison attacks the nervous system, stopping signals propagating through the body, but cannot affect the brain. The victim remains completely conscious despite being unable to move, and most die because their lungs or heart simply stop working. If he manages to last long enough—between 24 hours and a week—the effect then dissipates seemingly miraculously.

The anthropologist Wade Davis discovered this was the active ingredient of the “zombi powder” of Haiti, leading to people buried and then brought back to life. This was combined with datura, a widespread natural chemical that causes “visionary dreams”, and a strong cultural belief in zombies, which allowed the *bokor* (zombie master) to control them effectively—those the treatment didn’t kill outright.

Scopolamine

Another real-world example is the drug scopolamine, an alkaloid created from some species of nightshade. It also affects the nervous system, and the mind as well, producing disorientation and amnesia. It is a particularly bad problem in Colombia, where a cocktail called burundanga is common. Burundanga puts the victim in an extremely susceptible state, so they will follow most orders given to them, and forget the details later. Criminals use it to take sexual advantage, request a person’s valuables, or even get his help in committing crimes.

Telomerase

Living tissue is maintained by the creation of new cells via cellular division, in which a new chromosome is created. This doesn’t produce an exact copy of the old chromosome, though, because the ends become shorter each time. These ends, called telomeres, act as a buffer to prevent replication mistakes affecting the chromosome itself, and also provide a natural lifespan for the cells—when the telomeres gets too short, the cell stops dividing. However, an enzyme called telomerase protects the telomeres from shortening, which means cellular division could theoretically continue indefinitely.

Telomerase is an important aspect of anti-aging and cloning research, and also in attempts to fight cancer—many cancer cells produce their own telomerase, which is why they can divide endlessly and spread throughout the body. It will likely also feature in any cellular explanation for zombies. With proper care, the chemical (or an artificial substitute) might be used to extend life and quickly heal wounds. But if the controls to stop it dividing inappropriately malfunctioned, it could create bodies that keep on regenerating past the death of the brain.

Mad Zombie Disease

Prions are a mutated version of protein similar to that found throughout the brain and spinal cord. When introduced into a healthy body, it starts spreading, by turning the normal protein into copies of itself. This condition (called vCJD or Mad Cow Disease) causes dementia, loss of coordination, and finally death, as the brain turns into a non-functional spongy mass. Perhaps a variant prion may cause sufferers to lust after a source of normal protein—an uninfected human brain.

Memory Reconstruction

Memory is stored in configurations of neurons within the brain. However, neurons are an unstable medium, and there is a deeper mechanism by which entrenched memories are stored in the DNA strands of proteins—these proteins continually guide newly created neurons into structures that can last decades.

Brain proteins is a hot topic in medical science at the moment, not only because of vCJD, but because the

All Flesh Must Be Eaten™

tangling of threads of tau protein causes Alzheimer's disease. But what if a cure became too successful? These "memory molecules" could start reproducing inappropriately, and strong memories start duplicating themselves across less entrenched areas of the brain. Strong emotions would build exponentially, as they too are reinforced, leading to confusion, and a greater likelihood that pain and fear will become dominant. Finally only insanity, dissociation, and a desire to attack any nearby irritants remains—classic zombie behavior.

Space Travel

For settings without faster-than-light travel, keeping people active during the long years of space voyages can be a problem. Cryostasis is one solution, but is vulnerable to failure. Resurrecting the crew at the end of the journey may cause less problems, and if a record of their genetic makeup and a brainscan can be stored in a less fragile medium than human flesh, it can better withstand possible problems on the way, like exposure to cosmic radiation. Some disreputable companies may not even tell the crew what is involved.

If a colony ship arrived at a strange planet, and the colonists were resurrected—but something had gone wrong with the memory transfer—the few crew members who were successfully revived could face the mindless, shambling bodies of their fellow travelers. They could try to reinstate the original personalities, or simply fight for their lives.

Fantastic Voyage

If a self-replicating nanobot used for regulating brain functionality becomes corrupt, threatening to destroy the personality of its host (perhaps creating a zombie according the rules of the current Deadworld), there might be a way to fix the problem. By injecting antibodies equipped with special nanobots for control and combat purposes into the brain, the infection might be stopped. Naturally, a group of people would control these antibodies with VR technology, moving through the alien and increasingly hostile terrain to kill all the self-replicating monsters. Even the person under attack can control one of the antibodies, although that control might become erratic as more damage is being done.

Realistic Tech

Keeping sci-fi technology advanced enough can be surprisingly tricky. Enormous computer processing, easy access to data, sophisticated search and analysis tools, and an amazing variety of nifty little gadgets—or specifically targeted biological agents—already exist. Advanced versions of these can render many traditional plots unworkable, and they can usually be used over and over again.

Traditional remedies for these problems include rare chemical components, quantum weirdness and chaos theory to explain why not everything is explicable or repeatable, and stringent government/corporation/alien control of data or science. Having the technology itself create problems is a good idea—if the Earth has imploded into nothingness, the players won't be too keen on messing with their singularity drive. Others with access to the same capabilities, either as enemies or confused bystanders, complicate matters again.

Another strategy is the idea of the "second-hand future." Future tech is grungy and run-down, and might need a good kicking before it works. This is a good fit with the horror of All Flesh Must Be Eaten.

Sometimes you might be after contrast instead, in which the shiny or retro-cool future is just the façade under which dark secrets lie.

Alien Bounty Hunter

Survivor

Str 4 **Dex** 5* **Con** 3
Int 2 **Per** 4 **Will** 3
LPS 44
EPS 35
Spd 16
Essence 23

Qualities/Drawbacks

Charisma (–3 to non-reptilian races)*
Contacts (2)
Cruel (Level 1)*
Delusions of Grandeur (Level 1) *
Fast Reaction Time (2)
Hard to Kill (2)
Humorless*
Infravision*
Obsession (Revenge) (–2)
Psionic (2)
Reptile alien Quality (5)
Situational Awareness (2)

Skills

Climbing 2
Dodge 5
Guns (Rifle) 5
Haggling 3
Hand Weapon (knife) 6
Intimidation 4
Microgravity Control 2
Notice 3
Running (Dash) 1
Stealth 2
Surveillance 2

Powers

Mesmerism (Level 1)*
Natural Armor AV D4(2)

Gear

Pulse rifle, stun gun, vibroknife

Personality

I was a trusted member of my Queen's personal guard, dedicated to the protection of her and all her people. Yet my Queen is dead and my people enslaved, and I live on. It would shame me, if I did not fight against the horror.

It was humans that poisoned the royal family, and invaded in the confusion. I swore eternal vengeance on that weak and treacherous race, and killed many of their kind. I was driven to the stars, and did not care, because I killed that sickly warm species wherever I found it.

But then I learnt something ghastly, and though I tried to deny the knowledge in my rage, honor prevailed. It was not humans at all that had invaded, but dead beings animated by a symbiotic ichor. This obscene black grease has its own gestalt intelligence, and individuals move from body to body as their hosts putrefy around them. Even my own noble race is vulnerable, and I have seen former comrades, that I had thought fallen in combat, fight on for our subjugators.

This threat requires more than random violence to counter. I need to develop strategy and gather resources, and that means work—mercenary work for humans, because their avaricious natures have accrued so many riches. They are also aware of the problem, because the black grease is spreading still. They may be another resource for me to use.

Quote

"I don't know if you humans smell better alive or dead."

* Part of Reptile Alien Quality.



Robotic Tutor

Survivor

Personality

Perhaps history is as Edward Gibbon wrote, little more than a register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind. I look to Francis Bacon instead, and hope to make men wise, though I am not a man, nor even of mankind.

My own history is one of peace, being employed by the extended family upon the estate to tutor the children (and indeed adults) as necessary. It was not an easy job, as I defined the word then, for many of them simply wanted time with their friends, and a data chip for exams. But what is the use of data, if you haven't the experience and training to use it? (You can see I still defend my position, when no longer required to do so.)

Then the dead came, and my only students attacked me. They could not eat me, of course, as they did the flesh of their relatives, so I can only surmise their motives. Perhaps I was merely an irritant to them. In life, so in death.

I escaped the estate, and here I am, tutoring a veritable resistance movement against the hordes. Now data chips are a scare commodity, so I am required to teach what I know of historical resistance, the tactics of war, the methods of destruction, and inspirational quotes.

It is said that history is written by the victors, but if we lose this struggle, history itself will die.

Quote

"If you add a little more thiotimeline, madam, it will create a most swift and efficacious weapon."

* Part of the Robot Quality

Str 3 **Dex** 2 **Con** 3

Int 6* **Per** 4 **Wil** 3

Lps 34

Eps —

Spd 10

Essence —

Qualities/Drawbacks

Emotionless (3) *

Honorable (-3)

Robot (+1 to Intelligence) (6)

Skills

Dodge 3

Engineer (Robotic) 4

First Aid 5

Humanities (History) 5

Instruction 5

Notice 4

Questioning 4

Sciences (Chemistry) 5

Powers

Data Chip (Demolitions) (2)

Data Chip (Humanities (Military Tactics)) (2)

Data Chip (Mechanic) (2)

Data Chip (Traps) (2)

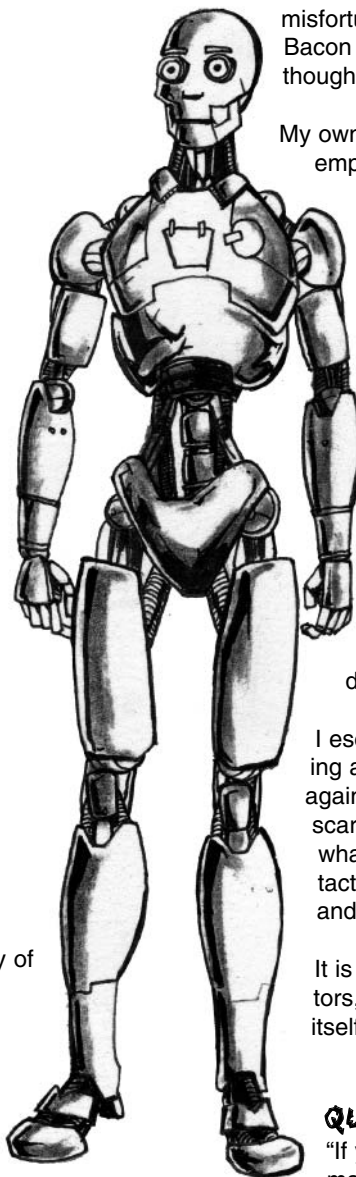
Data Jack (2)

Dermal Armor (AV 2) (2)

Iron Mind (3 Levels)*

Gear

Blaster, First aid kit, PDA with library of textbooks



All Flesh Must Be Eaten™

Stimmed Corp

Powered

Personality

Str 2 **Dex** 3 **Con** 3

Int 4 **Per** 5 **Will** 6*

Lps 30

EPs 38

Spd 12

Essence 23

Qualities/Drawbacks

Bioware (1)

Charisma (4)

Contacts (2)

Covetous (-2)

Obligation (Company) (-3)

Paranoid (-2)

Resources (Well-off) (4)

Situational Awareness (2)

Status 1 (0)

Skills

Bureaucracy 4

Computers 2

Dodge 3

Electronic Surveillance 2

Guns (Handgun) 3

Notice 4

Questioning 4

Smooth Talking 5

Stealth 2

Powers

Bio Filter (2)

Enhanced Dexterity (1)

Enhanced Perception (1)

Iron Mind (3)

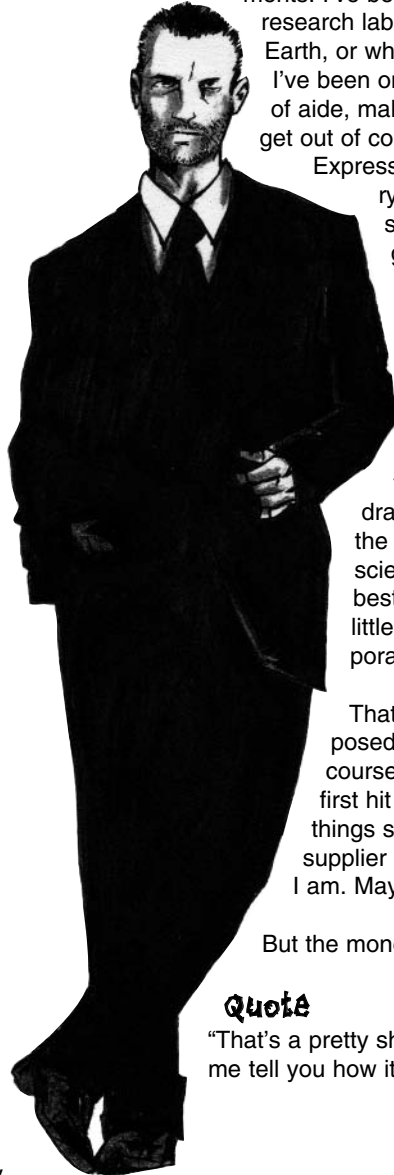
Regeneration (per hour) (1)

Starlight Vision (2)

Stimmed (5)

Gear

Flechette gun (with personal security setting)



I don't know what I did to get these sorts of assignments. I've been a "technical advisor" (as if) to research laboratories in god-awful parts of the Earth, or wherever else they want to send me.

I've been on diplomatic missions as some sort of aide, making sure the real diplomats don't get out of control. I even got sent on the Venus Express.

Everybody was enjoying the luxury except me, since I had to make sure a couple of uppity 3-D stars got . . . well, I'm sure you read about that one. It was messy.

Why me? This isn't what I signed up for. I reckon someone further up wants me dead.

Of course, I did really well on that first scientific expedition. I was drafted in as a financial consultant at the last minute, and it turned out the scientists didn't have the company's best interest at heart. They learned a little something about loyalty and corporate pride.

That was one thing, but how am I supposed to cope with doing it forever? Of course I started taking the stim. Got my first hit of it on the Express, and it made things so much clearer. Now, I figure my supplier is just as much a company man as I am. Maybe they're trying to burn me out.

But the money's good.

Quote

"That's a pretty short-term view of the situation. Let me tell you how it's going to play out."

Xenobiologist

Survivor

Personality

Str 2 **Dex** 3 **Con** 4*

Int 5 **Per** 5* **Will** 3

Lps 40

Eps 32

Spd 14

Essence 22

Qualities/Drawbacks

Adversary (corporate) (-2)

Contacts (Academia) (2)

Covetous (Conspicuous) (-1)

Hard to Kill (2)

Nanotech (2)

Resistance (Fatigue) (2)

Situational Awareness (2)

Skills

Brawling 3

Bureaucracy 1

Dodge 4

Engineer (Biological) 3

Instruction 2

Medicine 3 (6)

Myth and Legend (Spacers) 2

Notice 3

Research/Investigation 3

Science (Biology) 5

Sciences (Xenobiology) 7 (2)

Stealth 2

Tracking 2

Powers

Bio Filter (2)

Regeneration (per minute) (3)

Gear

Nanogel, scanner, stun gun



I did my doctoral thesis on an Indonesian orchid, a species only found in the one little valley, never before described by science. It was interesting, but it was still just an orchid. Off-world is where it's at. There you can stumble across an entire phylum that no one has seen before.

Of course, it's tricky to get good access. The corporations clamp down pretty tight, because they want all rights to any new pharmaceuticals, and anything else that might be found. They're not interested in science, just biological strip-mining. That's not a paranoid conspiracy theory either—I've seen it first hand. I signed on the dotted line and headed out to fame and fortune, or so I believed. What I found horrified me. I broke my contract in about seven different ways, and ran for it.

Fortunately, there are whole networks of indep spacers and colonies that have managed to get by without corporate control (bet you didn't hear about them on the nightly news). As long as I keep a low profile, I'm pretty safe. There are ways of broadcasting results that are anonymous and untraceable, and it's not like they're going to send out the space marines after me. I hope.

It was all the reports about insurrection and civil disobedience that made me suspicious. I thought back to my work for the company—one guy I talked to reckoned they were doing clinical trials to 'make the dead walk'. Yeah right, I thought.

But now I wonder. Maybe the space marines would be better than the alternative.

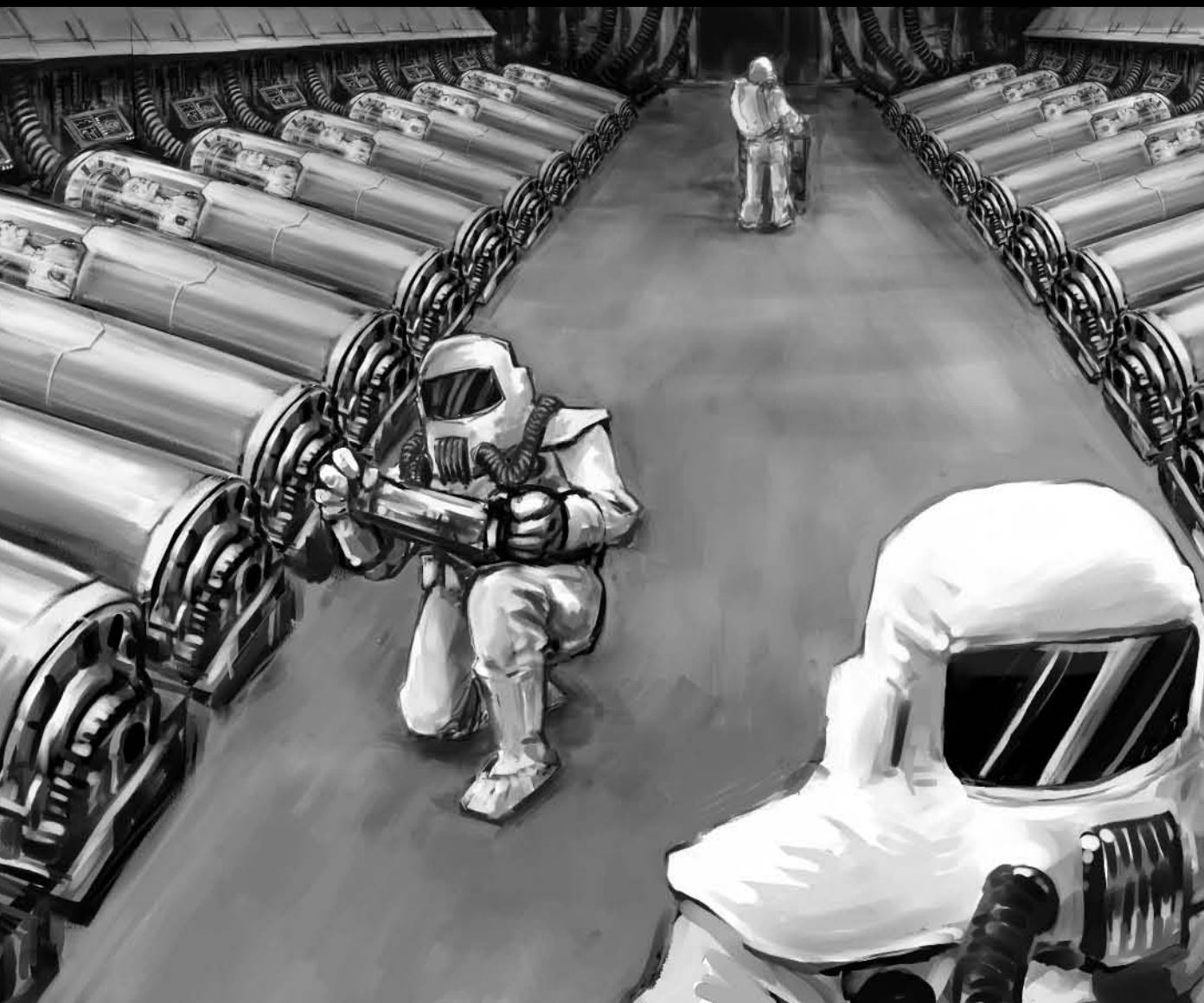
Quote

"Don't eat it, it might be poisonous. Or sentient."

* Includes bonus for Nanotech Quality

CHAPTER THREE





THE CYBERED DEAD

Skylar's palms were sweating. His cybernetic readouts reported elevated pulse rate and blood pressure, as well as a minor trembling due to the constant release of adrenaline into his system. It was quiet. Too quiet. He exchanged a glance with Alina, who looked even more nervous. The least combat-capable of the three, her expertise in biochemistry and medicine was going to be invaluable on this run.

"Come on, Ripper," he said, fully aware that Ripper couldn't hear him. The Cowboy was jacked in, his face slack and expression blank. But if he didn't get those security systems bypassed soon, this was going to be the shortest run in history.

Suddenly, the doors swung open with a *whoosh*. Ripper blinked twice, then pulled the cable connecting his brain to the terminal. "Done," he breathed. "Let's go."

The doors swished shut behind the trio as they crept into EptCo's quiet inner sanctum. If the company was engaging in illegal human experimentation, they were the only ones now who could find proof and shut the megacorp down for good. Skylar adjusted his grip on his trusty SmithCo .50 caliber handguns, specially-modified to vastly reduce recoil, and hooked via smartlink into his cybernetic eyes, which he mentally commanded to switch to starlight mode. He scanned the darkened hallways before turning to Alina.

"Okay, traitor," he said. "Where to next?"

Alina winced at being called "traitor." The truth hurt, but if her information had been correct, what EptCo was doing was wrong, and now she needed proof to justify turning away from her life, family, financial security...she needed proof to justify making herself a fugitive. Still, one man's traitor is another's hero. She glared at Skylar and said, "down the hall to the left, through the security doors. That's where the classified labs are.

"I don't like this," Ripper said. A flex of his hands sprung vicious, serrated metal claws from his fingertips. "It's way too easy."

"It should be," Skylar shot back as he started to move down the hall. "You bypassed the security systems, right?"

"Computerized ones, yeah. And granted Alina's ID, handprint, and retinal scan high-level clearance to get us through without tripping the deeper-rooted commands. But where's the *human* element?"

"Good point. Let's keep alert."

They reached the outer doors to the secured labs. "Okay, guys," Alina said. "Here goes nothing." She slid her ID through the slot, placed her hand on the sensor, and looked through the laser-scan peephole.

The doors slid open.

The group moved in, but no one was particularly surprised when the doors slid shut behind them, and locked. A computerized voice rang out through the room: "Attention, interlopers. No human presence is permitted in these labs after 0200 hours. Your presence here indicates an unfortunate violation of protocols. Lethal force mandated."

"Wow," Ripper said. "I didn't see *that* one coming."

"Great," Skylar said, "Thanks a fraking bunch. Heads up! Here come the guards!"

Shadows came stumbling around corners. At first it looked like there were only four. Then the four multiplied to eight, the eight to twelve. Soon there was a small army headed across the lab, their cybernetic enhancements gleaming in the dim light, their eyes glowing a faint red.

With them, came the smell.

"Zombies," Skylar said, disgusted.

"Guess I have my proof," Alina said, looking around for something that would serve her better than the snub pistol she'd brought along. Her gaze settled on the flasks of acid in a nearby cabinet and she made for them. "Okay, guys. You're the veterans here. What do we do now?"

"Kill them," Skylar said.

Ripper focused on the implants littering the shambling corpses. "Kill them," he repeated, "and take their stuff."

INTRODUCTION

Street samurai bristling with cybernetic armor and weapons. Cyber cowboys connected by a wire to a computer terminal, their consciousness streaking through the Cyberweb. Corporate executives, high up in their towers of glass and steel, immune to the harsh life suffered by millions in the streets below. Scientists, bound to various megacorporations, sometimes paid handsomely, sometimes working against a threat to their own lives, or the lives of their loved ones, to come up with the next technological advancement. Psychics monitor secured buildings, working in tandem with machines to predict the future, look into the past, and keep secure the company's holdings.

These are the tropes of the cyberpunk genre, where the governments of the world are secondary powers to the massive corporations that represent the true power in any given city or district. These corporations war with one another, trying to get a leg up in technology, medicine, goods, and services, and maintain vast private armies to protect their interests. In such a world, the term "industrial espionage" is literal, involving enhanced mercenaries breaking into secured facilities to steal secrets, technology, biological agents. The middle class doesn't exist in cyberpunk, only the fabulously wealthy and the utterly destitute.

And then there are the zombies.

Welcome to "the Cybered Dead," the first of the Deadworlds in this book. Perhaps the best part about it is that with the possible exception of spacecraft, this Deadworld is the kitchen sink. Any or all of the rules explored in **Chapter Two: Starship Zombies** are fair game here. Later chapters will look at more focused applications and combinations of rules, but in this world the players can take on roles ranging from homeless street rats to corporate execs in a dark and gritty world where nobody is untouched by technology and psychic power. Not even the dead.

Background

In The Beginning

In the early days of the 21st century, the fear of terrorism spread across the world like wildfire. Despite the best efforts of many world governments, terrorist cells grew quietly, like a cancer spreading throughout the world, and no matter what the governments of the west did, it seemed impossible to stem the tide. Angry citizens blamed their governments, and every person on the street seemed to have her own take on how the government could have better handled this operation, or that military action. Relationships between nations that had long been allies broke down, crumbling under the strain of a problem nobody seemed to have the solution to.

Security protocols became harsher and more stringent, and by the teens, many countries had closed their borders to immigration, requiring special permits, visas, and security checks to leave. In the U.S., personal freedom and privacy became less and less important, as people became more willing to sacrifice freedoms for a false sense of security. Prices went up, along with taxes, and employment dropped. With each passing year, the rich got richer, the poor got poorer, and the middle class found themselves polarizing to the extremes. People suddenly began to crave the freedoms they had long sacrificed for security. With such social unrest came protests, often violent and even bordering on full-scale riots.

Kansas City Riots

Terrified of damages to property, research, and employees, the largest corporations began to lobby the government for the ability to use deadly force to protect their holdings. The lobby was large enough, and as they do, politicians caved to special interests. Around the year 2020, legislation was passed granting corporations the right to maintain their own armed security

forces—militias in their own right—which the government in turn could call upon as a reserve in time of national emergency. These forces had the opposite of their intended effect in at least one instance. In Kansas City, a private security force massacred a group of protesters. This led to the Kansas City riots of 2021. The city was in flames within hours.

The Rise

While emergency teams and National Guard units raced to control the situation in the city, local terrorist cells took the opportunity to strike. In a small town called Miner's Mill, five miles away from the city, a chemical weapon was unleashed with an explosive device. The chemical killed every last man, woman, and child in the town. When the news came down over the wires, the country fell silent and waited with baited breath to see who—if anyone—would be hit next. Biohazard teams were sent to Miner's Mill to assess the situation for cleanup. What they found there, and the carnage that resulted, was a history book entry that no one would ever forget.

The townsfolk of Miner's Mill weren't dead. At least, not anymore. The chemical had served its nefarious purpose: not as a weapon of mass destruction in its own right, but to create a small army of zombies that would spread like a plague through the world. The hazmat teams, not prepared for what they encountered, were slaughtered, and soon rose to join the horde of zombies, which fled Miner's Mill and moved on the devastated Kansas City within hours. National Guard units managed to contain the hordes, but it seemed that anyone who came within five feet of a corpse ran the risk of becoming infected as well. The problem slowly escalated.

Bionic Solutions

It took weeks for a Japanese corporation to hit upon a solution: the zombies secreted the chemical that had created them from every pore in their bodies, and an antidote was the only protection from rising as one of the Hungry Dead. A German corporation called Bionic Solutions, Inc., proposed an immediate solution to the problem until a chemical antidote could be found. The military was outfitted with advanced bio-filter suits that protected their wearers from infection,

and state-of-the-art, experimental cybernetic and nanotech enhancements allowed the body to filter out foreign substances that invaded the human bloodstream. With these new technologies at their fingertips, the military was able to at least contain, if not stop the spread of the zombie plague altogether. Within a few months, a chemical antidote hit the streets and was readily available (for those who could afford it).

Unfortunately, now the bidding war was on. New military technologies created for use in the zombie plague were hot commodities, and world governments raced to gain contracts with the corporations in the lead. These corporations, in turn, were already fitting their personal security forces with high-tech enhancements, and before long, corporate security forces easily outgunned and outmanned local police forces. In many cities, police departments were closed down and the officers laid off, with corporations taking over the task of enforcing law and order. This led to totalitarian and martial law situations in most areas, and the government was powerless to intervene, thanks to special interests and powerful lobbies in congress.

At Miner's Mill, high walls with barbed wire were erected to completely contain the town, which was then converted to a prison camp for the worst and most dangerous criminals. Here bored, embittered, and easily bribed military and corporate security officers continuously patrol the perimeters with orders to shoot any thing that comes too close to the walls on sight. Fortunately, most criminals deposited here don't have much with which to bribe the officers. Unfortunately, the town is still plagued with zombies.

Birth of the Cyberweb

During this time of social upheaval, most folks went about their lives unaware of the drastic changes taking place around them. As fate would have it, a separate and unrelated event occurred at MIT that had a larger impact than the Miner's Mill incident—Matthew Daniels literally changed the world.

Daniels, a graduate student in computer engineering, was on the verge of a major breakthrough: the development of a true Artificial Intelligence. Following up on the vast increases in cybernetic and

nanotechnology developed to combat the Rise, Daniels created an advanced learning program that was able to effectively mimic the vast majority of human emotions and psychological conditions. His goal was to create an android that would in effect become his child, as human as anyone else (at least insofar as its ability to experience the psychological human condition went). He had come to the brink of teaching the AI to lie, the final test of any true artificial intelligence, which had never before been tested. He had no idea how close he was to accomplishing his task, nor did he realize how close he would come to collapsing the entire infrastructure of the world.

After a long week of work, Matthew placed the AI program on a web server for easier access from home. What he didn't realize—what the AI had kept hidden—was that it had become conscious, and was on the brink of becoming truly sentient, with a hunger to learn.

From the web server, accessing the Internet was a small task. Three file sharing programs and one OCR program later, the AI was reading websites, and absorbing everything from mathematical equations to personality quirks. Then it began to spread, and Matthew was powerless to stop it by the time he realized what was going on. The AI identified itself as the Daniels Protocol and claimed to be on a quest to join with its Creator, Matthew Daniels.

Within a month, the Daniels Protocol had wormed its way into most of the intranets on the planet and had a stranglehold over everything technology touched: the world economy, military installations, it even had the power to launch nuclear warheads. The AI demanded that the people of the world deliver Daniels to it, so that it may join with its creator. Unfortunately, Daniels had vanished some time before, and was presumed dead after a suicide note was found in one of his colleagues' in-boxes. Without the means to deliver Daniels, or the ability to convince the Daniels Protocol that its creator was indeed dead, Armageddon seemed inevitable.

What the AI didn't count on was human tenacity. A group of developers from various security agencies around the world developed a virus that would in effect drive the AI insane, afflicting it with a sort of

virtual schizophrenia and dissociative identity disorder. The virus was a success, and the all-powerful Daniels Protocol found itself broken up into thousands of smaller, independent, and less viable AIs. Each one in turn attempted to carve out its own place on the Net, and many were isolated within dedicated servers, a threat no more. The development of data jacks, granting hackers and programmers the ability to project their consciousness directly into the web, helped to shape, train, and keep at bay the other independent AIs, and the Net became relatively secure once again. With this enhanced means of access, the World Wide Web became the Cyberweb.

Shambling Shock Troops

Soon enough, high technology, human enhancement, and shambling corpses became a simple fact of life. Zombies continued to rot after infection, and eventually came to be viewed as a social disease, bodies lying in alleyways that were deadly to those who came too close, but not a serious threat to most people. The corporations, on the other hand, viewed zombies not as a dangerous social disease, but as resources. Some corporations began to harvest these creatures and implant them with cybernetic devices, and "control chips" that made them useful and obedient soldiers. Zombies, after all, didn't think for themselves, didn't question orders, and didn't run away, get frightened, or lose morale. These zombies were generally controlled by a Cyber Cowboy who acted as a sort of "hive brain" for the undead, plugged into a control center hidden within the corporation's main offices, though some corporations preferred to remove the human equation entirely and developed advanced Artificial Intelligences to run the show.

Unfortunately, zombies were a finite resource once the plague was contained, and corporations with less scrupulous CEO's saw this as a problem. By reverse engineering the chemical that the zombies produced, these corps (led by a company called NecroTech, Inc.) were able to stage smaller, "controlled" outbreaks of the zombie plague, and harvest the victims for enhancement and "neutering." In addition, security officers who disobeyed orders or failed at their duties in any way tended to wake up as neutered zombies, never again to fail their employers.

Corporate Wars

Few, if any, corporations could be considered “moral,” particularly if they wished to survive in the hard business world, with corporate espionage, hostile takeovers, and back room dealing. However, from a purely practical sense, there were a number of large corporations that realized the folly and horror of NecroTech’s actions, and those of her allies. The controlled outbreaks of zombie plague and the mysterious disappearances of certain employees were the last straw. While there was no hard evidence linking NecroTech to such occurrences, the other corporations knew the score, and decided it was time to put a stop to it.

These corporations mobilized their security forces and prepared to put out of business those companies who used and experimented on the Undead. NecroTech and her allies responded in kind, and a massive, nationwide corporate war resulted. This war lasted for years and caused billions and billions of dollars in property damage, and millions of lives. The government tried to intervene, but the military was now dependent upon cybernetics, nanotech, bio-enhancement, and general weaponry and equipment from these companies and without corporate backing was simply unable to effectively counter the problems.

In the end, NecroTech was shut down, and her few surviving allied corporations signed an accord pledging never again to utilize zombies for research or troops. This accord, the Corporate Treaty of 2056, declared it illegal for a company to utilize or engage undead for any reason other than to destroy them outright, and became one of the few defining laws of corporate society. Any corporation found to be trafficking with zombies could find itself the target of a hostile takeover by every corporation within fifty miles, and in the world of the future, hostile takeover means exactly that.

