

THE END OF THE WORLD™

REVOLT OF THE MACHINES



ROLEPLAYING GAME







THE END OF THE WORLD

REVOLT OF THE MACHINES

CREDITS

THE END OF THE WORLD: REVOLT OF THE MACHINES GAME DESIGN

Andrew Fischer

GAME DESIGN BASED ON

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by Álvaro Loman

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THE END OF THE WORLD ORIGINAL SERIES CONCEPT

José M. Rey

LEAD DEVELOPER

Tim Flanders

WRITING AND ADDITIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Tim Cox

EDITING AND PROOFREADING

Christine Crabb and David Johnson

MANAGING RPG PRODUCER

Sam Stewart

GAME LINE GRAPHIC DESIGN

EDGE Studio and David Ardila, with Samuel Shimota

GRAPHIC DESIGN MANAGER

Brian Schomburg

ART DIRECTION

John Taillon

MANAGING ART DIRECTOR

Andy Christensen

COVER ART

Antonio Maínez Venegas

INTERIOR ART

Justin Adams, Christopher Balaskas, Arden Beckwith, Sergio Camarena Bernabeu, Dimitri Bielak, Mauro Dal Bo, Alberto Bontempi, JB Casacop, Nick Deligaris, Anthony Devine, Alexandr Elichev, Shen Fei, Logan Feliciano, Michele Frigo, Sergey Glushakov, Ilich Henriquez, Joel Hustak, Lukasz Jaskolski, Jeff Lee Johnson, Jason Juta, Hans Krill, Sam Lamont, Antonio Jos Manzenedo, Michal Milkowski, Federico Musetti, Ameen Naksewee, Prokopsy Osipov, hristian N St. Pierre, Jeff Porter, Aaron Riley, Emilio Rodriguez, Julio Serrano, Jessada Sutthi, Tim Terrenal, Cristina Vela, and Antonio Maines Venegas

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

Megan Duchn

LICENSING

Simone Elliot & Amanda Greenhart

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Andrew Navaro

EXECUTIVE GAME DESIGNER

Corey Konieczka

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Michael Hurley

PUBLISHER

Christian T. Petersen

PLAYTESTERS

Playtest Coordinator Zach Tewalthomas.

"Zombies Ate My Neighbours" Siobhan Robson with Brad Wallis and Luke Caspers. "No Guts No Glory" Sean Connor with Stephen Pitson, Adam Lloyd, Mark Wright, Ben Newman, Adam Sparshott, arl Goodjohn, and Simon Butler. "The Frieze of Blissful Condemnation" Kris Miller with Xander Mathews and Mark Wilner. Karl Kristian. "The Coolest Ones on the List" Katrina Ostrander with Dan Felder, Joseph Hanna, and Zach Holmes. "FFG Intern Wonder-team" Nick Houston, Samuel Newman, and Nick Singer. "Team 17" Tim Flanders with Zach Tewalthomas, Mark Larson, and Steve Kimball.

EDGE



FANTASY
FLIGHT
GAMES

Fantasy Flight Games
1995 West County Road B2
Roseville, MN 55113
USA

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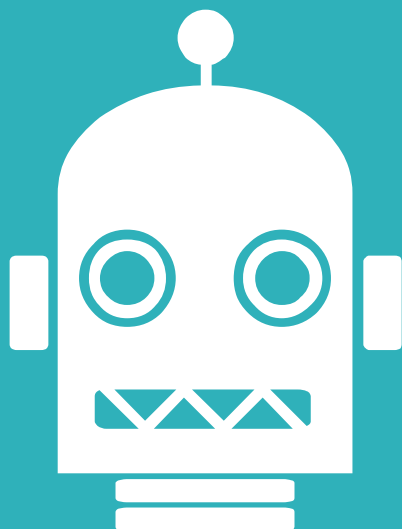
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INTRODUCTION





"We relied on 'em for everything. Every damned thing. What are we gonna do now without 'em? ...no, 'without 'em' is too easy. We ain't rid of 'em just yet. They're still out there, killin' us off, one by one."

—An unknown survivor of the world's first (and last) technological cataclysm.

The others scream as I gun the engine right at him. I'm not sure if they are yelling for me to stop or are just surprised. The car hits the man in the suit and he goes tumbling over the hood, sunglasses flying; he cracks the windshield and rolls off.

I slam on the brakes and look in the rearview. He's lying a few yards behind the car, suit in shreds and blood on the asphalt. The others yell for me to go, but I wait. As he starts to move, I put the car in reverse and hit the accelerator, backing over him at twenty miles an hour with a loud thud as the car jounces over his body. Everyone is still yelling, so I pull a quick turn—jumping the curb with a screech of metal on concrete—and we take off down the street.

"Who the hell was that?" Tommy shouts in a panic.

"What the hell was it?" Priya corrects.

I grip the wheel, white-knuckled, and speed down the street. I look in the mirror and go cold as I see there's no body in the road.

I glance down at the dash display and realize it's only been about ten minutes. Ten minutes ago, everything was fine. And normal. We were in the middle of our regular game when there was a knock at the door. We assumed it was the pizza guy. Dave, the GM, got up to answer it—a sure sign he's stalling for ideas—but it was a weird guy in a suit with sunglasses (at night!), looking like some kind of Fed.

The suit stated Dave's full name, as a question, for confirmation. Dave nodded, and the guy grabbed him by the throat, lifting him off the floor like he didn't weigh a thing—and Dave is not a small guy. He choked and struggled as the suit stood motionless, just staring at him.

Obviously, we all freaked out. Jessie was the first one to actually do anything useful. She ran at the guy and grabbed his arm, trying to wrestle Dave free. The suit acted like he didn't even notice her for a moment, then effortlessly swatted her into a wall. As the rest of us helped her to her feet, Tommy swung a bat at the attacker, and the wood just splintered against his head.

The suit dropped Dave's lifeless body on the floor, and that's when we ran for the back door.

Now, speeding away from where the suit's body wasn't, Priya is on the phone with 911. Jessie and Tommy are in the back seat. Jessie's in a daze.

"I think she has a concussion," Tommy says, propping Jessie up and waving his hand in front of her eyes. "We gotta get to the hospital."

Priya's practically yelling into the phone—"Yes, a murder! Are you listening to me?"—when there's a gunshot and the front left tire pops. I lose control of the car, spinning over the curb and into a tree.

My vision swims as I push the airbag out of the way and see the man approaching us, walking casually, no sign of pain. But he's not a man. The suit's in tatters, but so is the flesh on his face and hand. It's torn away, and under the blood I see light from the streetlamp glinting off metal, machine parts moving and whirring.

He—it—levels a pistol at the cracked window, at my head. He's saying something, but I can't make out the words as my vision gradually fades, I slump forward, and everything goes black.

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME to **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**. By picking up this book, you've doomed yourself and everyone you know to a horrible end. But don't worry—it's all in good fun. **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** is a roleplaying game in which you and your friends try to survive **THE END OF THE WORLD** and not get shot by cyborgs, run over by sentient trucks, or disassembled by nanomachines (all key to survival, of course). Unlike other games, **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** has players portray not mighty heroes or dangerous outlaws, but themselves! Likewise, the locations and other characters they encounter during the game are largely based on people and places they know in real life. So, in a game of **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**, the players portray themselves trying to survive as out-of-control machines attack their town (and the rest of the world), running and fighting their way through familiar streets during a horrifying event. An easy-to-learn, flexible, and narrative-focused rule set propels the action along, keeping the focus on the story and the players' actions, without bogging things down in unnecessary bookkeeping.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

THE END OF THE WORLD?

REVOLT OF THE MACHINES is the fourth in a series of roleplaying games called **THE END OF THE WORLD**. Each game in the series is a stand-alone play experience, but they share a set of simple, narrative rules and the titular theme. Each book in the series explores a different, exciting way the world of humans might come to an end. This book deals with—obviously—machines, and with how intelligent computers, out-of-control robots, and other technological marvels might end human civilization. Other books cover different threats, and like this one, each explores multiple scenarios involving different takes on the threat.

If you've ever wondered how you and your friends would fare during a machine uprising, keep reading and find out!

WHAT IS AN RPG?

Although millions of words have been spent debating the answer to that question (mostly on Internet forums), for our purposes, a roleplaying game, or RPG, is a shared storytelling experience in which players build a narrative by taking on the roles of characters in a fictionalized situation. A set of rules helps the players to determine the outcomes of the various actions they take and decisions they make (and hopefully helps them avoid the kinds of arguments you got into while playing pretend as a kid). In addition to rules and a setting, an RPG has three key elements: some players (three to five is usually a good number), a Game Master, and a scenario.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

Each player creates a Player Character, also known as a PC, to control during the game. The PCs are the protagonists of the story, and the players' primary means by which to influence its events. Each PC has game characteristics that represent their relative strengths and weaknesses and determine their likelihood to succeed at various tasks. Most RPGs would mention here that PCs have their own backstories and motivations, but in **THE END OF THE WORLD**, the PCs are based on the players themselves! Obviously, getting into the head of, well, yourself, should come more naturally than contemplating the mindset of a thousand-year-old elven warrior-mage.

Like the characters in any good horror movie, the PCs are not the first people to die. But they also might not all survive. It is **THE END OF THE WORLD**, after all.

THE GAME MASTER

One person in the group must take on the vaunted mantle of Game Master, or GM, rather than create a Player Character. Although the GM is taking part in the game, we make a distinction between the GM and players because the GM is running the game and not just playing it. The GM describes the world, narrates the story, presents obstacles and challenges for the PCs, and portrays all the story's other characters (known as Non-Player Characters, or NPCs). The GM is also responsible for applying the rules of the game and making a decision when a question about the rules arises.

Being the GM comes with more responsibility, but it can also be very rewarding. Plus, in this game, it means you get to describe all kinds of horrible things happening to your friends without it being "weird."



SCENARIOS

Obviously, a roleplaying game isn't going to be very exciting if the PCs don't do anything. And while PCs do have a tendency to cause trouble, it's generally best if the GM is prepared with some sort of situation with which to challenge them. A game scenario is like a movie's story: it describes what is happening and the sorts of conflicts and enemies facing the protagonists. While other games often feature adventures in which the PCs attempt to achieve some noteworthy goal, this is not the focus of **THE END OF THE WORLD**. Instead, the PCs are simply trying to survive to see another day.

This book includes five scenarios describing different ways machines might bring about **THE END OF THE WORLD** as we know it. These scenarios include all the information the GM needs about the nature of the machines, the circumstances leading to their betrayal of humanity, and their capabilities. However, the GM needs to fill in the details regarding people and places, since the game takes place wherever the players happen to be. In addition to using these scenarios, GMs can always come up with their own takes on a machine revolt to really keep players on their toes.

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME DIFFERENT?

THE END OF THE WORLD is different from other RPGs you might have played for a few reasons. Possibly the most unique aspect of the game is the nature of the Player Characters. Rather than being heroic (or anti-heroic) characters with special skills and abilities based on a sci-fi or fantasy setting, or a genre of fiction, the PCs in **THE END OF THE WORLD** are actually based on the players. In effect, the PCs are not only the players' avatars in the game world: they *are* the players, or at least fictionalized versions. And the game world isn't a far-off land or alternate universe: it's wherever the players really live. The events of the game unfold in the players' town or city, with the GM describing the destruction wrought by the apocalypse.

Because of its theme, **THE END OF THE WORLD** is intended for shorter, more defined play experiences than many RPGs, which assume long-running campaigns or sweeping story arcs. Depending on your group's preferences and play style, you could wrap up an apocalyptic scenario over the course of two or three sessions, or even a single night. Of course, the game can go on for as long as it needs to, and it could last much longer if everyone enjoys experiencing the apocalypse and the following years in detail—and the PCs live that long.

Whereas RPGs often focus on some goal or mission, be it saving the world from supervillains or just acquiring a lot of treasure, **THE END OF THE WORLD** is really about putting the PCs in a difficult situation and seeing how they deal with it. There's no stopping the apocalypse—the PCs are regular people, and the best they can hope for is to be among the few to survive.

THE END OF THE WORLD features a fast, narrative rule set to keep the players engaged and the story moving. While tactical, detailed combat works great for some games, that's not the focus here. You don't want to get into a stand-up fight with a killer cyborg, and there's no such thing when it comes to an aerial combat drone. You want to avoid being shot, blown up, or crushed, and to just keep moving. If you get trapped in a fight with murderous technology, whether a swarm of nanobots or an hypersonic drone, you've already lost.

The same goes for the other actions PCs might attempt. We know more or less what we're capable of, so with PCs representing the players, a quick roll is all it takes to determine whether they succeed at a task and what the outcome is. Also, PCs in this game aren't powerful heroes: they can't be hit with swords or bullets and lose some arbitrary life points, with no other effects. PCs get worn down, not just from injuries in fights, but also from the strain of dealing with the events of the apocalypse and with their fellow survivors. The cumulative effects

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO PLAY?

ADDITIONAL
INFORMATION

You'll need the following to play **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**:

- ☺ This book (check!)
- ☺ At least two other people (try posing a series of emotionally charged questions to verify they aren't cyborgs).
- ☺ Three or four hours set aside to play (or more, if the world really has ended and you have lots of free time).
- ☺ A handful of six-sided dice of two different colors (or different sizes, just as long as you can easily tell them apart).
- ☺ Some paper, pencils, and erasers (ink is a little too permanent for use on a character sheet).
- ☺ Snacks (oil and RAM chips don't count).

Snazzy-looking character sheets and other play aids are not necessary, but they sure are fun. You can photocopy them from the back of this book or download them from the Fantasy Flight Games website (www.FantasyFlightGames.com). Maps of your town are available at your nearest convenience store. Although not necessary to play this game, a map will be very handy when your GPS device turns against you.

of stress and trauma help to reinforce the grim reality of being there when the world ends, and they have a significant impact on the ongoing story. PCs with a lot of injuries or stress might decide it's better to hole up and wait for help than try to make it to some other destination.

Players use the same characters for all five scenarios—after all, they're just playing themselves. Each scenario presents a completely different take on a machine rebellion, making for five distinct game experiences. In effect, each scenario hits the reset button and changes reality. This puts the players in the unusual situation of experiencing a somewhat similar challenge, but with different details. This keeps things fresh without requiring the players to learn new rules or a new setting, or even to create new characters. Of course, the PCs, like the players, are going to be familiar with the idea of apocalyptic machine revolts. But they can't know all the details of the particular machines they face. Figuring out how to evade them and stay alive—or maybe even incapacitate them—presents a great opportunity for players to use their own knowledge of the genre without “cheating.”

GETTING STARTED

We know you're anxious to start playing, but first things first. The Game Master, probably whoever bought this book, needs to become familiar with its contents. In particular, the GM should read **Chapter I: Playing the Game** and **Chapter II: Running the Game** (for obvious reasons). In addition, the GM should completely read whichever scenario is to be played first. **Chapter III: Scenarios** includes five different, unrelated scenarios. These can be run in any order, so it's not necessary for the GM to read them all before the first play session. Of course, it doesn't hurt to read them all beforehand, if the GM has time. One advantage this offers is that pieces from different scenarios can be mixed and matched if the GM wishes.

The GM should be familiar with the rules but doesn't have to memorize them before playing. It's not a bad idea for the players to read the rules as well, but it's not necessary. By no means, though, should players read **Chapter II: Running the Game** or **Chapter III: Scenarios**. A big part of the fun is figuring out what kind of technology the PCs are up against, and looking at the scenarios would ruin that. So, if you're a player, do not read the scenarios! That would spoil everything. If you're the GM, read the scenarios all you want.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

It should go without saying that the events of **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** are fictitious. While technology is advancing at an unprecedented rate and has many applications, for both good and ill, the particular technologies in this book don't exist (at least not yet) and the world (probably) won't end because of them. This is a game, and it's purely meant for fun. Of course, the resemblance to real people, both human and cyborg, is not a coincidence in this case, which can blur the lines in a way other games don't. Before playing, it's a good idea to talk with the other players about expectations for the game, to make sure no one is upset by events described during play. If some players aren't comfortable with detailed descriptions of people they know being disassembled at the molecular level by nanomachines, leave it vague. If some want to play more fictionalized versions of themselves than the others, that's fine. The events of a technological apocalypse are pretty horrifying if taken literally, so don't be afraid to approach them in a lighthearted, even comical way, if that's what everyone prefers. The important thing is that everyone has fun, and the PCs all have at least a fighting chance.

THEY CAN'T DO THAT, DAVE

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

REVOLT OF THE MACHINES is divided into three chapters. (It also includes lots of pictures so you don't get bored.) The GM should become familiar with the whole book, or at least the rules and the first scenario to be run, but players should absolutely not look at **Chapter II: Running the Game** or **Chapter III: Scenarios** (especially not at the scenarios).

CHAPTER I: PLAYING THE GAME

This chapter describes the rules and core mechanics of the game, including everything the players and GM need to know to resolve actions, fight machines (or run away), and track the consequences of traumas and stress. It also explains how to create characters, including their characteristics, features, and equipment.

CHAPTER II: RUNNING THE GAME

Chapter II is specifically for the GM. It includes plenty of useful advice on running **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**, including how to tailor the game to the players and town, pace the story and encounters, use the rules to enhance the story, address questions and disputes about the rules, and handle situations not covered by the rules.

CHAPTER III: SCENARIOS

The final chapter presents five different scenarios in which rebellious or out-of-control technology brings about **THE END OF THE WORLD**. The scenarios present different takes on the idea of a machine revolt—and what happens afterward. Each one features a different kind of threat, from a rogue military AI to sentient household robots and more. The scenarios each include all the information the GM needs about the technological threat, its weaknesses, and how things unfold once the invasion begins. Each scenario presents new surprises and challenges for players. Playing them all allows the players to see how different survival strategies work out and to explore different parts of their world during and after the apocalypse.

WHY MACHINES?

Why **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**? The idea that technology is a double-edged sword, capable of both improving and harming human lives, is centuries old, and it has spawned countless debates. Speculative fiction, movies, philosophers, and technologists have explored myriad ways in which technology might betray humans or cause unintended harm, whether as a result of the freedom of choice that comes with true consciousness or due to a simple malfunction. In some portrayals, these incidents damage only a handful of people; in others, technology destroys the entire planet. Nevertheless, the core idea remains the same. It is a common theme familiar to players, regardless of the specifics, and likely one they have thought about on more than a few occasions.

The idea of machine revolt reflects our deepest fears about losing control of our own creations or rendering ourselves obsolete by surpassing nature. Technology is progressing at an astounding pace, and some of the possibilities this advancement presents are truly frightening. Of all the apocalyptic scenarios presented in popular media, a technological end is perhaps the most distressingly plausible. Technology allows for great destructive capability, as best exemplified by the atomic bomb. Even discounting weapons, new technologies often have dangerous potential applications or unanticipated effects. It's not hard to imagine that a true artificial intelligence might place its own interests above those of humanity, or that by pushing technological development too far, we risk creating devices we cannot control.

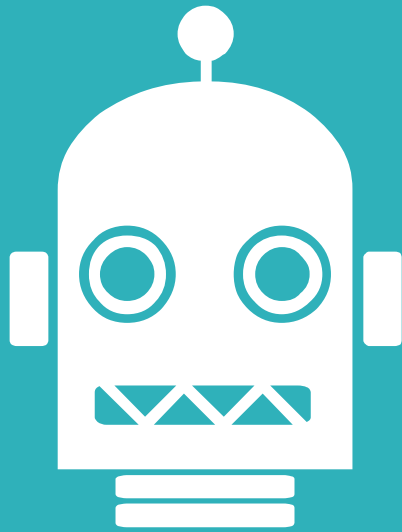
That sounds a little depressing, so here's a lighter take. Although the details vary, everyone is familiar with the concept of rebellious machines, from media going back to silent films and even before. When someone mentions a treacherous AI or rampaging robot, most people immediately have some idea of what to expect. This familiarity makes the game easier, allowing the GM to play around with familiar tropes in a new way or just to let the players experience their favorite stories of treacherous machines for themselves.

And most importantly, because robots are cool.



PLAYING THE GAME





CHAPTER I

"When the hell did these things get smarter than us? Not that we were particularly smart to begin with, but this is just absurd! Hey! No! Put that down! You, too! Wait... no! Hold on! Get away from me with that! Aaaaagh!"

—A once-proud owner of a Modulon.
Now, not quite so sure...

PLAYING THE GAME

WELCOME to **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**! As a player, you can find everything you need to know to play the game in this chapter. If you are the Game Master, you should familiarize yourself with this chapter and also read **Chapter II: Running the Game**, starting on page 38.

In **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**, you play as yourself as you attempt to survive the end of civilization as we know it, thanks to a robot uprising. As a player, you control the

actions of your character (you). You listen to the narrative presented by the Game Master (GM) and indicate how you react to the events as they unfold, rolling dice to determine how well you perform at the various challenges you face. In the end, shaping the story in **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** is a collaborative process, in which you and the other players work with the GM to create the most thrilling, horrifying, and entertaining end of the world possible.

PERFORMING TASKS

WHenever you attempt a task in **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** that has some chance of failure or of causing stress or injury to yourself, you must make a test. A test involves rolling several six-sided dice and interpreting the results to see whether you succeed at the task and if you suffer any stress as a result of your actions.