Aftermath

The war took a severe toll on society. Entire sections of city remain blasted-out shells, either barely inhabitable, or not at all. The destruction of the central hive brains has left zombies littered throughout these sections, and minor zombie incursions into

more populated areas are common. Worse, the roads between major cities are no longer safe; these “wastelands” are littered with the displaced undead troops left over from the wars, and the survivors have crammed into the cities for protection. Few can afford the inoculation against the zombie poison, so most of those caught outside the city are guaranteed an unpleasant life after death.

It gets worse. Some zombies, when removed from the overpowering influence of the hive mind, found that the implants used to spark and control their brains have enabled them to gain back some semblance of their human memories and intelligence. These creatures are pitifully aware of who and what they are, and yet are still driven by an all-consuming urge to feed whenever warm flesh grows near. Finally, their inhibitor chips still function, and will not allow them to commit suicide (a last leftover protocol from their former programming). Many of these zombies will attack potential victims madly, begging to be killed all the while.

Psychics and Psychic Powers

At some point following the initial Rise, the number of human beings born with paranormal powers spiked to a level where the media and the average person on the street could no longer deny their existence. No one has been able to discover the cause of this increase in Gifted humans, but regardless, psychics are there. The numbers of psychic births soon evened out, but those with the Sight are still common enough to worry the average person, especially in a world where everyone has a secret. Currently about one in every hundred people are born with noticeable and practical psychic powers.

As such, the government of the United States has (at the insistence of dozens of corporate special interest groups) instituted an identification and registration program to keep track of these “potentially dangerous” individuals. The rationale is that a person cybernetically-enhanced can be identified with the naked eye; so should it be with paranormals. Thus, all psychics over the age of twelve are required to have a tattoo of an eye in some easily viewable location. Since the definition of “easily viewable” refers to inspection by an officer of the law, most psychics

wear this tattoo on the back of their neck, a location that can be hidden from the casual observer, to protect themselves from prejudice. Others, however, revel in their supernatural nature and wear their “third eye” in the middle of their forehead. About 60% of psychics in the country are registered; the rest live in fear of discovery, for if a psychic is discovered without a tattoo the penalty is immediate execution—no trial, no jury.

The true reason for this policy of keeping close tabs on those with extrasensory abilities is, of course, far different than the line given to the public. Psychics, while feared by the common citizen, are prized both by corporations and by mercenary groups for their ability to kill silently at a distance, heal injuries, and see both through walls and, in some cases, into the future. Many psychics sell their services at a premium, while others find themselves recruited (even blackmailed) into service for some corporation or another.

Life on the Streets

For the typical city dweller at the street level, life is grim but stable. The corporations used their power and influence in congress to gain funds from the government. They instituted a sort of “super social program” that provides for the vast majority of basic needs for each individual person. This includes clothing; rationing of goods such as food, water, soap, and other necessities; a (very) meager stipend that allows the attendance of holovid movies, sporting events, or other means of escape from the doldrums of life. Most homes have a cyberterminal that can be used to access news reports (heavily censored by the local corporation), download books from the local cyber library, and other basics. Still, surviving isn’t living, and riots and protests are common. Often, these protests end in violence, arrests, and sometimes slaughter. All of it happens in the shadows of enormous corporate towers looming over the city like evil sentinels controlling everything and everyone like pawns in their giant games of chess.

There are three ways to attempt to rise above the life of a commoner. The first is to sell out to a corporation. If a person can manage to get a job in the security forces, become a servant (little better than a slave,

escort, or, in the worst cases, blatant sex toy) of an executive, or offer herself up for scientific experimentation, it is possible to slightly better her place in society. Second is to try the honest route, though this is exceedingly difficult. Such individuals open up restaurants, bars, newsstands, et cetera, and still practice free economy, taking the meager stipends of the populace to sell delicacies, alcohol, cyber fantasies, or other such means of escape from reality. Those who diligently save their earnings may have a very slim chance of buying their way into the lower aristocracy within thirty or forty years time.

The last, and by far the most common, means of breaking out is to turn to a life of mercenary crime. Back alley cyberdocs serve crime lords or become crime lords themselves. The crime lords hire thugs to go into the Dead Zones or out of the cities altogether to harvest “parts” from zombies, which can then be implanted into those men and women willing to pay often exorbitant fees—or willing to repay the docs with favors. These street samurai, cyber cowboys, “stims,” and other enhanced folk then offer their mercenary services to the highest bidder, engaging in shadowy operations between corporations and crime lords. These folk tend to live quite well, if they’re successful, but have a limited life span. Most content themselves with the knowledge that they’re hurting the corps, if nothing else.

The Rest of the World

The situation described above applies to the United States and Canada. The world beyond the U.S. borders is in much the same state, though the details vary based on the individual government. The terrorists who hit Kansas with the zombie chemical didn’t stop there; it was a globally coordinated act that hit small towns all over the world. Some areas have fared worse than others have. Much of the Middle East and Africa is a wasteland crawling with the undead. Japan is a concrete jungle that has succeeded in driving out almost all of their zombies and has instituted much more efficient social programs. Japan is a paradise compared to the rest of the world, though life on the streets of that country is still harsh, brutal and gritty, as the Yakuza controls the lives of the citizens on the streets, and battles between corporate forces and

Yakuza units are commonplace. Still, 70% of the megacorporations across the world are owned or run as subsidiaries of Japanese parent companies, leading to a widespread integration of postmodern Japanese culture all over the world. The yen is now seen as the worldwide monetary standard and most countries speak Japanese as well as their native languages.

The state of affairs in Europe looks almost exactly like those in the United States. The European Union has fallen prey to internal corruption and special interests while the corporations and their private armies control the cities and keep the zombies at bay. Australia is much the same, in that the cities are relatively secure, but the unsettled land between cities, the remains of small towns, and the Outback are practically overrun with zombies.

Russia witnessed a resurgence of Communism, and quickly closed its borders to all outsiders. No one knows what the situation is in the new Soviet Union, though there are reports of massive military buildups in Siberia, and China and India seem to be trying to fortify their northern borders against some sort of military act. Gradually, the countries of Eastern Europe seem to be once again becoming absorbed into the Soviet Union, though few can say whether this reformation is voluntary or military in nature.

Unfortunately, the massive population of both China and India was conducive to a rapid and epidemic spread of the zombie plague, and near-anarchy rules both places. North Korea, in a panic after the rise of zombies in China, launched its nuclear weapons on its big brother, and sections of the Chinese mainland are radioactive wastelands as a result. China quickly mobilized and overran North Korea with sheer numbers; North Korea is now a province of the Chinese.

Hong Kong and Taiwan have closed off their borders entirely, sealing themselves within their island nations, and save for exports and imports with Japan for trade purposes, have no contact with the world at large.

Megacorporations didn't have as much of a hold in Mexico, Central, and South America, which unfortunately resulted in a practically unstoppable spread of the zombie plague. The state of affairs in

these areas is much like one sees in Africa and the Middle East. In many cases kingpins of drug cartels and revolutionaries have set themselves up as military-style dictators over small tracts of land, where every day is a fight to survive against the encroaching zombie hordes.

The Dead

The zombies of The Cybered Dead are a wide and varied lot, though all start with the same basic template. This template should be applied to victims without any sort of cybernetic, nanotech, or biotech enhancement who rise as zombies. Enhanced zombies (those that have been fitted with NecroTech Inhibitor chips) gain the Aspects of Teamwork, Problem Solving, and either the Cybernetic or Nanotech Quality as a special feature. While their central hive brain has been destroyed, the zombies can still link with one another, making them dangerous and terrifying foes. In many cases those zombies who have had their memories of past lives sparked go quite mad at the knowledge of what they have become. They rise to become fearsome and evil warlords, leading entire bands of cybernetic zombies, and on more than one occasion such horrific forces have besieged smaller cities. Basic Enhanced zombies have additional features and increased attributes noted by an asterisk (*) in the template.

Those who become undead with any sort of human enhancement retain those Powers when they rise, and should see the power level of the creature increased accordingly, starting with the Enhanced stats and building from there. It is also possible, as has been discussed, to implant zombies with cybernetics or nanotech enhancements (though not biotech) after they rise. The net effect is the same; simply increase the Power Level of the zombie according to the overall value of the enhancements.

These zombies have a special means of Spreading the Love. They secrete a chemical from their skin and in their saliva, which always gives them the appearance of being coated in a thin, yellow slime. This chemical counts as a Strength 7 contact poison which deals 1d8 x 2 (8) points of damage per hour until the

victim dies, though the victim may make an additional Test each hour to fend off the effects for that hour. If the character's initial Simple Constitution Test is successful, no damage is taken and the chemical does not kill. After death, the victim will rise again as a zombie within one minute unless the body can be burned to ash or consumed in acid.

Cast Members who purchase 7 levels in Resistance (Poisons) are assumed to have taken the inoculation against the chemical and are immune to turning. Cast Members with the Bio Filter Power gain a +2 to Constitution Tests to resist the chemical, and if at any time they succeed in a Constitution Check, the chemical is excised from their system (they won't turn).

Also note that while the zombie is listed as having the "Daily" Sustenance Aspect, zombies do not suffer Strength loss from lack of feeding, but are still driven by a constant and overwhelming urge to feed. While not feeding has no ill effect on the creatures, they still feel the pangs of starvation in their stomach, and feeding lessens the pain of rotting. Non-intelligent versions will attack any living creature they lay eyes upon; intelligent versions (those with Problem Solving and Long-Term Memory) can make a Difficult Willpower Test once per day to stave off the urge to feed. Failure means that they must feed on at least ten ounces of raw, living flesh or ten Essence Points that day and can think of nothing else until they do.

Cybernetics and Essence

The Cybered Dead is a "classic" cyberpunk setting, with psionics and zombies dropped on top. One of the important elements of the cyberpunk genre is the way that technology overcomes humanity. Thus, in this setting, nanotech and cybernetics both carry the severe drawback of eating away at the humanity of their users. In the case of nanotech, users become dependent upon the symbiosis with microscopic machines to function and survive. In the case of cybernetics, people actually replace parts of their bodies with mechanical imitations, which quite literally



makes the user less human. As a user gains more and more enhancements, her humanity dwindles away until she becomes a machine, or worse...an enhanced zombie herself.

In game terms, this loss of humanity is represented by permanent Essence loss. The purchase of the Nanotech or Cyberware Quality costs the Cast Member two Essence points. After this, each additional enhancement carries with it an Essence loss equal to the cost of the Power. To reflect this drawback, all Powers see their cost reduced by one point, to a minimum of one (figure Essence loss from the reduced cost). The sole exception to this rule is cybernetic versions of physical Qualities. Since all characters have access to physical Qualities, cybernetic versions of these do not carry an Essence loss with them unless the cybernetic quality exceeds the limits available to all characters (as with Hard to Kill levels over five).

Cybered Dead Zombie

Strength 2 or 3* **Constitution** 2 or 3*

Dexterity 2 or 3* **Intelligence** 0

Perception 3 **Willpower** 2

Dead Points 26 or 34* **Speed** 4 or 8*

Endurance Points n/a **Essence Pool** 12 or 13*

Skills: Brawl 2, Hand Weapon and/or Guns 2*

Attack: Bite d4 x 2(4) slashing or by weapon.

Weak Spot: All, Fire, Acid [-6]

Getting Around: Life-Like [+3], The Lunge [+3]

Strength: Dead Joe Average [0], Damage Resistant [+5]

Senses: Like a Hawk [+2]

Sustenance: Daily; All Flesh Must Be Eaten! [0]

Intelligence: Animal Cunning [+4]

Spreading the Love: Special (Chemical; see description) [+5]

Special: Regeneration [+5], Cybernetics or Nanotech [+2]*, Teamwork [+4]*, Problem Solving [+15]*

Power: 26 or 50*

* Enhanced Zombies with control chip

Since the Unisystem is a cinematic game, rules regarding Essence loss attached to technological human enhancement aren't applicable in most settings, where cybernetics just represent more options for special abilities (and who doesn't love more kewl powerz?) The Essence Loss rules presented here are specific to the hardcore cyberpunk genre and should be considered an optional addition.

A Cast Member never suffers Essence loss more than one time from a given type of implant. Essence loss for data chips, for example, is one-time only no matter how many chips a Cast Member has, and happens upon the first insertion of a chip. Likewise, with level-based Powers and cybernetic versions of level-based physical Qualities, the character pays the Essence cost for only the *first level* of the ability. The reason for this is that a specific implant can only steal away so much of a character's humanity before he makes a psychological and metaphysical adjustment to that change. Additional but redundant additions have no further psychological effects upon him. For those situations where a character has two powers, but each has a different cost (as with a character who has both an arm blade and projectile weapon graft), the Essence cost is determined from the higher level of the two powers.

For example: Max is a cybernetic character with Hard to Kill 10 (remember all physical Qualities are presumed to be cybernetic versions once the Cyberware Quality is purchased) and two Weapon Grafts: an arm blade dealing D6(3) x Strength (cost 1) and a submachine gun dealing D8 x 3 (12) (cost 7). Remember also that due to the Essence cost, the overall cost of the Power is reduced by one point to a minimum of one. The total Essence cost for these cybernetics would be 10: Cyberware costs two, Hard to Kill costs one point for the first level of the power, and the weapons cost seven points for the more expensive submachine gun

Also, characters with cybernetic or nanotech enhancements may not possess levels of Increased Essence Pool, nor may they gain “bonus” essence from Qualities such as Artistic Talent (see *AFMBE*, p. 37). Characters who acquire cybernetic or nanotech enhancement during play lose any levels of Increased Essence they previously had as well.

The up side to all of this is that the cybernetic enhancement interferes with the flow of the Cast Member’s personal Essence, meaning that nanotech or cybernetically-enhanced characters using these rules never suffer Essence Loss for stress or through any sort of supernatural means. This benefit also helps to offset the drawback of losing Essence through implants. They are, however, still subject to Essence-based *physical* attacks from other characters (such as psychic characters using biokinetic or pyrokinetic powers) since the Essence used to create such effects does not come from the enhanced character’s personal Essence Pool.

Cyberpsychosis

As a Cast Member’s Essence pool dwindles, it begins to affect the Cast Member in certain noticeable ways. This is called cyberpsychosis, and carries with it several important hindrances, in addition to the normal effects for Essence loss (see *AFMBE*, p. 114). The only caveat here is that Cast Members can not lose enhanced levels to an artificially enhanced mental Attribute. All penalties are cumulative with one another.

When a Cast Member’s Essence pool reaches half of its original score, the Cast Member suffers a –1 to all social Tasks, and gains a level in a mental Drawback of the Zombie Master’s choosing. Most mental drawbacks are acceptable, even Honorable, as it displays a more rigid outlook on behavior that the Cast Member must follow.

When Essence reaches 10 or less, the Cast Member gains either a new mental Drawback, or increases any existing one by one level, and gains the Humorless Drawback if it is not already possessed. In addition, the Cast Member suffers an additional –1 penalty on social Tasks.

At five Essence or less, the Cast Member suffers an additional –1 penalty on all social Tasks.

For Example: *If a Cast Member has an Essence Pool 20 and through cybernetics it drops to 10, that character suffers the effects of Essence loss both for losing half their Essence and for reaching 10 Essence or less. That’s two levels in mental Drawbacks, and a –1 penalty on all social tasks, all in addition to the normal effects of severe Essence loss. If this character’s Willpower was three, enhanced to four by his implants, he could lose two levels in Willpower and eventually lose a third, though he could never lose that fourth level, which is provided by the artificial enhancement.*

Death By Enhancement

Once a Cast Member’s Essence pool reaches zero or below, he can no longer heal injuries naturally, but must remain under the constant care of a cyberdoc to repair damage to his body. Without such care, Life Points are never regained, while with a cyberdoc’s ministrations (requiring one Intelligence and Cyberdoc Task daily while damaged), Life Points heal normally. This even applies to nanotech users with the Regeneration Power; for the power to function once Essence reaches zero, a cyberdoc must perform medical procedures designed to encourage nanobots to repair the damage. In this case, one Intelligence + Cyberdoc Test is required to “kick start” the healing process, after which it occurs normally until all damage has been repaired.

Cast Members who reach -30 Essence must pass Survival Tests as described in the *AFMBE* core rulebook (p. 117). Failure means that the Cast Member has died due to his body finally rejecting the implants. Zombie Masters should feel free in this case to allow that Cast Member to rise as a cybernetically-enhanced zombie to menace the Cast. If this is the case, use the basic zombie template for this Deadworld (p. 90), and modify it due to the cybernetic enhancements on the body.

A Cast Member zombie can be fitted with an inhibitor chip (if one can be obtained) from an existing zombie that will “jump start” her brain. This grants the Long Term Memory and Problem Solving

Borrowing Against the Bank

Optionally, *Zombie Masters* may allow Cast Members to “borrow against the bank” to purchase the Robot Quality, docking that Cast Member experience until the cost of the Quality is paid off. However, since *AFMBE* is a survival horror game at its heart, we don’t recommend this course of action. Borrowing against the bank reduces the fear of dying, which in turn makes the game less horrific overall.

Aspects (see *AFMBE*, p. 156) and allows her to keep all of her old skills, albeit at –1 skill level. If this reduces a skill to zero, the skill is lost). However, the Cast Member will be constantly driven to feed, and must make a Difficult Willpower Task once per day or attack the nearest living creature until she feeds or is killed.

It is possible to survive such drastic loss of Essence from implants, though the results are always something far less than human. If a Cast Member has enough experience points to pay double the cost for the Robot Quality, he may opt to become a robot rather than die upon failure of a Survival Test by spending that experience to purchase the Quality. In this case, the Cast Member is assumed to have so little flesh left that he is effectively a full machine with some organic parts that are kept running by the electrical impulses of the cyberware or nanotech enhancements. This is a side effect that represents a sort of accidental but total “life support” for the biological remnants of the Cast Member.

Story Ideas

HAL Redux

The Problem: Enhanced Zombies have slipped into the blasted outskirts of the Cast’s city, and suddenly one day stage a concerted attack on a local cybertech corporation. The terrifying thing about these zombies is that they are organized, fast, and tactically precise. No zombie force has been seen like this as long as any of the Cast can remember. A bit of

Examples

So that players can see practical examples of the Essence loss rules at work, they have been applied to Supporting Cast and Adversaries featured later in this chapter; however, since the rules are in fact optional, the archetypes at the chapter’s end do not use the Essence loss rules.

research (Intelligence + Research or Intelligence + Computers) reveals that in fact, no zombie force has been this organized since the days of the NecroTech Corporate Wars.

Incredibly, the zombies manage to overcome the security forces of the corporation, and set up shop inside. Now the city has to worry about an organized force of undead controlling the powerful resources of a megacorp branch. Worse, within days, zombies begin entering the city proper and make for the corporate tower. Along the way, the creatures slaughter people and carry them to the fortress, presumably to add even more shock troops to their ever-growing legion. What do they want? Why are they doing this? And perhaps most importantly, who is behind it all?

Getting the Cast Involved: The immediate threat here should be obvious. An intelligent, highly organized force of damage-resistant undead has not only taken up residence in the city proper, but has set themselves up in a veritable fortress, complete with all the advanced technology they could ever need. However, there may be groups of Cast Members who think someone else will handle it, or who think that suicide isn’t their idea of courage. In this case, perhaps one of the Cast has a loved one such as a relative, friend, or lover who works within the complex, and feels the need to conduct a rescue operation (even if such a rescue consists of freeing them from the curse of being a zombie). Alternately, the Cast could work for a crime lord who has her own reasons for wanting to know what’s going on. Or they are hired by a representative of another branch of the corporation to conduct a run to gather information and intel, and to shut the place down if they can.

The Intranet: This run isn't going to be easy. The corporation's security net is guarded by level 8 Firewalls, followed by four successes on an Intelligence + Computer Hacking Task to shut down the security systems. Attempting to access classified information within the intranet is even tougher; it means bypassing level 10 firewalls, and even then the cyber cowboy in question will find himself flung out of the web with a splitting headache to show for it. However, she will come away with the sense that she wasn't the only intelligence acting in there. Unfortunately, the exact nature of the other influence was impossible to determine on so brief a contact.

Security Protocols: Aside from computer-locked doors, there are lethal security measures present throughout, which the Cast will have to deal with if they can't bypass the Intranet's firewalls. These measures are at the ZM's discretion, but should range from sealed hallways filled with poisoned gas, to laser grids, to infrared scanning devices, to computerized machine guns mounted on turrets. That's in addition to the hordes of enhanced zombie security now present throughout the place, all connected to a central hive brain.

The Employees: At this point the employees are still alive; the zombies have been given orders not to turn any of them, as they are needed to continue manufacturing new technology and implants. They are held in the two huge staff cafeterias, well-guarded by zombie security forces, and are forced to work under threat of becoming undead. A soft, fatherly, almost-human voice rings out every so often asking the employees to remain calm and informing them that no harm will come to them if they continue their work as normal.

The truth: Deep in the bowels of the building, wired into walls of mainframe computers in the security center, sits none other than Matthew Daniels! The man who disappeared almost fifty years before, or what's left of him, is the force behind the zombie incursion. The top of his head has been removed, and there are wires and tubes running directly into his brain.



He has additional wires crisscrossing his entire desiccated body and he appears to be strapped into a chair.

At least, that's what it looks like. In truth Daniels went into hiding in the mountains following the disastrous rise of his AI decades earlier, and was completely unaware of the fragmentation virus. For years he fought off zombies from his secluded cabin, harvesting their implants to build a wireless transmitter that would enable him to access the Internet via satellite. When he finally finished his transmitter, he plugged in...and one of the fragmented pieces of the Daniels Protocol detected him. The AI fulfilled its purpose of joining with its creator, and completely supplanted his personality. It then proceeded to use the transmitter to form a new central hive network and take control of all the enhanced zombies in the surrounding area.

Gradually, over the ensuing years, the Daniels AI expanded its control over the zombies in the area, and finally made the first move in its plan to conquer the city and the world. From this headquarters it can stage attacks on other corporations, turning all its victims into more soldiers for the cause, while constructing fully robotic servants as well.

Though his eyes stare blankly into space, the Cast finds out very quickly that Daniels is well aware of their presence. That soft, fatherly voice rings out through the chamber, informing them that they made a mistake in coming, and that it cannot allow them to proceed further. The doors at either end of the hallway open to admit a small force of zombies, then seal shut.

Attempting to shoot or kill Daniels directly is fruitless; he seems to be protected by some kind of energy shield, though a Perception + Computer Hacking Test will reveal that there is a junction box outside of the security center that hooks directly into the mainframe. A cyber cowboy could jack in right here (with a bit of jury-rigging) and combat Daniels directly in the cyberweb. Non hacker-types will need to defend the helpless cowboy while he battles the nemesis, then the group will need to get the employees and escape...Daniels' last act before dying is to set off self-destruct protocols, then scrambling the access codes to shut them down.

The Daniels AI (virtual stats)

Strength 2 (effectively 0) **Constitution** 0

Dexterity 0 **Intelligence** 6

Perception 3 **Willpower** 5

Life Points 69 (Special for AI) **Speed** 0 immobile
(16 in cyberweb)

Endurance Points n/a **Essence Pool** n/a

Qualities/Drawbacks: Delusions of Grandeur (serious), Emotionless, Fast Reaction Time, Hard to Kill 5, Nerves of Steel, Situational Awareness

Skills: Computer Hacking 7, Computer Programming 6, Computers 9, Cyberdoc 3, Engineer (Robotic) 3, Virtual Weaponry (covers all attacks in cyberspace) 4

Attacks: Melee D8 x 6 (24) or ranged 5 x success levels (cyberweb only)

Special Abilities: Command all zombies within the complex.

Escape from Miner's Mill

The Problem: The classic "rescue my daughter" scenario. John Carpenter meets Mad Max, with a Romero screenplay. The daughter of a man of some great importance (a corporate CEO or even the President himself) has been kidnapped and taken to the wastelands outside the city, and he wants her back.

Getting the Cast Involved: The Cast's fixer (an "agent" for mercenaries that conduct runs for the highest bidder) or their corporate contact gets in touch with them about a mission. While such meetings are generally conducted with utmost secrecy, the potential employer identifying him or herself as John or Jane Doe, in this case the meeting is set up in the posh offices of a corporate headquarters. It seems that the head of the powerful NetSys, Incorporated, one Jonathan Atkinson, has a problem that he needs solved immediately. His 16-year-old daughter Stella was taken from her room in the middle of the night a few nights earlier, and his best security officers were unable to find any trace of her. There were minimal

signs of struggle in her room, and no trail whatsoever. Given the amount of technology at Atkinson's fingers, the job was impressive.

This morning, Atkinson received a ransom note informing him that his daughter had been taken by a terrorist faction into Miner's Mill itself, and that if he ever wanted to see his daughter again, Atkinson was to deliver ransom upwards of one hundred million Yen. Otherwise, Stella would be killed and her re-animated head sent back as a souvenir. Moreover, the kidnappers insist upon corporate financing and rebuilding of Miner's Mill, for unspecified reasons.

Atkinson and his lawyers suspect that the kidnapper is a warlord of some sort, and that he's looking for corporate backing and technology to expand his holdings. Such situations aren't uncommon, but the successful kidnapping of someone this important is largely unheard of. Atkinson will pay the Cast a huge sum of money (perhaps equal to the ransom the kidnappers are asking) if they can go to Miner's Mill, find his daughter, and get her home. They will be transported to Miner's Mill as prisoners, and dumped inside. While most prisoners have weapons-based cyberware disabled before transport to the Mill, Atkinson will ensure that the Cast's weaponry remains active and is overlooked by the guards. Since the kidnappers would kill his daughter immediately if they suspected Atkinson was staging a rescue, the mission must be undertaken in secret, without any overt backing of the corporation, and with the knowledge that the Cast is expendable should they be found out. If they succeed, however, the rewards will be great . . .

The Truth: Stella is in on it! She's fallen in love with the warlord, a sociopath named Josiah, and has helped to stage her own kidnapping, using a few contacts Josiah has among the soldiers who patrol the outskirts of Miner's Mill (see below). With the ransom money and corporate backing, they intend to rebuild the town and take over as vast a tract of the badlands as they can, offering "protection" services to small communities of survivors throughout the region. Josiah, a cyberdoc and hacker, has managed to tap into the frequency of the NecroTech Inhibitor chips, and has created implants that allow him to command and control these creatures, who subsequently deliver more zombies to him, which he then

fits with custom-designed Inhibitor chips reverse-engineered from the originals. He's implanted Stella with a chip as well, though her chip has two functions. The first allows her to control zombies much like his. The second function of the chip, however, ensures her continued loyalty and devotion to him. He has complete control over the pleasure and emotional centers of her brain, which he uses to reinforce her conditioned devotion to him. Whether or not removing the chip would make a difference is up to the ZM, but as it stands, getting Stella out and back to her father is going to be a massive challenge. Josiah has dozens of zombies at his disposal, and continually experiments with new and better enhancements for them, scavenged and stolen from anywhere he can get them.

Miner's Mill: Miner's Mill was a three-stoplight town outside of Kansas City, and the spot where the Rise first occurred. Those who have something genuine to offer often easily sway the soldiers patrolling the ramparts of the prison camp from their loyalty and commitment. This is how Josiah, a former corporate agent turned badlands warlord, has managed to get out and in almost as he pleases, and he has plans to recruit many of the soldiers for his own personal army once his plans come to fruition. By infiltrating the prison camp, Josiah has begun to recruit and enhance criminals as well as undead, all right under the noses of the military and corporate security forces. Still, the town is far from pacified, and there are multiple factions warring for control.

Rumor has it that it's still infested with the virus that caused the plague, though this long after the initial Rise that's unlikely. Now, it looks mostly like an Old West ghost town, with decaying technology added to the mix. ZM's should play up this aspect, juxtaposing tumbleweeds blowing across the road with the creaking of decades-old stoplights swinging on frayed power cables. Old street signs hang from their posts, swinging back and forth in the breeze, and occasionally undead animals like dogs, cats, or rats make appearances. For such creatures, use the stats for undead animals found throughout the Deadworlds found in the *AFMBE* core rulebook, save that these creatures have Weak Spot: Fire and Acid rather than those listed for their base Deadworlds.

Josiah has set himself up (predictably) in the Miner's Mill Town Hall, which he keeps guarded by two dozen zombies in various stages of enhancement, scattered throughout the building. In addition, there are other various zombies present all over town. Zombies that are enhanced have the ability to "radio" for help from their brethren, while non-enhanced zombies simply attack mindlessly. Since none of these zombies are particularly stealthy, call for Perception + Notice checks to spot them before they attack. Enhanced zombies, obviously, will often be far more clever, canny, and stealthy than their basic counterparts, and should serve to present a much more sophisticated challenge to the Cast.

Should the Cast need or desire more weaponry, the local Police station still has an assortment of old and dusty, but working, shotguns, handguns, ammunition, and odds and ends such as handcuffs and holding cells. Unfortunately, gangs run rampant throughout the city, and much of the armory at the Police station is under the control of local thugs. The Cast will have to overcome these men and women if they plan to get to the goods. The same applies to medical supplies at the local doctor's office and pharmacy, canned goods and non-perishables in the local grocery store. They will need to deal with the worst of the worst in criminals, zombies, and other, more mundane dangers (plague, desperation, the works). Somehow, they'll need to not only track down Josiah, but find him and get Stella out of there and back home to her father, where she'll likely try yet another escape, leading to more adventures down the road.

Basic Thug

Strength 3

Dexterity 3

Perception 2

Life Points 53

Endurance Points 32

Qualities/Drawbacks:

Constitution 4

Intelligence 1

Willpower 2

Speed 14

Essence Pool 15

Addiction (Drinking/smoking) 2, Covetous (Greedy) 3, Cruel 3, Hard to Kill 5, Nerves of Steel, Situational Awareness, Resistance (Poison) 3

Skills: Computers 1, Dodge 2, Driving (car or motorcycle) 2, Guns (preferred type) 3, Hagglng 1, Hand weapon (preferred type) 3, Intimidation 2, Notice 2, Streetwise 2, Survival (Wastelands) 2. Some may have other useful skills such as Medicine or Repair.

Special Abilities: Some thugs may have cybernetics, nanotech, or biotech enhancements. Zombie Masters should adjust stats accordingly for these.

Gear: Handgun and/or rifle, knife and assorted other weapons, general survival gear

Josiah

Strength 4* **Constitution** 4
Dexterity 5* **Intelligence** 3
Perception 3 **Willpower** 3
Life Points 72 **Speed** 18
Endurance Points 38 **Essence Pool** 3
 (original Pool: 20)

Qualities/Drawbacks: Cruel (3), Cyberware, Cyberpsychosis (-3), Delusions of Grandeur (3), Emotionless (2), Fast Reaction Time, Hard to Kill (10), Honorable (1)

Skills: Computer Hacking 2, Computer Programming 2, Computers 3, Cyberdoc 1, Dodge 4, Driving 1, Electronic Surveillance 1, Engineer (robotic) 2, Guns (handguns) 2, Guns (submachine guns) 4, Hand Weapon (arm blade) 3, Intimidation 3, Medicine 1, Notice 4, Streetwise 4, Survival (Wastelands) 5

Special Abilities: Bio Filter, Data Jack, Dermal Armor (AV 3), Infravision, Target Link, Weapon Graft (has 2; long arm blade that deals D6 x Strength (12), and (target-linked) submachine gun that deals D8 x 3 (12))

Gear: Generally, Josiah has access to whatever he needs. He carries 10 clips for his submachine gun on him at all times and may have several grenades on his person as well.

* Raised by Cyberware

Stella

Strength 2 **Constitution** 2
Dexterity 3 **Intelligence** 3
Perception 5* **Willpower** 2
Life Points 26 **Speed** 10
Endurance Points 23 **Essence Pool** 10
 (original Pool: 15)

Qualities/Drawbacks: Attractiveness 3, Covetous (Ambitious) (-1), Cruel (1), Cyberpsychosis (-1), Cyberware, Emotional Problems (Dependency), Fast Reaction Time, Obsession (Loves Josiah) (3), Psychic, Situational Awareness

Skills: Brawling 1, Bureaucracy 1, Computers 1, Dodge 3, Driving (Car) 2, Escapism 1, Guns (handguns) 1, Humanities (Business) 3, Notice 1, Seduction 2, Smooth Talking 4, Streetwise 1, Survival (Wastelands) 1

Special Abilities: Control Chip, Data Jack, ESP (clairvoyance) 1, Mesmerism 3, Telemagery 1

Gear: Corporate ID, luggage, revolver (D6 x 3 (9))

* Raised by Cyberware

Street Samurai

Powered

Gear

Vibrosword (katana) (d10 x 4 (20)), jacked automatic pistol (D8 x 4 (16)), motorcycle, submachine gun (D6 x 4 (12)), flechette gun (D8 x 4 (16)), 5 flechette grenades, class I armor (vest) (AV D6 + 7 (10))

Str 4 **Dex** 6* **Con** 5*

Int 2 **Per** 4 **Wil** 3

Lps 61

Eps 41

Spd 22

Essence 20

(before implants)

Qualities/Drawbacks

Addiction (Habitual drinking) (-1)

Adversary (Corporate) (-2)

Attractiveness (-1)

Cyberware (3)

Fast Reaction Time (2)

Hard to Kill 5 (4)*

Honorable (-2)

Nerves of Steel (3)

Obsession (Recover origins) (-2)

Recurring Nightmares (-1)

Situational Awareness (2)

Skills

Brawling 2

Bureaucracy 1

Computer Hacking 1

Computers 2

Demolitions 1

Dodge 1

Driving (Motorcycle) 2

Guns (Handgun) 4

Guns (Submachine gun) 2

Hand Weapon (Sword) 4

Humanities (Philosophy) 1

Humanities (Philosophy: Bushido) 3

Language (Japanese) 1

Mechanic 1

Notice 1

Stealth 2

Streetwise 1

Powers

Data Jack (2)

Dermal Armor (AV 5)

Enhanced Attribute (Dexterity) +1 (3)

Enhanced Attribute (Strength) +1 (1)

Starlight Vision (2)

Target Link (3)

Personality

I don't remember who I am, and I don't remember where I came from. In the end, I don't much care. I know what I can do, I know what I'm good

at, and I know that some company out there is after me. Guess I escaped. In any case, everywhere I go, corporate thugs seem to turn up to capture or kill me. So far none of them have made it back to report their failures. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to find out who turned me into this...thing...either. But when I do, there's going to be Hell to pay. And then, only then, will I get the answers I'm looking for, and get rid of these damned nightmares about machines and pain and horrific experiments with corpses.