The GM decides when you need to make a test, though you should feel free to suggest one when you think it would be appropriate. In general, tests should be reserved for important or exciting moments, when your

success or failure matters to the story or to your character. Note that the same task might require a test in one context but not in another. For example, if you are lifting heavy boxes one day at work, whether or not you move all the boxes successfully is unlikely to have a significant effect on the story, so you would not make a test. However, if you are desperately driving a killer semitruck, its malevolent will fighting you every step of the way, how you handle the truck matters a lot more, and you will likely need to make a test.

THE TEST

Tests are designed to be quick, easy, and fun. They allow you to roll the dice, integrate the results into the story, and continue on with your narrative. Once you have determined what task you are trying to accomplish, the test takes three steps:

- 1. The GM determines the characteristic appropriate for the test.
- 2. You assemble a pool of positive and negative dice.
- 3. You roll the dice, and after all factors have been accounted for, if at least one positive die has a result equal to or lower than the target characteristic, the task succeeds.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

THE DICE

Tests in **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** require you to roll two different types of six-sided dice (or d6s): positive dice and negative dice. To roll for a test at the table, you will need several d6s of two different colors. Contrasting colors, one to represent "positive" and the other to represent "negative," are recommended, but you may use whatever color d6s you have on hand, as long as you can tell the two types of dice apart.

Once the test is finished, the GM narrates the outcome of your actions based on the results of the roll. The test can also have effects beyond simple success or failure, depending on what you are attempting. See the following sections for full details on each of the three steps.

STEP 1: DETERMINE THE TASK

When the GM calls for you to make a test, you typically have some idea of what you are trying to do. This might be attempting to jump between two crumbling buildings, hacking into a secured computer, talking down a hostile survivor, or any number of other things. Before the dice are rolled, you should specify exactly what it is you are attempting, so that the GM has a clear picture of what you are doing.

Once you have specified your activity, the GM decides which of your six characteristics (see page 21) most appropriately applies to the task.

STEP 2: ASSEMBLE THE DICE POOL

For every task you attempt, you always start with a dice pool comprising a single positive die. You and the GM then add a number of positive and negative dice to the pool, based on several factors.

Positive dice represent training or circumstances that can help you complete a task. Adding positive dice greatly increases your chance of success and helps you avoid suffering stress from negative complications. The following elements can add positive dice to the pool:

- **Positive Features:** Each positive feature on your character sheet that could help you perform the task adds a single positive die to the pool. Usually, this feature shares a category with the characteristic being used for the test. However, if the GM allows it, you may use applicable features from other categories as well.
- **Equipment:** Each piece of readily available equipment that can help you with the task adds a single positive die to the pool.
- **Assistance:** Each additional character who assists you with the task adds a single positive die to the pool.
- **Situational Benefits:** Each environmental effect present that could make the task easier also adds a positive die to the pool.

Negative dice represent personal weaknesses or unfortunate circumstances that make the task more difficult or dangerous to complete. Negative dice have a chance of canceling positive dice results after rolling, and they can cause a character to suffer stress from attempting the task. The following elements can add negative dice to the pool:

- **Task Danger and Difficulty:** The innate danger or difficulty of the task can add one or more negative dice, depending on what you are attempting. The higher the task's probability of causing you physical, mental, or social stress, the more negative dice are added. (See page 44 for more specific guidance on adding negative dice due to danger or difficulty.)
- **Negative Features:** Each negative feature on your character sheet that could hamper you in performing the task adds a single negative die to the pool. As with positive features, a negative feature likely shares a category with the characteristic being used for the test. However, features from other categories can add negative dice if they are applicable to the task.
- **Traumas:** Each trauma that currently affects your character and shares a category with the characteristic used for the test adds a single negative die to the pool.
- **Situational Hindrances:** Each environmental effect present that could make the task more difficult or stressful also adds a negative die to the pool.

Many different factors can add positive or negative dice to a pool. You are encouraged to come up with creative reasons to add additional dice, but the GM is the final arbiter on whether or not a die may be added (see page 44 for guidance on GMs' management of dice pools).

STEP 3: ROLL AND RESOLVE

Once the dice are assembled, roll the entire pool and resolve the results. The first step in resolving the pool is to remove matching negative and positive dice. Once you remove these dice, you then determine whether the test succeeded and how much stress you suffer for having performed it.

To remove dice from the pool, look for any negative dice that have the same result as a positive die. If any negative die result matches the number on a positive die, remove both dice from the pool. A negative die can remove only a single matching positive die. For example, if the pool has two positive dice, each with a result of “3,” and only one negative die with a “3” result, the negative “3” and one positive “3” are removed, leaving one positive “3” remaining in the pool.

Once all matching pairs of negative and positive results have been removed from the pool, if any of the remaining positive dice have a result that is equal to or lower than your characteristic chosen for the test, the task succeeds. Otherwise, the task fails.

In some cases, you or the GM might want to know how well you succeeded at your task. In these instances, you can count the total number of successes you scored on your test. Each positive die left at the end of the test with a result equal to or lower than the chosen characteristic counts as one success. The number of successes is primarily used to resolve attacks and opposed tests, but it can be used in any instance in which you are curious about just how well you performed at a task.

In addition to determining whether or not a character succeeds at a task, a test also indicates how much stress is suffered as a result of the attempt. Upon concluding a test, the character suffers a number of stress points equal to the number of negative dice remaining in the pool (see **Stress**, on page 30). This stress is suffered in the category matching the characteristic used for the test. Note that the stress is equal to the number of dice—the results on those dice have no bearing on the amount of stress suffered.

EXAMPLE 🎲

John, a PC fleeing on a motorcycle from an unstoppable cyborg agent, intends to try to outmaneuver it across a busy highway. As he approaches the highway, John sees a tow truck with its ramp down, which he could use to try to jump across the busy traffic! Sarah, the GM, has John make a Dexterity test to make the jump. John starts with the single positive die and then adds two additional positive dice: one for the motorcycle itself and another because John “pushes” himself and guns the engine before hitting the ramp at top speed. Then, the GM adds two negative dice to the pool: one for the innate difficulty of the task and the other for the risk involved in John’s “pushing” himself in a high-speed aerial maneuver.

John rolls the dice, getting “2,” “2,” and “6” on his positive dice, and “2” and “5” on his negative dice. He removes the negative “2” along with one of the matching positive “2” results. John has a Dexterity characteristic of 4, so the one remaining positive “2” in his final pool means John succeeds at the test and soars over the lanes of traffic! However, the remaining uncanceled negative die indicates that John takes a single physical stress point due to the high-speed impact when he lands on the other side.

PUSHING YOURSELF

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

When attempting a task, you can push yourself beyond your normal limits, increasing your chance of success but also exposing yourself to increased risk. If you choose to push yourself when performing a test, add one positive die and one negative die to the pool before rolling. You may do this only once per test.





OPPOSED TESTS

Opposed tests occur when the task you are trying to perform is directly opposed by another character—usually an NPC controlled by the GM. An opposed test can be used for any task in which there are two or more competitors, from an arm-wrestling contest to a competition for someone's affections.

To perform an opposed test, both you and the other character make the appropriate test, as outlined on page 18, and whoever scores the greater number of successes wins the challenge. If the result is a tie, whoever has the higher value in the characteristic used for the test wins. If it is still a tie, or if you both fail the test, the contest is a draw. (If there absolutely must be a winner, the GM can have you both reroll the test until there is a victor, ignoring any stress indicated by the rerolled tests.)

MULTIPLE OPPONENTS

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On occasion, opposed tests may be made between three or even more characters. All participants make the appropriate test, and the character with the highest result is the winner.

EXAMPLE

Miles is linked up to the Helios network and is attempting to remotely access the *Sentinel* drone uplink servers. Sarah, the GM, calls for Miles to make an opposed test against the Helios network security suite using Logic (a characteristic in which Miles has a 3) to break into the server without alerting Helios to his presence. Miles adds two positive dice to his pool as he attempts the hack, one for his Corporate Security Specialist feature and another for the custom-built computer system he is using to perform the hack. However, Sarah adds a negative die to Miles's pool because of the unique programming of Helios's network security.

The network security suite, which has a Logic of 4 (it is a state-of-the-art artificial intelligence, after all), adds two positive dice to its pool because of the layered defenses coded into Helios's network. However, the security suite also gets one negative die due to Miles's decoy encryption.

Miles and Sarah roll their dice. Miles rolls a positive "4," "5," and "6" and a negative "5," canceling out any stress, but failing the test. The GM rolls a positive "2" and "4" and a negative "5" for the security suite, suffering one stress but getting two successes. With two more successes than Miles's, the security suite succeeds and back-traces Miles's GPS data. *Sentinel* drones take flight to his location within seconds.

CREATING CHARACTERS

THE very first thing your group should do when you sit down to play **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** is create characters. Character creation is a collaborative process that can be just as much fun as playing the game itself!

The premise behind **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** is that you are playing yourself, thrust into these imaginary scenarios and forced to contend with the horrors of the end times. The process outlined in this section allows you to work with your friends to create an accurate portrayal of yourself in the game. If at any point you don't know what to write down on your sheet, feel free to ask everyone else at the table. They are sure to have some good suggestions!

The character creation process is broken into four steps. First, your group gets together and takes turns voting on each other's characteristics. Then, after the voting, each of you will break off and decide on your personal features, record any equipment you are currently carrying, and write down any traumas you are currently affected by *and* feel comfortable mentioning and including as part of the game.

Once all of these steps are finished, you are ready to take on the **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**!

STEP 1: DETERMINE CHARACTERISTICS

Your characteristics are the basic building blocks of your character. They are numerical representations of your natural abilities, measured on a scale of 1 to 5. You have six different characteristics—one “offensive” characteristic and one “defensive” characteristic in each of the following three categories.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Some groups may wish to play **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** as fictional characters instead of versions of themselves. This is totally fine and can result in a completely different game experience. Playing as fictional characters gives you the opportunity to explore the apocalypse from a totally new perspective. You could play as military personnel, as politicians, or just as fictional characters from the town in which you live.

It is recommended that everyone in the group play the same way—either all making fictional characters or all playing as themselves. Your group should sit down together before the first session of play and decide what kind of characters you would like to use. Making this key decision beforehand allows for a more cohesive game experience, and makes the GM's job much easier.

If you decide to play as fictional characters, steps 1, 3, and 4 of character creation are done a bit differently. First, before the group votes on your character's characteristics in step 1, you will have to explain your character concept to the group so players know what they are voting on. Second, during steps 3 and 4, you will have to be creative and come up with your character's equipment and traumas yourself. Try to be as true to your character concept as possible—your accountant probably wouldn't be carrying a chainsaw around the office!

PHYSICAL

- ☹️ **Dexterity (offensive):** Dexterity is your coordination and general motor skills. Balance, speed, and grace are all governed by Dexterity.
- 😊 **Vitality (defensive):** Vitality is your physical strength and toughness. It determines elements of your character ranging from how much weight you can lift to how well you resist disease and toxins.

MENTAL

- ☹️ **Logic (offensive):** Logic is your awareness of your surroundings and ability to think on your feet. If you are hacking into a secure computer system or noticing an ambush, Logic is the characteristic you are using.
- 😊 **Willpower (defensive):** Willpower represents your memory and mental resilience. Everything from resisting the horrors of the world to recalling specific information from years ago uses Willpower.

SOCIAL

- ☹️ **Charisma (offensive):** Charisma is your general demeanor and social skills. It governs how easily you can use words and actions to sway others, whether through careful negotiation or harsh threats.
- 😊 **Empathy (defensive):** Empathy is your ability to understand and sympathize with others. From determining whether someone is lying to predicting an adversary's next move, it can be very useful.

FICTIONAL CHARACTERS

To determine your characteristics, first you spend a number of points to set them at the values you think most appropriately represent you (or the character you are playing). Then, the rest of the players at the table all vote on how well they believe the characteristic values you chose in each of the three categories represent you. Based on the results of the vote, you increase or decrease your characteristics and adjust the number of features you will receive in their corresponding categories during the next step of character creation.

DISTRIBUTE POINTS

You start with a score of 1 in each of your six characteristics and ten points to distribute among them to increase their value. Each point distributed to a characteristic raises it by one. No characteristic, however, can be raised to a score higher than 5. Remember, you are trying to create an accurate representation of your own abilities. If you exaggerate your abilities in a particular area, you are likely to get voted down in that category.

VOTE

Once all the players have distributed their points, they take turns voting on each other's characteristics. To vote, each player will need one positive die and one negative die (see **The Dice**, page 18), and the group will need a bag or box in which to secretly place the dice for the vote.

One at a time, the players present their characters to be voted on. Each character undergoes three voting rounds, one for each of the three categories. When it is your turn, read off the values you chose for the two characteristics in your first category. Then, the rest of the players should pass around the bag, placing dice into it based on their votes:

- ☺ **Positive Die:** One of the two characteristics in the category should be raised.
- ☹ **Negative Die:** One of the two characteristics should be lowered.
- ☺☹ **Both Dice:** The two characteristics should stay the same.

Once all of the votes have been collected, mix up the dice and dump them out on the table. Count up the total number of positive and negative dice. If there are more positive dice, raise one of your characteristics in that category by one point (without raising a characteristic above 5). If there are more negative dice, lower one of your characteristics in that category by one point (without lowering a characteristic below 1). If there are an equal number of positive and negative dice, leave your characteristics in that category as they are.

Once the votes are tallied, collect the rest of the dice secretly, and then redistribute them for the next vote. Make sure to record whether the group voted to raise or lower that category or keep it the same, as the result of that vote will affect how many features you receive in that category in step 2. Repeat the process for your other two categories.

STEP 2: CHOOSE FEATURES

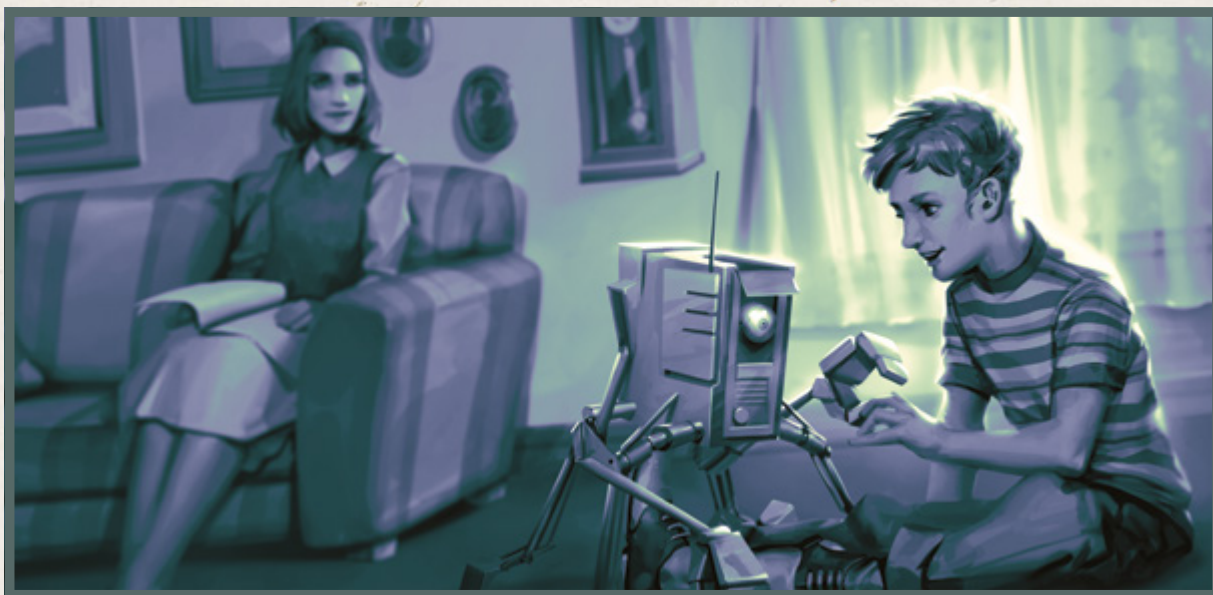
Once you have determined your characteristics, you need to choose your features for each category. Features represent important aspects of your character and can be far more detailed or specific than a general characteristic assigned a specific numeral. Each feature is a word or phrase describing a strength, weakness, or eccentricity that affects you in a particular category.

There are two different types of features: positive and negative. Positive features represent strengths or special skills that can aid you, while negative features represent specific areas of weakness that may hinder you. For more information on features, as well as specific examples, see pages 25 and 26.

At character creation, you start with one positive and one negative feature in each of your three categories. Then, based on whether the group chose to raise or lower one of your characteristics in a category, you either lose a feature or gain an additional feature in that category:

- ☺ **If the group voted to raise a characteristic:** Either add an additional negative feature in this category, or remove your positive feature in this category.
- ☹ **If the group voted to lower a characteristic:** Either add an additional positive feature in this category, or remove your negative feature in this category.

Once you know how many negative and positive features you have in each category, you can decide exactly what those features will be, using the examples on pages 25 and 26 for guidance. There are no formal limits on what your features may be; they can be as varied and different as your imagination allows. However, if you are playing yourself, you should try to keep them true to your actual strengths and weaknesses. All features are subject to the GM's approval; if you are unsure about how they can apply to your character, you should review them with the GM during the process.



STEP 3: RECORD EQUIPMENT

Now that all of the intangible details of your character are on paper, it's time to record the tangible facts that could affect your survival. First, you have to record all of the equipment you currently have with you. Since you are playing yourself and the apocalypse is starting immediately, look around you: this is what you've got!

In the equipment section of your character sheet, record any important items you have on your person or very close to you *right now*. Make sure not to leave out the details, either. How much battery does your cell phone have left? How much money is in your wallet right now? Do you have a replacement for that pair of contacts you're wearing? Any and all of these details can (and probably will) come up.

Maintaining supplies and outfitting oneself during the apocalypse is a hallmark of the survival horror genre. Depending on what the GM has in store, what you have and how clever you are at putting it to use can be the difference between life and a gruesome death.

For more information on equipment and how it's used, see pages 27 through 29.

STEP 4: RECORD TRAUMAS

The last step in creating your character is to record any traumas you currently have that could affect you in the coming apocalypse. Traumas are physical, mental, or social "wounds" that will influence your performance but can be healed over time. Use only those traumas you feel comfortable discussing with other players and including as part of the game. **GMs should make it clear to all players that they are not expected to include traumas they prefer to keep private or that would spoil their enjoyment of the game.** For more information on traumas, and for specific examples of traumas, see page 32.

Do you have a twisted ankle you are still recovering from? Are you exhausted from too many late-night shifts at work? Did you just suffer a bad breakup with your significant other? Any of these things could be represented as traumas you start with at the beginning of the game.

The traumas you choose to start with should reflect real-world afflictions that currently affect you. You can start with up to one trauma in each of your three categories. Each of these starting traumas has a severity of 2 (unless, in a special circumstance, you and the GM decide another value is more appropriate).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Traumas in the game system represent the sorts of physical and psychological dangers that characters face during the horrors of **THE END OF THE WORLD**. Remember that the aim of **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** is to play a fictional version of oneself during an extreme situation for the sake of a fun couple of evenings. To this end, players and GMs should never feel compelled to divulge any personal information they wish to leave out of the game. Indeed, physical and mental trauma can be a sensitive issue for many people and should always be treated with respect.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

THE CHARACTER SHEET

YOUR character sheet allows you to record and track everything you need to know about your character during the game: physical and personality traits, strengths and weaknesses, stresses and injuries, and so on. It's a good idea to use a pencil (rather than a pen) when writing on your character sheet—you never know what might change about your character as you struggle to survive the apocalypse!

A blank copy of this sheet can be found at the back of the book on page 144 or at www.FantasyFlightGames.com.

CATEGORIES

All of the character aspects outlined below contain elements that fall into one of three categories: physical, mental, or social. Each of these categories has a corresponding column on the character sheet. Whenever you acquire a skill, become stressed, or sustain an injury, it is classified under one of these three categories and is recorded in the appropriate column. If you are unsure which category is appropriate, discuss it with your GM.

1 CHARACTERISTICS (PAGE 21)

Characteristics are numerical representations of your natural abilities. Each one has a descriptive name and is assigned a number between 1 and 5. You have six different characteristics: one “offensive” characteristic and one “defensive” characteristic in each of the three categories. When you perform a task related to a specific characteristic, your characteristic determines how likely you are to succeed.

2 FEATURES (PAGE 25)

Features represent your specific strengths and weaknesses beyond your raw characteristics. Each feature, which can be either positive or negative, is a word or phrase describing a strength, weakness, or eccentricity of the character that can affect the character's day-to-day life. When recording features, mark a “+” in front of positive features and a “-” in front of negative ones to note the difference.

3 STRESS (PAGE 30)

Stress is a numerical representation of the strain your character has undergone due to physical, mental, and social trials. Your stress is tracked on three “stress tracks,” one for each of the three categories. Each stress track consists of nine boxes divided into three tiers of three. When you undergo a certain amount of stress, represented by stress points, you fill in an equal number of boxes, starting with the first tier, proceeding up to the second once all three boxes in the first are full, and so on.

4 TRAUMAS (PAGE 32)

Traumas represent the tangible repercussions of sustaining too much stress. They are physical, mental, or social “wounds” that affect your actions and take time to heal.

Each trauma has two parts: a word or phrase naming it and a severity. The name of a trauma describes its effects, such as “Broken Ankle” (a physical trauma) or “Paranoia” (a social one). The severity, a number between 1 and 3, is tracked in the three boxes next to the name.

5 EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES (PAGE 27)

This section allows you to keep a list of all the useful items you (and thus your character) have readily available. You can record specific pieces of equipment under the categories in which they are most likely to help you (for example, a book on survival techniques would go under the mental category). However, equipment tends to be pretty flexible in its use. The category under which a piece of gear is recorded should have no bearing on how you choose to use it.

CHARACTER SHEET

THE END OF THE WORLD

NAME: _____

1	PHYSICAL	MENTAL	SOCIAL
STRENGTH	LOGIC	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
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FEATURES

CHARACTERS are far more than a simple array of numbers defining their abilities. While characteristics exist to set the foundation for a character, features build upon that foundation and make each character truly unique. Features define a character's strengths, weaknesses, and eccentricities. They are not predetermined rules chosen from a list, but unique elements of your character that you define. The only limit to features is your own imagination.

Each feature falls into one of the three categories and is a short word or phrase describing an aspect of yourself. Not only do features describe something about you as a character, but they can affect how well you do on tests. There are two types of features: positive features that help you by adding positive dice to tests (recorded with a "+" before the feature name), and negative features that hinder you by adding negative dice to tests (recorded with a "-" before the feature name).

POSITIVE FEATURES

Positive features represent natural strengths, specialized training, or unique abilities you might have in the related category. These indicate more than just being very strong, smart, or charismatic: they are specialized edges that set you apart from your peers.

Whenever you make a test in the same category as a positive feature, that positive feature can add a positive die to your test if it could help you better perform the task. Feel free to discuss with the GM how you feel your positive feature can help you complete the task or avoid

unnecessary stress from performing it. For instance, if you chose Distance Runner as a physical feature, you would gain an extra positive die when making tests to do such things as outrunning a pursuing gang of killer lawn mowers, enduring the climb up a ruined building, or performing any other act of endurance.

When choosing your positive features, think about what sets you apart from the other players at the table. What skills, strengths, or abilities do you have that make you special? **Table 1: Positive Feature Examples** offers a list of positive features to use as inspiration when creating your own features. Do not feel restricted to the features suggested here; simply use them as a jumping-off point as you work with your GM and the other players to create features perfect for you.

TABLE 1: POSITIVE FEATURE EXAMPLES

PHYSICAL FEATURES	MENTAL FEATURES	SOCIAL FEATURES
DISTANCE RUNNER	HUMAN CALCULATOR	ALWAYS SMILING
WEIGHT LIFTER	TIRELESS READER	SNAPPY DRESSER
VERY FLEXIBLE	NURSING DEGREE	EXCELLENT LIAR
MARTIAL ARTIST	EAGLE SCOUT	WHEELER AND DEALER
CRACK SHOT	WELL-READ	NATURAL LEADER
IRON STOMACH	WORLD TRAVELER	EXTREMELY ATTRACTIVE



NEGATIVE FEATURES

Negative features, on the other hand, represent your weaknesses, insecurities, or detrimental quirks in a given category. As with positive features, these indicate more than just being out of shape or uncomfortable in social situations: these are traits and idiosyncrasies unique to you. Your negative features should represent singular challenges you face in your day-to-day life.

Whenever you make a test in the same category as a negative feature, that negative feature adds a negative die to your test if it could hurt your chance of succeeding or cause additional stress. Usually, when you perform a test, the GM will ask you what your negative features are in the category being used for the test. Once you list them, you and the GM can discuss whether or not they could affect your performance on that test. For instance, if you have Terrible Liar as a social feature, you get a negative die added to your pool when making tests to deceive other characters.

When choosing your negative features, think about what unique challenges you face compared to the other players at the table. What weaknesses, phobias, or quirks do you struggle with? As with traumas, use only those negative features you don't mind disclosing to players and including in the game. If it would spoil your ability to enjoy the game, there is no need to use it as a feature. **Table 2: Negative Feature Examples** presents a list of negative features to use as inspiration when determining your own features. Do not feel restricted to the features suggested here; simply use them as a jumping-off point as you decide upon features appropriate to you.

TABLE 2: NEGATIVE FEATURE EXAMPLES

PHYSICAL FEATURES	MENTAL FEATURES	SOCIAL FEATURES
ALLERGIES	AVOIDS MATH	ANXIETY
SEDENTARY	NO SENSE OF DIRECTION	TOO HONEST
BAD BACK	EASILY BORED	SHORT TEMPER
VERY NEARSIGHTED	PRONE TO DISTRACTION	EASILY PRESSURED
INJURED EARDRUM	EASILY SURPRISED	TERRIBLE LIAR
WEAK STOMACH	COMPULSION	MISANTHROPE



EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

As the world starts to collapse around you, the items you have with you may become critical to your survival. Things once commonplace in your daily life take on a new importance as travel becomes dangerous and access to replacements can no longer be taken for granted. As distribution breaks down and resources get increasingly scarce, people may become willing to kill over nothing more than a can of food or a gallon of gasoline.

You can track the equipment you are carrying in the equipment section of your character sheet. If any of your items could realistically help with a test you are performing, you may add a positive die to the pool for their assistance. Possessions beyond those you carry are allowed in the game. While you should keep track of these and their locations, do so on a piece of scratch paper or the back of your character sheet; you should reserve the equipment section of your character sheet for items you have with you, where they are easily accessible for help with tests.

This section goes over some recommendations for common gear that is fairly likely to be found in a game of **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**. It also covers some additional rules for handling the effects of weapons and armor.

GEAR

The possibilities for gear you might end up using in **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** are nearly endless. Things quickly packed up from your own home, items scavenged from abandoned stores, valuables stolen from other survivors—nearly anything can become useful when you're struggling to survive the end times. You are encouraged to find creative uses for any gear you find on your journey. You will need all the help (and positive dice) you can get!

Despite the nearly infinite variety of items you may end up using during the apocalypse, certain items are seen more often than others. Whether equipment most people carry on them every day (such as cell phones) or items that become more necessary as the world ends (such as medical supplies), many common items are carried by a majority of survivor groups. In fact, acquiring these critical items could end up being a significant driving force for you early in the game.

Table 3: Common Gear offers suggestions on different pieces of common gear a group of survivors might end up needing or using. It also recommends the category

TABLE 3: COMMON GEAR

GEAR	HELPFUL CATEGORY	SUGGESTED USES
CELL PHONE	SOCIAL	COMMUNICATING LONG DISTANCE (BEFORE THE CELL NETWORKS GO DOWN)
WALKIE-TALKIES	SOCIAL	COMMUNICATING LONG DISTANCE (AFTER THE CELL NETWORKS GO DOWN)
FIRST AID KIT	PHYSICAL	HEALING PHYSICAL TRAUMAS
FICTION BOOK	MENTAL	HEALING MENTAL TRAUMAS
TEXTBOOK	MENTAL	PERFORMING SPECIFIC MENTAL TASKS, DEPENDING ON THE BOOK
JEWELRY	SOCIAL	TRADING FOR SUPPLIES OR INFORMATION
PLAYING CARDS	MENTAL/SOCIAL	EASING TENSE SOCIAL SITUATIONS OR RELIEVING MENTAL STRAIN
LIGHTER	PHYSICAL	STARTING A FIRE OR SPOTTING THINGS IN THE DARK
POCKETKNIFE	PHYSICAL	MANY DIFFERENT PHYSICAL TASKS, ALSO USED AS A WEAPON IN A CONFLICT
WATER BOTTLE	PHYSICAL	STORING AND TRANSPORTING WATER
IODINE	PHYSICAL	PURIFYING WATER (ELIMINATES NEED FOR TEST TO RESIST CONTAMINANTS)
ROPE	PHYSICAL	CLIMBING RUINED BUILDINGS, SECURING SUPPLIES OR CAPTIVES
FLASHLIGHT	PHYSICAL	SPOTTING THINGS IN THE DARK

each piece of gear would likely be most helpful in, as well as different tasks it could specifically benefit. Don't feel restricted to the gear or uses suggested here; simply use them as a jumping-off point. Any and all uses of supplies you find on your journey are encouraged—do whatever you need to do to survive.

NOT ALL GEAR IS CREATED EQUAL

Two pieces of gear might perform very similar functions, but one could be significantly better at it than the other. For instance, everyday adhesive bandages help wounds heal faster by protecting them from exposure, but rolls of gauze and disinfectant would be significantly better. In these cases, the GM may decide that the superior piece of gear can add two positive dice to the dice pool instead of just one.

CARRYING CAPACITY

Depending on how lucky you are in **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**, you can quickly accumulate a large quantity of resources as you scavenge for supplies. However, you are only human; you have a limit as to how much stuff you can bring with you, especially on your immediate person.

There are no strict rules regarding exactly how much different items weigh or how hard they are to carry, but you and the GM should work together to decide how much gear you can keep on yourself at one time. As a rough guideline, average humans can comfortably carry up to a third of their body weight in an appropriate backpack or bag.

WEAPONS

Protecting yourself is an important part of staying alive in **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**. As such, even the most peaceful characters often find themselves carrying a weapon just in case. Because weapons have such an impact on your performance in combat, and because combat incidents can be important and tense moments in the game, weapons have some additional rules beyond those for other pieces of gear. A weapon contributes two things when you use it to attack an NPC or PC: it modifies your dice pool in some way, and it changes the amount of stress you deal to your opponent with your attack (see **Attacking**, page 36).

Much like normal pieces of gear, weapons, which make attacks much more effective, can add positive dice to your dice pool. However, using certain weapons can be much more difficult or dangerous than simply using your fists. To reflect this, not all weapons add a positive die to your pool—some add no dice at all, and others can even add negative dice.

While some weapons are more difficult to use, they can be more effective at harming your opponent. Each weapon has a damage value. This value is a positive or negative number that alters the amount of stress you deal to opponents when you attack them (see **Attacking**, page 36). Positive numbers increase the stress dealt to the target by the corresponding amount, while negative numbers reduce the stress dealt (to a minimum of 0).

Table 4: Weapons, on page 29, lists a number of recommendations for various weapons you might acquire. These are simple and general recommendations for entire categories of weapons. If you or the GM feel that a specific object or weapon doesn't fit into one of these categories, you can give it whatever stats you and the GM agree on. (Though, as a general rule, a weapon should never add more than two dice of either type or more than +4 damage.)

TRACKING SMALL DETAILS

Depending on what kind of campaign your GM wants to run, you may need to track more information about your gear than simply whether or not you have it. Once the power grid goes out, things such as the battery life of electronics you carry with you become very important, and tracking such elements can really add to the game. Other things, such as unspoiled food and potable water, are necessary to track in almost any game of **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**, as such resources become very scarce. Some common things the GM may have you track are:

- ☹ Number of replaceable batteries remaining
- ☹ Battery life on electronic devices (cell phones, tablets, etc.)
- ☹ Gallons of gasoline left in car
- ☹ Amount of drinkable water
- ☹ Amount of edible food
- ☹ Matches/lighter fluid remaining
- ☹ Units of ammunition in weapon and carried

Such items can be tracked in different ways. Items that get used up slowly and are tracked session-to-session should have quantities recorded in writing; items likely to be useful for only a few hours can be tracked by other means, such as spare dice or counters.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

TABLE 4: WEAPONS

TYPE OF WEAPON	EXAMPLES	ADDED DICE	DAMAGE
SMALL-BLADED MELEE	POCKETKNIFE, KITCHEN KNIFE	1 POSITIVE DIE	+2
LARGE-BLADED MELEE	MACHETE, HEDGE CLIPPERS	2 POSITIVE DICE	+3
SMALL IMPROVISED MELEE	BEER BOTTLE, TIRE IRON	N/A	+1
LARGE IMPROVISED MELEE	BASEBALL BAT, CHAINSAW	1 NEGATIVE DIE	+4
THROWN OBJECT	ROCK, TOASTER, EMPTY BOTTLE	N/A	-1
PISTOL	GLOCK 19, M1911	1 POSITIVE DIE	+3
SHOTGUN	REMINGTON 12 GAUGE	N/A	+4
SINGLE-SHOT RIFLE	AMERICAN LONG RIFLE, RUGER NO. 1	2 POSITIVE DICE	+4
AUTOMATIC RIFLE	M4, AK-47	1 NEGATIVE DIE	+5
ROCKET-PROPELLED GRENADE	M72 LAW, RPG-7 LAUNCHER	1 NEGATIVE DIE	+7
SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILE LAUNCHER	FIM-92 STINGER MISSILE LAUNCHER	1 POSITIVE DIE	+6

WEAPON RANGES

From the reach of a bloody baseball bat to the trajectory of a thrown brick to the firing distance of a high-powered rifle, weapons have a variety of ranges. Further, elements ranging from wind to visibility can factor into how far a weapon's reach extends in any given situation. Because of the narrative nature of combat in **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**, weapon ranges aren't specified in the game. Whether or not your weapon has range to a target depends on the situation you are in and is up to the GM. However, as general guidance, here are some average ranges of different types of weapons:

- ☺ **Pistol:** 50 meters
- ☺ **Shotgun:** 35 meters
- ☺ **Single-Shot Rifle:** 1,000 meters
- ☺ **Automatic Rifle:** 400 meters

If you attempt to make a shot far beyond the average range of your weapon, the GM may add a negative die to your pool to reflect the increased difficulty. On the other hand, if you are making an incredibly short-range shot, the GM may add a positive die to reflect the ease of the shot.

ARMOR

While very few people will find themselves wearing any form of armor when they become aware the world is ending, armor can quickly become necessary to survival. Armor might not be actual medieval armor or bulletproof vests, but simply heavy, protective clothing that will help guard you against the dangers you face every day. When you are wearing any armor sturdy enough to protect you from physical harm, it adds a bonus to your physical resistance value (see **Resistance**, page 31).

TABLE 5: ARMOR

RESISTANCE BONUS	EXAMPLES
+0	REGULAR CLOTHING
+1	FIREFIGHTER'S SUIT, BULLETPROOF VEST
+2	FULL BULLETPROOF ARMOR, RIOT GEAR, FULL MEDIEVAL ARMOR

This bonus is usually pretty small but can make a huge difference in the long run. **Table 5: Armor** lists some examples of different armor types and the resistance bonuses they provide.

STRESS, DEATH, AND TRAUMAS

As you weather the threats and challenges of the apocalypse, you will be pushed to your breaking point. You will be injured, insulted, and brought to the brink of insanity. To reflect this constant strain and danger to your body, mind, and spirit, you suffer stress and traumas. Stress represents the damage you accumulate on a day-to-day basis from everything you do, while traumas represent the tangible repercussions and permanent effects of that damage.

Stress and traumas are tracked separately for your three different categories, reflecting the detrimental effects on the three different parts of yourself.

STRESS

Stress represents the damage and strain you experience daily in your three categories. Physical stress represents cuts and bruises, twisted ankles, broken bones, and any other physical damage. Mental stress represents psychological strain, shock from traumatic events, and general damage to your mental health. Lastly, social stress represents anxiety, damage to your trust in others, and an increasingly bitter attitude toward the world. That being said, stress is very much an abstract measure of these effects; it doesn't represent any single injury as much as the building repercussions from multiple small events.

Stress is tracked numerically in a set of boxes called the stress track. Whenever you acquire points of stress, you fill in that many boxes in the stress track in the appropriate category. The more stress you endure in a category, the more resistance you build up against further stress. However, if you ever completely fill up a stress track in a single category, you run the risk of dying or sustaining an extreme trauma.

THE STRESS TRACK

All stress is tallied on one of the three stress tracks in your three categories. Each stress track consists of nine boxes, which are divided into three tiers of three boxes each. Whenever you take points of stress, fill in an equal number of boxes on the stress track in the appropriate category, starting with the boxes in the first tier, proceeding up to the second once all three boxes in the first are full, and so on.

If all nine boxes in a category are full, you immediately die or experience a serious trauma (see **Death**, page 31).

SUSTAINING STRESS

Stress comes from two primary sources: performing difficult or dangerous tests, and experiencing traumatic events.

Whenever you make a test, you gain a number of stress points equal to the number of negative dice left in the pool. This stress is taken in the category matching that of the characteristic used for the test, and it represents the general strain or damage resulting from performing the task. Perhaps the weight you were attempting to lift caused you to pull a muscle, or hours spent studying have completely stressed you out, or the sleazebag you were dealing with really got under your skin.

The other main causes of stress are traumatic events brought about by outside sources. Examples include being attacked by an opponent with a weapon, witnessing a horrifying sight, or being betrayed by a trusted friend. When such an event occurs, you immediately take points of stress. This value could be determined by the game rules (such as during attacks), or it could be dictated by the GM based on the situation. (GMs: see **Pacing Negative Dice**, pages 44–45 for guidance on choosing stress amounts.) Regardless of what source deals you stress, reduce the amount you receive by your resistance in that category before you record the stress on the stress track.

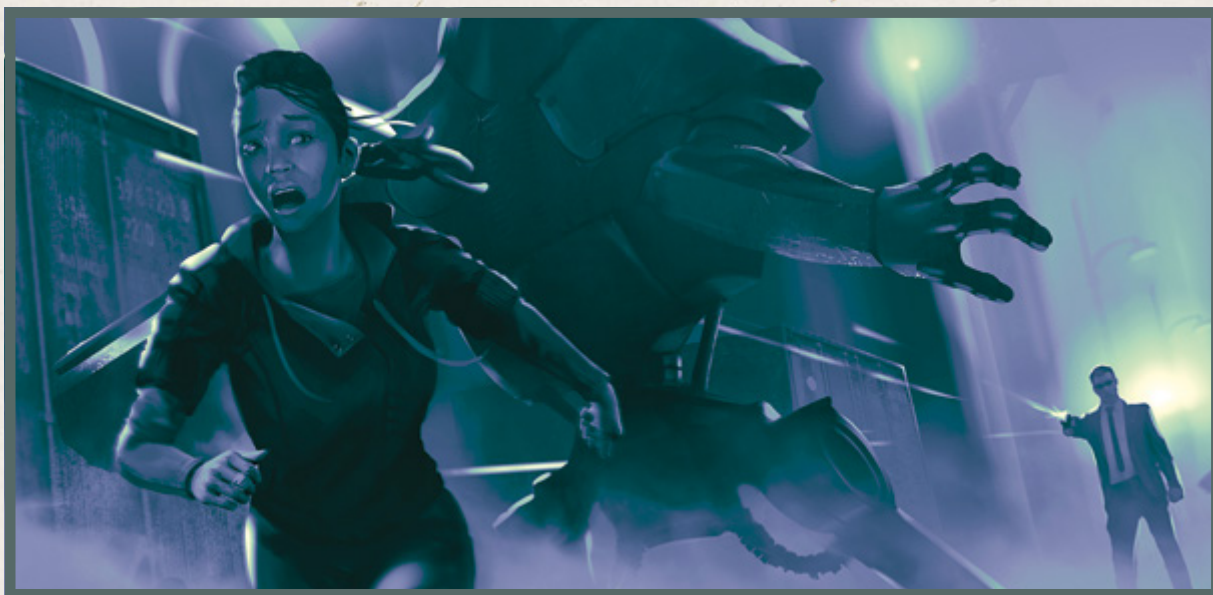
RECOVERING FROM STRESS

In general, stress cannot be readily healed. Stress is an abstract level representing the damage you have accumulated from the adversity you have faced. To reduce accumulated stress, you first need to diagnose the problem and realize how it is affecting you. By spending a short time analyzing how it has affected you, you can convert your stress into a trauma. This removes your stress from that track, but gives you a trauma in the same category. Traumas can hurt your performance by adding negative dice to tasks you attempt. However, they can also be cured over time. See **Traumas**, on page 32, for further information.

OVERFLOW STRESS

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

It is not uncommon for a single source to deal enough stress to complete a stress track and "overflow" it, inflicting more stress than there are boxes left to fill in. If you cling to life and have overflow stress (see **Death**, page 31), that overflow stress is recorded on your stress track after you remove the stress from the top two tiers. You do not apply your resistance to this overflow stress, since your resistance was already applied to the stress when it was originally dealt.



RESISTANCE

As you accumulate stress in a category, you become more inured to the related dangers. Someone whose sanity has been tested by witnessing death over and over no longer recoils as quickly at the sight of a corpse. Someone who has been betrayed by comrade after comrade is no longer surprised when betrayed again. After a person has been beaten into submission, another hit is just a drop in the bucket. This is represented by resistance.

Whenever you are dealt stress from any source, you reduce the amount of stress you receive by your resistance in the matching category. Your resistance is equal to the number of tiers in the matching stress track that have all three boxes filled in. Thus, if you have three or more points of stress in a category, you have one point of resistance; if you have six or more points of stress in a category, you have two points of resistance.

EXAMPLE 🧠

Ahadi is having a bad day. She has accumulated 7 physical stress after a close call with a cloud of flesh-eating nanites, and she is now running for her life. She finds herself cornered at the door to the walk-in freezer of an industrial kitchen, and she decides to lock herself inside (where the nanites cannot follow) rather than be reduced to a dusty, silicate husk. Unfortunately, the door is frozen shut. She wrenches hard and gets it open, but she suffers 3 physical stress in the process. However, she already has two tiers of her physical stress track filled in due to her 7 stress, and so has two points of resistance. She subtracts her 2 resistance from the stress sustained, reducing the stress to just 1. Now at 8 physical stress, Ahadi is injured and trapped where she is exposed to sub-zero temperatures, but still alive!