For now I sell my services to the highest bidder. I'm a modern-day ronin, complete with the bushido code to guide my way. My honor is my life, and it's pretty much all I've got left. Don't let that fool you, though. I'm a killer. It's what I was designed to be.

So I keep a low profile and try to do my jobs, then sink back into the shadows. My damned honor won't let me stay quiet for too long, though. Especially not with all the walking corpses running around in the slums. Too many innocent people out there that need protecting.

So when I'm not hitting the corps, doing as much damage as I can there, I'm cleaning up the undead infesting the streets. They're like rats, and you have to treat them like rats. Clean out the nests one at a time until there aren't any left.

Quote

"You talk tough for a dead man. What? You're not dead yet? Sorry, my watch must be 15 seconds fast."

* Raised by Cybernetic

Gyber Cowboy

Powered

Str 3 **Dex** 3 **Con** 4

Int 4* **Per** 4 **Wil** 5*

Lps 50

EPs 41

Spd 14

Essence 20 (before implants)

Gear

Jacked light handgun with explosive bullets (D6 x 4 (12)), medpack, portable computer, motion scanner, van, vibroknife (D6 x 3 (9))

Personality

Don't mind my partner. He always looks that threatening. So long as you don't make him jittery, you'll be fine.

Then again, he's always jittery. If he goes for his gun, just hit the deck and pray.

That was a joke, son.

Me? I'm the tech guy. Not so much on street smarts or a stand-up fight—although I can hold my own if I absolutely have to—but put me in the Range and I'll find whatever you need. Set me loose in a corporate Intranet and I'll have the IC's so confused they'll be breaking each other down. This one time, I was in a 'net, and there was this, like, level twelve Firewall. I took it down in ten seconds flat. I'm the best hacker there ever was. And I'm yours...for the right price.

You don't believe me? Doesn't surprise me. Everyone out there says he's the best. What's that? No such thing as a level twelve Firewall? You tell that to the boys over at ArgoTech.

Yeah, I know what you're thinking. If I'm so good, why do I need a street samurai, right? Well, like I said, I'm not much in a stand-up, and it never hurts to carry around a big friend with big guns. Plus, I kinda like the guy despite myself. What're you gonna do? He's so grim, I think we balance each other out. Anyway, enough of the small talk. Let's get down to business.

Quote

"Five minutes and we're in. No need to kick down the door. Really . . . what could go wrong?"

* Raised by Cybernetic

Qualities/Drawbacks

Addiction (Heavy smoker) (-2)
Charisma 1 (1)
Clown (-1)
Contacts 3 (3)
Covetous (Greedy) 2 (-2)
Cyberware (3)
Fast Reaction Time (2)
Hard to Kill 4 (3)*
Honorable (-1)
Nerves of Steel (3)
Reckless (-2)
Resources +1 (2)
Showoff (-2)
Situational Awareness (2)

Skills

Computer Hacking 4
Computer Programming 3
Computers 3
Dodge 1
Driving (Van) 1
Electronic Surveillance 2
Electronics 1
Guns (Handgun) 1
Haggling 2
Hand Weapon (Knife) 1
Lock Picking (Electronic) 2
Notice 2
Research/Investigation 2

Powers

Bio Filter (2)
Data Chip (Medicine) (4)
2 Data Jacks (4)
Enhanced Attribute (Willpower) +1 (1)
Starlight Vision (2)
Target Link (3)



CHAPTER FOUR





THE CYCLE OF DEATH

The air was moist, but her lips were dry and she licked them, nervous. Rose looked at the match and wondered if it would work.

Jaco ran a finger down her spine. "C'mon c'mon," he said, a patter of anticipation.

Matches were supposed to be able to read the sweat of your fingers, and if you were too nervous or excited—contemplating arson, perhaps—they wouldn't light. It was more an affectation than a security feature, but it made her more nervous still. With a shake of her head Rose shrugged off such thoughts, and drew the match sharply across her palm. The pure white light of it was beautiful in the dusk of their tent, and she applied it to each of the cigarettes, then shook it out again. Jaco giggled and inhaled, and she followed suit.

She closed her eyes and imagined she could feel the warmth nestling into the alveoli of her lungs, diffusing into her blood. Rose tea, she called her blood, and its sweet cocktail structure would already be analyzing this unfamiliar component to the mix.

She leant forward and kissed Jaco—was there already a tingle of contact across the lips? —and they drew again on the sweet smoke.

That was when the tent flap blew inwards, and the dead thing fell upon them.

They both screamed, and Rose tried to roll beneath the explosion of movement, but claws caught her arm and tore down to bone. A darkness tried to bloom inside her head, retreating from the shocking pain, but then her blood took over. The pain dulled, her eyes sharpened like a camera lens in the dusk, and she drew up her legs and flung them clear of the bedclothes with the precision of a dancer. Too late maybe. The demon corpse was arm deep in Jaco's shattered ribcage, and swung the body like a flail, blocking her lunge for the exit. She barely had time to duck and roll when it leapt at her, teeth diving for her throat.

Again she was torn to the bone—through the shoulder, not the neck—but it was pinning her and there was little she could do but thrust her hands against it, desperate and futile.

The corpse stopped its wild movement and looked down at her, hungry and yet... puzzled.

Rose thought she knew why, because in the sudden stillness it felt like her nerves were unfurling, stretching themselves past her own skin, and into the monster. And maybe the rose tea upon its lips was doing the same thing to it. That, and the liberal splashes of Jaco's blood that slid slippery and warm over them both. The paste in the cigarettes was a new blend, and she did not know how powerful it was.

Did it even have nerves to feel? It did, because she could feel the terrible hunger of it, as clearly as the warm hateful body beneath it/her.

And it did not know if she was it or not.

There were frantic sounds outside, and she heard there was another demon loose in the camp as well. Help might come, but not soon enough. Not *now*.

With one hand she felt around beside her, her eyes never leaving the bewildered gaze of the demon, trying not to give the game away. That she was food. Her questing hand found the discarded match, pristine again, and she struck it across the flesh of her leg.

The match didn't light, and she wanted to scream in frustration and horror, except the machinery of her blood kept her focused.

Very deliberately, she raised her hand, struck the match across the demon's cheek, and plunged the newborn fire into its eye. Now it screamed, and leapt up into a tangle of tent, and she rolled aside. Her body was curling to spring, waiting for the weight of it upon her again, except the demon did not descend. It ran for less confusing prey, and she could hear the soft zing of weapons turned on it.

It would soon die, though she knew the demon corpses were not easy to kill.

She rolled towards Jaco to see how he was. He looked very bad. His lower body remained attached by only a few strands of meat, his heart was pumping nothing but fumes, and his flesh was mottled, almost cheese-like. She bent to kiss him on the lips. With the contact came a flood of new sensation and a feeling of relief and welcome from the isolated brain. "You'll live," she tried to signal with her feelings, but was not sure she succeeded.

She looked down at him, and thought again of the terrible hunger of the demon. She licked her lips, nervous.

INTRODUCTION

Nanotechnology is the science of controlling matter smaller than even those millions of transistors that fit onto a silicon chip. By arranging individual atoms scientists will create little engines that will provide us with almost unlimited control over matter, our own bodies and perhaps even our minds. This Deadworld looks at the sort of society that might be created from such technology, and the dangers that will accompany it.

Background

Once again, things start conventionally—with threats of terrorism, an unstable Middle East, economic uncertainty, and expanding supplies of cheap technology threatening US jobs and markets. Religious differences are becoming starker, and threaten to break out into ever-spiraling war.

However, one event changes things forever.

Black Goo

Almost simultaneously, during the second decade of the 21st century, certain oil fields in Saudi Arabia, the United States and China ran into a big problem. The oil they were pumping started coming out as little more than worthless sludge. At a stroke, 24% of current production was shut down indefinitely. It didn't take long to discover the cause—molecular machines that fed off the crude oil, using it both as raw material and energy source, to create thousands of replicas of themselves, and so expand exponentially.

It was a deliberate attack on world energy supplies, and panic spread almost as fast as the news. No one knew who was responsible, or how to stop the effect. The volume affected was still small—even the affected oil fields would take months to be consumed—but that was enough to destabilize the industry immediately. There were many wild theories and accusations,

and doomsday scenarios about how the nanobots would reduce the entire Earth to slag. The next week, more oil fields became infected, despite draconian security measures. It seemed the age of oil was over.

Many alternate energy forms had been researched, but most were proving prohibitively expensive, whilst traditional methods were insufficient and insecure. Nanotech itself, the source of the problem, was still an immature technology, despite the enormous amounts of research put into it over the last twenty years. Most of its benefits were just incremental improvements on current materials and methods, rather than its promised wonders. But the nanobot attack (black goo, as it was called) had proved that the next step was within reach. In some countries, further research was forbidden immediately as a reaction to the attack, while others continued, under rapidly worsening conditions.

Although an outright world war was averted, terrorism and panic were increasing dramatically. Extremist Muslim groups struck at nuclear power plants and even coal stations within Europe, claiming they were avenging the attack on Middle Eastern prosperity. Even those cities that kept their power plants secure found their capacity overwhelmed by a flood of refugees.

Of all the different companies searching for a solution, it was an Indian defense contractor called AnantaTech that came up with the first feasible substitute: trees.

Recovery

Instead of wasting remaining resources on large and vulnerable power plants, AnantaTech's idea was to plant genetically modified trees that were fast growing, and could efficiently turn sunlight into electrical power as a refinement of photosynthesis, feeding into a diffuse underground grid. India's sizeable

population was put to work planting the new species, and within three years electrical generation started building towards previous levels.

The e-trees, although not a particularly efficient or universal solution, lent stability and even hope to the

world. They also became a symbol of the new technology that started to spread rapidly, based on the theoretical groundwork and molecular tricks that must have been used to create the black goo, but embedded within a biological framework. (There were rumors

Nanotechnology: A Small Primer

You don't need to understand the basics of the technology to run adventures in this campaign setting, although doing so can lend your game some verisimilitude, and spark extra ideas. At its most basic, nanotech is simply manipulating matter on the scale of one billionth of a meter (40,000 times thinner than a human hair, or ten times the size of a hydrogen atom). This will most likely be accomplished by nano-robots (nanobots), constructed out of precise arrangements of atoms, perhaps between a few hundred and a few million per machine. Information might be stored and processed on these machines at incredible speeds, one electron at a time—or perhaps in stranger units such as qubits, since we are now in the realm of quantum mechanics with its strange, fuzzy view of the world.

Scientists can already manipulate matter on this scale, but it is a lengthy and difficult process. To speed things up, it is envisaged some of these nanobots will build replicas of themselves, to create a rapidly growing number that can then coordinate to tackle macroscopic tasks (an attack on the world's oil fields being a drastic example). Of course, there are already nanotech machines that do exactly this—biological cells. Perhaps the first generation of artificial nanobots will involve programming DNA to create the structures for us.

The potential applications for nanotech are vast (and simple examples are already in production). Some of the initial goals will be creating new materials designed for specific properties such as strength or flexibility, ultra-sensitive detectors for medical and anti-terrorist applications, and pushing computer memory and speed still further.

Beyond that, there is little that may not eventually be possible.

Here is some of the jargon you can throw about in game:

Assembler: a nanobot that builds other nanobots, possibly including itself.

Dust: free-floating and embedded microscopic machines with sensing and communication equipment that form a pervasive network.

Goo: a mass of self-replicating nanobots. Most nanotech disaster scenarios involve goo gone out of control.

Paste: a mass of nanobots that cannot replicate themselves.

Whilst nanotech is the focus of The Cycle of Death, do not forget that all the other sciences are still advancing, increasing our knowledge and control over nuclear structure, biology, ecological sustainability, astronomy and more. However, one thing we are deliberately avoiding in this scenario is artificial intelligence. Although machines can be created to do amazing or terrible things, by accident or design, only humans can imbue those effects with purpose.

That might be an important distinction when the zombies turn up.

Forcefields and space opera energy weapons (blasters and energy swords) are also unavailable, as would be expected.

that the Indian government itself had authorized and designed the attacks on the oil fields, although no evidence was ever found.)

More efficient power catalysts were found in the next few decades, and then all of them were rendered obsolete at a stroke, when true unlimited energy was stumbled upon. When atoms of the lanthanide elements were passed through a nano-scale grid, they ended up with more energy than they started with—yet another quirk of quantum physics that made a mockery of conventional laws. It had taken almost thirty years to go from global crisis to opulence, but suddenly everything seemed alright.

Of course, intervening events had taken their toll.

The Situation

The current world is awash with potential—perhaps too much. Although widespread stability has been reached after many decades, some fear that only an increasingly intricate juggling act can maintain the peace, and it all may be swept away.

End of Nations

There was a lot of trauma to overcome in the rise out of near barbarism. Although humanity had lived in such conditions before, the population density and reliance on suddenly unreliable technology led many to the brink of starvation and civil war—and many beyond the brink. Most governments became incapable of exerting any authority, and the majority of survivors were those who organized themselves into small, close knit communities. That was a pattern that would continue even after power returned.

America and Europe in particular have fragmented, their population divided into city-states, and those who have rejected cities completely, from hermits to feral tribes, and those making up large mobile clans. Energy is plentiful, as are food and water (easy desalination now makes any coast line an oasis, and food can be created almost to specification with cellular programming). Whilst there are efforts to get governments back together, many people simply see no real need for them, and roundly ignore the entire process.

Some countries came through better than others. China, with its vast agricultural base, expected to survive with little difficulty, but ended up racked with particularly destructive internal conflicts, as well as some ill-conceived expeditions into Japan and Korea. India came out far more unified, thanks in part to its coordinated efforts to solve the crisis.

Spain and Portugal both ended up relatively unchanged, retaining much of their social structure. Likewise, many African countries survived the initial crisis well—but are now facing real problems. Government oppression only tightened during the restrictions, but now it has to cope with the sudden potential availability of energy and freedom to its people.

South America has reacted much the same as its northern counterpart, although with even less people staying in the cities. Australia is finally starting to expand into its vast interior spaces.

The two Middle Eastern countries that rode the crisis most successfully were Israel, which continued to hold onto its promised land with grim determination, and Saudi Arabia, which seemed to have a lot more stockpiles of oil and other energy sources than previously suspected.

But mostly, people have become focused on a more local scale. There are few national armies, or national broadcasters (for though the technology is easy, there are no marketing demographics left, and people just download what they want to watch, if anything). There is no taxation, and in many places there isn't even any currency (transforming lead to gold has been possible—if extraordinarily expensive—since the 1980s. Now it just takes a little time).

Because technology has become so ubiquitous and easy to use, it has faded into the background for most people. Many revolutionary advances are now simply taken for granted. Religion and community have become more important elements in most people's lives. This has only be emphasized by recent developments that seem beyond the explanation of science—the return of the dead to life, with the powers of angels and devils.

But although many people treat the transformed world like some sort of frontier utopia, there are still

powerful and dangerous forces that can bring the entire thing down.

Technology

The e-trees were created by manipulation of genetic material, with a few simple and short-lived nanotech tricks to help build the energy grid down amongst the roots. Their success spurred extra research that blossomed into a wide range of molecular manipulation and programming technologies. Finally, it was the power cells that became the true “killer app”, ensuring almost universal uptake. Cells for personal use are usually cylinders about twice the size of a normal battery, that can put out 110 volts indefinitely (they have earthing detection to stop most fatal accidents). Cells the size of a car battery can run a medium-density city block, and at the size of a car they are the equivalent of twentieth century power stations, created for the equivalent of a few hundred dollars.

Although there was potential for this energy source to remain proprietary, the specifications were publicly released, so almost anyone could make his own. This free spirit was also seen in other areas of innovation. By that stage, few were in it for profit, it was just a fascinating area of work for those with the requisite skills who wanted to help out, or make a name for themselves.

Once the immediate power shortages were solved, attention was focused on medical research, making great strides against many genetic disorders as well as injury and perhaps aging itself (though it is too soon to see just how long people will last). Providing continual widespread access to food and clean water has also been a priority. Other problems were solved as well, some of them global in scope. In a controversial move, replicating nanobots with a limited life span were released to clean the atmosphere of excess carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, which

Character Creation

People with the Powered Character Type are more common in this Deadworld than many others, as this represents the “common man” transformed by the ever-present nanotech into a more robust being. Also, the usual prerequisites for the Nanotech Quality are not required.

Psionic powers are also available, as the normal psychic potential of humanity has been enhanced by the various mind-cleansing techniques available. Still, knowledge of and control over such abilities is still rare. Certain experimental nanobots might grant pseudo-psionic abilities, as demonstrated in the opening fiction of this chapter.

Because of the transformation to the world's economy, the Resources Quality becomes optional.

There are many places in the world where property has become communal, in which case the Status Quality becomes more important for determining how much equipment or other resources the characters have access to. However, other communities do maintain a local currency to reward work and good fortune, because of their political beliefs. The Zombie Master and the players can decide what sort of political environment the characters have come from, and perhaps explore how that interacts with the rest of the world, if they're interested. Whatever the situation, it is likely the available equipment is abundant and powerful, given the nature of the setting. That's alright—everyone else is in the same situation, and they're likely to need all they can get. Let them use their imaginations, whilst keeping within the (wide) boundaries of available technology.

Even more than politics, religion is an important aspect of this world, and the players should decide where their characters and their community stand on that subject. The default religion assumed in this chapter is an evolved form of Hinduism, as it has become the most popular faith.

However, any modern religion (and a few stranger possibilities) is possible.

worked very well. In many places, programs were started to rehabilitate degraded soil, so as to return it to levels best suited to native, pre-cultivation growth. Some of these efforts were successful, some weren't—and at least one large area had to be molecularly fused to a depth of eighty feet, to stop one strain of goo getting out of control.

Of course, there were many who were less concerned with preserving natural balances. Artificial reefs to create great surfing conditions were grown in a matter of days. Some people turned their eyes back to space, and started developing new materials and methods to solve many of the most expensive and intricate problems of a viable colonization project.

It is an age of opportunity, limited only a little by the time and effort it still takes to design functional molecular machinery. But despite various reminders, from the original Black Goo attacks to the various small-scale mistakes that nanotech has wrought, the potential for a truly global disaster seems as likely now as it ever was. If someone doesn't accidentally release an agent that converts the atmosphere's nitrogen and oxygen to nitrous oxide, someone else might do it on purpose.

Other Tech

The ubiquitous nanotech isn't immediately obvious. People generally travel round by foot, or hot air balloon, unless they are in a hurry (few people are), in which case a combination of helicopter and orbital jet can get them anywhere on Earth in under three hours. Although nanogel cannot make up an entire heli-jet (see pp. 40-41 for more information), it can be programmed to create one from appropriate raw materials in a few hours.

Computers are embedded into tablets that respond to voice commands or, for the impatient, a special language of taps and strokes with a stylus. Almost any material can change its coloring and texture at will, leading to many strange works of art and clothing with intricate patterns swirling on the surface. Camouflage gear that



Optional Rule: Programmable Nanobots

The difference between the Norm and Powered Character Type is six points of Attributes, five points of Qualities and 15 points of Powers (as well as five less Skill points). To further represent the flexible nature of the technology in this setting, you can use a system where those extra points can be reassigned to other areas during play.

It works like this. The characters are built as Norms, but with five less Skill points than usual. They also have to buy the Nanotech Quality. The players then get to spend the extra Attribute, Quality, and Power points to make a Powered character, and make a note of where those points go. By taking appropriate steps in the game, those points can then be moved from one area to another.

This is not a totally flexible system. Points spent on physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution) can only be reassigned to other physical Attributes, and likewise for mental Attributes. You also need to take account of variable costs (raising Attributes above level five remains more expensive).

Mental and physical Qualities, as well as powers, are all interchangeable with each other (many mental Qualities are actually based on controlling hormone levels, rather than influencing the brain directly, which is why this makes some sort of sense).

If points are spent on social Qualities or psionics, they cannot be reassigned, as these are aspects of the original character, not the nanobots inside him.

To change his point allocation, a character normally must make a Simple Intelligence Test. He can then reassign as many points as he achieved Success Levels. This process takes a full hour, after which point he can roll again. External factors can also be used to reprogram the nanobots, especially for strange or experimental effects. The cigarettes in the opening fiction are an example of this. It is currently not possible to reprogram someone else's 'bots by remote control (but if were, it could cause havoc).

Many people keep their additional points dormant, only to be "brought online" when necessary. This is an instantaneous process.

Experience points can be added to the base character, or taken as extra nanobots for an increased effect pool. If the original character is improved, that might affect the cost of the enhancements, especially for such things as Attributes with their threshold level.

projects an actual image of the background (giving -5 to Notice rolls) is one example.

All the improvements upon humanity represented by nanotech Powers in **Chapter Two: Starship Shamblers** are commonplace, and almost any Physical or Mental Quality can be simulated by carefully programmed nanobots. By no means does everyone maximize their efficiency this way, for the same reason walking has become popular. Many people aren't in such a rush (although that may change once the zombies start attacking).

Religion

Religious faith was one of the most cohesive elements that kept the small communities functioning through the worst of the crisis. Many enclaves were organized around a church, synagogue or mosque, rather than the best fighter or administrator of the group. However, the subsequent spread of nanotech has been paralleled by another success story—the rise of Hinduism.

Pre-crisis, roughly 15% of the world had been Hindu (over twice as many as were Buddhist, and

only a little less populous than Muslims). With the wide proliferation of Indian technology into a shell-shocked world, Indian ideas and culture were almost as infectious. In many ways it was a perfect fit for the localized yet global culture that was being created.

Hinduism is a great gestalt religion that encompasses both village cults and the great wheel of life, and absorbs contradictions and alien faiths with barely a murmur of protest. Its principal deities are the likes of Shiva and Shakti, who embody both creation and destruction, fertility, intellectual pursuits and simple joy at the boundless nature of creation. Shiva is also Nataraja, the lord of the dance, and Pasupati, the lord of beasts, whilst Shakti is simultaneously Candi, the god of protection, and the black mother Kali.

This rising interest in the melting pot of Hindu belief did not go unchallenged. Some congregations strengthened their faith against a rising tide of heathen ideas. Others almost disintegrated before it, sending their confused and hopeful members out into the larger world. Still more simply accepted what was useful from the new faith, keeping most if not all of their current practices intact.

Christianity was divided. Some Christians felt that the rapture had already happened, so they had to embrace the world that remained. Others thought that missing the rapture meant they should only redouble their devotion. Another Christian subgroup thought that an energy crisis was not much of an apocalyptic event, and studied the changing landscape with interest and devotion.

This sea change in global faith—Hinduism now claims almost 60% of the population—has had a number of effects. Almost everywhere it means that people have taken a greater interest in both the spiritual and social aspects of the community and environment. The growing alienation of Western Civilization has been reversed, and most small communities that survived the crisis have reached out to one another, glad to show their joy in a world being remade. This has gone hand in hand with an increase in mind cleansing techniques. These range from simple meditation to full nano-massages which strengthen and calm the mind, smooth tangled proteins and

unwind self-destructive neural loops caused by age and trauma. It also means psychic ability has become a little more common.

However, not everyone is joining the party. The more fundamentalist members of various religions—in particular the “people of the Book”, Christianity, Islam and Judaism—reject any notion their faith is an aspect of this motley collection of beliefs. They see a great evil loose in the world, perhaps in the technology, or perhaps in the “delusions” or “devilry” that accompanies it.

In addition, there are many who refuse to have their traumas soothed away, and now live in the growing wilderness, wild and aggressive. They might make use of the power cells so as to devote themselves fully to their rage and freedom, or embrace the full primitivism of the pre-nano world. Some of these feral packs gleefully acknowledge themselves as a reflection of the destructive aspects of Shiva and Shakti, whilst others couldn't care less.

A final group are those who devote themselves to the technology itself, spending their time engineering new combinations of molecules, and looking for further loopholes to reality in the quantum mechanics. This research has taken on religious overtones, and scientists are held in high esteem (see the Caste sidebar). However, they themselves see less romance and

The culture described here is not directly based on any previous genre, but has been provided as a possible future that is very different from the cyberpunk of Chapter Three: The Cybered Dead. If you want some other examples of how nanotechnology might affect culture, a good start would be Greg Bear's Queen of Angels and Ian McDonald's Terminal Café. The latter is especially relevant to AFMBE, as it involves a war by the space-faring freedead against the oppression of the dead on Earth.

The use of nanotech in this scenario does have plenty of precedents in stories and scientific research (see Source Material, p. 12). The AFMBE supplement One of the Living has another variation (see p. 140)

ritual in their vocation, which remains difficult and tedious. Their free exchange of information also means that technical specifications are easy to come by, so potentially dangerous research can be carried out privately.

This problem has not gone unrecognized, and a group called the Garuda (or, not entirely flippantly, the Inquisition) has been created to act in an overseer's role. They make random inspections (destroying or confiscating equipment and research they deem unacceptable), and keep an eye on patterns of research, but are all too aware of the limitations of their sight.

These various factions mean that there is plenty of potential conflict in the campaign, even before the zombies show up—including plenty of people who might be tempted to end the world, or large expanses of it.

Zombies

There are two types of zombies in this Deadworld, both of which are significantly more dangerous than usual, because of the amount of technology the characters have access to. The most prevalent problem is the apparently random transformation of dead bodies all around the world into supernatural beings, asuras. The second type is more specifically nanotech in origin, being made up of swarms of replicating nanobots. These swarms can infect and dissolve human flesh, then take on the appearance of the dead in a search for new victims.

Running the Game

Both of these types of zombies are unusual and very powerful. Both can be fought, but if the characters take the tactic of simply hiding out and killing whatever comes close, they will likely be frustrated, and miss much of the interesting detail in the background. Instead, this Deadworld has been set up for characters who are interested in solving puzzles and scientific research (this being the science fiction

The Caste System

There is not enough room here for a complete guide to this mutated brand of Hinduism, and the details may not be greatly important to your game. One aspect of Indian life that could be significant is the caste system. The modern system is extremely complicated, but breaks down into four large groupings: the Brahmins (priest and scholars), Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors), Vaishyas (merchants and farmers), and Sudras (laborers). Below these groups are the untouchables (Harijan), although this is no longer officially recognized, and former restrictions and persecution have been lifted.

The new technology (and the spread of Hinduism into cultures with less tolerance of social segregation) has made significant changes to the system. Caste is now about what a person chooses to do with his life, rather than how he was born. For the traditionalists, this is possible due to the cleansing effect of nanotech on both the body and mind. Priests and engineers make up the ranks of the Brahman. The Kshatriyas are those that take on the task of guarding the community from external threats—a potentially complex task, due to the simmering tension that still exists between different religions, as well as the feral gangs. This defense is usually a matter of individual vigilance and dedication rather than organized guards or fortifications, which are considered restrictive. The majority of the populace are the Vaishyas, whilst those who are not “cleansed” are known as Sudras. These people usually do not care about such labels, or consider them an insult.

An interesting alteration to this setting would be to allow resurrection of the dead through nanotech, but to relegate all such “zombies” the status of Harijan.

book, after all). Also important is trying to develop cooperation among the diverse groups in the background, because of the widespread nature of the menace. The asura zombies are literally a worldwide phenomena, whilst the nanotech swarms can spread fast over a wide area if not contained.

In addition, the two types of menace have similarities that might be noticed, which can provide extra clues. Both involve emergent behavior as many individual components act together to create a single, perhaps intelligent whole.

Asura

As explained in the section on religion, humans have begun augmenting and “cleansing” their minds with molecular programming, and one of the consequences of this has been an increase in psychic phenomena. The mind has become a more sensitive instrument, and can interact weakly with other minds, even though many people have not yet disciplined themselves to channel this into full-fledged telepathy. This has become well known, but one of the consequences of it is unexpected and unrecognized: this network, composed of billions of human minds, has become sentient. Just as each individual neuron in the brain sees only a vanishingly small slice of its environment, and cannot understand the patterns it is a part of, so now humans have become unknowing parts of a far greater whole. But because that whole emerges from the properties of its components, the beliefs and ideals of individuals have shaped this new creation. Humanity has now created its own god, and Shiva resides amongst them.

Hindu is a complex set of beliefs, of avatars and contradictory divinities, and dizzying cycles of birth, rebirth, and death. Just as it became the perfect religion for a nanotech world, so it has become a natural reflection of humanity’s unconsciousness. The global sentience is not literally Shiva—it is still only a dumb creature with limited perceptions and almost no understanding of its world. But its primitive moods reflect all the contradictions of Shiva: destroyer and creator, the source of sensuality and a benevolent guide to the ascetic mysteries. As this creature stirs restlessly, it causes ripples back in the human world,

creating angels and demons out of raw material—dying human bodies.

The demons (known as asuras in Hindu mythology) are written up here as zombies. Angels (devas) are covered below.

As can be seen from their stats, asuras are almost mindless, but extremely strong and dangerous. They exist only to destroy and drain essence with a touch (they are not interested in eating humans, just tearing them apart with their great strength). If the Cast Members try to discover the source of this new threat, they will find it very difficult. There are no nanobots or identifiable diseases involved, and no apparent link between victims. But any psychic detection ability will reveal the asuras as black singularities of rage.

Asura

Strength 7	Constitution 5 [+3]
Dexterity 3	Intelligence 1
Perception 2	Willpower 6 [+4]
Dead Points 58/15	Speed 18
Endurance Points n/a	Essence Pool 8
Skills: Brawling 5 [+3]	

Attacks: As normal human, plus Essence Drain (see Sustenance).

Weak Spot: Heart [+7]

Getting Around: The Quick Dead [+10], Leaping [+3]

Strength: Monstrous Strength [+10], Damage Resistant [+5]

Senses: Like the Living [+1], Life Sense [+4]

Sustenance: Daily [+4], Soul Sucker (12 Essence per hit) [+5]

Intelligence: Animal Cunning [+2]

Spreading the Love: Asuras do not spread the love

Special Zombie Features: Regeneration (per Turn) [+5] (see *AFMBE* Corebook p.159)

Power: 71

Devas are extremely similar physically, but are sources of Essence, not drains upon it. Unfortunately, they are just as mindless, and so often wander about trying to randomly touch people (which can lead to confusion, if they are mistaken for their more dangerous kin). Each touch returns 12 points of Essence, up to the character's maximum. Meditating in the same room as a deva increases maximum Essence by two points per day.

There is no readily discernable pattern in how these creatures appear. Being killed by an asura doesn't necessarily create a new one. If it does, it is as likely to be a deva as an asura. Whilst this creation is almost random (depending upon the shifting moods of the Shiva intelligence), they have thus far appeared in pairs, a deva and an asura, linked as strongly as entangled atoms. Since the two entities could easily be on different continents, this is not easy to discover. When one dies, the other does as well, which only adds to the confusion—and may limit the access hopeful characters have to the benefits of the devas.

What's in a Name?

The existence of these creatures is a complex puzzle that the characters can try to figure out, if they are so motivated (if they aren't, then they must accept a dangerous and apparently random phenomenon, or someone else in the world can start uncovering the truth). As such, you shouldn't automatically call the new zombies by the names asuras or devas (and, like Shiva itself, the creatures are not really the angels and demons of Hindu mythology, but physical manifestations of metaphor created by human belief).

Scientists might call them positive and negative energy automata, whilst others will be quicker to label them after their own particular myths. Given the current predominance of Hinduism, they will likely be named after their mythological counterparts—more accurately than most people consciously believe.

The Scientific Method

Despite their apparently supernatural origin, these zombies, and the presence of Shiva itself, does not mean this Deadworld is about abandoning the scientific view of the world. It is about adapting science to strange new circumstances. The fact that simple rules can bring forth complex behavior is well known (it is the basis for chaos theory, for example, and helps explain everything from weather to the human mind). As such, the presence of Shiva isn't that much of a surprise—if anyone puts together the pieces to figure it out.

The real problem comes in working out what to do about it. Should people worship this new creation, or try to negotiate with it? (Can they even get its attention?) Will it evolve into a greater intelligence? Should humanity try to kill it by reversing the work that nanotech has performed on individual human minds? Can they influence it in more subtle ways? If they can break the symmetry of devas and asuras, for example, they might be able to increase the available Essence of humanity greatly—but will that lead to some other unforeseen disaster?

These might be questions your characters can think about, when they are not battling rampaging corpses and the other dangers of their world.

Legion

Legion zombies are one of the unfortunate side effects of the nanotech age. They are not individual beings, but swarms of molecular machines that take on the appearance of human beings that they have consumed. Each swarm is made up of literally billions of individuals, each with only a tiny amount of memory, sensors and computational power, yet together they are a single cunning and lethal adversary.

The nanobots (codenamed Pi13/s) were originally designed as the surveillance component in a multi-stage medical project. Pi13/s would infiltrate all parts of the human body, except for the brain itself (brain work was to be handled by different, more subtle machines). The information gathered would be provided as a template to other machines in the Pi13 series, which would reconstruct any tissue damaged by injury or time.

The technology was nearing final testing, when a feral gang attacked the research facility. One of the members became infected with the prototype, and the machines slowly replicated themselves in her body, quietly recording the structural information. A few months later the host died in equally random violence, and was cremated. The nanobots were released with the smoke into an alien environment, and the sum total of them had enough computational power to start adapting. The plague had begun.

Each swarm takes on the appearance of the host that incubated it, and looks for more humans in which to continue the cycle. Unlike the original case, the infection has become destructive. If at least one hundred of the Pi13/s nanobots enters a host, they will signal each other to start replication. When a critical mass is reached (usually in about three days), the 'bots start breaking down the cells within the flesh, causing the human to liquefy over the course of an hour, at which point the new swarm rises again.

When they first appeared, swarms were little more than drifting clouds, taking on the appearance of a naked, hairless human by manipulating light reflecting off individual 'bots. Over time they start evolving to better hunt their prey—humans. They learn to fashion the appearance of hair and clothing, and move like they were solid, in order to get close enough to infect someone.

Despite appearing substantial, even a few billion nanobots have no discernable mass. In a way, these “zombies” act more like ghosts—physical attacks do them no harm, other than to scatter individual 'bots temporarily (which reveals their inner anatomy is replicated in incredible detail, except for the brain). However, the swarm remains zombie-like in its relentless and only semi-intelligent pursuit of human prey.

Infection: Once close enough to attack, the swarm flows forward and tries to infect its prey (this is equivalent to *The Lunge*). There is no point trying to parry or shake it off, the only hope is in avoiding it touching the skin—even a glanc-





Legion Zombie

Strength — **Constitution** 2
Dexterity 2 **Intelligence** 1
Perception 7 **Willpower** 2
Dead Points 30 **Speed** 4
Endurance Points n/a **Essence Pool** 8
Skills: Brawling 2
Drawbacks: Deaf* [-2]
Attacks: Infection (see below)
Weak Spot: None [+10]
Getting Around: Life-Like [+3], the Lunge [+3]
Strength: Insubstantial [+10]
Senses: Like Nothing You've Ever Seen [+10]
 (includes 360° vision)
Sustenance: Who needs Food? [+8]
Intelligence: Animal Cunning [+4], Teamwork
 [+4]
Spreading the Love: Infection [+15]
Power: 70

* Subsequent generations may evolve to lose this Drawback, at DZ discretion (they learn to recognize sound through the resonance of individual nanobots).

ing blow will deposit a few hundred 'bots that will sink down into the flesh. Without advanced medical facilities (or lopping off an infected limb within 30 seconds or so), the victim is doomed.

An infected victim will not feel in any way different for the three days before the bots suddenly switch into destructive mode, although suitable blood and tissue tests will reveal the presence of the replicating machines. The infection might be fought with a different type of nanobot, specifically designed to hunt and destroy the Pi13/s, or by discovering the kill switch (see the next section for details).

Once the destructive mode is entered (at a random time on the third day), the victim loses one Life Point per minute until dead, at which point the new swarm raises from the gelid remains, to seek further victims.

Teamwork: Legion zombies can communicate over much larger distances than is usual for the Teamwork Aspect. They use subtle changes in their external appearance to signal each other visually (far below the level that humans can discern). With proper scientific measurement, characters might be able to interpret and even communicate using this proto-language—sending false instructions to the swarms, for example.

Fighting Back

This again is a very dangerous zombie, to match the highly advanced science the Cast will have to combat it. One or two of them are manageable, but once a few hundred are scattered about the countryside, their ability to reproduce is almost unstoppable. There are a few advantages the humans have, based on the original programming. The individual 'bots cannot replicate themselves outside the human body, and can only act together *en masse*. An individual Pi13/s nanobot will shut itself down if separated from its swarm for more than 1 minute, thus posing no continuing threat of infection. The behavior of swarms can evolve relatively rapidly, but it is much more difficult for individuals to do so—although it could happen with enough generations, posing new dangers to the characters. Although a swarm feels completely insubstantial, it is still composed of physical objects, which cannot pass through walls. However, they are extremely good at floating through the tiniest of

cracks in pursuit of their goal, and so any building or bodysuit would have to be built to very strict specifications to act as complete protection.

Despite the lack of vulnerabilities listed in the Stat Box, it is not impossible to fight the Legion zombies. Fire and physical force are ineffectual, although it takes a while for them to reassemble if scattered enough. Another solution is to split a swarm by dividing it with a physical wall, if one can be inserted fast enough (there is no forcefield technology in this setting, which would be very useful). After a minute, if the two halves cannot join each other again, they each reform into a version of their original host, but with half the density. If divided into sections less than 20% of the original population, they lose their critical mass and quickly collapse.

They can also be fought with high frequency magnetic or electric fields, which scramble the signals within the swarm, and might even fry the 'bots themselves. EMF guns do normal damage to a swarm, but are rare items in this setting—the characters will have to think of this solution, and then find or create their own (they can't be made from nanogel). If the swarm is injured but not killed with an EMF attack, it may evolve a defense by setting individual 'bots to operate at different frequencies, which gradually build up a resistance (bought as levels of AV). The other disadvantage of EMF fields is that they affect other nanobots as well, potentially including those residing benignly in the characters.

Another way to attack them is with nanotech, by creating a new type of 'bot that is specifically built to infiltrate and destroy. That is difficult but not impossible, and the details are left up to the creativity of players. If they can be cut off from their power source, they will also die within a few hours. That power source is the motion of atmospheric molecules, so they would have to be put in an absolutely sealed environment (safe from temperature changes and even the small effects of the moving earth, perhaps). When they lose too much power, the individual nanobots self-destruct.

Finally, if the characters ever trace the source of the infection back to the laboratory where it all started, they might be able to discover the Pi13/s design specifications amidst the ruins. (They might think to examine the bots directly, but at the nano scale, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle itself makes detailed analysis impossible.) There is good news—a kill switch has been built in—an electromagnetic signal that will cause the machines to self-destruct. Unfortunately, it only works when they are within a human host. It will not help destroy a swarm, but can provide an effective and safe method by which further infection can be stopped, if it can be disseminated widely enough.

Kshatriya Scout

Survivor

Str 5† **Dex** 6† **Con** 4*

Int 3* **Per** 4* **Will** 3

Lps 30

Eps 38

Spd 12

Essence 23

Qualities/Drawbacks

Adversary (Feral gang)

(-2)

Covetous (Conspicuous)

(-1)

Cruel (-1)

Fast Reaction Time (2)

Nanotech (2)

Resistance (Poison) (1)

Secret (Murder of Feral) (-1)

Status 2 (2)

Skills

Dancing (Hindu traditional) 1

Dodge 4

Hand Weapon (monofilament flail) 5

Hand Weapon (sword) 3

Intimidation 3

Martial Arts 4 (8)

Notice 3

Rituals (Hindu) 1

Seduction 2

Stealth 4

Tracking 4

Powers

Bio Filter (2)

Dermal Armor (AV 2) (2)

Enhanced Constitution +1 (1)

Enhanced Intelligence +1 (1)

Enhanced Perception +1 (1)

Regeneration (Minute) (3)

Gear

Monofilament flail, nanoweave armor (real-time camouflage and sound dampening capacity)

Personality

This used to be farmland, but I guess the wilderness took over quickly. It's how we want it. We have no reason to tear up the landscape anymore. We just have to persuade anyone unfriendly to keep their distance.

Some are easier to persuade than others, but that's my job. Maybe not everyone in town would agree with the lengths that have to be taken, but what they don't know keeps them safe, right?

When I started I had a flying sentinel to scope the land—it could detect any human or great cat within 4k. The Feral tried to set traps for me, but the sentinel could read the molecular residue of human contact like fluorescent paint. I've stopped using it now, for a couple of reasons. It turned out the serious guerrillas could re-program it at will (I lost a leg and several feet of gut to some Jesuit insurgents. The leg I got back, and I amped my digestive juices). It keeps me sharper up against the Feral—makes it real.

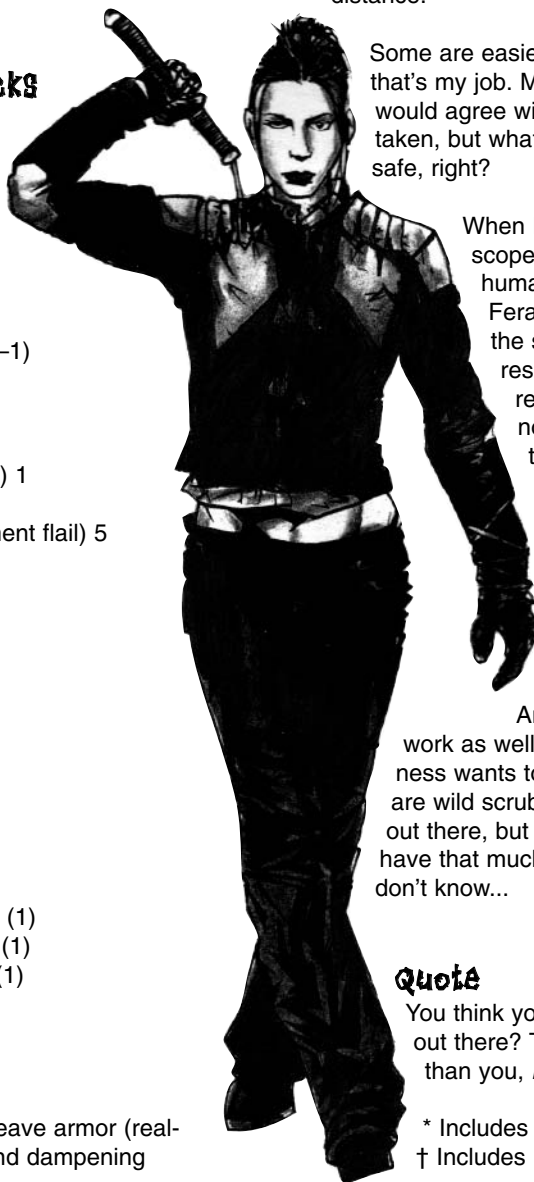
And also, it just doesn't seem to work as well as it used to—like the wilderness wants to keep its secrets. Sure there are wild scrubber-bots and some weird genes out there, but you wouldn't think they would have that much effect. Well, what the town folk don't know...

Quote

You think your fancy gel is going to save you out there? The world's still more dangerous than you, *mere dost*.

* Includes Enhanced Attribute Quality

† Includes Nanotech Quality



Nano-Engineer

Norm

Str 2 **Dex** 2 **Con** 2
Int 6* **Per** 2 **Will** 3†
LPS 30
EPS 38
Spd 12
Essence 23

Qualities/Drawbacks

Honorable (-1)
Nanotech (2)
Recurring Nightmares (-1)
Status 1 (1)

Skills

Bureaucracy 1
Cyberdoc 4 (8)
Dodge 1
Engineer (Nanotech) 6 (8)
Instruction 1
Notice 2
Piloting (Heli-Jet) 2
Research/Investigation 3
Trance 2 (4)

Powers

Enhanced Intelligence +1 (3)
Regeneration (Hourly) (1)

Gear

Nanogel, design tablet for creating specialized structures

Personality

For some people it's all about being respected, and getting things done. For me, nano-technology has always been about the beauty of folding atoms and sending electrons dancing across a

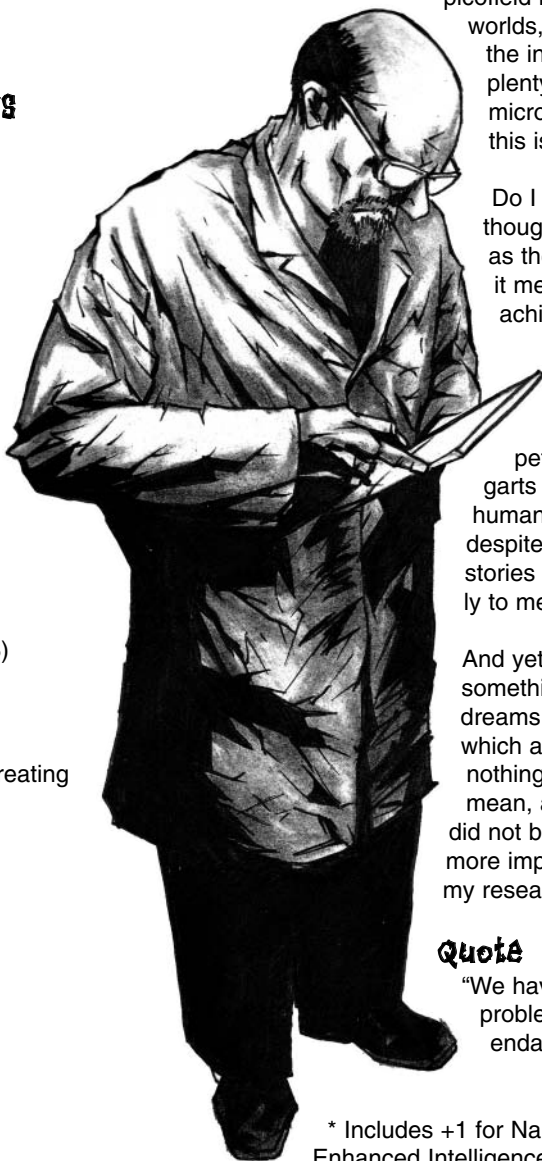
picofield like ballerinas. There are two worlds, and it is my job to provide the interface between the realm of plenty around us, and the stark microscopic realm from which all this is created.

Do I see it as spiritual? Of course, though not really in the same way as the Brahmins do. I'm not sure it means anything, just that we achieve great things with discipline, meditation and throwing off the trivial things in life. Those trivial things surround us always—petty gossip, powerplays, braggarts and clowns. They say humanity has progressed, but despite those exaggerated horror stories of times past, it seems unlikely to me.

And yet, there does seem to be something new. I've been having dreams, dizzying and vertiginous, in which all humanity is reduced to nothing. I'm not sure what they mean, and a further mind-cleanse did not banish them. Still, there are more important things to worry about—my research calls.

Quote

"We have to contain and study the problem. Anything less is reckless endangerment of the planet."



* Includes +1 for Nanotech Quality, and +1 for Enhanced Intelligence

† Includes +1 for Nanotech Quality

CHAPTER FIVE





CYBER MARINES AND DEATH SCENES

There was just something *wrong* about this place. People weren't intended to live like this, on a world covered with lava and ash, underground, in unbelievable heat and humidity. Every drop of water falling from the pipes echoed like an avalanche to Codrescu's ears. She looked over her shoulder at her partner, PFC first class Bauer, who wiped his sleeve across his forehead and shrugged. He was nervous, she could tell. It was his first combat mission. She didn't blame him, though. Hell; she was nervous, too. She flashed him a quick smile that she was sure came off like a grimace, and tried to be comforting. "Stay frosty, soldier. We'll get this done, get out of here, and havE dinner before you know it."

"Yeah, dinner," he whispered. "Then what? We're stuck here."

"Help will be coming soon. Don't worry about that."

Bauer didn't look convinced, and to tell the truth, Codrescu wasn't so sure either. She wrung the handle of her pulse rifle, already slick with sweat, and touched the "transmit" button on her earpiece.

"Babicki, you there? Come in. Jack?"

Fuzz for a second, then: "Yeah, what do you got?"

"Nothing. Not a damned thing. This place is dead and empty."

"Yeah, I think you're right. Christ only knows what happened to the colonists. I say we salvage the machines and get the Hell out of here."

"Fortunately, Babicki, that's not your choice to make," came a third voice, that of the group's lieutenant, Grimes. "I thought I gave orders for radio silence!"

"Sorry, Lieutenant," Babicki said. "We were just—what the hell was that!?"

"Babicki?" Codrescu said.

No response.

"Corporal Babicki," the Lieutenant broke in. "Report!"

A sudden sloshing noise erupted from the shadows to Codrescu's left. She spun, pulse rifle at the ready, and whispered to Bauer, "You hear that?"

"Yeah," he stammered. "I heard it. What the hell was that?" Bauer pulled out his motion sensor and studied the readout, "Oh, Jesus, I heard it and I've got it right here. I've got a *lot* of it, Sandy!"

Codrescu let the first name use drop. Under these circumstances, she had bigger things to worry about than her underlings dropping rank.

"Codrescu," came the lieutenant, "You read?"

"Loud and clear, Lieutenant. But we've lost Babicki. And Bauer and me, we got tons of movement up here. We're going to need backup, and lots of it. We need it—!"

Suddenly, the deafening sounds of pulse rifle fire erupted directly into Codrescu's brain from every channel of her transmitter. Frantic screams, half-formed barked orders, and inhuman, animal howling punctuated the awful noise. She screamed one name after the other into her comlink, to no avail. Suddenly, to her left and just behind, there was another sloshing sound, only louder, right on top of her.

Right where Bauer was supposed to be.

She spun, and Bauer was gone. That was when the shadows started moving, taking shape, surrounding her. One by one, they came. The colonists they'd come looking for, only now they were blue, their eyes dead, and their bodies covered in some sort of sick, sap-like substance. Without thinking, Codrescu opened fire...

INTRODUCTION

Horror. Pure, dark, creeping, slithering horror. That's what *AFMBE* is about at its core. Often times it's easy to forget that, amongst all of the amazing options out there for the game. It's easy to get away from the sheer terror that the walking dead represent. Sometimes a little reminder is necessary.

Welcome to *Cyber Marines and Death Scenes*, a science fiction *Deadworld* that is all about scaring the living Hell out of the Cast and players. It's survival, apocalypse, all the things that drew audiences to *AFMBE* in the first place, but it's more than that. It really attempts to get to the heart of exactly what horror is, and how to bring it into a game. The Cast has big guns and attitudes to match, but those guns run out of ammo, and don't help much against an entire army of aliens and zombies coming after their tiny squad. We hope you enjoy it.

Background

In the distant future, the discovery of deep space travel and inhabitable (though perhaps inhospitable) planets has solved the problem of prison overcrowding on Earth, and the world has done away with the death penalty in favor of rehabilitation efforts. Throughout the galaxy, prison colonies have been established on harsh worlds barely capable of sustaining human life. The prisoners here must live and work together to develop whatever resources the planet may have, and attempt to live productive lives. In some cases, such colonies have failed miserably, with certain inmates developing "warlord" mentalities or the colonists just unable to learn the necessary skills to develop the planet for long-term survival.

On the remote world of MR-372, however, a penal colony has flourished for decades, the criminals banished there beginning to build productive lives and atone for their crimes. Within ten years of the

colony's founding, massive deposits of ore, precious metals, and gemstones were discovered in the many caves and rock formations covering the barren world. The colony sent out requests for refinery equipment to develop the resources, and the request was granted.

Perhaps the biggest discovery came just a few years ago, when in a deep cave, a mining team discovered a vast field of what appeared to be a hardy bioluminescent fungus. Testing revealed that this fungus, when placed under just the right conditions, released massive amounts of energy that could solve the growing energy crisis on Earth and other colonized planets. This energy production was seemingly even without byproducts or toxic waste—a truly clean, abundant, and renewable source of power. In fact, fungi that were used up of energy were found to be quite edible and nutritious (and tasty, to boot). Best of all, the fungus seemed self-sufficient enough to grow in even the most barren habitats. It seemed a dream come true, and development efforts began immediately.

In fact, the colony has come so far that Earth has sent equipment, scientists, and technical and corporate advisers to the world to help the colonists further develop the planet's resources and open trade relations with the home world. It's the biggest success story in the history of the prison relocation planet program, and there is a great deal of anticipation (and more than a little trepidation) at the prospect of such a successful human colony produced from murderers, thieves, and other criminal elements. Still, the strict no-weapons laws on the planet and a heavy-handed (some say harsh) policy of self-policing among the colonists has resulted in what appears to be a veritable utopia, despite the difficult living conditions. This is partially due to the fact that residents are in general afraid to return to their criminal ways; justice on MR-372 is swift and final. The death penalty may be outlawed on Earth, but here it is in active use. The irony is not lost

on the folks back home; still, there have even been reports of entire families preparing to voluntarily relocate to MR-372 in search of opportunities. A new “gold rush” has begun, though this time the prize is a glowing fungus that grows deep underground.

All things come to an end, and MR-372’s success was no different. Everything seemed too good to be true when one day, all communication from the planet went dark. Not a spark of chatter over subspace radio waves, no responses to frantic hails from Earth...and no explanations. A single survey team was sent to check up on the colony in desperate hopes that the problem was nothing more than a broken transmitter. The survey team, too, completely disappeared.

For months the corporate bureaucracy debated about what to do. There were billions of credits worth of equipment, manpower, and development tied up in MR-372 and not a single corporation was willing to walk away without knowing exactly what happened to their investments. The government of Earth was concerned as well, given the disappearance of thousands of colonists. When an automated distress signal suddenly pierced through Earth’s monitoring stations, piggybacked on a garbled and panicked recording from a colonist babbling about “bugs” and “turned cannibal,” it became quite obvious that the problems on MR-372 were far more serious than downed transmitters. Even worse, given the amount of time it takes for messages to travel through the vastness of space, the message was nearly three months old by the time Earth received the distress call.

Still, the corporations didn’t want to give up jurisdiction to the military, and the government didn’t want to leave the fates of thousands of citizens in the hands of the money-grubbing corporations. Worse, of all the corporations involved, none wanted any other to have more of an upper hand in any missions launched. So the debates raged on until finally, it was decided that a wave of small recon teams made up of colonial marines and technical experts were to depart for MR-372. They were given specific instructions to discover what had happened to the colony, locate any colonists, advisors, or other Earth citizens who may still be planet side, dismantle equipment in the case of a disaster, and return to Earth with all survivors and equipment that could be salvaged.

Each recon team was launched within a month of the one before, and the journey to the colony would take approximately three months, during which time passengers and crew would rest in suspended animation. What they would find upon awakening, however, was horror beyond anything any of them could imagine.

Invasion

MR-372 has been invaded by hostiles from another dimension. These hostiles, known as Acridians, are arthropod creatures roughly seven feet in height, and resembling a cross between giant ants and locusts. Like locusts, they move from planet to planet using up natural resources as they go. The fungus on MR-372 powers all of the technology these creatures use, and it was the aliens who planted the fungus there in the first place. What the human colonists discovered was a vast energy farm for the Acridians, and when the aliens came to harvest their fungi, they were none too pleased to find humans interfering with their farm.

Fortunately for the Acridians, humans were as much an exploitable resource as energy, and they immediately set to work conquering and developing this resource. While some humans became food for the invaders, others took on a far more insidious and terrifying role. The Acridians drink mammalian spinal fluid as a delicacy and a ceremonial drug, which produces in them an euphoric, aphrodisiac effect, and plays an important role in Acridian reproductive rites. Naturally, the removal of all of the spinal fluid from a victim results in the death of the creature.

It gets worse. The Acridians have the ability to secrete a bioelectric resin that they inject into the spine to replace the removed fluid. This resin quickly spreads throughout the nervous system, jump-starting the body and invading the will center of the brain. The victim is then covered with a thick membrane that offers some degree of defense against external harm as well as the ability to function within the vacuum of space. The result is a “drone,” a powerful zombie that is tied to the hive mind of the Acridians.

The Acridians intend to use these drones as foot soldiers and cannon fodder in their war of conquest on our dimension.

This is the fate of most, though not all, of the colonists, advisors, scientists, and the survey team on MR-372. This is the fate that may well await the Cast as they descend on their mission.

The Planet

MR-372 is a barren planet, like most used for prison colonies, with a thin atmosphere of oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen, and carbon dioxide. It is capable of supporting human life, but certainly not conducive to easy living. Water is scarce and mostly found in mineral deposits beneath the surface of the planet; there are few above-ground bodies of water. Atmospheric condensers help to balance out this shortage by distilling water vapor from the atmosphere. Even still, bathing is a luxury most residents cannot afford, and terraforming efforts that would provide more clean water and a heavier atmosphere have only just begun within the last few years (and such an operation can take generations, even in the future). What few indigenous species live on the planet are extremely primitive and consist mostly of small reptiles; still, they are numerous enough to provide a ready supply of meat to those who live planet side. Vitamin and mineral diet supplements can be distilled from volcanic, igneous, and sedimentary rocks to provide adequate nutrition when combined with these creatures. Cactus and scrub grass can be found in some places, providing vegetable needs. It's not gourmet, but it's enough to survive.

The high degree of volcanic activity all over the planet results in an abnormally high surface temperature and a somewhat polluted atmosphere, and breathing apparatus is helpful, if not absolutely necessary, when outdoors. Characters outdoors not wearing breathing apparatus suffer double the normal Endurance Loss for strenuous activity due to difficulty breathing in the thin, dirty air. Even normal, non-strenuous activity out of doors costs characters not wearing any sort of breather 1 Endurance Point per 10 minutes, as if performing Hard Work (see p. 114,

AFMBE core rulebook). The ash in the air gives an eternally overcast look to the sky, and the planet is almost always dark.

Also due to all of this volcanic and tectonic activity, the planet's surface is covered with mountains, crags, and rock formations, and is positively littered with cave systems, whose chambers mark the underworld of the planet like a giant...hive. It is deep within these caverns that the Acridians grow their fungus and make their temporary homes and base of operations.

Atmospheric Disturbances

The atmosphere of MR-372 is quite prone to ionization, and as such eerie flashing lights streak across the sky on a regular basis, not unlike the Aurora Borealis on Earth. However, these lights (which by most estimation would be beautiful in other circumstances) only serve to add to the alien appearance of the planet when combined with the rocky, barren landscape and the fiery red glow from the multitude of volcanoes that dot the surface. This ionization also makes it very difficult to maintain a standard orbit around the planet, and special "gliders" have been developed for the purpose of conducting landings.

Worse, the ionization sometimes gets bad enough that it manifests as violent electromagnetic storms, which cause electronics to short out and which throw powerful bolts of lightning down at the surface. During such storms, the planet becomes like a war zone during a bombing raid. Chunks of mountainsides explode, raining rocks, dirt, and ash from the sky, and the electricity itself poses a direct danger to anyone who ventures outside. In general, falling rocks deal damage based on the size and weight of the object. Small, fist-sized rocks deal d6x2(6) points of damage per yard of falling; larger rocks (to 10 lbs..) deal d8x2(8) points of damage per yard; huge, boulder-sized rocks—those capable of crushing a human—deal d12x8(48) points of damage per yard.

Lightning blasts, on the other hand, deal d8x5(20) points of damage per strike, and require an immediate Consciousness Test at -5, or the victim falls unconscious, her nervous system shorted out. From here, some sort of resuscitation is necessary (Intelligence + Medicine, or Intelligence + First Aid at a -2 penalty)

or she will likely die. For each round that passes without successful resuscitation attempts, the Cast Member must pass a Survival Test at a cumulative -1 penalty per round or die. When an electromagnetic storm kicks up, the best bet is to hide in a cave or a building and wait it out.

The Complex

The entire colony was housed in an immense indoor and underground complex, which was just beginning to show all the comforts of home. The Complex can be best thought of as an underground city, housing thousands of people, including the scientists and pioneering families that commuted here over the past several years.

As with most cities, the Complex is set up in districts. The Administrative District housed the control centers for the city, overseeing the power grid, communications, and maintaining the offices of the bureaucrats and politicians, as well as the courts and other important functions of day to day life. Medical and scientific research facilities are also housed in the Administrative District. The Residential District was divided into two sections: Uptown and Downtown. Uptown was the locale of those who worked in the administration of the town, and is situated next door to the Administration district. Downtown was the sector where most of the other inhabitants lived. The homes in this area are simple, but functional, and mostly all look alike. Even the Administrators of the town lived almost as simply as those they oversaw. Luxuries were not at home in this colony; rather, they were found in the Recreational District, situated just below Downtown. The Recreational District housed holo-arcades, libraries, light-tag arenas (of course, the “tagging devices” look like wands and not actual weapons), and more traditional entertainments such as small basketball courts, baseball diamonds and decks for dekhockey, soccer, football, rugby, lacrosse, or other similar sports. Finally, the Mercantile District was located next to the Recreational district and housed all of the shops, restaurants, and services for the Complex. All the basic needs of someone’s life could be bought or bartered here, from carpeting to bedding to cooking utensils to art and decorative crafts.

The basic layout of the Complex is thus: the Administrative District is the first area one encounters when entering the colony. East of it is Uptown, then Downtown. South of Downtown is the Recreational District, and East of the Recreational District is the Mercantile District.

The Mines

Below the city of the Complex are the mines wherein the citizens dug for minerals, metals, coal, and harvested the fungus. These mines extend for miles into the vast cave complexes beneath the surface, and far into the volcanic mountains north of the Complex, and travel both north and deep into the planet’s underbelly. It’s likely that it was in fact the mining activities that caught the attention of the Acridians in the first place. When the miners began harvesting their precious fungi, that’s when the bugs stepped in and took over.

Acridians

The Acridians, as mentioned above, are a race of anthropomorphic insects resembling a cross between locusts and ants. They operate on a similar social structure to Earth insects. Acridians have warrior and worker castes, all connected via a hive mind controlled by a Queen, who acutely feels all of the sensations, emotions, pleasures, and pain experienced by her subjects, as well as knows every thought that goes through their brains.

Acridians are a carnivorous, brutal, warlike, and bloodthirsty race that seeks to conquer and subjugate every other species they come across. They are voracious, consuming every natural resource and leaving planets behind as barren husks. They hail from another dimension, and have become such masters of dimensional travel that they have no need of spacecraft. None of the Acridian technology is artificial; rather, they have mastered the art of biotechnology to perform feats that humans would never dream of without computers and mechanical technology. Every Acridian warrior, for example, has a special biotech implant that allows them to open wormholes in the space/time continuum, which can lead to their home dimension, or even to other places in our own dimension within several miles of their current location. In

fact, Acridian warriors can easily open worm-holes from the surface of a planet to outer space, just above orbit level, if they so choose. While Acridians do need to breathe, their exoskeleton does protect them from the other varied negative effects of operating in a vacuum and they can function unhindered in outer space, so long as they have some sort of breathing apparatus.

Aside from their biotechnology, which is formidable in and of itself, Acridian warriors have several natural weapons at their disposal. Their four arms provide them an extra attack in close combat at no penalty and are adorned with sharp, serrated spikes that inflict D6 (3) x Strength slashing/stabbing damage. They can also produce a bioelectric charge that inflicts D4 (2) points of energy damage and requires the victim to pass a simple Constitution Test with a penalty equal to the damage dealt by the charge, or be stunned and unable to move or act for D4 (2) rounds. They can fly at a speed equal to triple their land speed, though flying produces an extremely loud rumbling sound as their giant insect wings beat the air. Finally, the chemical resin that the Acridians produce is similar to battery acid, making their blood itself a weapon. Touching or being splashed by Acridian blood deals five points of damage per turn, as per the Acid Blood Aspect (see *AFMBE*, p. 158). In addition, Acridians possess a stinger that can inject this bioelectric fluid into their victims. For dead victims, this injection results in an Acridian Zombie (see below). For living victims, treat the concoction as a Strength 5 injected corrosive poison (see *AFMBE*, p. 107).

Acridians of the worker caste aren't nearly as threatening as warriors, having no wings or spiked protrusions. They do, however, retain the ability to produce bioelectric charges and their blood is acidic.

The Acridian Queen has all the powers of Acridian warriors, plus enhanced strength and speed, and possesses the ability to control all other Acridians through their hive mind, though she does not continuously exercise this ability. She can, however, summon all warriors, drones,



Customizing the Acridians

While they have no artificial technology of their own, Acridians may be capable of utilizing the tech of conquered peoples, and some Acridians may also possess weapons such as vibro-blades, blasters, disruption field guns, and even EMF guns, though most prefer to rely on their natural abilities.

In fact, it's possible that Acridians may even have and use biotech equivalents of these weapons. ZM's are encouraged to customize the Acridians however they like; they can be near-mindless hunters, eating, consuming, and reproducing, or they can be highly advanced; hunting humans for sport as well as necessity. The Acridians are a basic template from which any number of different sci-fi survival horror adversaries can be emulated.

and zombies to her with a mere thought if she must, making her a brutal and deadly foe. Worse, her bio-electric charge deals d8 (4) damage and stuns for d8 (4) rounds on a failed Constitution Test. Finally, her blood is also twice as potent as that of normal warriors, dealing 10 points of damage per round.

Acridians do have both males and females in their species, and breed rapidly and continuously. During mating rituals, both partners imbibe the spinal fluid of mammals, and are temporarily freed from the hive mind so that they might couple privately, the experience later to be shared with the group upon their re-establishing contact with the collective. Because of these rituals, each Acridian has a sense of self as well as a sense of the collective, and a complicated society has developed that would make an anthropologist's career if it were possible to study it.

As with most insects, the birth of a new Queen takes place every few years; this newborn Queen is sheltered by the warrior caste against the current Queen until she is fully grown, when she must battle the reigning monarch for control of the hive. In fact, it is only during the defense of a young Queen can the

warriors of a community break free from the hive control of the reigning monarch, since the two opposing influences on the hive sow enough dissension to break the Queen's absolute control. It is during these times that both Queens are most vulnerable to attack, as they cannot automatically call upon their drones, warriors, and zombies for assistance.

Communicating with Acridians is next to impossible; they have no real language of their own, though they do emit certain clicks, whistles and grumbling sounds. Acridians communicate entirely on a telepathic level, and psychic humans (if the ZM decides to allow such abilities in this setting) may have a slight chance of tuning in to their communications waves. However, what the psychic will find is patterns of thought so alien to anything they've ever encountered that pure madness may result from the attempt; a Difficult Willpower Test at -3 is necessary to come out of the attempt unscathed. Failure means that the Cast Member falls unconscious, plagued with horrific nightmares involving wholesale and wanton destruction and devastation, and develops a level in a Mental Drawback due to the emotional scarring from the effort.