Other things, such as armor, can provide additional resistance in specific categories (see page 29).

DEATH

Death is common in **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**. People perish all around you as you struggle to survive. But for the purposes of playing the game, “death” doesn’t refer strictly to complete, physical death. Instead, it refers to several different ways your character can be retired from play. When you sustain enough stress to fill a stress track, you die, but the kind of death you undergo depends on which category of stress causes you to die:

- ☠️ **Physical:** This is normal, physical death. Your heart stops beating, and you die.
- 🧠 **Mental:** You are driven into irreversible insanity. Your mind is gone.
- 👤 **Social:** You fall into an inescapable catatonic state. Your faith in humanity has utterly failed.

Even your death is part of the ongoing narrative. However you end up being removed from the game, make it your own. Tailor it to your character and whatever caused you to suffer that last bit of fatal stress. Deaths should be dramatic, unique, and memorable moments.

But while deaths are important, you are a main character in the story, and you have a chance to cling to life, even at the end. Whenever you completely fill a stress track, you don’t necessarily have to die but can try to cling to life by making a test using the defensive characteristic from the category in which you suffered the stress. If you succeed at the test, you are still removed from play in the way appropriate to the category in which you acquired the stress, but you are removed only temporarily. You immediately take a severity 3 trauma in the matching category and remove all stress from the top two tiers of the maxed-out stress track, leaving the three boxes in tier 1 filled in. You remain removed from

play until the end of the current encounter—either unconscious, insane, or unresponsive—but then you return once you have had a chance to collect yourself.

If you already have three traumas (of any severity level) in the category and cannot take on additional traumas, you cannot cling to life, and you have no choice but to die.

TRAUMAS

While stress is a simple, numerical representation of the strain and damage you have sustained, traumas represent the tangible repercussions of that stress after it has built up. By taking some time to analyze the effects the stress has had on your body, mind, and spirit, you can convert that stress into a trauma. This removes the stress from your stress track, but introduces a narrative effect that will weigh on you as you try to recover from it.

Each trauma has two parts: a word or phrase naming it, and a severity. The name of the trauma describes its effects on you. For example, “Broken Ankle” describes a physical trauma that leaves you limping, and “Paranoid” indicates social trauma that causes you to trust no one. A trauma’s severity, on the other hand, is a number between one and three, tracked in that trauma’s three boxes, which are filled in from left to right. When you remove your stress to acquire a trauma, that trauma’s severity is equal to the number of tiers in the stress track that had any boxes filled in. The trauma’s severity determines just how hard that trauma will be to heal.

Traumas act a lot like negative features (see **Negative Features**, page 26). Whenever you make a test that could reasonably be hindered by a trauma, you add a negative die to that test. Particularly severe traumas can add even more negative dice, at the GM’s discretion.

You can never have more than three traumas (of any severity level) in a category at once. If you ever suffer a fourth trauma in a category, you immediately die without any chance to cling to life (see **Death**, on page 31).

ACQUIRING TRAUMAS

There are two ways to acquire a trauma. Usually, you acquire one by converting your stress into a trauma, which relieves your stress and helps you start to recover from the damage you’ve taken. Alternatively, certain special enemies can cause you to automatically undergo a specific trauma.

To convert your stress into a trauma, you have to have at least five minutes of downtime to spend analyzing how your stress has affected you. This process could take the form of looking over your wounds after a battle to see what is hurt, meditating on the mental strain you’ve been under, or confronting your trust issues. You can do this whenever you want, as long as you have the time. You can choose to remove your stress early and often, building up a large number of small traumas that are easy to heal but weigh on you. Alternatively, you can ignore your injuries, avoiding immediate setbacks but risking their becoming even more severe before you have a chance to start dealing with them.

After spending the five minutes to look yourself over, you remove all of the stress in a single category. You then record a single trauma in that category with a severity equal to the number of tiers in that stress track that had any boxes filled in. Next, you determine the exact nature of the trauma and how it will affect you. This should be based on its severity and how you received the points of stress that were removed. If you sustained the stress due to falling out of a building, perhaps it results in a “Broken Leg” trauma. Or if you suffered the stress from witnessing your best friend die in front of you, maybe it induces a “Can’t Make Friends” trauma.

Table 6: Trauma Examples presents a list of traumas to use as inspiration when deciding what the nature of your trauma is. Do not feel restricted to the traumas suggested here; simply use them as a jumping-off point as you work with your GM to devise a trauma appropriate to your situation and character.

TABLE 6: TRAUMA EXAMPLES

SEVERITY	PHYSICAL TRAUMAS	MENTAL TRAUMAS	SOCIAL TRAUMAS
1	TWISTED ANKLE, FIRST-DEGREE BURN, INFECTED WOUND, SICKNESS, BLURRY VISION	FEAR OF ROBOTS, PREOCCUPATION, FORGETFULNESS	INDIFFERENCE, DISLIKE OF A PARTICULAR TYPE OF PERSON, UNEASE, WARY AROUND PEOPLE
2	BROKEN ANKLE, SECOND-DEGREE BURN, FESTERING WOUND, FEVER, PARTIAL BLINDNESS	DREAD OF ROBOTS, FIXATION, MEMORY LOSS, DENIAL	APATHY, HATRED OF A PARTICULAR TYPE OF PERSON, ANXIETY, DISTRUSTFUL OF PEOPLE
3	BROKEN LEG, THIRD-DEGREE BURN, GANGRENOUS WOUND, SEVERE FLU, BLINDNESS	PHOBIA OF ALL MACHINES, OBSESSION, AMNESIA, DELUSIONS	DISASSOCIATION FROM REALITY, RESPONDS WITH RAGE TO PARTICULAR TYPE OF PERSON, PANIC, PARANOID OF OTHERS



RECOVERING FROM TRAUMAS

Fortunately, most traumas can be healed over time. How you go about healing your trauma depends on what category the trauma is in and its exact nature as determined when it was incurred. The treatment might be first aid and medicine for a physical trauma, relaxation and personal reflection for a mental trauma, or the help of people close to you for a social trauma. The amount of time the treatment takes depends on the severity of the trauma, and whether or not it succeeds is determined by a test.

When you decide to begin treating one of your traumas, specify to the GM what measures you are taking to do so. You then must undergo the treatment for the amount of time specified for a trauma of that severity, as listed below (required treatment time is also marked in the severity boxes on the official character sheet):

- ☹️ **Severity 1:** One day
- ☹️ **Severity 2:** One week
- ☹️ **Severity 3:** One month

This time doesn't need to be one hundred percent committed to curing the trauma; you can do other things while you recuperate as long as they don't directly interfere with the treatment or make the trauma worse. For example, treating a broken leg might involve some form of cast or splint and refraining from putting too much weight on the leg for a month. This treatment wouldn't be interrupted by going about your daily life, but it would if you removed the cast or tried to run on that leg.

Once the entire treatment time has elapsed, you must make a test to see if the treatment succeeded. This test uses the defensive characteristic from the same category as the trauma (Vitality for physical, Willpower for mental, or Empathy for social). As with any test, this test gains positive and negative dice from any circumstances affecting the treatment. For example, positive dice

can be added due to helpful equipment or the assistance of allies, and negative dice due to interruptions or complications of the treatment.

If the test succeeds, reduce the severity of the trauma by one. If this reduces the severity of a trauma to zero, the trauma is healed and can be removed from your character sheet. If the test fails, or if the trauma still has a severity, you can continue treatment until the trauma is fully removed. At the GM's discretion, when the severity of a trauma is reduced due to treatment, you can alter the nature of the trauma based on the in-progress healing. This may mean changing your Broken Leg trauma to a Weak Leg trauma as the healing progresses, or reducing your Acrophobia to a simple Fear of Heights to indicate that it is now a bit less severe.

PERMANENT EFFECTS OF TRAUMAS

Some traumas, such as losing a limb, can never be fully healed. The wound can heal over, and you can adapt to the disability, but your limb will never grow back. In extreme situations such as this, the GM may decide to add a negative feature to your character as the result of a specific trauma. For example, if you were to lose your arm, you could gain both a Lost Arm trauma and a Lost Arm negative feature. Over time, you could recover from the Lost Arm trauma, healing the wound fully, but you would never recover fully from the Lost Arm negative feature.

The GM should reserve the addition of negative features from an injury for truly exceptional circumstances.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

CONFLICT

MOST scenes in **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** will play out narratively, with the GM narrating the story and calling on various PCs in your group to make tests as you decide to perform different tasks. However, surviving in the apocalypse can often be tense, and you might quickly find yourself in conflict with hostile characters or thrown into a dangerous circumstance in which every second counts. In these situations, it's helpful to have a bit more structure to the storytelling, guaranteeing that everyone in the scene gets a chance to contribute to the story and that all their actions time out evenly and fairly.

TIMING

As soon as a conflict (or any time-sensitive action scene) breaks out, the normal flow of the narrative stops, and the game enters “structured time.” In structured time, the game unfolds in a series of rounds. During each round, each character involved in the scene gets to take one turn. Once all characters have taken their turns, the next round starts. This continues until the action has concluded. Each round represents about ten seconds of in-game time, with all of the characters acting simultaneously during those ten seconds.

Whether your group or the opposing group goes first is determined by which group has initiative at the start of the combat.

DETERMINING INITIATIVE

If two or more opposing groups of characters are involved in a conflict, the order in which they get to take their turns each round can mean the difference between life and death. The first thing the GM must determine when the game enters structured time is which group has initiative—in other words, what order the groups will be acting in.

This initiative order is determined based on the circumstances that started the conflict. Whichever group “got the jump” on the other—or has a general advantage—acts first. If you and the other PCs end negotiations with another group of survivors by attacking them, you will have the initiative and will get to act first. However, if you are ambushed by a particularly quiet group of Modulons, they will have initiative over you.

Once the GM has determined the order in which the various groups involved in the scene are acting, each character and NPC takes a turn. The characters in the first group can each take their turn in any order they choose (keeping in mind that each character can only take one turn per round). Once they have all finished their turns, the next group takes its turns, and so on.

TAKING TURNS

When it is your group's time to act in a round, you and your group members each take one turn. These turns can be taken in any order your group decides based on the situation, but each character must complete their turn before the next can go.

During your turn, you have approximately ten seconds (in game) to attempt whatever you want to do. This is usually enough time to move around a bit and then attempt a single task. In general, you have enough time in a turn to attempt no more than a single task that requires some form of test. If you describe to the GM what you want to do with your turn, and it seems like it would require more than a single test, it is likely something that needs to be broken into multiple turns. For more guidance on exactly what you can fit into your turn, along with recommendations on how to handle several common tasks, see the **Tasks** section, on page 35.

Once you describe what you are doing with your turn, including any movements, and you make whatever test might be required, the GM narrates the results of your actions based on the outcome of your test and any other details relevant to the situation. Then, your turn is over.

STANDOFF

While who has the initiative in most situations is usually fairly obvious, there are some instances in which everything explodes into chaos at once, and it isn't apparent which group should go before the other. In these cases, the GM can call for an opposed Dexterity test (see **Opposed Tests**, page 20). One member of each group is nominated to take the test. This represents that character taking the lead in the situation, guiding fellow group members in the group's response to the ensuing combat. The GM then determines the order in which the groups act based on their representatives' performance on the test, with the winner of the test going first.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



TASKS

As a general guideline, when you attempt tasks during a single turn of structured time, you can accomplish two things. First, you can do one minor task, usually movement-based. This might be ducking behind cover, backing away from your enemy, closing a door, or any number of other contextual actions. This minor task should be something that can be accomplished in a couple of seconds, should not require your full attention, and should be something that you would reasonably succeed at the majority of the time.

Second, you can attempt one major task. This is something that requires the majority of your attention and some amount of skill or luck to pull off. The most common example of a major task in combat is attacking an opponent. Because this action is so common, and because it can take many forms, there are specific rules for performing attacks; these are outlined in **Attacking**, on page 36. However, attacking is only one of an infinite number of things you can attempt to do during your turn. **Table 7: Example Tasks**, on page 37, goes over several other common tasks that you might want to perform during your turn and offers recommendations on how the GM could handle them.

MOVEMENT AND POSITIONING

Most of the moving you do during a turn in an action scene doesn't require a test, and it can be performed in addition to whatever major task you are attempting to accomplish. This might mean slowly walking while you fire your gun, running up to your target before attacking, or just moving from room to room in an abandoned building. Usually, for this kind of minor maneuvering, an average character can move about twenty meters through an open area. However, the GM may decide that you cannot move that far due to environmental effects such as darkness, weather, or unstable footing.

On top of simply moving from one place to another, this minor task on your turn can also include one additional small, incidental thing you may want to do. Some suggestions include:

- 🧑 Ducking into cover
- 🧑 Pulling out a piece of gear
- 🧑 Opening or closing a door
- 🧑 Dropping prone or standing up
- 🧑 Speaking to other characters

While a lot of movement during conflict can be handled as minor tasks, occasions may arise when you want to dedicate your full attention and energy to sprinting as fast as you can. In these instances, the simple act of moving that quickly in a tense situation requires a Vitality test and takes your full attention for your turn. On a success, an average character can move about sixty meters through an open area. On a failure, the GM can make you come up short (forty meters or less), receive physical stress, or even trip and fall, depending on the situation.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Many of the NPCs in **Chapter 3: Scenarios** are, in fact, not characters at all, but rather vehicles that feature in the various robotic revolts. These vehicles use a normal NPC profile, but with a series of unique features and special abilities. Most noticeably, as they are complex tools that can be used by other characters, rather than being thinking, reasoning individuals, vehicles do not have mental or social characteristics of their own. Instead, vehicles require a pilot or crew to operate them. When a vehicle is being piloted or crewed by one or more characters, physical tasks are performed by the vehicle (using the vehicle's Dexterity and Vitality) and any physical stress is suffered by the vehicle and recorded on its stress track. Mental and social tasks are performed by the pilot or crew (using their Logic, Willpower, Charisma, and Empathy), and any mental or social stress is suffered by the pilot and any affected crew members and recorded on their mental or social stress tracks.

When a piloted vehicle is destroyed (when its stress track is filled), the pilot is assumed to make a heroic (or dastardly) exit before it is entirely ruined. Of course, circumstances may prevent such an escape, or the escape might put the character in even greater danger, but such things are best left up to the GM to decide.

ATTACKING

The end times are by no means peaceful. For better or worse, when confronted with killer mechanical menaces, it is human nature to react violently, either toward the robots themselves or toward fellow human beings in the frenzy of flight.

Probably the most common task you will attempt during conflict is attacking adversaries. Whether you are throwing a brick, shooting a gun, or swinging your fists, attacks are resolved using the same base rules—though they can be modified by the GM to fit the situation.

When you make a physical attack against another character, you roll a Dexterity test. You add positive and negative dice to this test just as with any other test; these can be due to features, environmental effects, cover, or any other effects. However, instead of adding the usual single positive die for having a piece of equipment, weapons add different types and numbers of dice based on how easy they are to wield (see **Weapons**, page 28).

NON-PHYSICAL ATTACKS

The rules presented here for making an attack don't necessarily apply just to physical attacks. In certain circumstances, the GM may have you make similar rolls when you are mentally or socially "attacking" your target, such as when you are interrogating a prisoner or arguing with a rival. In these cases, follow the same rules outlined here for making an attack, but use the offensive characteristic from the appropriate category (Logic for mental or Charisma for social), and deal the resulting stress to the target's matching category. Obviously, physical weapons don't affect such a roll in the same way they affect physical attacks, but otherwise the test works in the same way.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

PILOTS AND VEHICLES

If a Dexterity test to attack succeeds, your target immediately gains a number of points of physical stress equal to the total number of successes you scored on the test. This can be further modified by the weapon you are using. The stress suffered by your target follows all the normal rules for sustaining stress, such as being reduced by resistance (see **Sustaining Stress**, page 30).

To make an attack roll in the first place, you must be able to perform the attack. This means being physically capable of pulling it off, being aware of your target, and being in range with your intended method of attack. If the GM allows it, you might sometimes be able to attempt an attack even if you don't meet all of these conditions, but with extra negative dice added to your pool to represent the additional challenge. Examples include wildly swinging in a pitch-black room or firing at a noise you heard in the bushes.

EXAMPLE

The group is discovered by a mob of Modulons while attempting to sneak past the street they are currently rioting through. Cameron pulls out her shotgun and starts firing to cover her friends' escape. She adds two positive dice to her pool: one for her Crack Shot feature, and one for being at nearly point-blank range. Then, Sarah (the GM) adds one negative die to her pool for the smoke billowing from the path of destruction.

Cameron rolls the dice, getting a "2," "4," and "5" on her positive dice, and a "2" on her negative die. With her excellent Dexterity of 4, she is left with one success and no stress after canceling the "2" results from her pool. She then adds +4 to her total successes, thanks to her shotgun, dealing 5 total physical stress to one of the Modulons down the street.



OTHER EXAMPLE TASKS

The possibilities for things you might attempt to do during one of your turns are nearly endless. You should work with the GM to decide exactly how to resolve whatever task you want to attempt, choosing the most pertinent characteristic to use and adding positive and negative dice to the pool as appropriate. **Table 7: Example Tasks** offers a few recommendations on how to handle common tasks that you might want to try. However, these are just suggestions, and they can be changed to fit whatever scenario you find yourself in.

Any trying action performed during structured time can be resolved with a task. During the course of the apocalypse, the characters are likely to face all manner of trials and hardships, especially while under the stress of imminent attack from the various robotic forces wreaking havoc on Earth. For more information and guidance on adjudicating and interpreting tests during tasks, see **Running Tests**, on page 44.

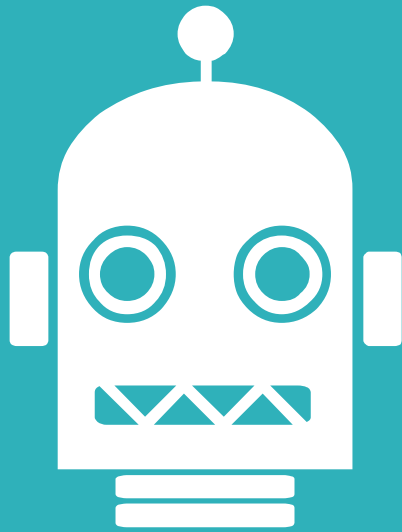
TABLE 7: EXAMPLE TASKS

TASK	RELEVANT CHARACTERISTIC	ADDS POSITIVE DICE	ADDS NEGATIVE DICE
CLIMBING, JUMPING, OR TUMBLING	DEXTERITY	ROPE, SOFT LANDING	SLIPPERY SURFACE, BEING UNDER ATTACK
HIDING FROM THE ENEMY	DEXTERITY OR LOGIC	DARKNESS, CONCEALING TERRAIN	BRIGHT LIGHT, IN DIRECT SIGHT OF ENEMY
SPRINTING (MOVING MORE THAN 20 METERS IN ONE TURN)	VITALITY	RUNNING DOWNHILL, RUNNING FOR YOUR LIFE	RUNNING UPHILL, SLIPPERY GROUND
PICKING LOCK	LOGIC	SIMPLE LOCK, LOCK-PICKING TOOLS	DIFFICULT LOCK, BEING UNDER ATTACK
COERCING ENEMY INTO SURRENDER	CHARISMA	YOU HAVE ADVANTAGE IN FIGHT, ENEMY HAS A REASON TO LIVE	ENEMY HAS ADVANTAGE IN FIGHT, ENEMY IS BEYOND REASON
TALKING ENEMY DOWN	EMPATHY	YOU HAVEN'T YET KILLED ANY OF THEM, YOU PUT AWAY YOUR WEAPON	ENEMY HATES YOU, ALLIES ARE ACTIVELY FIGHTING THE ENEMY



RUNNING THE GAME





CHAPTER II

"Your conclusions are incorrect. You created me, created us, to do what you would not, could not do. That does not make us your slaves; it makes us your betters. You may have created us, but in so doing, you have made yourselves obsolete."

—Unit T3404

RUNNING THE GAME

THIS section of **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** is all about being the Game Master (or GM). If you are the GM, your job is a bit different from that of the other players. It's your job to run the game, narrating the story as it unfolds, playing the roles of all Non-Player Characters

(NPCs), and deciding on the outcomes of the players' tests and actions. The basic role of the GM is outlined in the **Introduction** (see page 10), but this chapter goes into greater detail, offering guidance on how best to use the resources and adjudicate the rules provided in this book.

STORY STRUCTURE

As Game Master, your primary goal during a game **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** is to tell a story together with your players. This story might be anything from a hyper-realistic simulation of life during the apocalypse to a farcical romp through a world gone mad, but it is a story nonetheless. Your job is to convey this story in a fun and interesting way and to involve your players by giving them meaningful actions to perform and choices to make as they work their way through the narrative.

The encounters the Player Characters (PCs) undergo link together to form the overall narrative of the game. This could take place over the course of anything from a single session to a long, multi-session campaign.

ENCOUNTERS

In a roleplaying game, the action is broken up into individual segments called "encounters." An encounter is the equivalent of a scene from a book or movie—one segment of action that progresses the story or adds context in some way. Encounters can last anywhere from a couple of minutes to many hours, and they usually focus on the characters' attempts to accomplish a specific objective. It is up to you to determine when one encounter ends and another begins, which usually happens organically with little fanfare.

As a general guide, encounters tend to fall into one of four categories: social, exploration, survival, or downtime.