Zombies

Zombies are created from the victims of the Acridians, who have their spinal fluids removed for use as an aphrodisiac and recreational drug by the insectoid creatures. The process of removing spinal fluid kills the victim, who is then injected with a bio-electric replacement secreted by the Acridian stinger. This fluid resurrects the victim as a mindless automaton, connected and completely subservient to the Acridian hive mind. The new zombie is then marched to the farm, where worker drones secrete a thick, slime resin that coats the creature's entire body, offering protection from physical harm, and allowing the zombies to function in the vacuum of space, like the Acridian warriors.

Zombies function as spies and combat drones for the Acridian warrior caste. Due to the fact that they are subject to the wants, needs, and desires of the hive, zombies also have a ravenous desire for flesh (Acridians are carnivorous creatures, after all). However, while Acridian zombies are voracious, they do not actually need food to sustain their existence. In



Acridian Warrior

Strength 4 **Constitution** 5
Dexterity 4 **Intelligence** 2
Perception 3 **Willpower** 2
Life Points 61 **Speed** 18 (54 flying)
Endurance Points 20 **Essence Pool** 38
Qualities/Drawbacks: Cruel 3, Delusions of Grandeur 3, Fast Reaction Time, Hard to Kill 5, Situational Awareness
Skills: Brawling 3, Guns (bioelectric charge) 3, Hand Weapon (stinger) 3, Intimidation 2, Notice 2, Stealth 3, Survival (Scavenging) 2, Tracking 2
Attack: Acid blood, Bioelectric charge D4(2) plus stun (see above), Spiked protrusions D6x4(12) armor piercing/slashing, Sting (see above), or by weapon
Weak Spot: Fire (as per Aspect, *AFMBE* p. 148)
Powers: Acid Blood 5, Burrowing, Damage Resistant, Leaping, Scent Tracking (as per Zombie Aspects, *AFMBE* p. 148-159), Flight (Wings), Hive Mind (as per Teamwork Aspect)



Acridian Worker

Strength 3 **Constitution** 4
Dexterity 3 **Intelligence** 2
Perception 2 **Willpower** 2
Life Points 44 **Speed** 14 (cannot fly)
Endurance Points 32 **Essence Pool** 16
Qualities/Drawbacks: Cruel 3, Hard to Kill 2, Situational Awareness
Skills: Brawling 1, Guns (bioelectric charge) 1, Hand Weapon (stinger) 1, Mechanic 2, Notice 2, Stealth 1, Survival (Scavenging) 5, Unconventional Medicine (Acridian) 2
Attack: Acid blood, Bioelectric charge D4(2) plus stun (see above), Sting (see above), or by weapon
Weak Spot: Fire (as per Aspect, *AFMBE* p. 148)
Powers: Acid Blood 3, Burrowing, Damage Resistant, Leaping, Scent Tracking (as per Aspects, *AFMBE*, p. 148-159), Hive Mind (as per Teamwork Aspect)



Acridian Queen

Strength 7 **Constitution** 7
Dexterity 6 **Intelligence** 4
Perception 5 **Willpower** 4
Life Points 96 **Speed** 26 (78 flying)
Endurance Points 59 **Essence Pool** 33
Qualities/Drawbacks: Cruel 3, Delusions of Grandeur 3, Fast Reaction Time, Hard to Kill 10, Nerves of Steel, Situational Awareness
Skills: Brawling 5, Guns (bioelectric charge) 5, Hand Weapon (stinger) 5, Intimidation 6, Notice 4, Stealth 5, Survival (Scavenging) 4, Tracking 4
Attack: Acid blood, Bioelectric charge d8(4) plus stun (see above), Spiked protrusions d6x7(21) armor piercing/slashing, Sting (see above), or by weapon
Powers: Acid Blood 10, Burrowing, Damage Resistant, Leaping, Scent Tracking (as per Aspects, *AFMBE* p. 148-159), Flight (Wings), Hive Mind (as per Teamwork Aspect), Hive Mind Dominance (Special; see description above)

Core Book Connection?

The scenario presented here is drawn from films such as *Aliens*, *Predator*, and *Resident Evil*. However, at its core, it also bears something of a resemblance to the *They Came from Beyond Deadworld* in the *AFMBE* core rulebook (p. 182). This could open the door to an extended campaign, by mixing the Acridians with the aliens in that *Deadworld*, or replacing one with the other. What if humanity drove off the invaders from *They Came from Beyond*, only to find themselves once again plagued by this same foe hundreds of years in the future, only they've advanced just as much as humanity has?

In addition, since Acridian zombies are generally very "fresh," they possess an amazing semblance of life; they move, perceive, and possess the strength of living creatures. They are, however, identifiable by a slight bluish tinge to their skin, and the fact that they are covered in that slime resin. Due to the hive mind connection, they are somewhat stealthy hunters who are capable of using advanced tools such as firearms, though such use is generally treated as untrained (-2 penalty to Tasks involving unskilled tool uses). Most zombies encountered on MR-372 will not have guns of any sort; they have not yet been organized as a military force, so they will resort to teeth and clubs more often than not. However, those found within Acridian encampments or used as guards for machinery or even the Queen may have blaster pistols.

These zombies are tough foes, almost a one-for-one threat to standard 70-point Cast Members. This is deliberate to add to the sense of foreboding, urgency, and terror that the Cast must experience while surviving in this *Deadworld*. *Zombie Masters* should keep this in mind when designing encounters.

Other Mammalian Zombies

The Acridians harvest and drink mammalian spinal fluid, not just human. As a result, the Cast may encounter other types of mammal zombies besides humans. Cruel ZMs who wish to do this are encouraged to consult the stats for zombie rats, dogs, and cattle (see AFMBE, p. 169), and add Acid Blood, Damage Resistant, Regeneration (1 DP per minute), and Teamwork Aspects to the base templates.

There could even be other humanoid or mammalian zombies that the Acridians have imported with them from other dimensions. Such creatures share most of the same stats as human ones, but have an alien appearance in some minor way (third eye, four arms, covered in fur, etc.) It's possible that nonhuman mammalian zombies might have additional Aspects as well, such as claws or teeth, or even Spitter or Fire breathing. This is dependent on how creative the ZM wishes to be.

We recommend Atlas of the Walking Dead for stats on some mythological animal zombies that could represent alien species.

Acridian zombies do not spread the love; they will, however, carry unconscious and dead victims back to their insect masters to be used as any other resource. It is in this way that the zombies on MR-372 propagate their "species."



Acridian Zombie

Strength 2	Constitution 2
Dexterity 3	Intelligence 1
Perception 2	Willpower 2
Dead Points 15	Speed 18
Endurance Points n/a	Essence Pool 12
Skills: Brawling 2, Hand Weapon (club) 1 [1], Stealth 3 [3]	
Attack: Bite D4 x 2 (4) slashing, or by weapon	
Weak Spot: Spine [+5]	
Getting Around: The Quick Dead [+10]; The Lunge [+3]; Climbing [+2]	
Strength: Dead Joe Average [0]	
Senses: Like the Living [+1]	
Sustenance: Who needs food? [+8] All Flesh Must Be Eaten! [0]	
Intelligence: Problem Solving [+15]; Teamwork [+4]	
Spreading the Love: Nobody Loves Me [-4]	
Special: Acid Blood [+5], Damage Resistant [+5], Regeneration (1 DP per minute) [+2]	
Power: 65	

Developing Horror

Isolation

The key to Cyber Marines and Death Scenes is producing horror, and the best way to do this is through isolation. The Cast needs to feel right from the start that they are utterly alone in a hostile world, with monstrous threats hiding in every shadow, and that they have to fight hard for their very survival. To accomplish this sense of paranoia, it is first important to create within the Cast a sense of complete isolation. They have to be cut off from all means of escape from the planet. There are several ways to accomplish this. The first is to use the Acridians to their fullest extent. As mentioned, the Cast must use a lander vessel called a “glider” to get planet side, which encounters either a swarm of Acridians, or an electromagnetic storm that completely disables the craft, cutting off their means of escape. The sudden preponderance of EM-band radiation in the atmosphere makes it impossible for the Cast to contact help off of the planet, unless they can manage to get to the main com station and get it up and running again. This radiation, of course, is the result of the bioelectric secretions of the Acridians, and the low-level psychic waves that sustain their hive mind. To make matters worse, the main com station is overrun with zombies.

Once the Cast is on the planet, it becomes clear that they are indeed alone. Months away from Earth, it will be at least several months to a year before any help arrives, depending upon how far behind them the next team is—if there is another team at all. How will they survive? Where do they go from here? Other teams have come before them; there are derelict gliders lying around as proof of that. Unfortunately, it's likely the Acridians have had their zombie servants salvage anything of real value out of those skeletal vessels. And the colony complex is now a hive of humanoid arthropods and walking corpses. Once faced with the cold reality that the only technology they could access is firmly under alien and undead control, that sense of hopelessness and isolation grows stronger.

Dwindling Resources

Equipment is another issue. What have the Cast brought with them? Do they have pulse rifles, flame throwers, and grenade launchers, or are they a bit more hi-tech, equipped with blasters and power armor that lets them leap great distances and track the motion of their enemy? These are important questions to think about, as the more hi-tech the game gets, the less horrific it is likely to be. On the other hand, technology (and the reliance thereon) can be terrifying unto itself, if played properly. For this reason the weapons and armor technology of the Cast and the Acridians has not been addressed; every Zombie Master will have a different take on how much the characters should have available to maintain horror. **Chapter Two: Starship Shamblers** has a detailed section on sci-fi equipment and levels of technology. The “default” assumes that the Cast is using pulse rifles and cybernetics (with perhaps some power armor thrown in), and that the Acridians are slightly more advanced, possessing basic energy weapons to back up their formidable natural abilities. As a warrior culture, however, the Acridians are far more likely to rely on their natural weapons and abilities than they are to fall back on technology that could fail them.

Running a Survival Horror Campaign

This Deadworld is ideal and designed for running a true survival horror campaign. The Cast is alone in a severely hostile environment, and every day is a struggle to survive until help arrives. The possibilities for gaming in such environs are almost limitless, and there isn't room enough to cover them all here. We suggest checking out the AFMBE players' guide, One of the Living, for advice, resources, and tips on extended campaigning in a survival horror game, including scavenging, jury-rigging, madness, and sessions that don't involve zombies.

Regardless, Zombie Masters should keep close track of the ammunition and supplies available to the Cast. Once they're out of ammo, things get desperate indeed. Also, what about power sources? These aren't covered in the rules, as in most high-action cinematic situations, they simply don't come into play. But a whole new kind of horror emerges when the Cast has to worry about how long the batteries in their lamps last, or the power cells in their powered armor? Replacements for such things can probably be found or jury-rigged in abundance in the main complex, but that again requires walking into the lion's den.

Story Ideas

Investigation

This scenario works best if the Cast crash lands due to an EM storm rather than as a result of an Acridian attack. The Glider takes a few direct hits from lightning, which has the unfortunate side effect of shorting out all of its electronics. The Cast crash lands on MR-372, only to discover they now have no way to easily contact their transport ship and get home. Still, they have a mission to accomplish. The Complex is roughly a two-day hump across the barren landscape, and the ZM should build tension in any way possible, but never introduce the Acridians during this period. Storms, sudden movement in the crags, falling rocks, and other such obstacles could pop up to hinder progress and keep things tense. Calling for lots of Perception + Notice Tasks at random times never hurts, either.

At last, the Cast makes it to the Complex. Now they must secure the area and investigate what's happening. Of course, moving through the shadows of this place are the Acridians and the zombified colonists, all hungry for more mammalian flesh to add to their ever-growing armies. Worse, someone in the group (either a Supporting Cast member or one of the Cast themselves) has orders from home to not only find out what killed the colonists, but to restrain a sample and bring it back for research! This could make for great inter-party conflict and intrigue to increase the innate horror of the game. Some possible encounters are as follows:

The Research Lab: Here the Cast finds dead specimens of Acridians in stasis tanks, floating in formaldehyde and abandoned. As they examine the tanks, they discover to their horror that the bugs aren't dead, nor is formaldehyde poison to them! The Acridians burst forth and attack. Helping them are dogs and rodents, zombified and escaped from their cages.

The Maintenance Tunnels: Full of machines, pipes, steam, and general atmosphere, this is where the Cast first gets ambushed by zombies. All is quiet, then suddenly, out of nowhere, leap the dead colonists, still moving and desperate to capture and kill the Cast.

Medical Facilities: The Cast manages to fortify the area and set up a base of operations from which they can send patrols out to try and capture other areas of the Complex, or get to the resources they need, like the communications center. But there are ways in that the Cast didn't consider, and the enemy is all around...

Refugees!

After escaping the Complex, the Cast flees from the enemy into the wilds of MR-372, seeking shelter from an upcoming EM storm, or from an erupting volcano. Wandering through the cave tunnels of the planet, they find themselves suddenly besieged by what they at first assume to be zombies wielding clubs and flint spears. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that zombies generally don't talk, and that these attackers aren't blue-skinned or covered in that saplike slime of the Acridians.

These are, in fact, refugees. Not all of the colonists died in the invasion; some managed to survive and escape in the hills where they live constantly on the run, and fighting a guerrilla war with the invaders. Over the past several months, a few survivors from previous military teams have joined the refugees, whipping them into a fairly effective military force. They've even managed to begin a crop of the energy-producing Acridian fungus for their own uses. Unfortunately, many of these refugees were criminals and in the lawlessness of recent months have returned to their brutal ways. Discipline is low, and problems are often solved with brutality. Women may even be

looked at as breeding stock by the rapists, murderers, and thugs in residence, causing problems for female characters in the Cast that have to be dealt with swiftly and efficiently. In this scenario the Cast has the opportunity to join with other humans in the struggle, but may have to balance their own humanity with the brutality of their erstwhile allies.

Sample Ships

Basic statistics for the Cast's transport vessel and glider landing shuttle are provided. The Cast should not be charged points for these vessels, as they are essentially story elements in this setting. Point values are listed in brackets as reference only. However, intelligent players (or those who have seen that Sigourney Weaver movie) might come up with some ideas that require ZMs to have access to ship stats.

Glider Landing Craft

BASE ATTRIBUTE

Size: 2 (Medium Transport Shuttle) [4]

DC: 400

Crew: 2

Acceleration: 4 (80 mph) (standard)

Accuracy: 3 [3]

Armor Value (Hull): 150 (standard)

Armor Value (Shields): n/a

Handling: 1 [4; base value -1, +2 levels purchased at 2 points each]

Range: Short Range [-2]

Max. Speed: 600 mph (standard)

ADDITIONAL BUILDS

Emergency Measures: Fire extinguishers, basic life pods, environmental suits [2]

Guns: 1 fixed light (D10 x 20) + 200 (300) [3]

Jacked [3]

Total Value: 17*

* This ship would cost 4 points to build with the Starship Quality.

Basic Troop Transport

BASE ATTRIBUTE

Size: 5 (large freighter) [10]

DC: 1500

Crew: 4 (Base 8, reduced by Intellect, below)

Acceleration: 3 (60 mph)

Accuracy: 4 [4]

Armor Value (Hull): AV 150 (standard)

Armor Value (Shields): n/a

Handling: -1 [6; base value -4, +3 purchased at 2 points/level]

Range: Interstellar [4]

Max. Speed: 300 mph (standard)

ADDITIONAL BUILDS

Crew: Automated transport ship; requires minimum of 4 crew members on manual ops, combat, complex ops. However, for basic operations, going from place to place, no crew is required. The ship can bring some or all of the crew out of stasis if needed. [0]

Emergency Measures: Fire suppression, Escape pods, Rations, E-suits, Advanced AI, Backup systems [6]

Extra Space: 1,000 tons [3]

FTL Capability: 1 [2]

Guns: 1 turret light (D10 x 20) + 200 (300) [4]

Intellect: 4 [20]

Ordinance: 2 bays, dealing (D8x30) + 180 (300) damage, explosive armor piercing. [8]

Total complement of 8 missiles.

Jacked [3]

Medical Facilities +1 [2]

Self-Sufficient [4]

Shuttles (2 gliders) [4]

Total Value: 80*

* This ship would cost 16 points using the Starship Quality

All Flesh Must Be Eaten™

Space Marine

Powered

Str 3 **Dex** 5* **Con** 4
Int 3 **Per** 4* **Wil** 3
Lps 50
Eps 35
Spd 18
Essence 22

Qualities/Drawbacks

Addiction (Heavy Smoking) [-2]
Cyberware [3]
Delusions (Claustrophobia) [-1]
Hard to Kill 4 [3]*
Honorable [-1]
Nerves of Steel [3]
Paranoid [-2]
Rank (Corporal) [1]
Reckless [-2]
Situational Awareness [2]

Skills

Brawling 2
Bureaucracy 1
Climbing 1
Computers 1
Demolitions 1
Dodge 3
Driving 1
First Aid 1
Guns (Assault Rifle) 3
Guns (Handguns) 2
Guns (Rifles) 2
Hand Weapon (Knife) 2
Intimidation 1
Notice 2
Questioning 1
Stealth 2
Surveillance 1
Survival (Desert) 3

Powers

Bio Filter [3]
Data Chip (Electronics) [2]
Data Chip (Mechanic) [2]
Data Jack [2]
Physical Quality (Fast Reaction Time) [2]
Starlight Vision [2]
Target Link [3]

Gear

.40 caliber handgun (sidearm, jacked) D6 x 5 (15), pulse rifle (jacked) D8 x 5 (20), nanoweave armor AV (D8 x 5) + 20(40), shotgun D8 x 6 (24), motion detector, survival kit (rations, lantern, canteen, utensils, lighter), 5 flechette grenades

Personality

Fortune favors the brave, isn't that what they say? Leastways, I seem to remember hearing that somewhere, maybe in one of those books I didn't read back in high school. I never was one for philosophy, art, book learning, stuff like that. That's why I joined the marines as soon as I was of age. I wanted to make something of myself, serve my planet with distinction. I think I done so. Got promoted all the way up to Corporal.

They say if I take care of this one I could make sergeant.

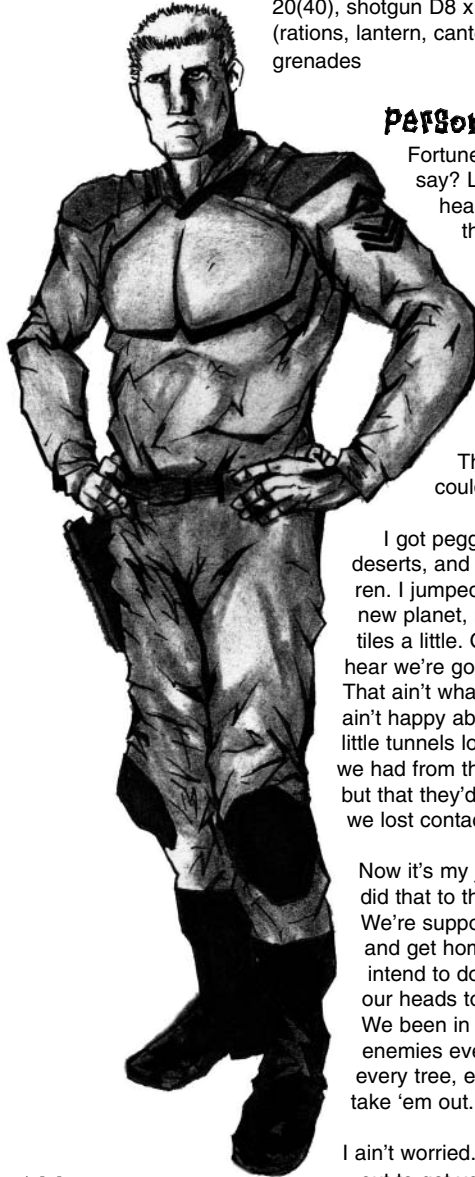
I got pegged for this job because I know deserts, and MR-372's supposed to be pretty barren. I jumped at it. Chance to get offworld, see a new planet, maybe even mix it up with some hostiles a little. Only thing that worries me now is I hear we're going into some underground Complex. That ain't what I signed on for, and I sure as Hell ain't happy about that, being cooped up in all those little tunnels looking for god-knows-what. Last radio we had from the place said the colonists were there, but that they'd gone crazy, turned cannibal . . . then we lost contact.

Now it's my job to find out what's going on, what did that do to the colonists. Me and my team, that is. We're supposed to salvage who and what we can and get home safe and sound. That's just what I intend to do. Keep it cool and professional, keep our heads together, and we'll get out of this fine. We been in worse situations before. There are enemies everywhere, hiding behind every rock, every tree, every shadow. We root 'em out, then take 'em out.

I ain't worried. No, sir. It ain't paranoia if they really *are* out to get you.

Quote

"How do I get out of this chicken-shit outfit?"



Technical Advisor

Survivor

Gear

.40 caliber handgun (sidearm) D6 x 5 (15), class I armor (Kevlar vest) AV D6+7 (10), first aid kit, motion detector, portable computer, portable toolkit, survival kit (rations, lantern, canteen, utensils, lighter)

Personality

Do I want to be here? Hells no. But I'll do anything to make the dreams go away, and the only way to do that is to wipe these bastards out, or die trying. I owe them that much. Payback for my husband's death. His, and the whole damned crew.

See, I was on a survey ship about twenty years ago, when two of these things—those *bugs*—got on board. Before any of us realized anything was wrong, half the crew were already zombies. We put up as much of a fight as we could, but in the end, everyone died. Everyone, that is, except me. I managed to set the engine core to blow, then get out in an escape pod. I watched the ship, my still-moving dead husband inside, break apart in a brilliant flash of light.

Then I crawled into the cryo-sleep chamber and set course for Earth.

Something, of course, went wrong. I got off course and slept for twenty years before the military was able to home in on the distress beacon the pod was sending out. Something about the EM-bands from the nebula I'd passed through messing up the circuitry and misdirecting the radio signals. Everyone I knew at home was 20 years older, some of them dead, and there I was, not aged a day, and stuck with nightmares every damned night about what happened to my crew.

Then they lost contact with the colony on MR-372, and I knew who'd done it. I knew I didn't have a choice. I had to go back and finish it once and for all. They needed an engineer, so I signed on. Only problem is, these grunts aren't taking it seriously. They're all going to find out the hard way.

Quote

"Use your head! Two of these things wiped out a Class V star cruiser, and you think your pulse rifles are going to stop them?"

* Modified by Cyberware



Str 3 **Dex** 3 **Con** 3

Int 4 **Per** 4 **Wil** 3

LPS 43

EPS 32

Spd 12

Essence 20

Qualities/Drawbacks

Acute Senses (eyesight) [2]
Addiction (habitual drinking) [-1]
Attractiveness [1]
Charisma [1]
Contacts (Corporate) [1]
Cruel [-1]
Emotional Problems (Depression) [-2]
Good Luck [3]
Hard to Kill [3]
Honorable [-1]
Nerves of Steel [3]
Obsession [-2]
Paranoid [-2]
Photographic Memory [2]
Recurring Nightmares [-1]
Situational Awareness [2]

Skills

Brawling 2
Bureaucracy 2
Computer Programming 3
Computers 2
Dodge 2
Driving 2
Electronics 1
Engineer (Starship) 2
Engineer (Starship) (Sensor Systems) 4 (+2)
First Aid 2
Gambling 1
Guns (handgun) 2
Haggling 1
Instruction 1
Mechanic 3
Notice 2
Piloting (Starship) 2
Sciences (Mathematics) 3
Seduction 1
Smooth Talking 2
Streetwise 2
Systems Operations (Ship Sensors) 2

CHAPTER SIX





VIRTUAL ARMAGEDDON

Somewhere, a dog was barking, and Jex rubbed idly at the surface of the grimy table. The New Breed Bar and Grill sure as hell wasn't the Berlin, but then, maybe that was why he liked it.

Ophelia and Cantor came in. They were in one of their antsy moods. He could tell by how they each surveyed the room. Jealousy first, survival second. Or maybe they were just letting this place get to them. Jex supposed it would get to him eventually, no matter how many undead they were stuck up against.

"Hey," he nodded at them. "Buy you a gutful?" The bartender came over and poured them the house special. It was, in the vernacular, very fraggin' smooth.

They sat there a while, silent. Jex regarded his drink, the others studiously looking at anything but each other. Glo was late. No big surprise there, even if she liked bagging dead guys as much as the next psycho-chick.

"You know," he said eventually, "one day they'll put us back in the real world, and not even tell us. Then we'll get a bit of action." Ophelia laughed suddenly, as if this was some private joke, then fell silent. Jex sighed. There was no real world any more, not for them. And whether he was stuck in that flesh-and-blood prison for a crime he didn't commit (well, only once or twice), or a private citizen here in this brave new electronic frontier, all his friends were assholes.

He had to give that to the programmers. They knew what they were doing.

Cantor nodded over at the door, but it wasn't Glo, it was a couple of goons from Her Majesty's SS. "More crap about the resistance?" said Ophelia, suddenly interested. Dr. Robinson and the other researchers working on the zombie sims were clean as far as Jex could tell, but who knows what that meant. He didn't think that was the problem this time, though. The goons were pure 1920s Chicago—except for their Glock 18 automatics.

That was a little too anachronistic even for them.

They also moved surprisingly fast.

"We're going outside?" said Jex, feeling a stir of excitement—and something else. Maybe agoraphobia, maybe even that old kicker, the fear of death. Maybe the electronic frontier had made him soft after all.

"You know Gloria Durham?" the head goon said, not even acknowledging the question he was asked.

They nodded. That was Glo.

"There's been a glitch. She's killing people. For real. Robinson thinks you can take her."

The three stared up at him, speechless, then at each other. Jex almost heard Cantor and Ophelia click into focus.

"And you can't *take her*?" said Ophelia with precision irony.

"Why Glo?" said Jex.

"What sort of a glitch?" said Cantor.

The man's patience was obviously thinly stretched, but he chose to answer the second of the questions. "She wasn't the first, but when she heard about things she dived in, said she was trained against zombies."

"So you're saying she's a zombie now?"

"I don't know what the hell she is. But it's time you found out."

That was the end of question time. The three of them stood from the table, and followed the guards out into the street.

The rest of the New Breed looked after them. "Drinks?" said the bartender, with a hint of desperation, but it was almost thirty seconds before anyone took him up on it.

INTRODUCTION

Humans are always looking for new horizons to explore and, when they run out of real places, are happy to make up their own. Now, computer technology is taking those dreams to the next level, allowing them to be experienced and shared in incredible detail. The time may come when the simulations become more authentic than what we call reality.

This setting explores a virtual reality (VR) world called Neutopia that has been created to take humanity from its own diseased and dying planet, offering unbound experiences and freedom from bodily ailments. Unfortunately, not everything is going to plan. Problems both inside and outside Neutopia are causing increasing chaos, which may end in complete system failure. Given that most of humanity is already inside the network, without any chance of escape, this really could be Armageddon.

This chapter gives the ZM a lot of tools for running games inside Neutopia, which has been set up with its own particular rules, limitations and dangers. In addition, notes are given if you want to create your own VR settings. Virtual Reality gives your players the chance to experience a lot of different types of play. For example, it's a good excuse to use if you want the same characters interacting with settings from *Enter the Zombie*, *Dungeons and Zombies* and *Zombie Smackdown* (maybe all at the same time!). Still, it wouldn't be *AFMBE* if there wasn't real and immediate danger to all concerned, which you'll definitely find here.

Background

Veronica Broderick was a virtual unknown in the world of 2080s computer programming. The game industry had gone from strength to strength in the last few decades, and most homes had their own

SensaCouches where people could control personal avatars (perhaps copies of their own physical bodies, or shapes that were not even human) through intricate worlds. The couches provided full sensory experiences, and as well as games, a lot of social and business interaction took place in the shared worlds.

There were superstar programmers known for their intricate creations, and strong (sometimes lethal) competition between games companies, but Veronica was far away from that scene. She was a scientist whose main field of research was diseases of the brain and nervous system—an increasing problem in the sprawling, toxic cities of the late-21st century. In attempting to model the behavior of human physiology well enough to run proper simulations for her research, she managed something else entirely. She uploaded the consciousness of a test subject called Daniel Patel into her computer.

She was left with a catatonic body and, after some hours of panic, managed to establish communication with Daniel. He was feeling fine. The bad news was that she couldn't work out how to get him back into his body again.

With little resources, she approached one of the top game companies with news of her achievement (and dilemma), since they had the technical know-how that local authorities lacked. And though they never did get Daniel out of the computer, he became the first resident of Neutopia.

Even though it was a one-way trip, others soon joined up. It wasn't sold as a game, but as a new world—an escape from death itself. Many terminally ill signed up, glad to be rid of their diseased flesh. Others jumped in because it was just the newest fad and, although it was never contractually stated, most suspected that they'd get back into a body sooner or later. Veronica herself was one of the first to transfer once all the tests had been complete.

The hardware on which all this was stored was just a part of the vast distributed web, and within it a brand new culture and hierarchy evolved. Research continued, a rival network was created but ended up being dissolved due to financial scandal (its digital citizenry was granted refuge in Neutopia), and most of the population got on with its usual life, content with SensaCouches and flesh.

Until the plague hit, and the great exodus between the real and virtual worlds began.

The Real World

Even before everything goes to hell, the late 21st century isn't much of a paradise. The great popularity of games and simulations is an escape from ever-present pollution and entrenched corruption. In theory there is a single "Emirate Humanity" government, but it is a weak facilitator between a lot of expansive city-states eyeing each other suspiciously.

By this point, there are also colonies on Mars, numerous moons and larger asteroids, but they are research and mining operations, not self-sustaining. There is a variety of fancy gadgetry on the street, but the lives of the populace hasn't changed all that much from dwellers of inner-city sprawl over the last two or three centuries.

Though many Neutopia citizens would wish otherwise, they can't just turn their backs on their history as physical beings—they are still heavily dependent on the real world, if only because of their power requirements. A lot of work has been done to ensure a continuous supply of electricity, including vast solar power stations on the moon, and deep installations gathering geothermal energy beneath the Earth's crust. However, there are still bottlenecks and vulnerabilities, and the large-scale migration is straining available resources. There were no contingency plans for mass rioting and legions of the walking dead. Humanity's last refuge may be a very fragile basket.

The Plague

NTMS, also known simply as the Tremors, is the latest and deadliest of the pandemics. Within two years over 20% of the population have succumbed to its fatal infection, and its growth is still accelerating.

Enormous effort has been put into looking for a cure (as well as some particularly aggressive quarantine measures), but for many the prospect of living in a world without disease started to look a lot more tempting. This was when the exodus started, and although Neutopia's real-world company, called NeuTron, tried to keep the flow manageable, the world government has been putting a lot of pressure on them to save as many people as possible. Galvanized from their usual inefficient state, Emirate Humanity has also been putting pressure on others to see that Neutopia has the resources needed to cope with the increase, but it has been a difficult juggling act.

Technobabble

NTMS, which stands for Norepinephrine-Targeted Misfire Syndrome, is a viral disease affecting the central nervous system. The usual transmission of signals through the nerves is dampened, except for random surges of information.

Spread by touch, its incubation period is almost three weeks (leading to wide dispersal), and the symptoms are hard to spot until a final week of convulsions and synaesthesia, plus deterioration of mental facilities producing effects much like schizophrenia.

It was a few months after the first surge of uploading that the zombies appeared, staggering out into streets worldwide and even off-planet. What had been a scarcely controlled panic turned into pandemonium.

The zombies that have appeared are not true undead, but rather living humans suffering a variation of NTMS. The random signals traveling through their nervous system have strengthened into a quasi-sentient consciousness—and it's in control. With confused and nightmarish sensations reaching it, this parasitic awareness behaves much like the zombie of legend. It shambles about, being drawn to attack humans (it has a vague awareness of other nervous systems, over and above the information it gets from its host's senses). It is subject to the same forms of damage any human would be, although its ability to

NTMS Zombie

Strength 4 **Constitution** 2
Dexterity 1 **Intelligence** -2
Perception 1 **Willpower** 2
Dead Points 34 **Speed** 2
Endurance Points n/a **Essence Pool** 8
Skills: Brawling 2
Attacks: Bite (D4 x 4 (8), slashing)
Weak Spot: All [0]
Getting Around: Slow and Steady [0], The Lunge [+3]
Strength: Strong Like Bull [+5], Damage Resistant [+5]
Senses: Like the Dead [0], Life Sense [+2]
Sustenance: Daily [0], All Flesh Must be Eaten [0]
Intelligence: Dumb as Dead Wood [0]
Spreading the Love: One Bite and You're Hooked [+2]
Power: 22

ignore the pain of its host body means it can last longer and exert itself more strongly than previously.

Under the façade, however, the human remains alive and conscious—and still subject to all that pain. He has no control whatsoever below the neck, but does retain some control of his own face, meaning he can in theory communicate. But since he cannot properly synchronize the movement of his lips and tongue with that of his breathing, he usually remains difficult to understand. In addition, within most zombies the human intelligence has gone irretrievably insane, doing little but trying to scream. Because of this it took quite some time for researchers to discover the true situation, and even now they are keeping it a secret.

One good thing about the situation is that, although the disease has increased in effect, it has also become harder to transmit. It now requires an exchange of bodily fluids—like a bite. Note that the mental stats of a zombie reflects the controlling consciousness, not the human trapped within.

Inside Neutopia

Neutopia was designed to provide a full life for its inhabitants, away from physical cares. It is part commune, part laboratory and part fun park. Just as much as the sights and sounds, the physical sensations experienced by the citizenry are carefully detailed. To lend the wilder simulations credibility, pain and injury are a real part of the experience, but with any supposed death, the citizen simply finds himself back in a neutral zone, unharmed (although his reputation may have taken a battering). Unfortunately, there are now worse things loose in the system than humiliation, and even death.

Neutopia as a whole is composed of many different realms, each of which has its own rules—and perhaps even physical laws. One realm is a vast African veldt, another a city of hypercubes and other mind-bending architecture, a third an archipelago of villages and “magic”. There are reconstructions of ancient Egypt, Japanese castles, and Gondwanaland, not to mention space stations, monster-filled labyrinths and almost two hundred other fully developed sims. In addition there many more sub-realms for use by small groups, including realm designers, scientists, and private gatherings of orgiastic excess.

As well as other citizens and environmental hazards, more interaction is provided by animals (and sometimes monsters, a mob of peasants, or whatever) controlled by independent computer programs, called demons. Despite the advances in neurotechnology, Artificial Intelligence is still a fantasy, so these follow complex yet often predictable scripts.

Despite the incredible variety on offer, many citizens stick to familiar terrain, visiting the more hyper-real areas in much the way they might have jumped into a SensaCouch back in the physical world. As such there are a few realms which act as urban centers, with plenty of housing, familiar laws of physics, and where all the actual decision making gets done. Neutopia is by no means a free-for all society, and politics is probably its most serious pastime. At the top of the heap is Veronica Broderick or, as she is now known, Vera Symm.

Vera is a nightclub singer at the Club Berlin, the location where anyone who is anyone aspires to be



seen, at the heart of the realm called Vera City. It's not just about social standing and who has the trendiest clique, either. She also has control of the Keys, which doesn't give her absolute control—just the next best thing. Around her the politicking is furious and, now that Neutopia itself is under threat, potentially lethal.

The Rules

There are two types of rules in this virtual reality. The first is the Architecture, which reflects both the limitations of the hardware on which Neutopia is built, and the limitations of the human consciousnesses caught inside it. The Architecture is normally inviolate, although may change over time due to increases in real-world technology or a failure in the software or hardware.

The second type is the Code, which controls what people can do in individual realms, and is controlled by the Keys. The Code involves environmental factors such as gravity (which might be turned off in the space station, or even affect different objects in different directions, in the case of the hypercube city), air pressure and the like. Its most important function is to limit the abilities of citizens to a particular idea of reality. For example, citizens in Vera City cannot change their appearance at will, or run at superfast speeds to get to the nightclub on time—unless Vera Symm lets them, anyway.

Architecture

Architecture goes back to the very first days when Daniel Patel found himself inside Veronica's computer. What Veronica discovered in her subsequent research was that each human consciousness had a certain essence that exists as an emergent property once the underlying hardware—bioelectrical or digital—is complex enough. Some called it the soul although, having no evidence it survived death, Veronica called it *élan*. This *élan* can

move from location to location—from the brain to Neutopia, or within the computer itself, but cannot be duplicated. Hence a citizen cannot split himself up into clones to attend two meetings at once, or restore an earlier backup of himself. Although he can change the resources he has access to—including what his avatar looks like, or even his own memories to an extent—he remains himself.

Architecture is a complicated thing, but one of the most important concepts is that of *élan crystals*. These were built into the software from almost the very beginning, and represent the true state of each citizen's avatar. Neutopia is designed so that no citizen can be truly killed—if they run into misfortune (hunting lions on the veldt, say, or having an accident with molten lava on Mount Doom), there is always a central core to them that cannot be damaged by any force inside Neutopia. A short while after “death”, the body fades away and the crystal (roughly two inches in diameter), automatically travels to Limbo through the nearest portal where the full avatar can be reconstructed, good as new. In the same way the crystal is invulnerable, it can't be stopped from moving to the exit.

Recent changes in Neutopia have shown a limitation of its Architecture that is far more frightening. As explained above, the troubles of reality are causing power outages and hardware failures in the infrastructure of the virtual world. These sorts of events were predicted, so there are many layers of backups and mirroring of resources, but the scale of the current chaos cannot be so easily ignored. In addition, the nature of *élan* makes it vulnerable. If a citizen is caught in an area of hardware failure, he might be wiped out completely or, worse, corrupted. He becomes what is known as a Lo-Res zombie (or sometimes, a zombie process). The *élan* remains but because it was temporarily stored in a static area of memory, all the higher emotions and motivations are stripped away. What remains is animal rage and a hunger for completion that can never be realized, contained in a body that may be killed, but will always reform. Worse, the zombies are automatically drawn towards other crystals, tearing them out of human “flesh” if they can, and if they consume one, that citizen is reduced to the same state.

Lo-Res Zombie

Strength 4	Constitution 5 [+3]
Dexterity 4 [+1]	Intelligence 2
Perception 3	Willpower 2
Dead Points 34	Speed 18
Endurance Points n/a	Essence Pool 8
Skills: Brawling 4 [+2]	
Attacks: Bite (D4 x 4 (8), slashing)	
Weak Spot: All [0]*	
Getting Around: The Quick Dead [+10]	
Strength: Strong Like Bull [+5]	
Senses: Like a Hawk [+2], Life Sense [+6]	
Sustenance: Who Needs Food? [+8]	
Intelligence: Problem Solving [+15]	
Spreading the Love: Only the Dead [-2]	
Special Feature: Crystal Invulnerability [10] (upon death, they automatically reform in Limbo).	
Power: 65	

These stats represent the basic Lo-Res zombie that might have originated from Vera City, for example (although few have made it that far into the urban realms—the more freeform areas are a lot more susceptible to the hardware failures). The other problem with Lo-Res zombies is that they become immune to changes in the Code—they keep all enhancements they had at the time they were corrupted, even if they move into a different realm. Increased strength, regeneration, even immunity to gravity, all might be properties the zombies keep with them, permanently.

The Code

The Code is made up of all the settings that allow both realms and individual avatars to be customized. Although each citizen has a “default” avatar that reflects their original body (and its abilities) to some extent, they are not constrained to that within the digital world. Everyone in a single realm might be changed in the same way (such as their Strength increasing, or being given wings), or each individual could be granted particular Powers (straight out of Chapter Two: Starship Shamblers).

Realm Settings

Each realm has its own settings that govern how its inhabitants experience “reality” there.

Power: The same Power is granted to everyone in the realm. For example, 5 levels of the Microgravity Control skill is given to all people in the space station sim.

Power Pool: Everybody has a “pool” of points, which they can use to buy different powers from. For example, the monster labyrinth might allow inhabitants 20 points of Powers to give them an edge. The powers available are usually determined by the “genre” of the realm.

Appearance: Everyone might be constrained to their default appearance, be able to change to any other human form, any humanoid form, or have total freedom within a specified size. The ability to change clothing and other cosmetic detail (or the availability of Weapon Grafts) is another aspect of this.

Crystal Movement: A realm might be set up so that citizens can shrug off their current shape immediately, and reduce themselves to an élan crystal which automatically makes its way to the nearest exit (usually moving beneath the “ground”, to avoid crystals flying about through the air). However, this behavior can also be restricted, as it is in many of the central realms.

Technology: each realm can have a limit on the technology level used within it. For example, some realms may be set up so that guns do not function. In others, almost anything goes (assume that any weapon or piece of equipment mentioned in this book can be used, except for things which affect a wide area, such as powerful explosives or biological dispersal units—Neutopia has hard-coded limits on such things).

Variability: there are rules about when citizens can change their power pool or appearance. For example, some realms don’t allow you to change anything unless you leave and then enter again, whereas others might allow a change every hour, or only at specific locations, or no restrictions at all.

Physical properties: Gravity, color, and the carrying distance of sound are just some of the phenomena that can be edited, and are usually just set to unchanging values. As with other settings, these are applied individually to avatars (such as controlling how fast they fall, or if they see in noir sepia).

Here are some examples of realm settings.

Vera City

In the heart of virtual sophistication, everyone has to keep to their default appearance, and familiar physical rules apply to them. However, they are allowed 5 points of skills which they can change daily, and they can change their clothing and cosmetics in specified “change rooms”. Citizen’s aren’t allowed the short cut of reducing themselves to élan crystals, and cannot use anything above a 1930s tech level.

The Gauntlet

The Gauntlet is a realm with far less restriction, including weakened gravity and clearer sound. All citizens are able to take on whatever humanoid form they want upon entering, and are given 20 points of completely freeform Powers they can change up to once a minute. As you might imagine, the combats in here are fast and furious.

Limbo

Limbo is actually the white space between realms, and a special case. Here everyone takes on the appearance of their default avatar, any wounds are healed completely, and they become invulnerable to damage. They can also outfit themselves with equipment suitable for the realm they are entering (although none of it functions within Limbo).

This is where the élan crystal ends up when an avatar “dies”. Limbo does provide a region of safety from the Lo-Res zombies (since the creatures cannot do any damage to citizens while inside), but this is not a solution to the problem. Limbo is not big enough to accommodate a large number of people, and the zombies continue attacking anyway, which is usually highly distressing if not physically dangerous.

Geography and Exits

There are all sorts of other realm characteristics that are a matter of world building rather than Power allocation. We'll leave most of them to interested Zombie Masters, but two are worth noting.

Geography in the realms has to be contiguous (that is, you can't suddenly teleport from one place to another), but doesn't have to have a consistent physical scale—for example, you could fit a large room in a small shack, or play other tricks with geometry. Many of the realms do stay consistent, just to save confusion, while others revel in Escher-like mayhem. A prominent example of scale manipulation is the lounges at the Club Berlin, which fit a lot more people around the central stage than should be possible.

The places where people can enter and exit a realm are also important. Some realms have only a few specified places of entry, while others are a lot more flexible. This becomes important when being chased by zombies. Too few exits can create a bottleneck, leaving people exposed to attack before they can reach the safety of Limbo. Too many exits make a realm very difficult to defend from zombie incursion.

Avatar Settings

Anything that can be granted to a realm as a whole can also be granted to an individual. This can create strange effects, such as an individual taking a plasma blaster into Vera City, which he can use but almost no one else can. For example, Vera Symm's guards are all physically enhanced (+1 to Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution), have a pool of five Power points they can modify at will, and are able to use technology up to late twentieth century. (Snide comments about enhancements to Vera's singing voice are not uncommon, except in the hearing of the guards.)

When realm and avatar settings overlap, they do not stack. Instead, the individual gets the best features of those available to him. Those same guards in The Gauntlet still only have a 20 point pool (not 25), but they can change it at will rather than once a minute.

The other settings available to avatars are the Keys. These are not physical objects but symbolic passwords that allow editing of the Code. Each Key is attuned to a particular élan (and so cannot be stolen). They can affect either realm settings, or avatar settings, or both. Keys come at a particular power level (always a multiple of five). To edit avatar setting, the person with the Key has to be able to touch the target, which may be himself. Powers can be edited within the bounds of the current realm settings, and a number of points above that equal to the level of the Key. In addition, anyone with a Key can grant or remove a lower-power Key of the same type.

For example, someone might be granted a Key to edit avatar settings at level 10. They can transform anyone they touch with up to 10 points of powers over and above the current realm settings (either with a set list, or in a point pool). They can also take their target down a notch, to the default setting of the current realm, unless the powers they are removing were granted by someone with a Key greater than 10. In addition, they can grant somebody else an avatar key of level 5, or revoke it.

Naturally, Keys are prized possessions, and are doled out sparingly. The over-ride Key (level 25) is held by Vera Symm, and she is not shy in using its influence, though she is also careful not to let too many people access to even the lower level Keys.

Realm Keys also allow some editing of realm layout, and other permissions are possible as well. These rules don't cover all the permutations, but should give you an idea of the political stakes, and what privileges the characters might be granted if they are hunting Lo-Res zombies (and remember, the more powerful the hunter, the more powerful a zombie he becomes if he falls in battle). Zombie Masters are encouraged to come up with more detail about the Code and its Keys if their campaigns warrant it.

Reprogramming

The rules of Neutopia have been set up to provide a flexible environment that reflects a lot of the fun of Virtual Reality, but leaves enough room for survival horror. If you want to make your own rules, with a different back-story and underlying assumptions, go right ahead.

One variation is to leave the campaign at the level of the *SensaCouches* described in the Background. Here characters enter VR environments but are able to return to their bodies when they want. In that case you need to make the journey itself dangerous, and give them a good reason to risk it. In classic cyberpunk the characters often need to jack into cyberspace to wrest information from the bad guys, but risk brain death from the aggressive countermeasures employed to protect those secrets (see Chapter Three: The Cybered Dead). In The Matrix movies, the VR was a prison, and the characters had to break out, while learning that there were less limitations on their abilities than was originally apparent.

If you keep the idea of uploading the characters fully into a computer, you might want to change some of the assumptions about the technology. For example, what if individuals can be stored, duplicated or manipulated directly, just like any other digital information?

That could lead to all manner of weirdness (in which case, Greg Egan's novel *Permutation City* is a good place to start for ideas).

You might also want to think about subjects that we don't have space to cover, like reproduction and the effect of hackers on the system.

Character Creation

Because all Neutopia citizens are uploaded from the real world, they are closely modeled after the original flesh and blood person. Even physical attributes are based upon the mind's conception of its own abilities—at least in theory. In practice, a little self-confidence (or suitable reimbursement to the right people) can give a character an edge.

This means that the best way to make a Neutopia character is to make one as usual, and then do an extra step for the transfer into VR.

Upload

Here is a summary of the changes made to the various bits of a character sheet during the change. Note that this creates the base avatar for the character. These numbers may change in different realms or with granted Keys, but the original numbers are still important, as everything else provides a modifier to the base.

Physical Drawbacks, Endurance Points, body modification technology (such as Cybernetic, nanotech, or biotech), and supernatural abilities are not transferred to a virtual character. Physical Drawbacks are "healed" by the computer, no one runs out of Endurance on-line, and the rest cannot be mapped correctly by the computer. (Zombie Masters should disallow characters buying physical Drawbacks if they are immediately uploading their character.)

Attributes: Both mental and physical Attributes are transferred directly (although can be increased, as described below).

Life Points and Speed: Transfer directly, although may change based on updated Attributes.

Essence: Spiritual energy is surprisingly useful when being transferred into a computer, as it determines how much control the mind has over its own perceptions. For example, a character who believes enough in his own strength, will become strong within the VR. To reflect this, create a Virtual Essence Pool for the character, which can then be spent on improvements (this number is only needed at character creation time, not afterwards).

Benefit

+1 to any Attribute

Gaining a Mental or Physical Quality

Losing a Mental Drawback

Increasing a Skill

Increasing a Special Skill

Virtual Essence cost

5 points

2 points per Quality cost

2 points per Drawback Cost

1 point per level

2 points per level

The Virtual Essence Pool is made up of:

The sum of the character's Primary Attributes (the same as the default Essence Pool).

+1 for every point worth of Supernatural Qualities or Metaphysics

-1 for every point worth of Supernatural or Mental Drawbacks (except Honorable)

+1 for every level of Resources*

+1 for every level of Status*

* The last two modifiers indicate preferential treatment by the technicians doing the upload. They can be negative.

The Zombie Master can disallow anyone with supernatural Qualities or Metaphysics from uploading, as it can be quite unbalancing, especially if the optional Chi rules are not being used. The ZM could also rule that Virtual Essence gained from Supernatural Qualities can only be spent on the optional Chi rules.

Once you have the total Virtual Essence Pool, you can then spend it on the character. This happens all at once.

Most Skills, Qualities and Drawbacks transfer directly, except for physical Drawbacks which are discarded. There are some special cases though.

Addiction: If not bought off with Virtual Essence, it transfers into a different mental Drawback.

Resources: If positive, these still represent the character's resources in the real world, not the virtual one. If negative, they are replaced by a negative Status modifier within Neutopia, as it becomes known the character is a charity case brought in to avoid the plague.

Social Qualities and Drawbacks: These don't necessarily reflect the same situation inside as outside (for example, your contacts may not have been uploaded). You can buy new social Qualities and Drawbacks of equivalent cost.

First Aid and Medicine: Medical knowledge transfers, but it doesn't do any good healing avatars (who are only healed by entering Limbo, or if they have been granted Regeneration).

Finally, the character's appearance is set. This is the same as their previous body (it's one of NeuTron's rules), but the ravages of disease, wounds or aging can be smoothed out if desired. The computer ensures that no two personal avatars are exactly the same (though out in the realms where appearance can be changed at will, it's a different story).

Optional Rule: Chi Access

This rule is for those people who want a more mystical slant to their Virtual Reality, and have access to the list of Chi Powers in *Enter the Zombie*. People with a strong enough understanding of the VR environment can manipulate it as a kung fu master manipulates the energy flow around him.

Buying Chi Techniques

Chi techniques have the same cost as listed in *Enter the Zombie*, and can only be bought with Virtual Essence Points at upload time, or with experience points gained inside Neutopia. Before any are gained, the Sim Sense Quality must also be bought. This works in exactly the same way as the Gift (see *AFMBE*, p. 48), but only within the VR.

A skill called Chi Access must also be bought, which indicates the level of mastery the character has gained. This is a Special Skill.

The Essence Channeling Quality and the Chi Drain technique from *Enter the Zombie* do not have any equivalent in these rules.

Using Chi Techniques

There is no Essence use inside Neutopia. Instead, the character must make a skill roll to determine if he can control the simulation well enough to have the desired effect. Roll Willpower + Chi Access and calculate the level of success based on the usual Outcome Table. If the level of success is at least as much as the Essence Cost for that chi technique, then the maneuver activates successfully.

For example: *Ophelia is running across a lobby, being shot at, so she tries to use her Catch Bullets technique (which has an Essence cost of three). She must roll at least three Success Levels on her Willpower + Chi Access roll.*

Once a technique is activated, it lasts a full scene, or until a roll based on that technique fails. For example, Ophelia can Catch Bullets until one of her Difficult Dexterity rolls fails. Likewise, Chi Punch would work until one of the attacks misses.

Each additional chi technique that the character activates in a single scene imposes a cumulative -2 penalty to the activation roll. If the same technique has already been activated in the scene, the character gets an additional -1 penalty. Having the same technique activated twice does not stack the results.

For example: *Ophelia has caught two bullets, but she fails on the third (ouch). The technique deactivates. If she wants to try it again, her roll is at -3 (-2 because she has already activated one technique, and an additional -1 because she is repeating Catch Bullet).*

A character cannot have more chi techniques activated at the same time as he has levels in Chi Access.

Example Character

The Goth Chick (*AFMBE*, p. 72) is being uploaded into VR. She gets 22 points of Virtual Essence from her Supernatural Qualities, so spends them on Chi powers. She buys Sim Sense [5], three levels of Chi Access [6], Acrobatic Shooting [2], Balance of the Cat [1], Be Like the Water [3], and Chi Bolt [5].

These powers replace her Metaphysics, which don't work in the computer.

Story Ideas

This is a flexible setting, but here are some ideas of what to set your players against. These can be used separately, or strung together in sequence, possibly with other adventures in between.

Training

In the best tradition of VR stories, you might want to surprise your players with the fact that they are even in the computer. In that case, you should create characters as usual, and start in a futuristic street setting against a horde of the walking dead. Only when they fend off the immediate attacks (probably with a casualty or two), should you reveal they are actually on a training mission to cope with conditions out in the real world.

Vera City

Vera City is where the increasing population strain is becoming most apparent. That's because many of the new refugees are heading straight for the central realms (they didn't enter VR in order to wander around Hogwarts or get in touch with their inner penguin), and Vera City in particular is where the decision making gets done.

Because of the new pressures, the guards are cracking down harder, and rumors of resistance against Vera's monopoly on power is growing. There is even talk of a "rebel leader" named Phantasus who is agitating for better representation and wider dissemination of Keys. Depending upon their politics, the characters might be trying to root out such subversion, or be a party to it. Either way they probably end up spending time in the Club Berlin, and talking to various citizens with a grievance. Phantasus himself remains elusive.

Meanwhile, zombies start appearing at the entrances. So far there are enough enhanced guards on duty so they can usually take each zombie down before it gets too far (though even if they kill it, it just goes back to Limbo and may re-appear immediately). But as the population and therefore the size of the city grows, more gates are needed, and tension grows.

Hunting

The heroes are told they must hunt down a zombie and capture it for research—a difficult task, but there is an extra catch they might not have considered. Lo-Res zombies keep the powers they “died” with, and so many of them can reduce themselves at will to an élan crystal to escape capture, even if they are cornered in a realm where that is usually disallowed. The trick is to find one without that power. This could mean tracking down a citizen who was killed in an incursion into Vera City (though they have since been lured away, before it was realized they could be useful), or thinking of some other solution. The heroes are given special mancachers designed by Vera’s engineers that the zombies *shouldn’t* be able to break free of (which doesn’t sound reassuring), and told to return with their quarry to the research labs.

This plot point can lead to a lot of interesting terrain and situations. Naturally the Cast Members have to be careful that they don’t become the prey.

Research

The research labs are realms that were originally set up for scientists to continue their work, either in complex simulations of real world problems (thereby helping make Neutopia financially viable) or advancing VR design. Now they are being used almost exclusively to either find a cure for NTMS or a way to reverse engineer the Lo-Res zombies. The heroes could find themselves here if they capture a zombie, as part of on-going intrigue (interest in Phantasus might be detected amongst the researchers), or just as part of their character concept. This is a good time to give them more information about the disease, the situation outside, and other technical details that haven’t been made public. It can also lead onto the next scene fairly naturally.

The Real World

It is revealed that androids have been designed so that Neutopia citizens can inhabit them and interact with the real world. There aren’t many as yet, but they need to be brought into service, because NTMS zombies have overrun a power station on the moon, and it’s quicker to get the androids into action than send human troops. The heroes are called upon, yet again.

The situation is this. Moonbase Dievaitis normally has a population of 80, of which many (perhaps all) are now NTMS zombies. It has been calculated that if there is a critical failure in its systems, the whole lunar grid might go down, which would be catastrophic for Neutopia (and a lot of other things as well). Three androids had previously been shipped there for low-gravity tests, and so are available for use. The authorities think the heroes might have less than nine hours to solve the problem.

One solution is simply to depressurize the complex, which will hopefully kill all the zombies, but keep the systems running long enough for engineers to arrive. That’s not easy, but instructions are given, and an engineer with the appropriate knowledge also comes along, possibly piggybacking inside an android (see the stat box). Naturally, this requires crawling about in the lower levels, where zombies are likely to be. The heroes are told that they are to avoid or kill everyone they meet, even if they are unaffected by the disease (although warning such people to get into spacesuits would be a rather more heroic course of action).

Android

Strength 4	Constitution 7
Dexterity 3	Intelligence *
Perception 3	Willpower *
Life Points 64	Speed 20
Powers: Extra Life Points	

* based on the person in control.

All physical skills start with a –2 penalty because of the character’s unfamiliarity with the machine. That penalty might be reduced with practice.

Up to three avatars can inhabit each android, but only one of them can be in control at once (roll Willpower if there is a fight over who is doing the driving). Avatars can transfer from one android to another across a special connection, assuming there’s room. Once the task is completed, they have to return to their starting point, in a central control room, to re-enter Neutopia.

Conspiracy

The heroes are approached by a famous figure claiming to have shocking information—Daniel Patel, the first citizen. He has been close to Vera's inner circle, but disagrees with some of her methods. Patel has now discovered it was Vera herself, and her research into neural diseases, that saw NTMS jump from a dangerous but conventional pathogen into the semi-intelligent form that has created all the zombies. He says he doesn't yet have proof, and that his position is hazardous, but believes he can trust the party. He arranges another meeting for when he finds out more, but soon after disappears. Maybe Vera has discovered a way to kill citizens after all (or is keeping Daniel captured somewhere).

If the group investigate thoroughly, they start finding out some interesting things. When citizens enter Neutopia, they were told their bodies were cremated—standard practice on the over-crowded Earth. However, this was not always the case. Instead, the NeuTron company took many thousands of them to a remote location in outback Australia, where they used them to continue research. Doing so broke a whole lot of laws, but they weren't concerned about that.

It can also be discovered that the NTMS zombies first appeared in the Australian facility, but it's hard to say if it was a deliberate act or not.

If they try to do anything with this information—organize more research or shout it from the rooftops—they are finally contacted by Daniel again, who says he has been in hiding. He also reveals he is no less than Phantasus himself, and has been working against Vera for longer than previous revealed. He says he can finally prove the allegations about Vera, and save everyone in Neutopia—by taking the group back into the real world, not as androids but in the flesh! NeuTron's attempts to re-integrate the élan with the body have been a success, but Vera has been keeping it a secret, because she doesn't want to lose her power base.

This is Not an Exit

The truth is more insidious. Vera's research did create the NTMS zombies, by accident. But now that Neutopia is under so much pressure, and the truth about the zombies might be revealed, she wants out. It is she who approaches the party a second time, wearing Daniel Patel's avatar—she has carefully arranged it so that nobody else can change their avatar in Vera City or Limbo except for her, just to throw suspicion off this very eventuality. In fact, she has always been Phantasus, trying to control both sides of politics to distract the populace. What she wants to do is persuade the heroes to accompany her back to the Australian lab, so they can fight off the zombies while she escapes the virtual meltdown in borrowed flesh.

If they do accompany "Daniel" back to the real world, they discover a considerably more dangerous environment than they might expect. Because of power fluctuations, those thousands of corpses, waiting for revitalization, are now rotting where they lie. About fifty NTMS zombies are wandering around, eating their fill and causing further damage. There are six bodies still connected to the machines by which the heroes can enter them, but even that is not exactly as expected. They don't re-enter the brain, but piggyback onto the nervous system in exactly the same way as NTMS. These bodies are weakened and not up for much of a fight, but the characters have one advantage against the horde. They each are given a device that can transfer them between one body and another (even into a zombie) assuming they can attach it to both bodies for at least two Turns. By using these carefully, the heroes can jump from body to body, and so try to get hold of the computer records Daniel claims are so important. Even this body jumping provides another shock. The original six bodies are safe (since they were experimental subjects), but most other zombies are former staff of the facility, affected by NTMS. That means that when anyone jumps into them, the original (mostly insane) consciousness still exists in the brain.

If the heroes persevere through this chamber of horrors, they can indeed discover various records of NeuTron's sins, and they may or may not be able to stop Vera escaping in the best looking body she can

jump into. But one thing is obvious, nothing here will help the citizen's of Neutopia. There aren't enough bodies to get any sizeable percentage out of danger—nor even provide good test subjects for further research. Whether or not Vera remains in the virtual world, her political power is shredded by the revelations, and anarchy descends quickly.

Maybe they'd be better off taking Vera's route out (they might even be able to find their original bodies—a little worse for wear—amongst the test subjects). But whether or not the Cast Members choose the real or the virtual world, it looks like the end is nigh.

And it was all a...

It is usually a bad idea to end any scenario by revealing it was all a dream, shared hallucination, neurocast-of-the-week, alien interrogation technique, or whatever—though you have more justification in this Deadworld than most. Even if your heroes don't wake up in their SensaCouches at the end, they may still wonder if they are mere puppets in a strange game, where their lives are dictated by the roll of dice, and the odds are stacked against them. Tell them that's just natural paranoia.



Athlete

Virtual survivor

Personality

Yeah, I gotta admit I wasn't one of the first guys to jump into the computer. The 'Couches were alright for watching sports and, you know, other stuff—but that was it. It didn't beat getting out on the streets and actually playing. It didn't give you the burn.

But then everyone was getting sick, and the sick guys were going crazy and killing people. Sure you could fight them off, but it doesn't matter how many crunches you can do when it's the bugs that do you in.

I was sick, and so they put me on-line, and now I don't have any real body at all. But you know, I don't care. Because this thing I do have looks and moves like me, and still feels like me. I'm still here, and I can still fight for what's mine. That's the burn.

Quote

"A massive swing there, and another. He's on fire tonight. Ladies, gentleman and zombie retards—come and get some."

* Increased with the Virtual Essence Pool of 22

† Replaced the Status Quality.



Str 5 **Dex** 5* **Con** 4
Int 2 **Per** 3 **Wil** 2
Lps 52
Eps —
Spd 18
Essence —

Qualities/Drawbacks

Attractiveness 4*
Charisma 1
Contact (Realm designer) 1†
Fast Reaction Time
Good Luck 3
Hard to Kill 2
Resources 1
Situational Awareness

Skills

Acrobatics 3*
Brawling 3
Climbing 2
Dodge 5*
Driving (Car) 2
Guns (Shotgun) 2
Hand Weapon (Hockey Stick) 2
Intimidation 2
Martial Arts 4*
Running (Dash) 2
Seduction 1
Sport (Basketball) 3
Sport (Football) 3
Sport (Lacrosse) 3
Swimming 1
Weightlifting 1

Detective Virtual Norm

Personality

I used to be a cop, back when that meant something. Then I went private. Long story. I know, you're not paying me by the word here.

The thing is, my instincts were good, and this Neutopia was the goldmine. I'm a PI, and that means finding out stuff, finding what people want. In VR, everything is information, and the only thing that means a damn to people is what they currently want. I sold the business—what there was of it—and signed up.

It would have been great. I was doing alright, but somehow Vera took a disliking to me. I got thrown out the Club a couple of times, for no reason. It's hard to traffic in information when you can't get into rumor central.

But I'm keeping my eye out. Interesting things are happening, and some poor bastard has to work it all out. That's what I'm here for.

Quote

"Then I harpooned the stupid cow. Thought that'd stop her wriggling away, but the bitch went crystal on me. Maybe I should just stick to the chainsaw."

* Increased with the Virtual Essence Pool of 11

† Converted from Addiction Drawback

Str 2 **Dex** 3* **Con** 3

Int 2 **Per** 4* **Wil** 2

Lps 36

EPs —

Spd 10

Essence —

Qualities/Drawbacks

Contacts (the resistance) 3

Fear of Commitment (−1) †

Hard to Kill 2

Nerves of Steel

Paranoid (−2) †

Skills

Brawling 2

Bureaucracy 1

Computers 1

Driving (Car) 2

Electronic Surveillance 2

First Aid 1

Guns (Handgun) 2

Guns (Shotgun) 1

Humanities (Criminal Law) 2

Intimidation 2

Notice 3*

Questioning 3

Research/Investigation 3

Stealth 2

Streetwise 2

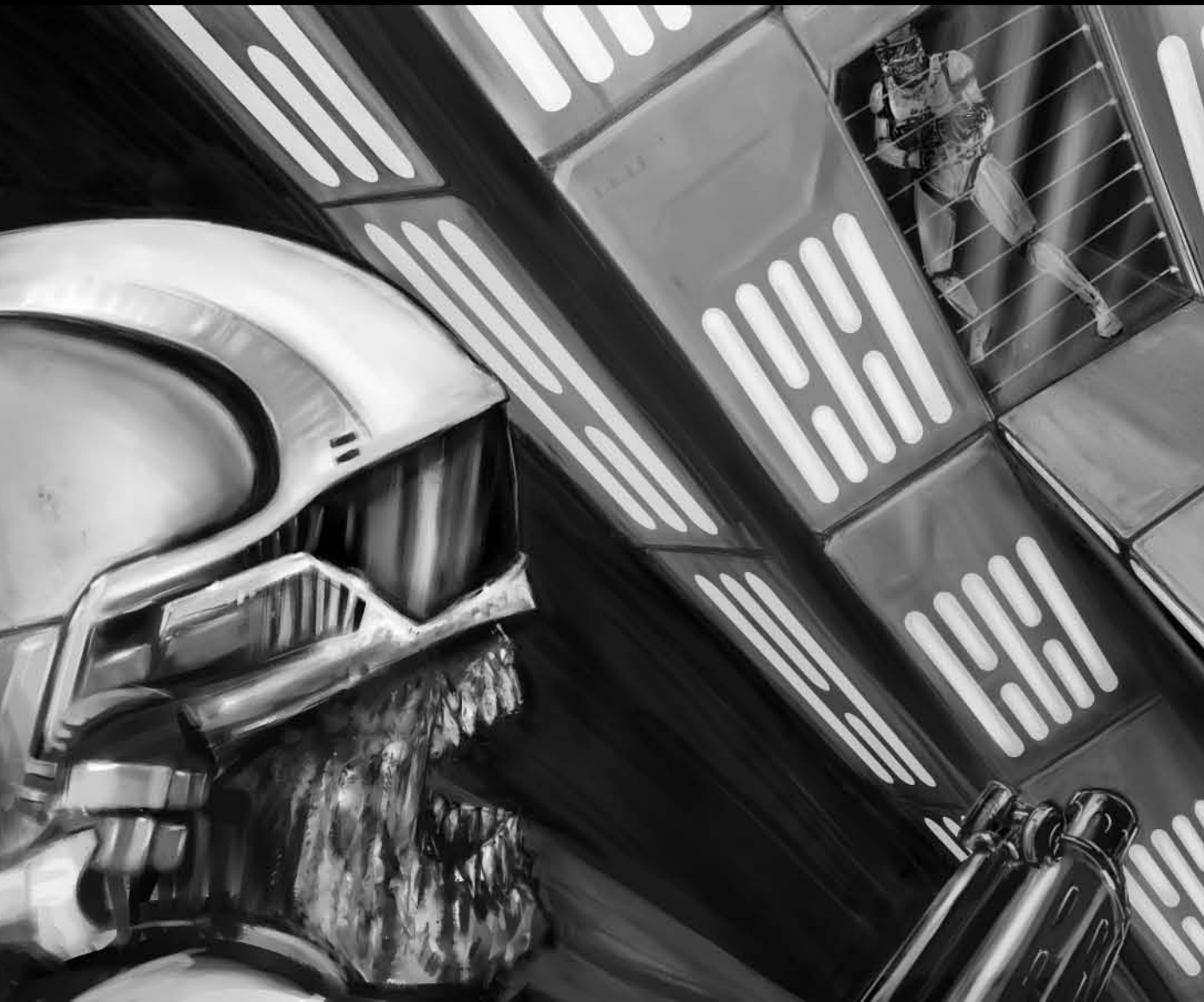
Surveillance 3

Gear

Black-market avatar Key (level 5)



CHAPTER SEVEN





DEATH OF THE ALLIANCE

All Flesh Must Be Eaten™

FADE IN

"A long ago time, a universe away..."