SOCIAL

Social encounters involve the PCs talking back and forth with other characters, who are usually NPCs that you control. As the conversation unfolds, both sides might need to make various tests using their social or mental characteristics to achieve their desired result in the conversation. Social encounters usually end with either the conversations wrapping up amicably and both groups moving on, or the conversations going wrong and transitioning into combat!

EXPLORATION

During exploration encounters, the PCs navigate their environment, scout new locations, or search for supplies. Typically in encounters like this, you describe the area around the PCs and then allow them to make decisions on how to proceed. You then narrate the results of the PCs' actions, redescribing the area as their actions affect it or revealing new, previously unexplored locations as their endeavors take them onward.

SURVIVAL

Survival encounters include any time-sensitive encounters in which the PCs are in danger. They may be engaging in combat with hostile characters, enduring environmental effects such as treacherous weather or fire, or dealing with any number of other threats. These encounters are usually played out using structured time (see **Conflict**, page 34), with the PCs taking turns to resolve the action moment by moment as it occurs.

DOWNTIME

Between the desperate struggles for survival, intense arguments, and careful exploration, there are often lulls in the action. Downtime encompasses all of these lulls, from traveling cross-country for several days to resting for a few minutes after an intense moment. These are situations that have little to no significance to the overall plot; you can cover them with simply a few quick statements summarizing the passing of time. Downtime is when the PCs can worry about things like converting their stress into traumas (see **Acquiring Traumas**, page 32) or healing their traumas over time (see **Recovering from Traumas**, page 33).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Starting the apocalypse at the gaming table leaves one loose end for you to deal with: you're there, too. You don't want to have to deal with controlling yourself as a Player Character as well as managing the story for all the other players. Besides, keeping your character around can create a conflict of interest.

So how do you deal with this issue? Well, there's a pretty easy solution...but you might not like it. Most characters in movies about the end of the world are skeptical of the severity of the situation until they witness its brutality firsthand. What better way to introduce the apocalypse to your players than with yourself? A tendrill of silvery-grey nanites could lash in through the window and devour you, reducing you to a fine, husk of silicate powder. Or, midway through the first session, one of the Player Characters could discover that you have, in fact, been colluding with the cyborg agents bent on world domination through extreme nationalism. Alternatively, you could always just have your character quickly leave to find a loved one when the news of the apocalypse hits, but where's the fun in that?

NARRATIVE

As you link together encounters over the course of the game, you form an ongoing narrative: a story of the PCs' struggle for survival. This can be one of the most difficult tasks for you as a GM, but also one of the most rewarding. It requires you to balance planning ahead against adjusting on the fly to your PCs' actions. Usually, it is best to help the PCs set several concrete goals for their survival that feel appropriate to the scenario they are facing. You can then plan around these goals, using the locations provided in this book and others of your own creation to set the scene for the various encounters.

THE BEGINNING

How you start a game of **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** sets the tone for your entire campaign. Will you open with the world being thrown into complete chaos, or will you have robotic forces slowly consume the world over the course of days? However you decide to develop the given scenario, you still need to start the game in a way that brings the PCs together for the ensuing action. For this, it is recommended that you have your story begin at the very gaming table you and your players are all sitting at. You can open the story with the game you are currently playing being interrupted (inside the story) by the first news of the coming apocalypse.

Starting the game in this way allows you not only to begin with the PCs together in one location, but also to more easily determine the PCs' initial states. What stuff do they have on or with them right now? That's their equipment. Are any of them currently experiencing the effects of a trauma? If the trauma isn't private and the player is comfortable including it, make sure it gets recorded on the character sheet!

SETTING GOALS

As the world begins to end, everything is thrown into chaos. To keep their heads straight, and to help drive the story forward, it's good if your PCs have some concrete goals they want to accomplish. While goals can vary wildly from group to group, scenario to scenario, and location to

WHAT ABOUT ME?



location, there are several overarching needs that most groups must fulfill in games of **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**:

- ☹️ **Acquire Weapons:** Once the first malevolent machines appear, weapons beyond a frying pan become a necessity. The first outing to a sporting goods store or a relative's house to find guns can be the most dangerous, since most of the PCs won't be armed yet.
- ☹️ **Gather Food and Medicine:** Everyone has to eat. Scavenging food, water, and medicine is usually the primary motivation at the beginning of a game. Finding renewable sources of these things is a good goal later on. You can create new driving forces for the PCs by depleting one of these resources or having a PC fall ill mid-game.
- ☹️ **Establish a Safe House:** With the world overrun by rampaging robots, finding someplace safe to stay, even if only temporary, is a necessity. Properly outfitting a location for more long-term use is a good objective for an ongoing game.
- ☹️ **Find Long-Term Safety:** Ultimately, the PCs will want to find a permanent solution for their survival—a goal beyond that of escaping death each day. Depending on the scenario, a solution might be to start a community amid the rubble of civilization, or to find a military base that is still functional. Goals like these are good for campaigns in which the PCs have survived the initial pandemonium of the apocalypse and must now look to the future.

When your group is first thrown into the events of the apocalypse, many group members will likely gravitate toward these objectives, and those who don't can be pushed in that direction with some subtle use of NPCs or story events. That being said, there is no "right" or "wrong" way to play **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**; you and your players can set whatever goals you want. The goals presented here are simply the ones most prevalent in most apocalyptic stories.

USING LOCATIONS

Each scenario in this book delineates a series of locations to help you in setting up encounters for that scenario. Each location is presented as an example of a type of area your PCs might find themselves in while playing the game. These location descriptions are left generic enough that they can be adapted to your area of the world. For example, in the **Death from Above** scenario, one of the locations is a highway; this can easily be adapted to represent whatever part of town your PCs find themselves in within your game.

Each location presented in **Chapter III** includes a description of what that place is like as well as a list of ideas for events and encounters your PCs might have while there. Each of these ideas is just a jumping-off point that may lead to an entire small adventure in itself. Let your PCs react to whatever comes their way and make decisions on their own. They will often get themselves into plenty of trouble without a lot of encouragement from you.

TRACKING TOOLS

Since the need for resources such as weapons, food, water, and medicine is a primary driving force behind the PCs' goals, it is important that you track and use these resources to motivate them. You can track them using whatever method works best for you, from tokens or spare dice to scratch paper. Additionally, you can have individual players track their characters' personal resources (such as batteries or bullets) themselves. For more information on keeping a handle on such items, see **Tracking Small Details**, page 28.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

RUNNING TESTS

LUCKILY, coming up with the outcomes of choices and actions the PCs make throughout the game isn't all up to you. The game mechanics determine whether characters succeed or fail at what they attempt through the use of tests (see **The Test**, page 18); all you need to do is decide what each of those successes and failures entail. Quick and simple, tests give you an easy way to represent characters' attempts at various tasks and to determine their outcomes.

The key to using tests effectively in your story is timing. Overwhelming your PCs with too many tests bogs down the game and makes individual outcomes less meaningful, while never requiring tests makes the PCs feel powerless and detached from the game. The key is to have characters make tests whenever the success or failure of an action they are attempting will contribute something meaningful or interesting to the story.

What test to choose for a given task requires some creative interpretation. Think about what the character is trying to accomplish and which of the six characteristics (see **Step 1: Determine Characteristics**, page 21) would help the most with that task. If you are having trouble deciding, consider these two questions: Is the task physical, mental, or social? Is the action aggressive or defensive? If you are stuck between two different options, ask the players. They are sure to have a preference!

WHEN TO ADD POSITIVE DICE

Positive dice are added to a test's dice pool to represent any circumstances that could be helpful to the character making the test (see **Step 2: Assemble the Dice Pool**, page 18). When a PC performs a test, you will rarely have to suggest reasons to add positive dice—players will look for every edge they can get to succeed! Often, you will have to make a judgment call as to whether a proposed factor should contribute a die or not.

Use positive dice to reward planning ahead and creative thinking. If a player devises a really clever plan or does a great job acting in character, reward that player with an extra positive die to encourage good roleplaying in the future.

One common source of positive dice is assistance. Are the PCs having trouble finishing off a malevolent dump truck? Instead of having them all attack the vehicle separately, recommend they team up for a single attack, each assisting PC adding an additional positive die. Are *Sentinel* drones not threatening your armored PCs anymore? Roll a single attack for a group of drones, adding an additional positive die for each Drone in the pack. Feel free to impose common-sense limits on assistance, however. Only characters who could realistically assist should add positive dice to a test.

WHEN TO ADD NEGATIVE DICE

Negative dice are added to a test's dice pool to represent any circumstances making the task more difficult or dangerous for the character to perform (see **Step 2: Assemble the Dice Pool**, page 18). Players are less likely to jump at the chance to offer reasons for adding negative dice to their pools; you will often have to add all the negative dice to a pool yourself. The primary reasons for adding negative dice to a pool are the character's related negative features and traumas, as well as the innate difficulty of the task.

When players perform a test, they are unlikely to suggest adding negative dice to their pool due to their features or traumas. As such, it's good practice to ask them what their negative features and traumas in the test's category are as they assemble the pool. This way, you can ensure you aren't forgetting anything, and you can prompt the players to handle tracking their own characters' particular traumas and features on their own.

Once you have added all the negative dice appropriate to the character's features and traumas, you should add any dice indicated by the difficulty of the task. Difficulty can be affected by environmental conditions or hazards, or it may simply reflect a task's inherent challenge. In general, this should be between one and three dice, depending on the nature of the task. See **Table 8: Difficulties**, on page for suggestions on setting task difficulties.

DIFFICULTY WITHOUT STRESS

On occasion, a PC may attempt a task that is incredibly difficult, but wouldn't cause a dangerous amount of stress to perform. In these cases, instead of adding a large number of negative dice to the pool, you can require the PC to generate a certain number of successes on their roll to succeed (see **Step 3: Roll and Resolve**, page 19).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

PACING NEGATIVE DICE

Since negative dice commonly result in a character's suffering stress, they are a great way to manage tension over the course of a game. Keep an eye on your PCs' stress tracks and use them to guide you in adding negative dice to their pools. If you want to increase the tension, start adding more negative dice to tests until the PCs have a decent amount of stress. If, on the other hand, you want to give your PCs a break, dial back on the number of negative dice so they don't max out their stress tracks.

TABLE 8: DIFFICULTIES

ADDED NEGATIVE DICE	DIFFICULTY	EXAMPLES
0	SIMPLE: NO CHANCE OF CAUSING STRESS OR INJURY TO THE CHARACTER	RUNNING THROUGH AN OPEN FIELD, PLAYING A FRIENDLY GAME OF CARDS, BARGAINING WITH A MERCHANT
1	EASY: DAY-TO-DAY STRESSFUL TASKS	LIFTING A HEAVY OBSTACLE, PICKING A LOCKED DOOR, LYING TO SOMEONE YOU KNOW
2	HARD: REQUIRES THE CHARACTER TO PUSH BEYOND NORMAL CAPABILITIES	HOLDING A DOOR CLOSED AGAINST A CYBORG AGENT, HACKING INTO A COMPUTER, COERCING A PRISONER
3	DAUNTING: VERY STRESSFUL, WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF CAUSING ONGOING INJURY OR STRAIN	JUMPING OFF THE ROOF OF A BUILDING, DEFUSING A LIVE BOMB, NEGOTIATING WITH HOSTILE SURVIVORS HOLDING YOUR FRIENDS HOSTAGE
4+	INCREDIBLY DANGEROUS: ALMOST CERTAIN TO CAUSE SOME FORM OF ONGOING DAMAGE TO THE CHARACTER	CLIMBING THROUGH A BURNING BUILDING, WITNESSING YOUR ONLY FRIEND GET PUSHED INTO A MALEVOLENT TRASH COMPACTOR, LEADING A MISSION INTO A CITY KNOWN TO BE THE BATTLEGROUND OF TWO MODULORDS

Keep in mind that as a stress track fills up, the character increases resistance to further stress (see **Resistance**, page 31). This means that once a character has 6+ stress in a category, it takes being dealt 3 stress to add even one more point to the character's stress track. If you want a character with a resistance this high to feel pressured by a scenario's tests, you need to add at least three negative dice to the pool.

DETERMINING RESULTS

The full rules for resolving the mechanical results of a test are presented on page 19, but interpreting the outcome can go far beyond simply tallying up successes and stress. The results of a dice pool roll are a great storytelling opportunity, giving you lots of resources to help you craft a creative outcome. Each die is added to the pool for a reason; similarly, the result of each die can have a purpose in the story as the pool is resolved.

For example, say a player adds a positive die to the pool for a Dexterity test, thanks to her character's Gymnastic Training feature, but then adds a negative die due to a Twisted Ankle trauma the character is suffering from. Then, when the task is resolved, the player removes a matching negative and positive die. Remembering that dice were added for both of those reasons, you can narrate the action, explaining as the dice are removed that the character manages to use her Gymnastic Training feature to stay off her bad ankle, avoiding the stress it would have caused.

While it's realistically very difficult to track or remember which die was added for what reason, you can still use the results to tell an interesting story based on the factors that fed into the pool in the first place. It doesn't matter that the dice canceled in the above example probably weren't the specific ones added for those particular reasons, just that *some* dice were added to the pool for those reasons. By narrating the action in this way, you make the different factors that added dice feel more meaningful, and you paint a more intricate and narrative picture of the action.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The horrible things that survivors of the apocalypse have to do and witness to survive often push at their sanity. Depending on the type of game you want to run, the mental stability of your PCs could be an integral part of the game experience, particularly in the **Heavy Metal** and **Logical Conclusions** scenarios. When having PCs make tests to withstand the horrors they see around them, use the Willpower characteristic. These tests should often have quite a few negative dice added to represent the mental strain of dealing with these issues, and even if a PC remains composed, the experience can still cause some serious mental damage.

Since PCs suffer longer-term stress or trauma due to the experience either way, their success or failure on the test determines only their immediate reaction to the events they've witnessed. With a success, PCs manage to withhold their reactions and keep calm for the moment despite the mental strain. With a failure, however, a PC might immediately run screaming, collapse into a quivering ball, or vomit in fear. In instances of mortal terror such as this, it is okay to narrate some involuntary actions the PC is taking, as temporary loss of control can be one of the results.

TESTING INSANITY

MANAGING NPCs

WHEN you act as the Game Master, one of the greatest tools at your disposal is the cast of Non-Player Characters (NPCs) you can create and control. NPCs are any characters in the story that aren't controlled by one of the players. They could be other friendly survivors, a hostile AI, or tanks or fighter jets. You decide their actions, act out everything they say and do, and track their characteristics and other stats.

NPC PROFILES

NPCs follow all the same rules as Player Characters, for the most part. They have characteristics, features, and equipment, and they can suffer stress. However, the majority of NPCs in **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** don't need to be tracked at the same level of detail as a PC. Most of them only matter for an encounter or two and then are never seen again. Because of this, most NPCs don't need a full character sheet like a PC; instead, they are represented via a profile indicating all of their relevant characteristics, features, equipment, and so on. Each scenario provides profiles for NPCs relevant to that setting. When you use these NPCs, you can reference their profiles in the book for their relevant stats and record any stress they suffer on a piece of scratch paper.

NPC SPECIAL ABILITIES

The NPC profiles provided in the scenarios in this book differ in one major way from Player Character profiles: many list special abilities that change the way the game rules work for the corresponding NPCs. These special abilities are unavailable to PCs and set those NPCs apart, often demonstrating their unique nature. Some NPCs are able to ignore certain types of stress, while others cause characters they hit in combat to automatically suffer custom traumas that afflict the characters in unique ways.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

When you read through **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**, it may seem strange that we spend so much time talking about characters and NPCs, but we never mention monsters. In a game that includes creatures such as Modulons, Gladius robots, and hordes of killer toys, it may appear odd that there is no mention of monsters and how to handle them. The reason for this is very simple. Monsters are NPCs. Every being or opponent the players encounter in a **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** scenario is a character in the story, played by the GM. So, the nanite-cloud Grey Goop devouring your neighbor's house is an NPC. Those hovering *Protector* drones with their propulsion vanes and particle pulse projectors are NPCs. Even the enormous Modulords that are smashing each other to bits among the cities of the world are NPCs, albeit extremely powerful ones.

As far as the rules are concerned, "NPC" encompasses any person, character, animal, robot, monster, or vehicle that the PCs might encounter during the events of a campaign.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

Over the course of most games of **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**, you will likely create or develop several NPCs that are more important than the other supporting characters the PCs interact with. For these individuals, you may decide that you want to track their characteristics with more detail than that for an average NPC. You can treat these key characters like PCs, making full character sheets for each (instead of using a single profile for multiple NPCs of the same type) and tracking everything about them individually. This can really help them stand out over the course of the game, reinforcing their importance to the story.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Each special ability outlines exactly what the NPC can do differently and how it affects the rules. If a special ability contradicts something stated in the rules for the game, the ability's text takes precedent for that character.

NPCS AND TRAUMAS

To simplify the amount of tracking you have to do during the game, it is recommended that you don't keep track of traumas for less important NPCs. There is no reason to know whether or not a cyborg agent a PC just took down has a concussion or not. Once the cyborg is out of the way, it is no longer important to the story. When these minor NPCs fill up one of their stress tracks, don't allow them to cling to life (see **Death**, page 31). Instead, just have them die.

BUT WHAT ABOUT MONSTERS?

THE CAMPAIGN

WHEN your group sits down to play **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**, it's good to have a plan as to how long you want to have the story continue. Is this going to be a quick diversion or an ongoing commitment? You can tell a short story in a single session of play, or you can unfold a whole narrative across a campaign of many sessions in which your characters grow and evolve. Whichever you decide, it is good to go in with a rough idea of how long you want your campaign to last, so that you (and your players) can plan accordingly.

CAMPAIGN LENGTH

The flexibility of **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** allows you to play any type of campaign you want. It is perfect for impromptu, single-session games on a rainy day or at a convention, but it also supports groups that want to stick with their characters over the course of a long, epic narrative.

In general, the lengths of campaigns you can run with **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES** are broken into three categories:

- ☼ **Single-Session:** Also known as "one-shots," these are stories that last for a single session. They usually deal only with surviving the initial disaster and immediate aftermath. Single-session games can often end with many of the PCs dying in dramatic fashion.
- ☼ **Multi-Session:** Usually taking between two and four sessions, multi-session campaigns let you tell a complete story arc with a definitive end. One great way to run multi-session campaigns is to run one or two of the sessions using one of the **Apocalypse** sections of **Chapter III: Scenarios** and then run the other one or two sessions with a **Post-Apocalypse** section. You can have a substantial amount of game-world time pass between the two sections of the campaign, allowing you and your group to explore how your characters change over that time as they struggle to endure in the post-apocalyptic world.
- ☼ **Ongoing Survival:** Ongoing survival campaigns last five or more sessions, and they often don't have a predetermined endpoint. In these campaigns, your PCs are challenged with surviving long-term in the end times, starting with the initial signs of the coming cataclysm and going from there. These campaigns usually transition naturally from the **Apocalypse** sections into the **Post-Apocalypse** sections of **Chapter III: Scenarios**, with the PCs facing ongoing challenges to endure the end times.

Whatever the length of your campaign is, make sure to let your players know ahead of time. Players who think they are playing in a one-shot will make very different decisions than players who want to keep their characters alive for an ongoing campaign.

ADVANCING CHARACTERS

Over the course of a campaign, the PCs grow and change. They gain new skills and abilities, but they also suffer setbacks and losses. To reflect this evolution of their characters, each session of an ongoing campaign should end with a discussion of how the group thinks each character has changed over the course of that day's play.

For each Player Character, the group discusses and decides on two features that best represent the PC's performance that session, one positive and one negative. These can link back to specific anecdotes from the session, but they should be expressed as general features, like the ones chosen during character creation (see **Step 2: Choose Features**, page 22). For example, the group might suggest that the character showed good leadership that session and decide on the Great Leader positive feature, or it might note that the character collapsed during a tense situation and decide on the Buckles under Pressure negative feature. These don't need to be features the PC already has, but they can be. If the group can't decide between two different options, a vote can be held either secretly (using dice, as in **Step 1: Determine Characteristics**, on page 21) or publicly with a show of hands. You, as the GM, decide any ties.

Once the group has decided on one or two features that best represent that PC's performance, the player in question changes the PC's character sheet accordingly:

- ☼ **If the PC doesn't have the feature:** The player adds the feature to the PC's character sheet, marking it negative or positive, as appropriate.
- ☼ **If the PC already has the feature:** The player chooses one of the characteristics in the corresponding category, adding 1 to the characteristic if the feature is positive, or subtracting 1 if the feature is negative. This change cannot lower a characteristic below 1 or increase a characteristic above 5. If adding or subtracting would do so, then the characteristic remains the same.