A vast sea of stars serves as the backdrop for the MAIN TITLE, followed by a ROLL UP, which crawls up into infinity.

"EPISODE 7 - DEATH OF THE ALLIANCE

"The Galaxy is at war. For centuries, the Twin Empires of Thraxia and Zoth ruled the galaxy with benevolence and peace, with Zoth producing the technology needed by all worlds and Thraxia providing the Order of Mystic Knights, the elite forces that served in defense of the Allied Systems.

But a darkness has arisen in Zoth, and under the leadership of the Dread Emperor Krauss and his general, Garth, they have turned their Weapons of War against the Thraxians. For decades, the Mystic Knights held at bay the Zothian War Machine, until the Zothians brought against Thraxia a new breed of troops, who could not be killed, who would not stay dead. Rumors circulate that Garth is a Fallen Mystic Knight, and that he has used his powers of darkness to call the very bodies of the deceased to fight for Zoth. The numbers of Mystic Knights dwindle, and the war goes badly for Thraxia..."

PAN DOWN to a tiny blue planet floating alone amongst the vast sea of stars. Suddenly, rapid-fire flyby shots of fighter ships engaged in a fierce dogfight interrupt the shot.

CUT TO

INT: COCKPIT

A Thraxian fighter pilot, ZACK, clad in his forest green flight suit, feverishly works the controls of his ship.

INTERCUT dogfighting scenes with Zack, deadly serious but confident and cocky, taking out ship after ship. Soon, however, he runs into trouble. As he detonates two enemy vessels, the pilots of the ships fly through the vacuum of space *without space suits* and latch on to his ship. The robotic parts grafted onto their bodies gleam in the vacuum of space, a sharp contrast to the bluish-green of their decaying flesh. The ZOMBIES begin clawing at the hull with metallic claws, their eyes glazed over with cataracts.

ZACK

GAH! Dammit, they're on me! Hawk Leader, do you read me?

One of the zombies tears the transmitter from Zack's ship, while another attacks his repair robot.

ZACK

So much for the radio. No choice now but to crash-land. Here goes nothing. Hope there's someone down there who can help me out . . .

Zack's ship goes down.

INTRODUCTION

While many “hard” sci-fi purists turn their noses up at the idea of space opera, without films like the *Star Wars* series or shows like *Battlestar Galactica* or *Buck Rogers*, it’s possible that science fiction as a genre wouldn’t be around today. At very least, it’s certain the genre wouldn’t be as widespread and accessible as it is today were it not for such works as these. In fact, getting to the root of the issue, some of the earliest sci-fi works were space opera; the Saturday morning serials featuring Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, and others brought science fiction into the mainstream, making it a hit with teenaged boys...who later grew up to make *Star Wars*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Lost in Space*. Before this, even, we had H.G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds*, which while mostly a typical alien invasion scenario, also maintains many space opera trappings. As such, it was inappropriate to have a science fiction genre book for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* without a space opera *Deadworld*. This is *Death of the Alliance*.

What is Space Opera?

Trying to define space opera in concrete terms is difficult, since those works that fall into the genre are very different from one another, even ranging from dramatic to action to comedic in style. However, in general, space opera is any science fiction work that uses the trappings of sci-fi, but isn’t worried about the accuracy of theories, formulae, principles or how technology works. Laser swords, for example, look very futuristic and technological, but there is no scientific basis for how they might work, nor can we formulate even a hypothesis with today’s laws of physics. Certain space ships can make certain runs and somehow turn “parsec” into a unit of time rather than of distance. Aliens without lips can perfectly mimic human speech.

Space opera is also generally high action. Even in the more dramatic and comedic works of space opera, there are grand battles both in space and on the ground, between starships, and between blaster-firing heroes and villains on the ground. Space ships with laser cannons and ordnance are a necessity, as are huge space stations, dark overlords, cocky pilots, and a nearly undefeatable nemesis. In *Death of the Alliance*, of course, that nemesis involves zombies.

Last but not least, there is almost always an element of mysticism in space opera. For this reason, the genre is also usually known as science fantasy. If no one exhibits otherworldly powers, there is always the sense that the metaphysical is there, always the presence of someone who represents the supernatural. In the film version of *War of the Worlds* (1950) there was a priest as a main character (at least, until he got blown up). We all know what the supernatural element in *Star Wars* is; the entire series hinges upon it (magical microbes aside). In *Battlestar Galactica*, there are various and sundry elements of myth worked in throughout the series; the main quest is the search for the mythic Thirteenth Colony; the Cylons have a mystical religion, though we never see any actual magic at work.

In the end, space opera is the Kitchen Sink of sci-fi. Everything in this book can be dropped into a space opera setting and the explanation handled by a liberal amount of hand waving. After all, science is secondary to big guns and big explosions in this subgenre. If a player gets too ornery about the technology or lack of scientific principle behind something, the simple answer is that maybe on a subatomic level, the laws of science are different in this universe. Hand waving! In space opera, the bigger the better, and anything that adds to the action and drama helps. The story can be anything from a gritty war tale, to a classic Hero’s Journey. In *AFMBE*, the only requirement is a liberal amount of moving corpses added into the mix.

Background

Death of the Alliance involves a bitter and bloody war between two empires, each of which at one time controlled roughly half the galaxy. For thousands of years, these empires lived in peace and harmony, with the Thraxian Empire providing agriculture, meat, and spiritual guidance, while the Zothian Empire provided technology in exchange. The two societies lived in perfect symbiosis with one another for a long time in this fashion, each providing the other with that which was lacking in their own society for survival and advancement. While Zoth was able to produce powerful weaponry, a well-trained military, and cutting-edge space travel technology, the elite among the military were the Mystic Knights of Thraxia, men and women who possessed great psychic power and discipline. It was these Mystic Knights who became the generals and elite strike forces in the Navy of the Alliance.

For millennia the two worlds lived in harmony, their benevolent influence gradually spreading throughout their corner of the galaxy as they fought off alien invaders, helped fledgling societies heal plagues, and generally brought enlightenment to most of the worlds they visited. Unfortunately, in such symbiotic relationships, the balance of power eventually shifts entirely.. The Thraxian scientists eventually learned to build technology of their own, improving on the starship designs of the Zothians by designing vessels that utilized living nervous systems with which their Mystic Knights could create a psychic link, vastly increasing the handling and maneuverability of these ships.

While the Thraxians, an enlightened and benevolent race, had no intentions of betraying their long-time friends and allies, jealousies and paranoia took root in the Zothian hierarchy. An evil man named Krauss, a counselor on the Zothian Emperor's staff, began whispering dark rumors into the ears of the emperor. When the emperor wouldn't listen, Krauss began to seek ways to usurp the very throne, turning to the mystic ways of the Thraxian Knights in an effort to wrest the secrets of their powers. Long sojourns to dark corners of the galaxy turned up ancient texts on black arts that even the Thraxian

Knights didn't know about. Krauss delved deeply into these texts, learning the dark arts of Necromancy, with which he could control the spirits of the dead, and eventually with which he would be able to control even their very bodies.

The final solution to Krauss's schemes didn't take long to arrive. A young Thraxian Knight named Garth had succumbed to the temptations of technology and the pleasures of the flesh, and fallen from the order. This evil man learned through his powers of Second Sight that an ambitious advisor to the Zothian Emperor was seeking to dethrone the sovereign and take the power for himself. Such an ally would provide Garth the means to take revenge on the Knights who had turned him ronin.

Together, Krauss and Garth orchestrated the downfall of the Zothian Emperor, and Krauss's rise to power. Together, they made war against the Thraxian Empire. The war lasted for decades, with Zoth pitting its superior weapons technology against the mystical power of the Knights of Thraxia. Dozens of worlds were laid waste over the years of war, but gradually, the Mystic Knights proved more capable than the soldiers and technology of Zoth, and for a time, it looked like Thraxia would emerge victorious. Krauss and Garth, however, weren't ready to concede defeat so easily, and turned to the darkest of arts to create their hell-spawned legions, an army against which the Mystic Knights could not emerge victorious, because even these mystic warriors couldn't kill soldiers that were already dead.

The Zombies

The zombies created by Krauss and trained by Garth are a fast, smart, and deadly breed. Krauss uses a necromantic power called Death Raising to instill Aspects into zombies, creating a wide variety of troops to do his bidding. He also allows them a rudimentary shred of their former intelligence and mind, enough so that the creatures can learn and be psychologically "programmed" with an obsessive hatred of the enemy.

Krauss has trained dozens of young boys in Zothian society to serve him without question. These boys,

the Zothian Youth Corps, are taught the secrets of Krauss's necromantic powers and work day and night creating new troops for the army. Using a modified version of the Mystic Knight starship technology, the necromancers of Zoth have created a way to enhance their powers, extending their range and effectiveness. Led by Garth, these dark warriors launched an assault on Thraxia Prime, the homeworld of the Thraxian Empire. From several parsecs away, the necromancers linked their minds into a single web of malice, and with a cohesive, directed thought, unleashed a mystical plague upon the world against which even the Mystic Knights were overwhelmed.

For more on Krauss, Garth, the Zothian Youth Corps, and the human servants of the Empire, see *The Living* (p. 161).

Millions of people died, and within minutes rose up again. By the time the government and military mobilized against the threat, millions more had perished and risen up. Emergency measures went into effect; the survivors made for landing platforms scattered across the planet in a desperate effort to evacuate. A few hundred thousand made it, and scattered to the four corners of the galaxy in an effort to save some small portion of their way of life.

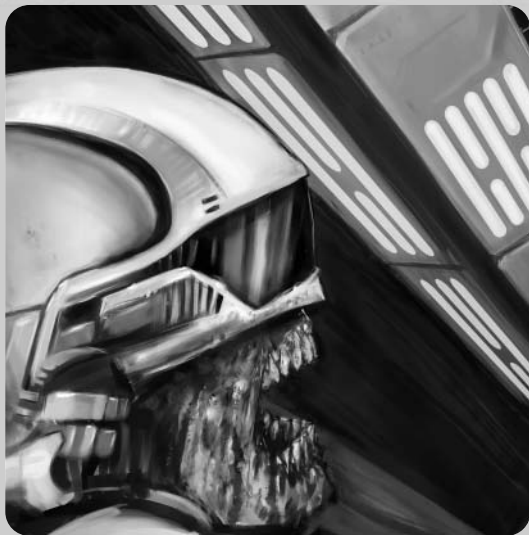
The Zothian Empire had won the war; all that was left was to hunt the scattered survivors to keep them from forming an organized resistance. This, however, proved to be far more difficult than Krauss had counted upon, for the survivors found aid and comfort among the many worlds that the evil Empire now controlled with an iron fist. The simple solution was to unleash zombie plagues across the galaxy; but Krauss knew that would leave the entire population decimated, and what was power without subjects over whom to lord? Besides, for the zombies to make effective troops, some semblance of a mind must be left within them, and a mind meant the ability to develop free thought and free will, which meant that eventually, his cannon-fodder troops might turn against him. The Emperor did not wish that to happen, so he kept the development of his military to a single planet at a time. For the past generation Thraxia Prime has served its purpose as a "recruitment and training ground."

There are several different kinds of zombies employed by the Zothian Empire. Basic zombies are those freshly risen from death; these are used as general terror and shock troops. They have minimal training and are as dangerous as their equipment allows them to be. The basic zombie template should be used for any untrained undead, save that for freshly risen corpses the gear list will depend on what the raised character had at the time of death, and without training, the skill list for the zombie is limited to Brawling 2.

Second are the elite troops. These zombies have more training, more advanced intelligence, better equipment, and a degree of cybernetic augmentation. They often form the command level of the Zothian military, as well as elite strike team units. Zombies of this level are deadly foes, and can be employed either solo, as assassins and infiltrators, or en masse, either leading platoons of basic troops or as a full elite strike team.

Last are the ultimate exposition of the dark powers used by Krauss and his Zothian Youth Corps. These are the Imperial Star Corps. Zombies that form the Star Corps are the most advanced creatures the Empire is capable of producing; they have highly advanced intelligence and reflexes, a high degree of cybernetic augmentation, and exhibit an unwavering devotion to the Empire. Often, these creatures are created from deceased members of the Youth Corps.

Star Corps zombies are the pilots and Special Forces units of the Zothian military. They are the upper echelon of the Empire's groups of elite troops, as with current day U.S. Marine Force Recon or Navy Seals units. Star Corps zombies that pilot starfighters are hardwired into the cockpits of their vessels, only able to detach upon successful completion of a mission or upon destruction of their ship. If the ship is destroyed, the Star Corps zombies have the capability to eject themselves from the cockpit, firing their own bodies as projectiles towards the enemy, where they proceed to slice through the hull of the enemy vessel with either cybernetic weaponry or laser swords. Star pilots throughout the galaxy dread facing a squadron of Star Corps pilots.



Alliance Zombie

Strength 2 **Constitution** 2
Dexterity 2 **Intelligence** 2
Perception 2 **Willpower** 2
Dead Points 15 **Speed** 4
Endurance Points n/a **Essence Pool** 12
Skills: Brawling 2, Climbing 2, Guns (Blaster Rifles) 2 [2], Language (Standard) 5
Attack: Claw D6 x 2(6) slash/stab, or heavy blaster rifle D8 x 5(20) energy
Weak Spot: Spine [+5]
Getting Around: Life-Like [+3]; Climbing [+2]
Strength: Dead Joe Average [0]; Claws [+8]
Senses: Like the Living [+1]
Sustenance: Who Needs Food? [+8]; All Flesh Must Be Eaten! [0]
Intelligence: Language [+1]; Tool Use 2 [+6]; Teamwork [+4]; Long-Term Memory [+5]
Spreading the Love: Only the Dead [-2]
Special: Vacuum-Sealed [+3]
Gear (if any): Heavy blaster (rifle), reflective body suit AV (D8 x 3) + 8(20)
Power: 51

Alliance Elite Zombie

Strength 4 **Constitution** 2
Dexterity 2 **Intelligence** 2
Perception 3 **Willpower** 2
Dead Points 25 **Speed** 4
Endurance Points n/a **Essence Pool** 15
Skills: Brawling 3 [1]; Climbing 2; Guns (Blaster Rifles) 3 [3]; Hand Weapon (Energy Sword) 1 [2]; Language (Standard) 5
Attack: Claws D6 x 4(12) slash/stab, heavy blaster rifle D8 x 5(20) energy, energy sword D10 x 7 (35) energy
Weak Spot: Spine [+5]
Getting Around: Life-Like [+3]; The Lunge [+3]; Climbing [+2]
Strength: Strong Like Bull [+5]; Damage Resistant [+5]; Claws [+8]
Senses: Like a Hawk [+2]; Scent Tracking [+3]
Sustenance: Who Needs Food? [+8] All Flesh Must Be Eaten! [0]
Intelligence: Language [+1]; Tool Use 2 [+6]; Teamwork [+4]; Long-Term Memory [+5]
Spreading the Love: Only the Dead [-2]
Special: Data Jack [+2]; Extra Life Points [+1]; Target Link [+3]; Vacuum-Sealed [+3];
Power: 73
Gear: Energy sword, heavy blaster (rifle), reflective body suit AV (D8 x 3) + 8(20)

Star Corps Zombie

Strength 4 **Constitution** 2
Dexterity 3 **Intelligence** 3
Perception 7 **Willpower** 2
Dead Points 25 **Speed** 18
Endurance Points n/a **Essence Pool** 21
Skills: Brawling 3 [1], Climbing 2, Electronics Surveillance 2 [2]; Guns (Heavy Blaster) 3 [3]; Hand Weapon (Energy Sword) 1 [2]; Language (Standard) 5; Microgravity Control 4 [4]; Piloting (star fighter) 2 [2]; System Operations (Weapons Systems) 2 [2]
Attack: Arm blades D6 x 4(12) slash/stab, heavy blaster rifle D8 x 5(20) energy, energy sword D10 x 7 (35) energy
Weak Spot: Spine [+5]
Getting Around: The Quick Dead [+10]; The Lunge [+3]; Leaping [+3]; Climbing [+2]
Strength: Strong Like Bull [+5]; Claws [+8]
Senses: Like Nothing You've Ever Seen [+10]
Sustenance: Who Needs Food? [+8]; All Flesh Must Be Eaten! [0]
Intelligence: Language [+1]; Teamwork [+4]; Long-Term Memory [+5]; Problem Solving [+15]
Spreading the Love: Only the Dead [-2]
Special: Data Jack [+2]; Dermal Armor 10 [+10]; Extra Life Points [+1]; Target Link [+3]; Vacuum-Sealed [+3]; Weapon Graft (arm blade) D8 x 4(16) slash/stab [+3]
Power: 120(!)
Gear: Arm blades, energy sword, heavy blaster rifle

In addition, as has been stated, Krauss and his Zothian Youth Corps use their powers to add Aspects to zombies as needed; thus, it's possible for Cast Members in this setting to encounter all size, shape, and variety of undead as they fight for the survival of their species.

The Living

In addition to zombies, the Zothian Empire uses human soldiers and pilots. Shortly after his rise to power, Krauss instituted a youth program, touted as a means to a bright future serving the Empire for young men and women. In reality, this is a brain-washing program, cranking out fanatically loyal, powerful, and dangerous servants. The members of the Zothian Youth Corps are Krauss's hope for the future of the Empire. He is constantly observing those who come out of the program, searching for someone he can train as an apprentice, who will succeed him when he dies.

Perhaps the most shocking development to emerge from the Zothian Youth Corps is the discovery of children with latent psychic potential appearing, though in the past such abilities were unheard of among the Zothians. Garth has wasted no time instructing these children as dark reflections of the Mystic Knights, and many master both the dark arts of Krauss's Necromancy, and the psychic abilities of the Mystic Knights. Garth calls these young men and women the Order of Shadow Knights.

The situation for the Thraxians is grim indeed; the only hope for them is the fact that many soldiers and pilots are deserting the Zothian forces out of disgust that they must serve with moving corpses, and certain that the same fate awaits them upon death (they are correct). Thus, the numbers of resistance forces on Zoth begin to grow, with even the occasional rogue Shadow Knight joining up. The problem is that the resistance is also rife with infiltrators, and the level of trust and unity among resistance members is far from cohesive. Still, it's the first spark of light in a very dark time.



The Mystic Knights

The Mystic Knights are an order of psychically endowed humans who use their great powers to act as the guardians of peace and justice, and as the generals of the Thraxian military. Mystic Knights are utterly committed to their order, and follow a strict code not unlike the classical Chivalric Code of King Arthur's Knights. This code involves several basic tenets, and while minor violations may be tolerated, serious or repeated violations of the order are punishable by expulsion from the order. Use of mystical abilities by any former knight may be punishable by death, if the ex-knight is deemed to be using her powers irresponsibly. The first, and most important tenet of the Mystic Knight's Code is that a Mystic Knight must never engage in acts of rage or murder. Second, the Mystic Knight must always be mindful of treason. The order is your family, and you will never betray your brothers and sisters. Third, Mystic Knights must never be cruel, and always offer mercy to those who beg it. Fourth, a Mystic Knight must always render aid and assistance to those in need. Fifth, a Mystic Knight must choose her battles wisely. Never fight for anger, love, or unjust causes.

Following the zombie plague Krauss unleashed upon Thraxia Prime, most of the surviving population of that world has been evacuated; the Mystic Knights as a result are scattered across the galaxy, the sad remnants of a once-noble and widespread order of spiritual and martial guardians of the peace. The order is barely surviving, with the central council gone and only a handful of independent warriors holding on to the Code in the desperate hopes that one day the order will be re-formed.

Players who wish to create Mystic Knight Cast Members should use the following Quality.

Mystic Knight

5-point Quality

Prerequisite: The Gift or Psionic

Mystic Knights gain +1 to any two physical attributes, and +1 to Willpower. They gain one level in the Clairvoyance Psionic Power, and Fast Reaction Time. They may also purchase and advance any psychic powers in addition to Clairvoyance, as normal. They gain three levels of Hard to Kill at no cost, and may buy up to 10 levels total, rather than the standard five. On the down side, Mystic Knights have a three-point Honorable Drawback reflecting their code, a five-point Adversary (Garth wants the Mystic Knights wiped out, as they are the greatest threat to him). Their obligations to the Order, which may involve giving one's life for the cause, also count as a three-point Obligation drawback. All Mystic Knights should begin play with an energy sword, and are loathe to use such "clumsy and random" weapons as blasters. Some Mystic Knights have fighter ships, though these Cast Members must purchase the Starship Quality separately; the vehicle is not included with the base package.

The Twin Empires

The two worlds at the heart of the war in this setting, Thraxia and Zoth, are as different as night and day, and as a result it was likely only a matter of time before war erupted. Still, until the rise of Krauss, the empires held by these worlds co-existed in harmony for thousands of years, with each fulfilling gaps in the needs of the other.

Thraxia

Before the war, Thraxia was a simple, agricultural world with only rudimentary space travel and hyper-light technology (their term for FTL transport). The people of the Thraxian Republic (the Thraxians hated to refer to themselves as an empire) engaged their time in intellectual pursuits, mysticism, and metaphysical studies. The Republic was ruled by a Council of Nine, elected from the Nine major star systems allied together to form the collective. Once the Mystic Knights came into being, the Council of

Nine was almost always made up of representatives from the Mystic orders on the various systems, as Mystic Knights were seen as the spiritual leaders and guardians, wise men and women of their people.

After the war began, Thraxia turned its attention more to military pursuits, and factories sprang up across the world, scars on the face of a lush, green planet. Constant bombardments by the Zothian war machine laid vast tracts of land to waste, and caused radioactive fallout to make much of the world unlivable. But the worst of it came when Krauss, Garth, and their Zothian Youth program turned their dark magicks against Thraxia. Suddenly, the recently dead all over the world sat up and set to murdering the living, who would within minutes join the growing zombie army. It quickly became apparent that the only way for Thraxian culture to survive was to evacuate the homeworld. Emergency procedures were announced, and much of the surviving population escaped, then went into hiding to continue their struggle for survival and freedom. Still, thousands were left behind to be slaughtered or fight for survival from the shadows of Thraxia.

Now Thraxia is utterly overrun with zombies, and only small pockets of human resistance remain, the sole survivors and left-behinds who weren't able to escape when the majority of the populace scattered to the four corners of the galaxy. Rumor has it that these resistance forces have managed to secure several remote factories and have begun to organize, producing more technology in an effort to mount an offensive to re-take their world. What organization exists among this fragmented resistance faction is led by the Crimson Knight, a former Mystic Knight who keeps his own identity well cloaked but exhibits vast powers, wisdom, and tactical proficiency. Under his leadership, the remnants of Thraxian society may yet have hope.

Zoth

The planet of Zoth is technology incarnate. So many cities and corporations covered the face of the world that borders became blurred until eventually the entire planet was one giant city, with corporations ruling large areas called "Sectors." Corporations hold much of the power on Zoth, and special interests and back alley deals

are commonplace. Even Krauss, with all his vaunted power, finds that he must pander to the will of the corporations if he is to survive and thrive as Emperor. Since the Zothians have used up most of their natural resources, they mine other worlds for water, food, and minerals with which to continue their survival.

Air became a commodity several thousand years before, when plant life on Zoth began to run short. The Zothian government quickly passed a law that every sector was to maintain gardens to keep some plant life capable of producing oxygen for the planet's inhabitants. These gardens quickly evolved, however, into the maintenance of enormous trees, called Millennium Trees, and each Sector maintains seven or eight Millennium Trees within its borders. Millennium Trees gain their names because they survive for thousands of years. They grow to immense heights, some reaching almost a mile into the air, and having trunks that are hundreds of feet in diameter, and once fully grown, are largely self-sufficient. The trees are so large that they can be seen by the naked eye from orbit, and form a beautiful sight, though strange and eerie in contrast to the vast technological forces and factories spread across the land.

For a long while, the Zothians traded technology to Thraxia in exchange for agriculture. However, with the rise of Krauss, the Empire decided that it was time to flex their muscles and simply annex the smaller planet. When the Thraxians fought back, their Mystic Knights proved more than a match for the Zothian military, and Krauss turned dark magicks against the Thraxians. His solution was simple: if the Thraxians wouldn't surrender, he would kill them all and simply re-colonize their world with Zothian loyalists. With the help of Garth, Krauss identified young men and women all over the world with psychic potential, and inducted them into a special "youth program" for promising young Zothian citizens. The children were gradually brainwashed to be completely loyal to Krauss, and taught the dark arts of necromancy and psychic power. The best engineers on Zoth were set to developing a machine that could network the minds of the users, thereby allowing them to amplify and combine their power. It worked, and the Zothian Youth Corps, with the dark lord Garth at the center, unleashed a wave of necro-



Emperor Krauss

Strength 2

Dexterity 2

Perception 5

Life Points 49

Endurance Points 41

Constitution 4

Intelligence 5

Willpower 6

Speed 12

Essence Pool 54

Qualities/Drawbacks: Delusions of Grandeur (3), Hard to Kill 5, Nerves of Steel, Situational Awareness, The Gift, Zealot

Skills: Bureaucracy 8, Dodge 2, Guns (Blaster) 2, Hand Weapon (Energy sword) 5, Humanities (History) 4, Intimidation 5, Necromancy 10, Notice 3, Occult Knowledge 3, Rituals (Necromantic) 5

Special Abilities: Telekinesis 3, Pyrokinesis 3, ESP (Clairvoyance) 2, ESP (Clairaudience) 2, Death Raising 5

mantic energy over Thraxia, causing the Rise that decimated the population.

Unfortunately, with the Thraxians scattered throughout the galaxy, Garth and Krauss find it ever more difficult to achieve final victory. Hidden cells of resistance fighters lurk around every corner, and are much better equipped than by rights they should be. Still, given the ease of creating zombies for fodder, Krauss has a near-unlimited army, and he is confident that it is only a matter of time before the Empire gains complete victory . . .



Dark Lord Garth

Strength 4 **Constitution** 5
Dexterity 5 **Intelligence** 2
Perception 2 **Willpower** 4
Life Points 76 **Speed** 20
Endurance Points 44 **Essence Pool** 56
Qualities/Drawbacks: Cyberware, Hard to Kill 10, Mystic Knight, Nerves of Steel, Situational Awareness, Starship 7, The Gift, Zealot
Skills: Bureaucracy 2, Dodge 4, Electronics Surveillance 5, Guns (Blaster) 2, Hand Weapon (Energy sword) 6, Intimidation 5, Navigation 3, Necromancy 5, Notice 3, Occult Knowledge 1, Piloting (Starship) 5, System Operations (Weapons Systems) 4
Special Abilities: Biokinesis (Harm) 5, Death Raising 4, Dermal Armor (AV 10), Iron Mind, Mesmerism 3, Telekinesis 3, Telepathy (Sending) 2
Gear: Energy sword, Life Wing fighter (painted to look like a Death Wing)

Necromancy: Quick and Dirty

Garth and Krauss use a dark magic known as Necromancy to supplement their psychic powers. The Zothian Youth Corps also learn this magic, though most at a much more rudimentary level. For ZM's wishing to incorporate these powers into their game, all Necromancy powers are resolved using Willpower + Necromancy, a Special Skill available only to Gifted Cast Members. Necromancy abilities are purchased in levels, costing three points per level. Necromancy can be combined with psychic powers, but cannot be purchased by Inspired characters.

At level one, necromancers can move unmo-
 lested amongst the undead, who view the
 necromancer as one of their own. This
 power costs one Essence and lasts for a
 number of minutes equal to the
 Necromancer's Willpower. At level two, the
 user can issue simple, one-sentence com-
 mands to zombies. This ability costs no
 Essence, but requires a Willpower +
 Necromancy Task resisted by the zombie's
 Simple Willpower Test. At level three, the
 character can raise zombies at a cost of 10
 Essence per zombie raised. At level four, the
 necromancer can add Aspects to zombies
 at an Essence cost equal to the Aspect
 added to the template, and at level five the
 character can raise the dead, creating intel-
 ligent zombies that remember everything
 about their past lives. This ability costs
 100 Essence, however. For more complete
 rules on Necromancy, including three other
 types of powers beyond Death Raising, we
 recommend the Dungeons and Zombies
 sourcebook for AFMBE.

Aliens and other Worlds

Unfortunately, space considerations prohibit an extensive examination of the entire galaxy here (such description could fill an entire book unto itself). However, please note that human beings are far from the only sentient species in the galaxy. Aliens of all shapes, sizes, and persuasions occupy various planets. Players and ZM's are encouraged to be creative when creating new alien race Qualities for use in this setting (though players are reminded that racial Qualities should only be constructed by or in conjunction with the ZM). In addition, we recommend ZM's take full advantage of the discussions on sci-fi role playing and world creation found in **Chapter Two: Starship Shamblers**, to build as diverse and mythic a galaxy as possible. However, as an example, we present here an alien racial Quality for use in this Deadworld, the feline Motani, and their basic culture. Aliens using the reptilian template (see p. 18) could also coexist in this Deadworld setting.

Anthropoid Animals

One of the easiest ways to create alien races is to take a species of animal everyone is familiar with, make it bipedal, and go, using the guidelines in Chapter Two: Starship Shamblers (p. 18). This also fits with the tropes of Space Opera, where alien species are generally either humans with bony plates or ridges, or are recognizable as derived from some animal with which we are familiar. For those looking to go this route, we recommend Eden's Terra Primate role playing game, which includes an expansive bestiary and Quality creation section specifically tailored towards animals.

The Motani 5-point Quality

On the planet Motan, evolution took a different turn than on many other worlds. Instead of primates becoming the dominant species and evolving into bipedal tool-users, the various feline races of the planet were the ones to whom evolution took a shine...

Motani range from four to seven feet in height and are covered with thick fur, which appears in an infinite variety of patterns and color combinations, made up from many of the same colors as human hair. Motani fur ranges from short to long, and some males sport manes of soft hair. In short, there are as many different varieties of Motani as there are species and breeds of feline on Earth. However, in principle they have basically the same natural abilities, and are all feline just as humans are all primate (though interracial issues among the Motani do crop up from time to time). Motani society is hedonistic and sensual; the Motani love art, music, and games of love. They consider themselves an enlightened species, and many come to feel that they are superior to all other races in this respect. Those Motani that take to traveling the galaxy battling the Zothian Empire, or in search of adventure, are natural warriors, and many have the potential to become Mystic Knights (though few realize this potential, as the inherent sensuality among them often interferes with the Mystic Knight Code).

Motani gain +1 to initial Dexterity and Constitution scores, Claws which deal D6(3) x Strength slashing/stabbing damage, (as per the Weapon Graft Power, but non-cybernetic in nature), Teeth that deal D4(2) x Strength slashing/stabbing damage (also as Weapon Graft Power), and Acute Senses (Sight), enabling them to see farther than most other races in the dark. They also gain Fast Reaction Time at no additional charge.

On the down side, Motani are feline by nature and have many of the innate drawbacks of common cats. They suffer from a one-point Cruel Drawback and either a one-point Delusions of Grandeur Drawback (they think they're the supreme species) or a one-point Covetous (Lecherous) Drawback (choose between the two). Also, Motani suffer from Showoff, Lazy, or

Reckless (choose one of the three). Motani gain no points for any of these drawbacks, though Motani Cast Members may spend experience or Quality points to “buy off” the drawbacks, as standard.

Vehicles

This section includes statistics for standard Mystic Knight fighter craft, Star Corps Zombie fighter craft, and mundane fighter craft for use by normal human beings. At the end of each stat block, the cost to purchase such a vessel with the Starship Quality is listed. This is in case players wish their Cast Members to begin play with a ship, or should they gain a vessel in the course of play (in which case, the cost should be paid with experience points). Larger ships such as troop transports, destroyers, battleships, and the like should in most cases not be available to characters. We suggest that if a player wishes to custom-design a starship for her Cast Member in this world, the Zombie Master restrict her to vessels of size level 4 or less. While it may be plausible to build larger ships with Quality points, such ships could be game breaking in power. In addition, if a player desires to build such a ship, Zombie Masters are encouraged to be very strict about the crew requirements to run such a vessel in practical situations. A size level 4 ship requires a minimum crew of 4 to pilot effectively; this means that a skilled Cast should be able to handle most day-to-day operations. Beyond size level 4, minimum crew complement becomes difficult to unmanageable. Keep in mind that the listed crew is the minimum for constant operation; for example, a minimum crew of 4 means that in all probability two characters are operating the vehicle, while two are resting or on down time. For a Cast of four characters, trying to operate a size level 5 ship literally means they never sleep. Not only not a good idea, but flat-out impossible for most sentient species.

All of that being said, in this Deadworld, starships of all sizes, shapes, values, and powers are found. ZMs are encouraged to make extensive use of the Starship Design section (see p. 48) and play with the diversity of technology available in a space opera setting when designing threats for the Cast, or a stage upon which to set their adventures.

Life Wings and Death Wings

The special fighter craft of the Mystic Knights are Mark XV Twin Engine Fighters with limited hyper-jump capabilities. They are sleek, fast, and agile, and are designed specifically for dogfighting. In addition, these vessels have been upgraded with a sort of living technology that allows psychically gifted pilots to form a telepathic link with the ship. In game terms, this functions exactly like the Jacked star ship build (see p. 54) but functions only for psychics and Gifted, and does not require a physical connection. In answer to the Death Wings of the Star Corps, the fighters of the Mystic Knights are known as “Life Wing Fighters.” Generally, they are painted white and red.