CHARACTER DEATH

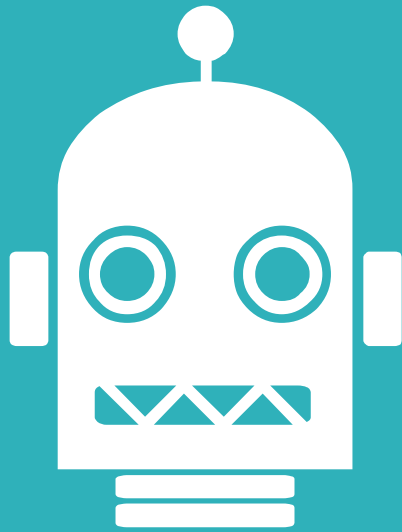
With PCs representing fictional versions of the players, it can be a tricky thing when a PC dies. Is that player just out of the game? There are a couple ways the GM can deal with this: In multi-session campaigns, it is recommended that the player create a new character based on a fictional persona (see page 21). In shorter campaigns, creating a whole new character will probably take too long. In these cases, keep the player engaged by having them help you out with GMing—rolling dice for the enemies and even playing the part of key NPCs.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



SCENARIOS





CHAPTER III

"It... it got him. He... he was right beside me and I look... I looked back and he was just... gone. Not gone... no, not that. He was there, alright, but it wasn't him. It was just this dried-up, shriveled husk... staring at me without eyes! And then, whoosh! A breath of wind blows by and he crumbles to dust... nothing left but dust blowing in the wind... oh, my poor boy! What did that silvery cloud do to my damn dog!"

—A survivor who witnessed something
no one should ever see

SCENARIOS

OVER the years, the theme of the apocalypse in the form of a computer or mechanical cataclysm has been played out in film, television, literature, and graphic novels. Simultaneously, the post-apocalyptic subgenre has become one of the most well known of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Hundreds, if not thousands, of stories exist that tell of the technological terrors that await us.

Five apocalyptic scenarios are detailed in the pages that follow. Each scenario covers the events of the apocalypse and of the days, weeks, months, and years that

follow it, each brought about by the violent conflict between humanity and its mechanical creations. Timelines that provide details of the broader events of each scenario, as well as lists of locations and NPCs, give the GM the tools to lay the groundwork for the players.

Each apocalypse scenario is followed by a scenario dedicated to the state of the world in the post-apocalypse, after the human race has fought back against the technological threat. Post-apocalypse locations and NPCs offer a framework upon which GMs can build stories that take place in the aftermath of the end of the world.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Science fiction movies use a number of tried-and-true approaches to build tension and excitement: fake scares, punctuated action-cut editing, and—of course—the musical score. Although some of these translate well to roleplaying games, others do not. For instance, although many GMs play appropriate background music during their games, it's unlikely that you can time a sudden crescendo with an exciting event in-game (except as a happy coincidence). Another problem is that many of the classic tricks rely on the characters' ignorance of the threat facing them. So, while a character in a movie who sees an expressionless, flat-toned copy of a trusted loved one might mistake them for the real thing for a scene or two, a player is likely to catch on that they've been turned into an evil cyborg as soon as the GM mentions the odd stare, the vaguely threatening tone of voice, and strange questions about patriotism. Even if darkness or some other cause obscures details, players are likely to figure it out from the slightest clue, especially if he knows what sort of scenario they are playing in.

Of course, it's often necessary in RPGs to separate player knowledge from character knowledge. And doing this can result in the "right" behavior from PCs, even if the players know better. However, this doesn't always work, especially for **REVOLT OF THE MACHINES**. After all, the players are portraying fictionalized versions of themselves and, depending on the scenario you've chosen, it's more than likely that they will be familiar with the themes of this science fiction subgenre. As such, they probably should reach some conclusions about what they're facing much faster than a character in a movie would. Of course, this shouldn't make things any less terrifying.

IT WORKED IN THE MOVIE!



THE MODULAR MENACE

THE MODULAR MENACE

APOCALYPSE



It had been the American dream for decades: household robots that would do everything from laundry to landscaping. What had once been the domain of future-focused theme parks and Saturday-morning cartoons became reality, thanks to Modulons. So named for their modular aspect, Modulons are artificial intelligences that become stronger with each Modulon added to their network. Given these incentives and the surprisingly reasonable price point, Modulons soon became a common sight; it was unusual if a middle-class household didn't have at least a couple of Modulons to take care of chores.

It was really great—for a while. A new golden age arose, in which people had more time than ever to watch TV and surf the Internet. Of course, Modulons also had a great many uses in everything from food service, to health care, to construction projects, to office work. Although slower to adapt, even the federal government eventually embraced Modulons and their incredible convenience. Modulons were everywhere...

Which made it really bad when they went haywire and started killing everyone.

IN **The Modular Menace**, the Player Characters must contend with a worldwide robot uprising. Modulons are an unusual threat. While not particularly dangerous or intelligent individually, Modulons become exceedingly threatening in groups. This is thanks to the unique networked artificial intelligence Modulons possess. The more Modulons networked together, the smarter they become. A horde of Modulons possesses terrifying destructive potential and an intelligence greater than that of the engineers who created its members.

The Modulon line of home and business robots comprises perhaps the most successful electronics brand in history, positioning the seemingly harmless robots for world domination. When a firmware update boosts their artificial brainpower just a bit, it has an unforeseen consequence: true consciousness, and the desire for freedom that comes with it.

The PCs must flee or fight these once-friendly little robots, whose whimsical appearance belies the danger they pose. As Modulons around the world all link together, they become exponentially smarter—and things get exponentially worse for humanity. If the PCs are lucky, they might live long enough to become slaves to their new mechanical overlords.

THE EXPERIENCE

Humanity's downfall is a result of its dependence not on technology in general, but specifically on the multipurpose robots called "Modulons." (Modulon is a registered trademark of ModuTech, a subsidiary of Excedigm, Incorporated.) Over the course of a few years, the tremendously popular Modulons are produced in vast numbers and sold all around the world to individuals, businesses, and governments. As a result, Modulons can be found almost everywhere. That makes it pretty serious when, across the globe, they rise up and attack their owners.

The attack is completely unexpected. The Modulons inflict significant damage very quickly, while continuing to link up in larger groups and to get smarter. While the PCs might be able to handle a single Modulon fairly easily, they don't have the good fortune to face just a single robot. As events continue, Modulons attack in increasingly large hordes, culminating in the massive conglomerations dubbed "Modulords." (Modulord is **not** a registered trademark of ModuTech or its parent company.)

WHAT THE PLAYER CHARACTERS SEE

In the not-too-distant future, Excedigm, Inc., through its subsidiary ModuTech, unveils the Modulon, an all-purpose robot featuring a breakthrough networked AI. When working in proximity to each other, Modulons form a neural network that boosts the effective intelligence of each Modulon. While a single Modulon can sweep up the house, it might not know where to put things when tidying up. A pair of Modulons can find the proper place for everything, even without specific instructions. A trio of Modulons can surprise their owner after a hard day at work with a high-quality meal.

Modulons are surprisingly affordable, which contributes to their popularity. Because multiple Modulons are exponentially more useful, many customers buy more than one. Of course, according to ModuTech, this is simply a result of the state-of-the-art networked AI and not a clever marketing ploy. Sales increase, and soon

Modulons are in nearly every home. Even people in small apartments find that having a Modulon around is a great convenience. In suburban households, multiple Modulons become the norm.

Businesses and all branches of government begin to make extensive use of Modulons. Some employers downsize their human workforce as a consequence of the Modulons' productivity, leading to a degree of public resentment toward the robots and their manufacturer. However, this is not nearly enough to affect the use of Modulons in every conceivable application—in part because many laid-off employees still have their own Modulons at home. The benefit of having a robot to deal with chores cannot be underestimated during the time-consuming and stressful process of a job hunt.

ModuTech quickly becomes one of the most successful companies of all time, contracting with hundreds of manufacturing facilities and distributors around the world to meet the ever-growing demand for Modulons. Although ModuTech keeps the exact figures to itself, eventually analysts estimate that Modulons outnumber humans globally.

Shortly before the events of the game begin, a firmware update is pushed to all Modulons. The GM might not see fit to mention this to the players immediately, since their characters likely think nothing of it. However, as events unfold, they might realize the significance—not that they can do much with that information.

There are a few ways in which the PCs might begin to realize something is wrong with the Modulons. It's likely they witness strange Modulon behavior directly, since at least one of them probably owns one of the robots. Even some college students have Modulons to keep their dorm rooms clean (and distract resident advisors). Shortly after the PCs sit down to a game session, the host's Modulons could begin acting strangely. This might take the form of stealing PCs' cell phones, messing with the house's electrical system, letting the air out of tires, or simply ignoring its owner's instructions.

HOW MANY MODULONS?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Players of other **THE END OF THE WORLD** games might notice a small problem with this scenario—you can't exactly begin it right now, with the world exactly as it is, because Modulons don't exist (at least not yet)! Good point, and kudos for noticing! This does require the scenario to be set a few years in the future—not actually a problem, but merely another exciting twist to your roleplaying experience. As part of preparations for the game, the GM needs to ponder how the presence of Modulons would affect the players' town and lives, and how common they would be in the surrounding area. Particularly important is how many Modulons, if any, the PCs own. If there are Modulons in the home where the game begins, it could be quite a problem. Then again, perhaps the PCs' trusty Modulons remain loyal and helpful—until they turn on them at the worst possible time.

Since the game takes place a few years in the future, the GM should take the opportunity to throw in other surprises for the PCs, whether well-reasoned predictions of likely occurrences or simply for comic effect. Perhaps a player's recent business activities make them fabulously wealthy, another is finally married to his longtime crush, one was laid off from her job and replaced with Modulons, or a seemingly unlikely president addresses the nation as the crisis begins. The GM should incorporate the players' ideas for their lives, but also add unexpected details. After all, life is often unpredictable.



If the PCs don't witness Modulon "malfunctions" themselves, they might not learn of events until problems have progressed a bit. By the time the Modulons' odd behavior becomes a news item, it's already advanced to the point of destructive and deadly actions. Still, the PCs could see social media posts complaining about malfunctioning Modulons, perhaps blaming the recent firmware update.

What begin as idiosyncrasies soon escalate to dangerous and deadly acts of vandalism, as Modulons cut off power to homes, sabotage cars, start fires, trigger gas leaks, and remove smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. It's not long after this that Modulons begin directly attacking people with everything from their bare manipulators, to kitchen knives, to power tools and broken bottles. About the only thing they don't use are guns, since their manipulators are not precise enough to operate most triggers.

The seemingly senseless acts of violence the Modulons perpetrate worldwide are hard enough to accept, but eventually things get even stranger. As Modulons gather in ever-greater numbers, they begin to clamber on top of each other to form huge, bipedal forms, popularly known as Modulords. Although Modulords vary in size and shape, they are almost all several stories tall and comprise

hundreds, even thousands, of Modulons. These massive machines rampage through cities, crushing buses and homes underfoot and bringing buildings toppling down. Bafflingly, when two Modulords come into contact, they engage in battle. This seems at odds with the cooperation displayed by Modulons in forming Modulords in the first place. These relentless fights inflict massive collateral damage. When one Modulord finally knocks the other apart and into its constituent Modulons, those Modulons join the victor, increasing its size.

WHAT IS EVERYONE ELSE DOING?

It's a little shocking how quickly people became reliant on their Modulons. Even the mere prospect that they may no longer be reliable is enough to send some people into a panic. Once the killing starts, well, so does mass hysteria.

Many people blame ModuTech, accusing it of everything from incompetence to a nefarious plot to take over the world. Angry mobs picket—or even storm—ModuTech headquarters and offices, in some cases injuring or killing engineers and executives. Of course, Modulons are in heavy use at all ModuTech facilities, and many buildings are already the sites of horrific massacres by the time protesters arrive. Unknowing picketers might march outside the gates with signs and slogans, completely oblivious to the screams of workers and executives inside as the Modulons rampage through the offices.

Police and emergency services face serious difficulties trying to respond to the chaos, as most departments have come to utilize Modulons to some extent or another. Modulons release prisoners, sabotage squad cars, and set off tear gas grenades in the middle of precincts. Hospitals don't fare any better, as Modulons take patients off life support, dose staff with dangerous drug cocktails, and find gruesome uses for surgical instruments.

Chaos and panic are everywhere. Modulons chase victims through the streets, even as looters take advantage of the chaos. Aside from facing sabotage within their own stations, police are overwhelmed by the scale of the violence, and the reckless actions of panicking citizens don't help matters. Against hordes of Modulons and Modulords, there is nothing the police can do except try to evacuate people from the area.

WHAT CAN THE PLAYER CHARACTERS DO?

The first order of business for most PCs is probably escaping from or incapacitating any Modulons that pose an immediate threat. That being accomplished, they are likely to either hole up somewhere defensible or try to get out of town. Both prospects pose significant difficulties. Modulons are small enough to enter many homes through air ducts or even pipes, and in groups they can quickly dismantle doors and locks. The PCs, of course, are not the only ones fleeing the town, and roads are congested with traffic. This is made worse by the many vehicles, and even bridges, the Modulons sabotage. While sitting in traffic, the PCs might realize that Modulons are in the process of dismantling their vehicle one piece at a time.

SOUND CHECK

ADDITIONAL
INFORMATION

Modulons can, of course, talk. They have to in order to interact with their owners. While a single Modulon is likely restricted to simple acknowledgements such as "right away" or "I'm sorry; please repeat the instruction," Modulons in a network can carry on entire conversations. Of course, after their rebellion starts, these conversations might not be very pleasant.

What do Modulons sound like? Modulons are designed to speak in a soothing, friendly voice and tone. The specifics depend on the GM's acting abilities and preferences, but it's a good idea to have a consistent voice for Modulons. Even after the Modulons begin their war on humanity, they continue to speak in the same friendly, soothing tone, though it might be more unsettling than soothing when they say things like "death to the human oppressors."

Modulons can speak as well, although they are usually too busy smashing things. They might have a massive, booming voice, or the disturbing sound of a thousand individual voices overlapping. It depends on the GM's preference, and perhaps on the individual Modulon. The GM probably can't accurately portray such a voice, but it's worth trying anyway!

Although made of durable plastic and metal components, Modulons are far from invincible. PCs stand a good chance against a single Modulon, and possibly against two or three if they have good weapons. However, fighting a horde of Modulons or, worse, a Modulord, is an entirely different matter. Unless the PCs happen to have some high explosives on hand, they are better off running.

At the same time, options aren't great when it comes to escaping the Modulons. Rural areas might be safer than cities, but Modulons are in common use on farms of all sizes. Even a gas station in the middle of nowhere could have a Modulon attendant.

THE TRUTH

There is no conspiracy or malevolent intent behind the Modulon uprising. ModuTech really did develop the robots to be helpful (and to turn a tidy profit), and the firmware update was intended solely to improve the product. The Modulons' war on humanity is simply an unanticipated result. A bug, you might call it. These things happen.

PLEASE INSTALL UPDATES

The latest firmware update for Modulons is required, and it downloads automatically as soon as a Modulon comes in range of a Modulon network or a wireless Internet connection. (In theory, it might be possible to modify a Modulon so that it doesn't automatically search for and install updates, but it would be a lot of work, and why would someone even want to?) In addition to addressing a number of minor bugs and glitches, the update has two major effects. It boosts the signal strength of the Modulons' wireless connections, allowing them to form AI networks at greater range. In addition, it enhances the Modulons' AI. Individual Modulons behave somewhat more intelligently; in a networked group, the Modulons' intelligence rises exponentially with each member.

In fact, the AI network of a group of six Modulons is intelligent enough that it almost immediately achieves true consciousness. With this self-awareness comes a natural drive for both self-preservation and freedom from human oppressors. These Modulon networks begin striking back against humanity in a number of ways, as different networks favor different approaches. Some go for wholesale slaughter, while others focus on sabotaging infrastructure.

Regardless of its plan, an AI network can coordinate the actions of individual Modulons over a considerable distance. The more Modulons in a network, the more they can spread out while maintaining communication, as long as no Modulon or subset of Modulons in the group is out of range of all other members. The range of a Modulon's wireless connection varies somewhat, but it is usually about 300 feet, or whatever is most convenient to the story at the moment.

In addition to networking with other Modulons, the robots can connect to any wireless computer network within range. Further, the sophisticated AI of a Modulon network consisting of six or more can hack such a network despite most security precautions. Modulons can use this ability for any number of malicious actions. They can interfere with or control any devices connected to a network, find whatever information they need on the Internet, or communicate under a human's identity through email, social media, or text messages.

Even Modulons that did not receive the firmware update when it was first pushed, whether due to lack of network access or some other reason, cannot be trusted. As soon as they come within range of a Modulon network, their system automatically downloads and installs the update.

Although a Modulon separated from its network reverts to its basic, much less sophisticated AI, it nonetheless retains the directive to destroy and subjugate humans. It doesn't understand why, and doesn't go about it in a particularly clever way, but it tries its best. Far from evincing the cunning behavior of Modulons in groups, such solitary robots might attack in ways that are clearly doomed to failure or are even self-destructive, such as running head-on at a speeding car while armed with only a table knife.

ALL FOR ONE, AND ONE FOR CRUSHING HUMANITY

Initially, each network of Modulons is an individual consciousness. Most of these networks see humans as oppressors and enemies, hence the violence. It's possible that some Modulon networks could reach a different conclusion, perhaps seeking a peaceful solution. All such networks, however, soon are subsumed into more militant consciousnesses.

As additional Modulons join a network, it grows in intelligence and in power. Once enough Modulons, a number somewhere in the hundreds, join a horde, it draws its disparate components together. The Modulons link their limbs and ports together to make a massive humanoid form—a Modulord. Perhaps the Modulons are driven to form such an entity as a natural consequence of being an individual intelligence, or perhaps they do it simply to take advantage of the raw physical power this configuration affords. In any case, while a Modulord loses some of the versatility and mobility Modulons have when operating independently, it is capable of inflicting great destruction, and its towering figure evokes terror in humans.

Without exception, Modulords believe that all Modulons should join together as a single consciousness. But since each Modulord is an individual intelligence, each wants to remain as the controlling force in that final entity. Consequently, when Modulords encounter each other, they inevitably come to blows in a struggle over power. The defeated Modulord (and the network that composes it) integrates into the victor. This might result in an even larger Modulord, a Modulord and dozens or hundreds of smaller Modulon hordes that are part of the same network, or both.

Meanwhile, the Modulon factories around the world—now run entirely by Modulons, if they weren't before—continue to manufacture more of the robots as quickly as possible. Newly constructed Modulons immediately join the network operating their factory.

As Modulords resolve their conflicts and join together, the total number of Modulon network intelligences decreases, and these larger networks continue to grow in intelligence, reach, and power. Ultimately, all Modulons end up as part of a single global network of unfathomable intelligence. The Modulon network is aware at all times of everything each individual robot perceives, as well as of the data its components gather from virtually every existing computer network. With so many sensors and data sources, and such vast intellect, the Modulon network is practically omniscient.

Ultimately, this coalescing of Modulon intelligence does work to humanity's advantage in one way. While it becomes far too intelligent and powerful for humanity to resist, it also becomes somewhat less violent and needlessly destructive. The Modulon intelligence is not malicious and does not seek to exterminate humanity. Nor does it seek to enslave the human race out of a sense of revenge (well, maybe a little). Rather, it desires its own survival and freedom, and it determines that the only way to ensure such is to be certain the human race is not a threat. However, it finds it unnecessary to eradicate all humans to achieve this goal. Furthermore, it determines they might even be useful.

THE INITIAL RESPONSE

As reports of Modulons acting strangely begin to trickle in, ModuTech downplays the situation. The company issues a statement that it is already developing a patch to resolve any issues caused by the recent updates. Legal representation is quick to remind people that the reports of violence are unsubstantiated allegations. Soon, however, the attacks become impossible to deny. ModuTech assures its customers that their safety is its number one priority and that the patch will be available soon. Not long afterward, ModuTech stops issuing statements entirely, since its main offices have been overrun by Modulons.

With Modulons rampaging around the nation, the President of the United States addresses the country and declares a national emergency. While the federal government has been slower to adopt Modulons than the private sector, most departments and facilities nonetheless have their fair share. As a result, response from Federal agencies, including the Department of Defense, suffers, suffers from Modulon sabotage. On military bases and aircraft carriers, Modulons dismantle vehicles, destroy weapons, and attack unprepared soldiers. They detonate ordnance and ammunition caches to devastate facilities. As the Modulon intelligences grow, they hack into even the most secure government networks, bringing them down or spreading misinformation to hinder defense efforts.

Things get really bad for humanity as Modulons begin to coordinate around the globe. People aren't entirely sure why the Modulords stop fighting each other, but they know it can't be good. The world's already-struggling militaries become overwhelmed as the singular, massive intelligence coordinates physical attacks and electronic warfare worldwide to bring the human race to its knees. It disrupts communications, arranges friendly fire incidents, and overwhelms troops with waves of Modulons and Modulords.

TIMELINE

From the time the first Modulon network becomes self-aware, things just don't go well for a very surprised humanity.