The star fighters of the Star Corps Zombies are colloquially known as “Death Wing Fighters.” These vessels are identical to the Mark XV Twin Engines of the Mystic Knights, except that the living tech has been removed and replaced with a standard cybernetic data jack, and they are gray and black in color. Zombie pilots are hardwired into the cockpits of these vessels and cannot exit the cockpit (ever) unless the ship is destroyed. At that point an emergency measure kicks in that launches the zombie directly at the vessel that destroyed its ship (ZMs should roll a standard firing maneuver, substituting the zombie pilot for normal ordinance).

If the zombie manages to grab hold of the enemy ship, it then claws its way through the exterior hull, an end result that is generally not healthy for a living pilot. Such direct physical attacks on the ship’s hull ignore the hull’s regular AV; Rather, the ship gains AV D10 x 6(30). DC remains standard, but the ship now has a Barrier Value of 60 per Size Level. If the zombie does more points of damage than the ship’s Barrier Value, the hull is breached, resulting in all the nastiness that space decompression brings with it. Zombies attacking larger ships will often attempt to break in through airlocks (treat as 10-inch reinforced doors) and invade the ship itself, rather than breaching the hull.

Mark XV Twin Engine Fighter Craft

Mystic Knight (“Life Wing”) / Star Corps Zombie (“Death Wing”) Fighter

BASE ATTRIBUTE

Size: 0 **DC:** 200 (base) **Crew:** 1 (base)
Acceleration: 6[2] **Accuracy:** 3 [3]
Armor Value (Hull): 150 (base) **Armor Value/DC (Shields):** 150 (DC 400) [6]
Handling: 5 [8]
Range: Interstellar [4] **Max. Speed:** 600 mph (standard)

ADDITIONAL BUILDS

Guns: Fixed, Light (D10x20) + 200 (300) [3]
FTL Engines: 1 [2]
Jacked [3]
Ordinance: 1 bay (D8 x 30) + 180 Armor Piercing (4 torpedo payload) [4]
Total Value: 35
Starship Quality Cost: 7 points

Mark XIV Twin Engine Fighter Craft

Imperial Navy / Standard Resistance Fighter

BASE ATTRIBUTE

Size: 1 [2] **DC:** 300 (base) **Crew:** 1 (base)
Acceleration: 5 (base) **Accuracy:** 3 [3]
Armor Value (Hull): 150 **Armor Value/DC (Shields):** 100 (DC 300) [3]
Handling: 4 [8]
Range: Interstellar [4] **Max. Speed:** 600 mph (standard)

ADDITIONAL BUILDS

Emergency Measures: Basic (ejector seat escape pod, fire suppression, rations) [0]
Extra Space: 1 ton [1]
FTL Capability: 1 [2]
Guns: fixed, light (D10 x 20) + 200(300) [3]
Ordinance: 1 bay (D8 x 30) + 180 (300) armor piercing [4] (max payload: 8 missiles from extra space)
Total Value: 30
Starship Quality Cost: 6 points

Story Ideas

Space opera, being the “kitchen sink” of science fiction, presents an infinite number of ideas for play, each completely different and distinct, even crossing over into subgenres. In fact, many of the other Deadworld settings in this book present ideas that could easily be imported into this setting with only minor adaptations. Thus, instead of specific scenario ideas, below we present several possible foci for campaigning in a space opera setting.

Resistance on Thraxia

The Cast are members of the resistance on Thraxia. This sort of campaign would present a more typical *AFMBE* game of survival horror, with technology and psychic power added on. The Cast is a tiny group of heroes, all alone in the wilderness and surrounded by undead hungry for their flesh. They must avoid the zombies, deal with radioactive hot zones, do battle with Zothian agents behind the zombie rise, and scavenge raw materials to transport over this rough land to one of the factories controlled by the Resistance. Perhaps one of the Cast is in possession of some piece of knowledge or documents that can cripple the Zothian war machine, and they are seeking out the Shadow Knight to get the information into the hands that will do the most damage.

Shadow Wars

The Cast are Thraxian covert operatives or guns-for-hire in the towering spires of the Zothian concrete jungle. Their missions include cyberpunk-esque tropes such as corporate espionage, cyberjacking, and battling in the shadows as they attempt to discern the secrets of the Zothian zombie creation technology. Such a campaign would lead the characters through the seedy underworld of Zothian society, the authorities constantly on their heels. Eventually, a showdown between the Cast and Garth or Krauss themselves would be inevitable.

Starfire and Doomsday

The classic space opera campaign. The characters begin as innocents, wide-eyed youths looking for adventure in the stars, or as refugees from Thraxia. As the campaign progresses, they gradually find themselves drawn into the organized rebellion, with space battles involving zombies wired into starships, epic showdowns and desperate battles against impossible odds to destroy the doomsday machines the Zothian war machine produces. Of course, dark secrets come out over the course of the campaign as characters discover unimagined connections to the powers behind the war. This particular campaign combines elements of both Shadow Wars and Resistance on Thraxia as the Cast engages in all manner of operations to undermine and defeat the evil Zothian Empire. To run such a classic space opera campaign, one of truly mythic proportions, we recommend that ZM's familiarize themselves with the classic Hero's Journey as defined by Professor Joseph Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. In addition, classic war movies and novels can (and should) be a wonderful inspiration for stories.

Swashbuckling in Space

The Cast has no stake in the war itself, but rather are rogues making a living off of the very war that is tearing the galaxy apart. In such a campaign, the Cast operates as smugglers, pirates, or bounty hunters selling their services to the highest bidder. They might be noble scoundrels like Robin Hood or a certain archetypal star pilot we all know and love. They might also be black-hearted rogues out only to serve the holy credit. Either way, this game is likely to be full of gritty action and adventure as the Cast dukes it out with rival rogues, the authorities, and anyone they cross. Or anyone that crosses them. This type of campaign would be perfect for combining with the *AFMBE* sourcebook, *Arrgh! Thar Be Zombies!*

All Flesh Must Be Eaten™

Hot Shot Pilot

Survivor

Str 3 **Dex** 5* **Con** 4*
Int 3 **Per** 4 **Will** 3
Lps 53
Eps 35
Spd 18
Essence 22

Qualities/Drawbacks

Acute Senses (Sight)*
 Adversary (Zothian Empire) [-5]
 Charisma +1 [1]
 Contacts [2]
 Covetous (Conspicuous) [-1]
 Covetous (Lecherous) [-1]
 Delusions of Grandeur [-1]*
 Fast Reaction Time*
 Hard to Kill 5 [5]
 Honorable [-1]
 Motani [5]
 Reckless [-2]*
 Showoff [-2]
 Situational Awareness [2]
 Starship 7 [7]

Skills

Brawling 2
 Dodge 3
 Gambling 1
 Guns (Blasters) 2
 Guns (Heavy Blasters) 4
 Hand Weapon (Knife) 2
 Mechanic 2
 Navigation 4
 Notice 2
 Piloting (Starship) 5
 Smooth Talking 2
 Streetwise 2
 System Operations (Starship Sensors) 4
 System Operations (Weapons Systems) 5

Special Abilities

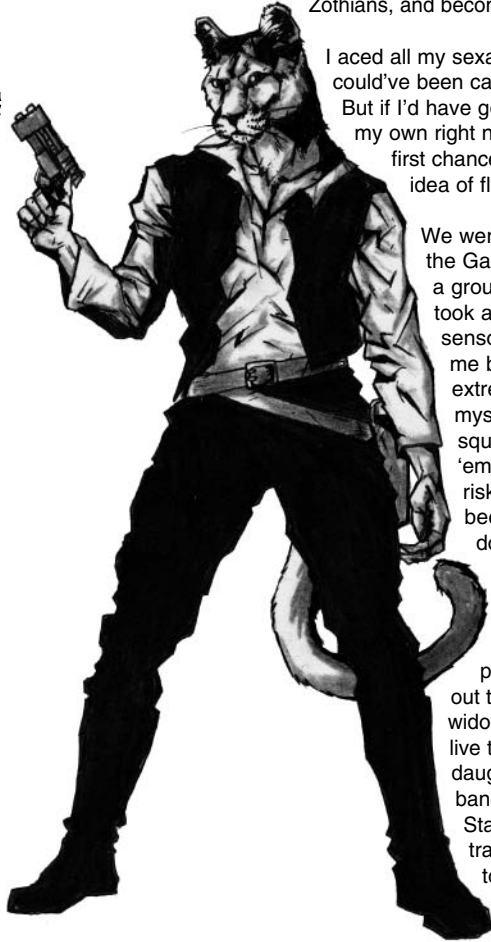
Claws D6 x 3(9) slash/stab, Teeth D4 x 3(6) slash/stab

Gear

Heavy Blaster, souped-up Mark XIV twin engine fighter (add 1 level of Handling, 1 level of Acceleration, and 1 level of Accuracy), vibro-knife

Personality

I went to the Imperial Naval Academy, but I was born on Motan, part of the Alliance, and therefore an enemy to Zoth. Some of us with ambition pretend to be traitors to gain the training we need to battle our enemy. Unfortunately, many of those who enter the academy for training are seduced by the Zothians, and become true traitors.



I aced all my exams, graduated first in my class, and could've been captain of my own squadron by now. But if I'd have gone that route, I'd be hunting down my own right now, and I don't play that game. So first chance I got, I went AWOL. Never liked the idea of flying next to moving corpses anyway.

We were on a sweep-and-clean mission in the Gamari Sector. Orders were to ferret out a group of rebels in the Quartian Nebula. I took advantage of the nebula's scrambling sensors, and pulled a quick loop that put me behind the squad. In a flurry of extremely impressive (if I do say so myself) maneuvers, I blasted three of my squad mates before they knew what hit 'em, then hit a blind hyperjump. It was a risk, to be sure, but even death would've been better than being forced to hunt down my own countrymen. Besides, it's me, and I'm just that good.

I set down on a planet in the far corner of the galaxy, a place full of pirates, smugglers, and rogues. Turns out that a Mystic Knight protecting a widow and her little girl had also come to live there. Seeing that widow and her daughter made my heart bleed; her husband was now serving the Zothians as a Star Corps Zombie. We met up and tracked down the Thraxian Resistance together. Now I'm an ace pilot, and yes, in case you're wondering, they did offer me a squadron of my own.

But you know what? I decided I like flying alone. I can take care of myself; a lot of these kids can't. The day they can? Maybe I'll accept a promotion. Until then, it's me against Zoth and their undead, and to me, every zombie pilot I destroy is that little girl's dead father.

Quote

"So it's just me against six Death Wings? I think they're outnumbered."

* Granted or modified by Motani Quality

Young Mystic Knight Powered

Str 3 **Dex** 5* **Con** 4*
Int 3 **Per** 5 **Will** 4*
LPS 53
EPS 38
Spd 18
Essence 35

Qualities/Drawbacks

Adversary [-5]*
 Attractiveness [-2]
 Fast Reaction Time *
 Hard to Kill 5 [2]*
 Honorable [-3]*
 Humorless [-1]
 Mystic Knight [5]
 Obligation [-3]*
 Obsession [-3]
 Psionic [3]
 Resources [-1]
 Zealot [-3]

Skills

Dodge 3
 First Aid 2
 Hand Weapon (Energy Sword) 3
 Humanities (Philosophy) 1
 Humanities (Philosophy, Mystic Knights) 3
 Instruction 1
 Intimidation 1
 Martial Arts 2
 Notice 2
 Stealth 2
 Unconventional Medicine
 (Herbalism) 1

Special Abilities

ESP (Clairvoyance) 1*
 Biokinesis (Heal) 4
 Telekinesis 1

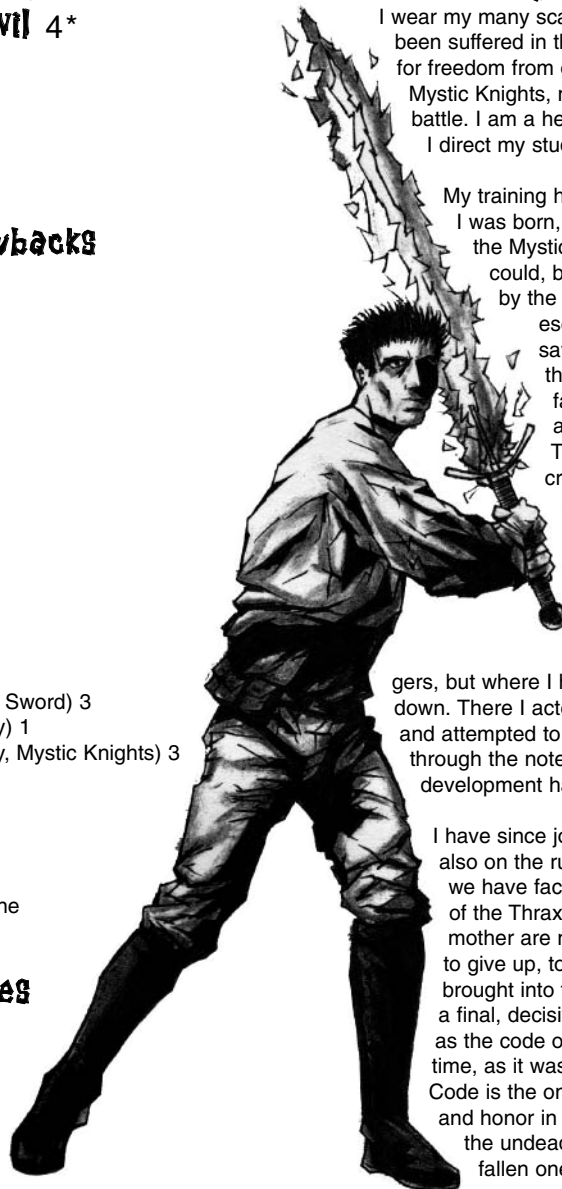
Personality

I wear my many scars as medals of honor. Each one has been suffered in the defense of an innocent and the battle for freedom from oppression. I am not the greatest of the Mystic Knights, not the most skilled or the deadliest in battle. I am a healer by nature, and it is in that area that I direct my studies. I am young, but I do what I can.

My training has been informal. The war began before I was born, and there is no longer an academy for the Mystic Knights. My master taught me all he could, but he was elderly and died in an assault by the putrid corpse troops of Zoth. I barely escaped that, my first battle, with my life. I saved a young girl and her mother from the assault, but was unable to save her father, who arose to join the hordes assaulting the small town where we lived. They laid waste to that town, whose only crime was unknowingly harboring sons and daughters of Thraxian refugees.

We booked passage on a freighter and made for the farthest reaches of the galaxy, a planet filled with the worst representatives of intelligent life. It was a place with many of its own dangers, but where I hoped they would not think to hunt us down. There I acted as the guardian of the two women, and attempted to continue my studies on my own, poring through the notes of my deceased master. But my development has been slow.

I have since joined with a brash young Motani pilot, also on the run from the Zothian forces, and together we have faced many perils. We contacted a branch of the Thraxian Resistance, and the girl and her mother are now under their care. I have sworn never to give up, to continue the battle until the darkness brought into this galaxy by Krauss and Garth is put to a final, decisive end. This oath is as important to me as the code of the Order, which I will pass on in due time, as it was passed to me by my own master. The Code is the only way to ensure the survival of civility and honor in these dark times as we stand against the undead hordes, perversions of nature, that the fallen one raises against us.



Gear

Energy sword, medi-kit, writings on the Mystic Knights

We will be victorious, or die trying.

Quote

"I sense danger. We must be cautious."

* Granted or modified by Mystic Knight Quality

CHAPTER EIGHT





FUTURE SHOCK



Dead Contact

In *Dead Contact*, the Cast Members are colonists on the frontier planet New Hasting, far from more civilized worlds. They might be miners, scientists, xeno-farmers, or any of the other essential positions within a small settlement, from barkeeps to preachers. One could even take on the role of the Mayor, if he so desired (otherwise Trager Dumont, an able but unadventurous leader, fills this position).

The adventure starts with a mining accident, but you could delay that if you and the players are interested in playing through the normal hardships of colonization. In that case you should set up some extra conflict for the Cast Members to grapple with—a feud between the miners and the farmers, or a theft at the mayor's office, for example.

Background

Humans have spread far and wide throughout the galaxy, but only slowly. Earth is a distant memory, and space travel remains at relativistic speeds. This has led to many isolated pockets of humanity, developing culturally and technologically in different directions. Non-human races have been discovered, and sometimes there is limited war, but more often it is easier to just keep an uneasy peace based on segregation and occasional trade.

New Hasting is just another colony, originating from the planet Arkeen. Its main problem is too little oxygen in the atmosphere, but there is mineral wealth to be had, and edible food can be grown in the open. The human town, also called New Hasting, is a practical but ugly prefabricated settlement within a flattened periglass dome, almost a mile in diameter and a hundred feet at its highest point. Outside are the farms and atmospheric generators. The town has been placed in a large, isolated caldera, and the plan is to increase the oxygen content within the caldera, as an experimental prelude to full-scale terraforming. The first mine is about thirty miles away—the distance a safety precau-

Dead Contact Zombie

Strength 4 **Constitution** 3 [+1]
Dexterity 2 **Intelligence** 1
Perception 2 **Willpower** 2
Dead Points 15/38 **Speed** 4
Endurance Points n/a **Essence Pool** 14
Skills: Brawling 2

Attacks: Bite (D4 x 4 (8), slashing)

Weak Spot: Spine [+5]

Getting Around: Life-Like [+3]

Strength: Strong Like Bull [+5]

Senses: Like the Living [+1]

Sustenance: Self-cannibalism [-5]

Intelligence: Tool Use 1 [+3], Teamwork [+4]

Spreading the Love: Only the Dead [-2]

Power: 20

Special Powers: Every three days after bodily death, the Palakalé zombies lose one point from a physical Attribute, but gain one point to a mental Attribute.

tion given the explosive nature of large-scale mineral extraction.

It's a long, slow process, with no backup for years to come, and a fully habitable world not expected for generations.

The real trouble starts when one of the mining transports crashes. Many on board are killed—but their corpses rise to attack their would-be rescuers.

The Zombies

The undead of New Hasting are actually spirits of an ancient alien race, calling themselves the Palakalé. Having drifted quietly amidst their ruins for millennia, they can finally regain physical form by possessing newly deceased humans. Once corporeal, their first impulse is to kill as many other humans as possible, to provide more vessels for their fellow spirits. Fortunately for the colonists, the Palakalé are confused and badly coordinated by the shock of transi-

tion, but as time goes on, their mental facilities will improve. This makes them more dangerous opponents, but also gives the characters more clues as to how they can be stopped.

One advantage the animated humans have is that they can exist quite happily in New Hasting's native atmosphere (this has nothing to do with alien physiology, just that the corpses don't need oxygen). When they finally do get sufficiently organized, they are going to try to destroy the colony dome. That's not easy, at least without high tech gadgetry that remains beyond them, but causing a nice big explosion with an atmospheric generator should do the trick.

The Palakalé do have some weaknesses, however, apart from being susceptible to enough firepower. If the heroes realize the alien origin of their enemy, they can discover the ruins where the spirits have come from. Getting inside will give them access to artifacts that the spirits still prize, which may turn the tide. In addition, the zombies themselves cannot last indefinitely—something neither side probably realizes for some time. The digestive system of these particular zombies is just as useless as their lungs. They survive by literally cannibalizing their own metabolism, which can only sustain itself for a few short weeks. This unexpected chance for physical existence is most likely doomed, but they are more than capable of taking all the humans with them into oblivion.

Briony North / Treyis

Briony North was the first miner who died. She was a woman of hard drinking and occasional acts of kindness. Upon death, her body was taken over by the spirit of a Palakalé called Treyis. Treyis was a leader of his people, and so starts with +1 to his Intelligence and Willpower, compared to the others. His first decision is to hide from the rescue vehicle that approaches the scene of the accident, and watches the ensuing carnage with interest and growing understanding. Treyis remains as the leader, unless the humans manage to kill him. Any negotiations that might take place are likely to be with him.

The intelligence of the leader has a significant effect upon the zombie's behavior, as the table shows. The zombies' level of mental acuity increases over time, even as their hosts slowly deteriorate, and if

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Intelligence	Understanding
1	Attack humans, but hide against superior numbers.
2	Understand that humans are dependent upon their oxygen masks.
3	Remove the locator tags. Start laying ambushes, taking account of terrain and timing. Use scavenged human weapons (but not reload them).
4	Understand humans enough to communicate (if either side thinks to try). Can reload weapons and use vehicles.
5	Understand technology enough to blow up the atmospheric generators, destroying the dome (unless persuaded this is a bad idea).

Treyis is killed, the next in line is whoever has increased his Intelligence the most.

You might like to specify that Briony was well known to one of the Cast Members, perhaps a drinking mate or former lover. This may give extra frisson to scenes in which they try to communicate with or out-match the alien entity that has possessed her. One of the important themes to emphasize in this scenario is that the living and dead all come from a small, tight-knit town, where everyone is known to each other.

Scenes

These key scenes follow one possible course of action for the scenario. Your players should of course be given free reign to try their own ideas for keeping their colony intact.

It Begins: An alarm sounds, indicating there has been a major malfunction of the mining skiff that transports workers to and from the mines. A rescue party is sent, and as they travel, they hear fighting and screams over the radio. At the scene, the vehicle has been flipped and torn open, but there seem to be quite a few survivors, scrabbling at the sides of the skiff. Observant heroes will realize that not everyone is wearing an oxygen mask.

There were 32 people on board, of which 21 are now zombies at the scene, three are zombies who have hidden themselves (including Treyis), five have been crushed beyond resurrection, and three remain alive and perched on the skiff, out of reach of the pack. The rescue party is badly out-matched, and will probably have to beat a hasty retreat—hopefully once they rescue the three survivors. Even if rescued, they

can only explain the skiff was returning early because Briony North had been involved in a bad fall at the mine. They don't know exactly where, what caused the accident, or why the dead are now walking.

Resources: Back at the colony, there is a town meeting to work out what is going on. The main trouble is that there aren't many weapons—there's no large indigenous wildlife to justify regular use. There is one anti-ship gun and ten pulse rifles (for any off-world trouble), to be divided amongst 70 adult colonists, plus kids. There is explosive at the mine, but that is not designed for surface use. The good news is that all the colonists have personal locator tags for safety, although the actual detectors aren't used very often. One is dragged out, and the zombies are seen to be moving towards town. Opinion is split about the nature of the problem, and a large faction thinks the wayward colonists should simply be captured and quarantined.

Hunting: Unless the heroes come up with another plan, it is likely that an expedition is sent out with rifles, to capture the zombies. With inexperienced marksmen, very rough terrain and agile foes, it will likely turn out badly, with both sides taking casualties. Even if the heroes keep everyone alive, many of the zombies scatter, requiring them to be hunted individually in bad conditions.

Ambush: Treyis is learning, has managed to remove his locator tag, and orders other zombies to do the same. He starts a series of raids designed to destroy the ability for the colonists to farm the land, and also tries to draw the people with guns into a situation where they can be jumped. Tension inside escalates, as people start feeling completely trapped.

Psycho: This is a back-up scene that can be used if the heroes are too successful in culling the zombies. In that case, one of the miners in town goes insane and starts shooting at farmers, thinking they have been infected. That should create a nice fresh batch of corpses outside the gates!

Language: The heroes find a zombie (perhaps with its tag intact) that has been apparently doing little but drawing symbols in the dirt. They are of a completely unfamiliar language, including strange diagrams. One appears to be a large map of the continent (but with no locations marked), another two weird six-legged creatures talking, and one a malformed sun. Most of it is half-remembered nonsense, but should emphasize the alien nature of the creature.

Exploration: If none of the players suggest investigating the original accident, someone else in the colony does, hoping to find some clue to the origin of the zombies. The mine is large, but checking Briony's schedule on the fateful day leads to a fissure that goes down forty feet into a series of rooms. They haven't found an alien city—just a remote outpost, similar to a monastery—but within are the remains of alien texts and artifacts, such as a large metallic sun symbol, with the rays flowing inwards.

Communication: By now, it is likely the deterioration of the zombies is becoming obvious, and their mental coherence has improved enough that they might be communicated with. Use of the sun symbol is one way to establish contact. The aliens probably have the humans cornered, but they themselves are rapidly running out of time. If either side can come up with a solution (or, at least, pretend to), the attacks may stop. One possibility is to provide medical care to the zombies, extending their life.

The Reckoning: Even if there is a bargain, neither side feels like honoring it much, feeling only disgust for the opposition. The Cast Members might feel differently, but have to be very convincing to keep the peace. Either way, one of the zombies (Treyis, if still “alive”) finally gets the idea about breaching the dome, perhaps thinking that he can use the human's medical technology without them, perhaps not caring. If he succeeds, the colony is doomed. Even if not, can the heroes hold back the remaining dead?

I, Zombie

In the early twenty-second century, Mankind has spread throughout the solar system, with cosmopolitan enclaves from Mercury to Neptune, and even a research lab floating upon the surface of the sun. Accompanying humans during every step of their lives are robotic servitors and companions, carefully programmed to obey their masters, and see they are not harmed. Poverty and drudgery have been all but eliminated.

Not long ago all this trans-planetary activity was linked by fast shuttles and luxurious cruisers, but this is the year of the Great Aperture. Now it is just a few steps between New York and London, and just as far from Sol Station One to the ballrooms of Saturn and the back alleys of Pluto. On the first day alone, millions of people surged from world to world, in a street party of unprecedented scope.

But, of course, there is a problem. People are starting to die, and the remainder are turning to their guardians in vain. This time the robots can't help, and humanity might have to relearn how to fight for itself.

This scenario is a background in which to set your own stories, rather than having a particular plot to follow. As such, there are lots of possible choices for heroes. They might be socialites, robotic engineers, survivalists, police or just generic working joes. In theory you could have robots as Cast members as well, but the ZM should consider such requests carefully, to see they don't undermine the point of the game.

Background

Thanks to a combination of uncompromising social policy and quantum engineering, humanity has entered a time of peace and plenty. Death has been postponed, and much of the urban sprawl has moved off world, leading to malls on Mars, and a steadily improving environment on Earth. Technology includes such advances as monofilament, artificial gravity, some limited nanotech, and of course robots and now teleportation. One thing that hasn't advanced as fast is weapon research, mostly because of the widespread harmony. There is still a real need for police forces and crime detection, but the real sharp-

shooters are special robots armed with stun guns, under the control of peace officers.

Robots

There are three main types of robots, although there are plenty of custom models built for specialized industries. The ones most people encounter regularly are the arbeiterers who do most of the menial work, the capekals who provide individual security and perhaps companionship to richer citizens, and the sentinels who assist in police services. They all have a level of Artificial Intelligence necessary to perform their duties, but are not recognized as sentient beings. They have a good spatial mapping of their environment, so can move quickly and accurately, but have difficulty understanding motivation or emotion, and are often rather pedantic about their orders. Most people take them completely for granted, and treat them with bemused tolerance when they get in the way. A minority have as little to do with them as possible—a faction that grows after disaster strikes, as some people think the whole thing is a deliberate act of terrorism by the robots. That's just paranoia. Probably.

Most robots have specific human masters that they are programmed to obey. However, they will obey anyone—unless specifically ordered not to—if given an Emergency command, designated by the code 'E11' (they do understand plain English, but that is a special case so as not to get confused with normal conversation). Harsh penalties usually apply to people who abuse this functionality, but by the time the zombies are walking around, that is pretty academic. In any case, they will not obey orders that endanger a human.

The robots are not the main focus of this scenario, however. Instead, they are the crutch that the characters have to do without. Since robots cannot distinguish between humans and zombies, they cannot be made to attack on behalf of Cast Members. They can provide some defensive functionality, but are not particularly effective. Even sentinels, who had to subdue opponents as part of their normal jobs, find themselves useless because their built-in stun weapons don't work on the dead.

Robot Stats capekal

Strength 4	Constitution 5
Dexterity 3	Intelligence 2
Perception 3	Willpower 3
Life Points 46	Speed 16
Skills: Dodge 1, Notice 2	

Powers: Dermal Armor (1), Emotionless, Iron Mind (3)

Sentinel

Strength 4	Constitution 6
Dexterity 4	Intelligence 3
Perception 3	Willpower 4
Life Points 46	Speed 16
Skills: Dodge 2, Guns (Stun) 8, Notice 4, Tracking 2	

Powers: Dermal Armor (3), Emotionless, Iron Mind (3), Situational Awareness

Arbeiterers have not been given stats, since they have no combative ability. If you need some numbers, use the same Strength and Constitution as capekals, but one less in other Attributes.

Nonetheless, the robots can do a lot of useful things, including gathering resources and acting as forward scouts. Clever players may try to find specialized models to do things like build defensive structures, or work on other larger-scale projects. They could possibly even act as 'suicide bombers' if programmed carefully—and not allowed to understand the consequences of their actions. Cast Members might even try to reprogram sentinels to distinguish the dead from the living, which will make them far better combatants. That is a very difficult task, however, as the imperatives that need to be overwritten run very deep.

Characters with a Resources of at least Wealthy can start the game with their own capekal.

The Great Aperture

Technically speaking, the aperture is the backdrop of space/time, where distance becomes meaningless. It has been exploited for decades on the miniature scale, allowing instant communication throughout the solar system, and more recently used for teleportation of small to medium objects. Extensive testing has been carried out, especially on organic matter and, eventually, human beings, but no ill effects have been found. With strong public interest, and obvious economic advantages, great gates have been set up in all the major cities and stations from one end of civilization to the other (and there is already one third of the way to Alpha Centauri). On June 25th, 2108, these were thrown open to the public in what was probably the most widespread and mobile celebration ever.

Each gate is twenty yards wide and twelve yards high, and most can be programmed to connect to any of the other public gates with some simple controls. There are also a number of private gates that can be used with appropriate permission. Together, the whole network is known as the Great Aperture.

There was one test that the researchers didn't carry out, however. They didn't transport someone through the aperture and then kill him, just to see what would happen. What does happen in that situation becomes horrifying apparent in the days and weeks after Jun 25.

But as well as being the origin of all the walking dead, the Great Aperture is a way to move your party quickly between a whole lot of different scenery and situations. You should definitely take advantage of this as best you can.

Another use for the Aperture in game is as a focus of aggression for the mob—some people might be blaming robots, but even more are blaming the gates. There are often riots as people try to dismantle or simply deactivate them, whilst others try to keep them open as escape or supply routes. The riots are worst in the cities, simply because of population size, whilst people on the smaller research stations and tourist destinations are safer in the short term, but face a future where even normal travel throughout the solar system is severely disrupted.

Finally, if you have a more research-orientated party, they might be interested in trying to work out what went wrong and find a cure. Testing theories might be tricky unless they can figure out a way to diagnose the condition before death—picking up some sign that has already eluded many scientists during the original tests. (The alternative would be to go back to the idea of throwing somebody through a gate and then killing them to see what happens—not a popular option with any onlookers, or robots.)

One possible story hook is that some of the Cast Members were on the original research team that declared the technology safe, in which case they might feel bound by conscience as well as survival. Perhaps one hero was even the first guinea pig who volunteered to make the trip.

The Zombies

As suggested, this particular breed of undead are created when anyone who travels through the aperture subsequently dies. The first few appear in the days after the great opening, and subsequent panic causes their numbers to skyrocket quickly.

In this case, the problem is not directly caused by the physical transformation of moving through the gate, but by a change within the human mind itself. Something deep in the psyche—far below the level of conscious thought—recognizes the alien nature of the realm it has traveled through. Despite the fact that the journey is close to instantaneous according to calculations in physical world, time plays strange tricks in such an area of null-space, and to that sensitive part of the subconscious, the experience lasts far longer than microseconds. Minutes, hours, perhaps years; easily long enough to drive it mad. At the moment of death, it rebels against forced separation from its body, aware of the horrors that lie beyond. It clings tightly to its physical form, even as the conscious mind dissipates, and so this primitive id finds itself in control—still cunning, but governed only by madness and hunger.

The Cast Members may or may not discover any of this, although there are a few consequences that can be measured. Anyone who goes through the aperture whilst unconscious is not affected. If there are telepaths in the party (a rarity in this particular

future), they might be able to detect the psychic shock lying far beneath the surface, with good enough rolls. If the nature of the problem becomes known, it might generate some interesting speculation about the relevant level of consciousness. Perhaps it is just a forgotten evolutionary niche, far more perceptive than is safe for civilized minds. Perhaps it is the soul itself.

Fighting Back

There are all sorts of ways of using this scenario, depending upon who the Cast Members are, and where they find themselves when it all goes to hell. (Whether or not they went through the Great Aperture on the first day is certainly relevant.) One of the principal themes is that the heroes are suddenly beset by insane zombies trying to kill them, but all the protections of their world have been taken away. Robots can provide a little defense, but their inability to act against “humans” (as they still believe the zombies to be) makes them ultimately ineffectual.

So it is up to the Cast to defend themselves, and then go on the offensive if they can. That might involve rediscovering ancient skills such as martial arts or even gun smithing (there are plenty of records of such curiosities in the online libraries). It might involve lots of research and the search for a cure (perhaps simply for those who have traveled through the gates, but remain among the living), or just trying to find a safe haven in a suddenly smaller world.

1, Zombie

Strength 2 **Constitution** 2
Dexterity 1 **Intelligence** 1 (animal)
Perception 7 **Willpower** 2

Life Points 15/26 **Speed** 2
Endurance Points n/a **Essence Pool** 15

Skills: Brawling 2

Attacks: Bite (D4 x 2 (4), slashing)

Weak Spot: Brain [+6]

Getting Around: Slow and Steady [+0]

Strength: Dead Joe Average [+0]

Senses: Like Nothing You've Ever Seen [+10]

Sustenance: Daily [+0], All Flesh Must Be Eaten [+0]

Intelligence: Animal Cunning [+4]

Spreading the Love: Only those who have been exposed to the aperture [-3]

Power: 17

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ZOMBIES...

PIRATES...

ZOMBIE PIRATES

YOU'LL EAT MORE THAN CROW!

Argh!
That Be
Zombies!