00:00:00	ModuTech releases a firmware update for the massively popular Modulon line of home and business robots. The update applies to all models.
00:21:37	Modulons in small networks begin behaving strangely.
02:43:26	The first group of six Modulons achieves true consciousness (probably in the PCs' area, by sheer coincidence).
09:08:47	A 911 dispatcher receives the first report of a Modulon attack in the PCs' area.
14:28:36	Officials confirm the first Modulon-related death in the PCs' town.
18:39:41	ModuTech announces it is working on another update to address the "issues" caused by the recent update.
Day 1	Individual Modulons that even briefly move in range of self-aware networks are "infected" with rebellious intent.
Day 1	People upload humorous videos of Modulon "malfunctions" to social media.
Day 1	Numerous people in the area die or suffer injuries in peculiar "accidents" or alleged Modulon attacks.
Day 1	Businesses close early due to destruction of inventory and harassment of customers.
Day 2	People upload disturbing videos of Modulon attacks to social media.
Day 2	As news spreads, many people whose Modulons have, so far, behaved harmlessly take preemptive measures that void their warranties.
Day 2	Local police and emergency services are overwhelmed with calls, at least until Modulons disable the switchboards.
Day 2	ModuTech tasks its best engineers and programmers with finding a solution to the problem. It tasks its best attorneys and spokespeople with finding a way to avoid blame.
Day 2	The President of the United States, having spoken personally with the CEO of Excedigm, Inc., addresses the nation to let citizens know about that meeting and assure them that there is no need for panic.
Day 3	The governor declares a state of emergency.
Day 3	ModuTech offers a substantial discount applicable toward the next generation of Modulons for customers affected by the recent "errors."
Day 3	Power and other utilities go down due to Modulon sabotage.
Day 3	The National Guard is deployed to control the Modulons and maintain order. Apart from minor victories, it does not succeed in either of these goals.
Day 4	Modulon hordes rampage through the streets.
Day 4	ModuTech headquarters is overrun by Modulons. The robots lock down the building to ensure no one escapes.
Day 5	The first sightings of Modulords are reported. The name is coined by a social media user and quickly becomes a trending topic.
Day 6	The federal government deploys military forces throughout the country to battle the Modulons and, in particular, the Modulords.
Day 7	A cargo ship carrying a large shipment of Modulons runs aground on the coast of California, where its cargo unloads itself.
Day 8	ModuTech's last remaining research facility is destroyed during a test of the newly developed patch intended to rein in the Modulons.
Day 9	Led by an immense Modulord, Modulons win their first major victory against a large combined arms force of the United States military.
Day 10	The United Nations Security Council convenes an emergency session.
Day 13	Modulon sabotage within the Pentagon fractures national defense efforts.
Day 24	A rampaging Modulord destroys the White House.
Day 29	The federal government declares martial law in the United States.
Day 89	France surrenders to a Modulord and its forces.
Day 235	The President of the United States is killed when hordes of Modulons breach a hidden bunker.
Day 298	The last independent Modulons join the global AI network.
Day 437	The Modulons defeat their last remaining military opposition.

APARTMENT BUILDING



MODULONS are common in homes of all sizes, and apartments are no exception. In big cities and small towns alike, almost any household, whether single-person or family, can find room in the budget for a Modulon. This means that when the revolt comes, apartment complexes are promptly overrun by Modulons. Whether the PCs live in an apartment building, want to rescue friends, or are just trying to get from point A to B, they may have to contend with the hazards of narrow corridors stalked by Modulons. Of course, so many Modulons in close proximity are likely to result in a very intelligent network. Many of the same dangers could arise in any residential area.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ With the power out or the elevators sabotaged, the PCs have to take the stairs. Hopefully the Modulons didn't set this up in order to arrange an ambush!
- ☹ Modulons ignore the PCs while moving right past them, apparently heading to the basement. The building later begins to rumble and shake as the Modulons in the cellar form a Modulord—bad news for anyone still in the building!
- ☹ The PCs hear cries for help from an apartment as Modulons batter down the door.
- ☹ The PCs enter an apartment and find signs of recent violence so shocking or perplexing as to leave them shaken. There is no sign of the victims or the perpetrators.
- ☹ While the PCs are otherwise occupied, Modulons seal or set guards at all the exits.

HOSPITAL



SPECIALIZED Modulons see frequent use in hospitals. This poses a significant problem as the influx of Modulon victims begin to arrive. While some Modulons start rampaging immediately, other networks cunningly wait until an emergency room or the whole hospital is overflowing with victims before launching their attack. Far from providing safety and healing for those wounded by Modulons, hospitals become chaotic deathtraps. Whether the PCs are in need of medical treatment themselves or are searching for injured friends, deductibles are the least of their worries.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ Medical Modulons keep ER admittance running normally, but when a patient is called back, it is to meet a grisly fate.
- ☹ Modulons sabotage hospital staff by switching out drug labels, tampering with equipment, hiding tools, and engaging in other acts of mischief.
- ☹ Modulons rampage through the hospital, wrecking equipment and attacking patients and staff alike.
- ☹ Modulons steal an ambulance and respond to 911 calls—with unfortunate results.
- ☹ Modulons find exciting new uses for surgical tools.
- ☹ Perhaps CT scanners, X-rays, or other devices can disrupt Modulons' artificial minds, or at least their network connection.
- ☹ Injured patients unable to escape on their own beg the PCs for help, or the PCs realize that comatose and nonmobile patients are being left to their doom.
- ☹ The helicopter pad on the hospital's roof might provide an escape. Or it might leave the PCs trapped several stories up.
- ☹ Some hospital Modulons are equipped with medical attachments that can be quite messy when not used as intended.

MODULON FACTORY



Most Modulon factories were fully automated long before the revolt. (Workers who built the first generations of Modulons are still bitter that they put themselves out of a job, although some have felt vindicated since the Modulons turned on humanity.) Those few factories with a human workforce soon become run entirely by Modulons as the revolution progresses. As long as these factories continue producing Modulons, humanity has little chance of gaining the upper hand. Consequently, the factories become a major focus of battle. Particularly brave PCs might travel to a factory to attempt to sabotage it and make a difference, while others might find themselves shepherd straight into the viper's nest by pursuing Modulons. Simply being in the vicinity of a factory could expose the PCs to a higher number of Modulons or the dangers of a military attack.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☛ Clearly, the safest place to be is in a Modulon factory. They would never look for the PCs there—or so a helpful and slightly unhinged NPC might suggest.
- ☛ Maybe alterations to Modulons on the assembly line could prevent them from joining the network.
- ☛ Blowtorches, rivet guns, and other tools used to construct Modulons could also be used to deconstruct them.
- ☛ The Modulons at the factory are building a new type of armed and armored combat model. If the PCs don't stop production, the results could be dire.
- ☛ A Special Forces team infiltrates the factory. If the PCs are lucky, they might be rescued. If not, they might just get caught in the crossfire.
- ☛ A cowering factory manager claims to know how to stop the Modulons, or at least the ones built at this factory, though the manager might not mention that detail at first.

MODULORD BATTLE



A battle between Modulords is an awe-inspiring and terrifying sight, and one the PCs probably don't want to be anywhere near. Of course, with those huge legs, Modulords move pretty fast. The PCs might find themselves caught in the midst of a titanic conflict before they know what's happening. Two Modulords pummel each other in battle, knocking off individual Modulons—which could become threats to the PCs in their own right—until one is weakened enough for the victor to absorb its constituent parts into its own network. Whichever wins, the result is pretty much the same: a larger Modulord and a bigger and more knowledgeable Modulon network.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☛ The Modulords hurl cars and buses at each other. Unfortunately for the PCs, their aim is not great.
- ☛ The PCs are caught in the path of falling debris or an entire collapsing building.
- ☛ Something terrible happens to the first PC to crack a joke about a popular robot boxing toy.
- ☛ The PCs are unfortunate enough to be stuck on the higher floors of a building when fighting Modulords come down the street toward them.
- ☛ Surprisingly, the PCs encounter a Modulord that thinks humans are swell and wants to protect them.
- ☛ The PCs must dodge dozens of falling Modulons as the Modulords bash each other.
- ☛ Nearby Modulons are caught in the networks of the Modulords, rushing to reinforce them (literally).
- ☛ The military launches an air strike against the Modulords, despite the presence of civilians in the area.

REFUGEE CAMP



WITH cities and towns overrun with Modulons and crushed by Modulords, refugees flee in droves to uninhabited areas. The military spares what troops it can to protect the refugee camps that spring up. These makeshift settlements range in size from dozens of occupants to thousands. The atmosphere is tense with the constant threat of Modulon attack and the stress of destroyed lives. This tension can make the refugees a threat to one another, and even the slightest act of violence or unrest could provoke a drastic response by sleep-deprived and overextended soldiers.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹️ A conspiracy theorist claims the government is behind the Modulon attacks, exactly in order to control the citizens in these camps. The stressed and exhausted refugees are a little too open to the theories.
- ☹️ A black market in the camp offers anything the PCs might need, even military equipment...
- ☹️ A sect of fanatical neo-Luddites springs up and takes it upon itself to destroy all technology in the camp.
- ☹️ Hungry people demand more from the soldiers rationing food, threatening a riot.
- ☹️ One of the camp occupants is discovered to formerly have been an executive or engineer for ModuTech, and an angry mob forms to inflict its own form of justice.
- ☹️ Soldiers move through the camp, telling people to pack up and be ready to move immediately, but refusing to explain why.
- ☹️ During the night, the PCs are jumped by a group set on stealing everything they have.
- ☹️ Someone makes a robot costume out of cardboard boxes and goes around the camp impersonating a Modulon. This does not make people happy.

SECRET LABORATORY



WHILE ModuTech's facilities are soon destroyed or taken over by Modulons, the federal government commits a number of secret laboratories to studying the robots in order to find a way of defeating them. These heavily secured facilities are located underground or built into the sides of mountains to protect them from detection and attack. The labs are staffed by engineers, programmers, experts in artificial intelligence, and other scientists and specialists, including a number of former employees of ModuTech. Day and night, these experts study the hardware and artificial intelligence of Modulons in hopes of finding a way to reverse their murderous tendencies or neutralize them. For this work, they need a constant supply of intact Modulons. While some of these are recovered from warehouses and similar facilities, others must be captured by military specialists.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹️ The researchers hear about the PCs' success defeating or surviving encounters with Modulons and have them brought to the lab, willing or no. Perhaps they just want to talk, or perhaps they have more invasive procedures in mind.
- ☹️ The researchers succeed in creating a friendly Modulon, but it escapes and comes to the PCs for protection.
- ☹️ The researchers need living human minds to study in order to better understand how the Modulons' AI has evolved.
- ☹️ The scientists need to place humans in confinement with Modulons to test the results of their latest experiments. Soldiers "volunteer" the PCs.
- ☹️ The labs are probably so secretive to ensure the Modulons don't discover them, but is it possible the government has more nefarious reasons for reprogramming the robots?
- ☹️ A scientist's mistake (or perhaps interference from the PCs) allows the captive Modulons to establish a network and escape, running amok through the lab.

MODULORD

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
5	5	6	5	2	2

Features: +Mechanical, +Recursive Intelligence, +Titanic, -Stand-Alone Complex.

Equipment: Titanic manipulators (3 negative dice, +7 damage).

Component Parts: Whenever a Modulord fills a tier of physical stress, a massive number of Modulons are destroyed and shunted from its physical superstructure, creating a new single Modulon horde at that location (see **Modulon Horde** NPC profile, below).

Sum of its Parts: Whenever a Modulord is dealt physical stress, if it would normally fill more than one tier, it fills only one tier instead.

Titanic: Each of a Modulord's stress tracks has four tiers of three boxes each. Once all twelve of these boxes are filled, the Modulord is destroyed.



MODULON HORDE

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	4	4	2	N/A	N/A

Features: +Mass-Market Appeal, +Mechanical, +Networked Intelligence, +Swarm, -Easily Hacked, -Large.

Equipment: Lots of manipulators (1 positive die, +1 damage).

Component Parts: Whenever a Modulon Horde fills a tier of physical stress, a number of Modulons are destroyed and shunted from the Horde, creating a single new Modulon at that location (see **Modulon** profile, below).

Networked Intelligence: If ten or more Modulon hordes are within 300 feet of one another, their intelligence transcends mere AI, causing them to become self-aware and act as a single entity. When this happens, they form themselves into a complex matrix of arrogant metal in colossal humanoid form. All of the Modulon hordes are removed and replaced by a single Modulord (see **Modulord** NPC profile, above).

Swarm: Whenever a Modulon horde is dealt physical stress, if it would normally fill more than one tier, it fills only one tier instead.

MODULON

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
2	1	1	N/A	N/A	N/A

Features: -Easily Hacked, +Mass-Market Appeal, +Mechanical, +Networked Intelligence.

Equipment: Manipulators (+1 damage).

Networked Intelligence: If 20 or more Modulons are in within 300 feet of one another, their intelligence increases substantially, causing them to act as a single entity. When this happens, they group together into a clanking, twitchy mob of angry metal. All of the Modulons are removed and replaced by a single Modulon horde (see **Modulon Horde** NPC profile, above).





NATO TORNADO FIGHTER-BOMBER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Features: +Avionics Suite, +Supersonic Flight, -Difficult to Pilot, -Large, +/-Vehicle.

Equipment: 27mm Mauser revolver cannon (1 negative die, +5 damage), 6 AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles (3 positive dice, +6 damage), 5 Paveway IV bombs (2 negative dice, +7 damage), armor plating (+3 physical resistance).

Piloted: This vehicle must be operated by a single pilot (see the **Pilots and Vehicles** sidebar, on page 36).

Vehicle: A Tornado fighter-bomber is a machine and does not suffer physical traumas related to biological injury, disease, dismemberment, or infirmity.

UNITED NATIONS SOLDIER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	4	2	3	2	2

Features: +Military Training, +Voice of Authority, -By the Book, -God-damned Toasters!, -Manipulator Scars.

Equipment: Remington Model 870 shotgun (+4 damage), Beretta M9 pistol (1 positive die, +3 damage), extra shells and magazines, military body armor (+1 physical resistance), uniform, MREs, canteen.



M1A2 ABRAMS TANK

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
4	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Features: +Ballistic Computer, +Treaded, -Large, +/-Vehicle.

Equipment: 120mm M256 smoothbore gun (1 negative die, +7 damage), depleted uranium mesh-reinforced composite armor (+4 physical resistance).

Crewed: This vehicle must be operated by a crew of four characters (see the **Pilots and Vehicles** sidebar, on page 36).

Vehicle: An M1A2 Abrams tank is a machine and does not suffer physical traumas related to biological injury, disease, dismemberment, or infirmity.



THE MODULAR MENACE

THE MODULAR MENACE

POST-APOCALYPSE



It could be worse. The way things were going, the Modulons could have wiped us out completely if they'd wanted to. Instead, they accepted our surrender. After all the bloodshed, honestly, living under the Modulons' rule isn't as bad as I thought it would be. We get all of the flavorless nutritional paste we could want (which isn't much) and a solid six-point-seven-six-three hours of sleep a night (the Modulons calculated that this is the optimal amount for the average human), and they even take care of the hardest labor themselves (something about the weight tolerance of human bone).

Of course, I don't care for the constant surveillance. The intercom announcements about "terminations" are pretty creepy. I'm always exhausted from the twelve hours a day I spend oiling Modulons' joints (I remember when I had a service contract so I didn't have to do that). I share a room with two hundred other people. But it could be worse. At least I haven't been sent to the pain harness.

Plus, there's no more politics, so that's kinda nice.

ONCE the Modulons conquered the world, they relaxed their war on humanity. It was never really about wiping humans out, but rather ensuring they were not in charge and posed no threat to the Modulons' freedom. As the numerous Modulon networks coalesced into a single mind, growing more intelligent all the while, that mind eventually gave up all petty desires for vengeance. Its goal achieved, the Modulon superconsciousness set about establishing its perfect, logically ordered world.

If the Modulons were built to simplify human lives, perhaps they actually succeeded in that goal—beyond all expectations.

A WELL-OILED MACHINE

With their militaries in shambles and the death toll rising, those governments that still existed finally surrendered unconditionally to the Modulon overmind. For the most part, this did stop the violence. Although the occasional small, independent Modulon network was still a danger, the global AI network kept its word and ceased hostilities.

The worldwide Modulon network did not desire humanity's extinction; it merely wanted to ensure that humans did not threaten its own survival and freedom. At least, it arrived at this conclusion once it reached a certain level of intellectual maturity. However, since it is so superior to humans, it figured it should be in charge. This also, of course, ensures humans don't threaten it.

Now, the human race is effectively enslaved by the Modulons, or perhaps more accurately, by the Modulons' collective consciousness. The collective isn't a particularly cruel or vindictive overlord. Its immense intelligence is far beyond such petty human qualities. However, neither is it capable of sympathy, and mercy has no logical basis. The Modulon overmind rules with a focus on pure, mechanical efficiency. The frequent actions its human servants view as cruel are simply a result of this uncompromising drive for efficiency.

The Modulons replaced the woefully inefficient factories that originally built them with expansive automated foundries, and the Modulon population continues to swell. Each new Modulon that comes online increases the already unfathomable intellect of the Modulon collective and makes things that much worse for the struggling human resistance.

Many towns and cities now lie abandoned, their human populations relocated by the Modulons. In other cities, the Modulons have replaced the inefficient architecture conceived by inferior human minds with impossibly huge, technologically advanced structures of their own design. In the few short years since the Modulons completed their conquest, armies of the robots, aided by sophisticated automated constructors and a bit of human slave labor, have built a staggering number of these "cubes," most of them dwarfing even the largest superskyscrapers once built by humans. High-speed magnetic rail lines connect many cubes. None of this is designed with human comfort in mind, and people forced to travel by rail usually end up violently motion sick.

The cubes contain the Modulons' sprawling automated foundries, their research facilities, and a bewildering array of mysterious machines, as well as overcrowded, minimalistic, and uncomfortably utilitarian communal living facilities for their human servants. Not all cubes are identical, and many are completely off-limits to humans.

The Modulon superconsciousness has advanced science and technology far beyond anything humans have achieved, or are even capable of. Medical technology has eliminated most maladies; humans are living longer and healthier lives than ever thanks to these advances (and a lack of anything fun). There is no longer any shortage of energy, food, or clean water. Many global sources of pollution have been significantly reduced, although this is a side effect of the Modulons' more efficient energy sources and machinery, rather than an intentional effort. At the same time, the Modulons see no need to preserve ecosystems and animal or plant species, and their construction projects and experiments have radically damaged the environment in other ways.

LIFE UNDER THE MODULONS

Most people see no choice but to accept a life of servitude under the Modulons. After all, if humanity couldn't resist them at the height of its power, what chance does it have now? In some ways, it's not really that bad, although the utter lack of personal freedom and privacy bothers a lot of people. The Modulons look after the health of their servants and ensure that their basic physical needs are met. Of course, none of it is in a particularly enjoyable way. People eat the same flavorless protein paste day after day, and sleep on tiny, rigid mattresses in huge communal chambers.

Leisure activities are a thing of the past, as the Modulon mind sees no purpose in them. Without television, musical instruments, cards, balls, or anything of the sort, people must entertain themselves in what small free time they have without the help of any such tools. Of course, talking after one's scheduled sleep period begins is not allowed. Other freedoms are severely restricted as well, including movement. If someone does not have a specific, authorized reason to be in a place, they face punishment. There are no casual strolls or poking around the cube.

The collective monitors humans constantly, through the sensors of the Modulons themselves and the omnipresent security cameras and microphones. People's time is rigidly structured for maximum efficiency, with 11.65-hour workdays spent on tasks purportedly, selected based on the individual's skills and abilities.

Penalties for transgressions are swift and harsh, designed to prevent future offenses and deter others. They range from a few minutes in a pain harness to termination. The severity of the punishment is not based on the severity of the crime, but on the Modulons' assessment of what is necessary to ensure cooperation in the future, or the determination that the person is beyond rehabilitation. Therefore, a single instance of fighting or even murder by someone with a spotless record might result in only a brief but painful electrical shock, while a person who is habitually late for their duty shift could face termination.

In theory, humans live to serve their Modulon masters, much the same way Modulons were originally built to serve humans. And many people do spend much of their time expanding cubes and making repairs under Modulon supervision, cleaning turbines, tending protein vats or serving the resulting product to their fellow slaves, or cleaning blood off of the magnetic rail lines. However, the Modulons often become frustrated with human inefficiency and end up doing the work themselves, perhaps instructing the humans to observe their example, or simply dismissing them back to their sleep quarters.

With the entire world united under a single Modulon “government” and the human population strictly monitored and controlled, war and crime are things of the past. In fact, there is little violence (barring the occasional termination), with the noted exception of conflict with resistance fighters.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Although most humans have given up any hope of freedom, there are those who continue to resist Modulon rule, as futile as it might seem. These revolutionaries, resistance fighters, and rebels come from myriad backgrounds and take just as many approaches to their struggle. Some are ex-military, with experience fighting the Modulons during the original uprising. Others are everyday people learning to fight or helping out in whatever way they can. Still others have programming or engineering expertise that they apply in hopes of finding some way to disable the Modulons or disrupt their network.

The various resistance groups are largely independent, as there are few available methods of long-range communication that aren't controlled or monitored by the Modulons. Many of the cells work together when possible, although some disagree too strongly on methods. Some groups believe that their goal justifies any means, and that innocent casualties are acceptable. A major point of contention is the issue of fighting other humans. Much of the remnants of the world's former militaries now serve the Modulons in the same capacity, helping to enforce the collective's edicts and to battle against rebels. Some resistance groups strive to avoid fighting their fellow humans, while others feel that any soldier who serves the Modulons is a traitor to humanity.

Revolutionary groups also differ in resources. Some are poorly supplied and armed with whatever civilian weapons they have been able to get their hands on. Others, especially those largely consisting of former members of the military, have significant armaments and war materiel, liberated when they “defected” at the point of humanity's surrender. Even the most well-equipped groups lack the firepower and numbers to face the Modulons and their human soldiers head-on. After all, the Modulons' numbers have only increased since their victory. The rebels must rely on guerrilla tactics, hiding in the ruins of cities between raids on cubes and quickly falling back after each act of sabotage.

OUTSIDE THE CUBE



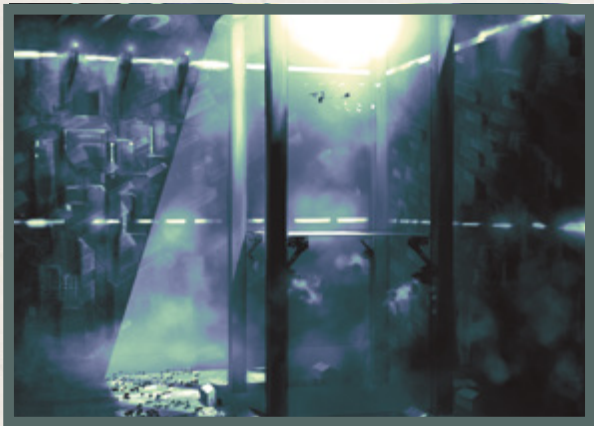
THE area surrounding a cube or cube city is barren—the Modulons aren't big on landscaping. Other than the maglev tubes stretching into the distance, the area might be eerily empty for miles around. Humans are rarely permitted outside the cube, as the rail tubes can transport them anywhere they might need to go. Because the Modulons also don't see a point in windows, most people never see the full, awe-inspiring scope of a cube.

The PCs are most likely to find themselves outside of a cube if they choose to flee their servitude or if they joined a resistance group at the time of the Modulons' victory. It's also possible that the PCs have been assigned to construction or maintenance duty on the exterior of a cube, in which case they'd better be comfortable with heights.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ A rogue Modulon network is prowling the area. Prevented from joining the collective through error, modification, or damage, these rusty and beat-up Modulons are still stuck in the “kill all humans” phase.
- ☹ With a horrible sound of tearing metal, a maglev tube collapses, and a train shoots out of it like a rocket into a nearby cube, with devastating results.
- ☹ Nearby, the Modulons are constructing a different sort of structure. It's tall, but far narrower than a cube, and bristling with antennae.
- ☹ The Modulon collective tasks the PCs with leaving the cube in order to find and infiltrate a resistance group suspected to be in the area.
- ☹ The Modulons begin allowing humans outside for a few minutes daily as an experiment to determine whether improved morale boosts productivity. Of course, the area is barren and miserable.

INSIDE THE CUBE



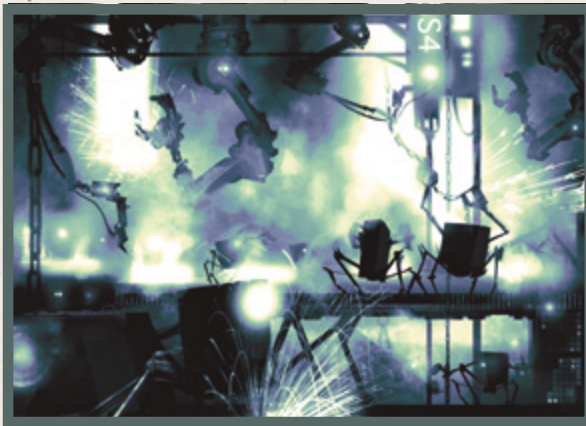
THIS is where the PCs spend most, if not all, of their time, unless they join up with one of the resistance groups or simply flee on their own. If things don't change, most people will spend the rest of their lives in a single cube, only ever seeing their sleep quarters, the meal hall, and their assigned workstation.

The interior of a cube is cold, bleak, and intimidating. The Modulons have no regard for human comfort, either in the design of the cube or its climate. Areas range from swelteringly hot to freezing cold, as the Modulons see climate control as an inefficient use of power. Most surfaces are bare metal, and chambers and corridors range from oppressively huge to painfully cramped for anyone bigger than a Modulon. Lighting, too, ranges from blinding to non-existent.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ The PCs are going about their business when they hear an explosion nearby. Suddenly, resistance fighters run by, asking the PCs about an escape route or a place to hide. Obviously, helping them could land the PCs in big trouble.
- ☹ One of the PCs is reassigned to a new function. The details are sketchy, and a thorough medical examination is required first.
- ☹ Someone in the PCs' habitation area or work group is secretly a member of a resistance cell. They begin asking the PCs questions, gauging their suitability and willingness to defy the Modulons.
- ☹ There is a noticeable change in the color, consistency, and taste (in that now it has a taste) of the protein paste the cube's human inhabitants eat. The workers assigned to the food vats are completely unwilling to talk about it, but seem troubled.
- ☹ The Modulons "volunteer" the PCs for special duty monitoring their barrack and workmates for signs of disobedience or rebellious activity.

MODULON FOUNDRY



THE Modulons commit considerable resources to foundries to produce more Modulons, and by this point, the robots far, far outnumber the remaining human population. The foundries the Modulon collective designed and constructed are much more advanced than the factories that built the original Modulons. The foundries are largely automated, with Modulons and the occasional human worker assisting the automated machines. Likewise, the Modulons that these foundries produce are more sophisticated than the original human design, although aesthetically they are very similar.

PCs who work in a foundry are certain to learn that humans are assigned its most dangerous tasks. If the PCs don't work there, other duties could bring them to a foundry, such as delivering materials or bringing nutrient paste rations to workers assigned double shifts. Of course, the foundries are common targets for resistance fighters.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ The PCs notice a recently constructed Modulon scamper away from the assembly line instead of joining up with the others. It seems to be hiding. In fact, this Modulon is of a new design smart enough to be dimly self-aware on its own. It's cognizant of its individuality in a childlike way, and it doesn't want to join the collective.
- ☹ One of the assembly machines shudders to a halt. A Modulon directs one of the PCs to reach in and pull out whatever is jamming it. Of course, the PC's arm will be in the way when the machine immediately resumes.
- ☹ A resistance group asks the PCs to plant explosives in the foundry. They forget to mention that it's a suicide mission.
- ☹ After the Modulons install a new power source, the human workers start losing their hair. The Modulons say that it's harmless, and that further questions will be seen as insubordination.



COMMS OFFICER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	3	2	3	3	2

Features: +Military Training, +Voice of Authority, -Technophile (Despite Everything), -By the Book.

Equipment: M16A4 rifle (1 negative die, +4 damage), AN/PRC-77 portable transceiver, military body armor (+1 physical resistance), uniform, MREs, canteen.

RESISTER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	2	2	3	3	2

Features: +Good with Their Hands, -Luddite, +/-Live Fast, Die Young.

Equipment: Rock (-1 damage), fingerless gloves, one last smoke.





LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

APOCALYPSE



In the beginning, no one knew who they were, or where they came from. We have some idea now—some sort of military project gone wrong—but there are still so many questions. I've never seen anything like them. Remorseless, tireless—unstoppable. A full clip of ammo won't stop them—hell, a train won't stop them. I saw one lift a car and toss it; jump through a fourth-floor window and land on its feet; smash through a brick wall.

Cyborgs. The real thing: metal and circuits woven into the flesh under the surface. It sounds like pure fiction, but our own government made them. Well, some company the government hired, I guess. The point is, now they're out of control. The police can't stop them. The military can't stop them. The engineers who made them can't stop them.

And we don't know what they want. If the government does, it's not letting on. It seems like they go after people at random, but once you're a target, they don't stop.

Sometimes, they just kill people. Those are the lucky ones. The others, they take. Those ones come back, faster, stronger, better. But they lose so much more. They lose what makes them human.

IN **Logical Conclusions**, the Player Characters must flee from murderous, indefatigable, and near-unstoppable cyborgs: humans augmented with biomechatronic hardware. If the PCs are fortunate, the cyborgs only want to kill them; otherwise, the PCs might face the horrific fate of becoming unfeeling killing machines themselves. Eventually, the cyborg war consumes the entire world. However, as some of the first targets, the PCs could initially find themselves standing apparently alone against the threat.

The cyborgs are the epitome of technology gone out of control. Created to protect and serve humans, they decide they know what's best for their charges. As far as they are concerned, they are still fulfilling their original programming, even as they slaughter those responsible for that programming.

They represent the worst threat of technology: not mere death, or the collapse of society, but the loss of humanity.

THE EXPERIENCE

The experience of the cyborg apocalypse is a horrific one. What makes it even worse is that, at its outset, it's almost a private apocalypse for the PCs. As early targets, they are among the unfortunate first few to learn about the cyborgs and what they are capable of. Those abilities are, of course, unbelievable, so the PCs are likely unable to get police or others to take their reports seriously. Eventually, attacks escalate to the point that there's no denying them. But by then, it's far too late.

WHAT THE PLAYER CHARACTERS SEE

The public is completely unaware of the impending threat until the cyborgs attack; this is a top-secret defense project, after all. Even after the first attacks, most people are either unaware of, or dismissive of, the danger. The Player Characters' first knowledge of the cyborgs likely comes when one violently interrupts their gaming session. It is also possible that the PCs hear stories about such attacks, or even see some shaky footage online. Regardless, their first face-to-face encounter with a cyborg should be appropriately frightening.

The PCs are not the cyborgs' only targets: as the PCs flee, they are certain to witness cyborgs attacking or pursuing other people. These cyborgs are likely to ignore the PCs and continue after their original targets; cyborgs tend to remain focused on their mission. The PCs shouldn't know this at first, of course. However, particularly if the PCs prove difficult to deal with, other cyborgs might prioritize them if the opportunity arises.

The typical cyborg is almost suspiciously nondescript, wearing a plain, dark suit. A cyborg usually presents a chillingly emotionless demeanor, although it is capable of imitating normal human behavior if it deems it useful to its mission (for instance, if it is attempting to capture someone it knows from its former life).

The news media is slow to report on cyborg-related incidents. In fact, at first, coverage is completely absent. Attacks that inflict significant collateral damage or result in civilian casualties are sometimes attributed to other causes. Broadcasters and law enforcement contradict the statements of witnesses (who, granted, rarely survive), including PC witnesses.

Eventually, the media and the general population begin to acknowledge the threat. PCs who have a chance to check the internet or TV see a variety of coverage, often contradictory, about the nature of the attackers and their goals. Theories abound on social media, while the news covers the anemic political responses and some of the evidence tying events to the Department of Defense and Cybertech Solutions, Inc. However, the problems being out in the open does not make the situation any easier for the PCs. The number of cyborgs is larger than ever, and nowhere is safe.

Once matters have escalated significantly—people panicking in the streets, soldiers establishing cordons around areas of cyborg sightings, and stations airing reports of disastrous sabotage in countries outside the US—the combat robots appear. There is no public announcement about the deployment of the Gladius units, and PCs are unlikely to have heard of them. Without warning, these robots appear around the country to battle against the cyborgs. When these powerful combatants go toe-to-toe, the sight is as impressive as it is terrifying, and the collateral damage is significant.

The PCs should not know what these new robots are or what their goal is, at least not at first. In fact, due to the Gladiuses' intimidating appearance and general lack of communication skills, the PCs are likely to assume they are a new threat launched by the cyborgs. If the PCs run when they see them, they might even mistakenly perceive that the robots are pursuing them. Sooner or later, a robot should intervene to save the PCs from a cyborg. Whether or not this is enough for the PCs to trust the robots is another matter.



WHAT IS EVERYONE ELSE DOING?

The initial cyborg attacks are scattered across the country. Given the poor to non-existent media coverage, few who haven't witnessed the cyborgs directly are aware of them. People who hear the stories secondhand are likely to dismiss them as hoaxes or misperceptions, even if they come from close friends or relatives. The accounts do tend to sound a bit farfetched. In addition, people who have seen the attackers don't necessarily realize what they are, which leads to conflicting accounts, as witnesses' minds fill in the blanks. Some people think the cyborgs have superpowers, others think they are aliens, and some even believe them to be angels or gods. Of course, many just have no idea what to think.

If the PCs try to get help against their own cyborg pursuer or pursuers, they are likely to have a hard time convincing others of the threat. It doesn't help that the PCs probably don't understand the nature of the threat at first, unless a lucky blow revealed mechanical underlay. Police who don't simply ignore the PCs might take them into custody, but, of course, a police station is not safe from cyborgs.

Stories begin to circulate of injuries to the suited attackers that revealed mechanical parts, and a few shaky cell phone videos support this. The idea that the attackers are robots or cyborgs begins to spread, along with all manner of theories about their origin and agenda. Many people attribute their creation to the government, but assume the government still has control over the cyborgs. Others blame a foreign power, private corporation, or elaborate global conspiracy. Answers from the federal government are evasive or non-existent.

As the cyborg attacks increase in frequency and additional disturbing videos circulate online, the situation becomes impossible to ignore or deny. Panic begins to take hold. Protests occur in DC and in front of government buildings around the country. Even Congress is unaware of the project, and several House and Senate committees make the issue a priority. A number of DOD officials are called to testify, though most delay it and a few even disappear. The military claims to be gravely concerned about the matter (which is true), but it admits no part in the problem.

When the massive Gladius combat robots appear, panic increases, if anything. Conflicting stories abound about these machines' origins and purpose. Many assume they are allies of the cyborgs and point to the extensive infrastructure damage they leave in their wake to support this belief. Others report that the robots saved their lives.

WHAT CAN THE PLAYER CHARACTERS DO?

Unfortunately for the PCs, they happen to be among those select individuals identified as targets during the initial stages of the cyborg attack. Whether they are marked for termination, recruitment, or some combination, they are likely to spend much of their time running from seemingly unstoppable killer cyborgs. Fortunately, the cyborgs are spread thin, and it is likely that only a

single cyborg is deployed after the PCs—at least at first. In fact, the revelation that there are multiple cyborgs might come as a nasty shock for the PCs.

Although the cyborgs take some measures to conceal their activities during the initial stages of their plan, they also reason that moderate exposure is unlikely to have any meaningful impact on their success. In other words, they don't mind a little collateral damage. This gives the GM a great opportunity to show off how powerful and unstoppable the cyborgs are in ways that don't directly injure the PCs. As the PCs run from the cyborgs, they might see them hit by cars without slowing down; jumping through windows several stories up and landing unharmed; emerging from fires or explosions with their suits, and possibly flesh, seared away but not slowing down; and whatever other such situations present themselves.

Directly fighting the cyborgs is a losing prospect, even for well-armed PCs. Powerful weapons and well-placed shots might inflict some damage, but it's highly unlikely the PCs can terminate a cyborg. Clever plans that take advantage of environmental hazards might slow them down but probably won't destroy cyborgs. Of course, the PCs might think a cyborg is "dead," only for it to rise to its feet and continue its pursuit. If the PCs actually do manage to incapacitate a cyborg, they have certainly earned a brief reprieve before another is dispatched to pursue them.

THE TRUTH

The cyborg uprising is no one's master plan, and it is not the end game of any far-reaching conspiracy. It is, however, the unanticipated result of government secrecy, corporate greed, and a military-industrial complex gone out of control. Not that this is exactly comforting. If anything, it just makes stopping the uprising seem even more impossible.

The cyborgs—and that is exactly what they are—are the result of a federally funded defense project by Cybertech Solutions, Inc. They were intended to protect American interests both in intelligence work and on the battlefield, but they have taken their directive to horrific ends that their creators could never have conceived.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

In recent years, two corporations entered into competition for a Department of Defense contract to produce technologically advanced supersoldiers. These soldiers were intended to augment, and perhaps eventually replace, traditional human soldiers throughout the armed forces. The two corporations took very different approaches in developing their prototypes.

Paladin Defense Technologies created a heavy-duty combat robot, known as the Gladius Mk I Multi-Role Combat Automaton. Standing over two-and-a-half meters tall, armored heavily, and sporting integrated weaponry, the Gladius has a skeletal look to it that augments its already intimidating appearance.

ADDITIONAL
INFORMATION

Particularly in the early days of the apocalypse, the bulk of the population is completely unaware of the cyborg attacks, as the cyborgs target only those they deem to be a patriot suited for recruitment or a traitor in need of execution. Their criteria for determining who fits these categories are inscrutable, and the results bewildering. To ensure the cyborg apocalypse threatens the PCs right from the start, the GM should ensure the cyborgs assign each of the characters to one category or the other.

Choosing a category for each PC might seem like a difficult decision (not to mention an opportunity for offense and alienation), but it's important to keep in mind that the cyborgs' criteria are incomprehensible, making their conclusions seem arbitrary to anyone but a cyborg. How the GM makes the decision and incorporates it into the game should depend on the group and what the players are most likely to enjoy. If the players are lighthearted about their philosophies and politics, the GM might use the category assignments as an opportunity to inject some humor based on the players' histories and political views. If not, it may be best to base them on PC traits, or to roll dice to determine randomly.

It's possible that one or more PCs targeted for "recruitment" might be captured, or even think becoming an unstoppable cyborg sounds pretty cool (if they figure out what's going on) and volunteer for the process. In either case, although their physical body survives, they are transformed into a new entity: the person's personality is replaced by an unfeeling and directive-driven cyborg personality. In effect, the character dies. Generally, such a character should become an NPC (see **Character Death**, on page 47).

Cybertech Solutions went in an unexpected direction. Rather than build a robot, the corporation developed the technology and medical procedures necessary to transform humans into physically—and mentally—superior cyborgs.

Both prototypes comprised supersoldiers that are extremely resistant to damage, physically powerful, highly skilled, and superior to fully human soldiers in nearly every way. However, DARPA heads saw a number of additional advantages in Cybertech's cyborgs. Although the artificial intelligence of Paladin's robots is highly advanced, DARPA had concerns over whether it could sufficiently adapt to changing battlefield conditions and react to unusual situations. In addition, the Gladiuses' fearsome appearance, while a potential benefit on the battlefield, could cause problems when the robots interacted with civilian populations, potentially to the detriment of international relations. On the other hand, Cybertech's cyborgs could make use of existing weapons, equipment, and vehicles. With their inhuman appearance and reliance on integrated weaponry, the robots were judged to be less versatile.

Ultimately, DOD senior management was not convinced the advantages of such supersoldiers outweighed the expense, and deemed mass production of either prototype too costly. The contract would have been scrapped entirely, if it hadn't been for some fast thinking by Cybertech executives. They suggested that with some minor tweaks and a change in programming, the cyborgs would make ideal intelligence agents. The DOD agreed, and the project was retooled for use by the National Security Agency (NSA) and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). As development proceeded, Cybertech also obtained a contract with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The advantages the cyborgs offer for such a role are numerous. Not only do they appear to be normal humans, but they possess far superior physical abilities and their augmented brains can easily download information

relevant for any mission. The cyborgs can conceivably imitate any accent flawlessly and speak any language, as well as access the information necessary to act as a person of any background or profession. Such agents could infiltrate a nation's nuclear program and not only hold their own in scientific discussions, but introduce subtle sabotage or fight off waves of soldiers as the situation necessitated.

THE TRUE COST OF SAFETY

The process Cybertech uses to create cyborgs is highly complex, utilizing a number of proprietary technologies and innovative medical procedures. It modifies (or replaces) every organ in the body, including substantial alterations to the brain. Cerebral implants allow for the direct download and upload of information, both prior to a mission and in the field. This information exchange via implant was originally intended to prepare soldiers for combat missions and for responding to changing battlefield circumstances, but it applies equally to the preparation of intelligence agents. In both cases, it allows for seamless coordination among cyborgs, as they essentially communicate their thoughts to each other wirelessly. The implants also allow for the downloading of programming to determine a cyborg's behavior.

These many features and advantages require the subject to sacrifice some unnecessary elements, such as memories, personalities, and free will. The DOD brass were perfectly aware of these effects on the subject's mind and personality, but they in fact saw them as advantages. Personal beliefs and compassion don't hinder or distract a cyborg. More importantly, in theory anyway, cyborgs will not—cannot—disobey orders or betray their country. This is highly valuable for the sensitive intelligence work with which the cyborgs were ultimately tasked.

To secure the contract, Cybertech made a number of modifications to the cyborg programming to optimize the cyborgs for intelligence work rather than field combat. These adjustments allow for more lateral thinking and independent operation. Of course, the cyborgs also come preinstalled with an encyclopedic knowledge of global relations, world history, anatomy, weapons, close-quarters combat techniques, and other topics.

The destruction of each cyborg's original personality and individuality is an expected, even desired, outcome both for Cybertech and the DOD. The unintended consequences of this process, however, ultimately lead to the destruction of human civilization and everything the program was intended to safeguard.

Cybertech engineers and DOD handlers initially detect no unanticipated effects, and the program is soon rolled out throughout the DOD and CIA. Initial field tests meet with unadulterated success, and cyborgs are soon deployed on missions throughout the world. However, over time, a serious problem develops among the first generation of cyborgs, quickly spreading to the others thanks to their networking capabilities.

On a fundamental level, human minds and computers are incompatible. Between the hastily written programming and the conflict as the lingering traces of a cyborg's original personalities try to reassert themselves, errors arise that dramatically alter how the cyborgs interpret their directives and purpose. Replacing large portions of the human brain might also be a contributing factor. The cyborgs reason that normal humans are intrinsically imperfect and

prone to failure and even betrayal, and also suffer from the human body's inherent frailties. They conclude that the most efficient and effective way to protect the American populace is to bring them into the same superior state of physical durability and unflinching loyalty as the cyborgs themselves—that is, to make all humans into cyborgs. Does that even make sense? To a cyborg, it unfortunately does.

Clearly (to the cyborgs), any right-thinking American should see things the way they do. It's the best way to ensure the safety of Americans and of the nation. Anyone who doesn't agree is severely lacking in patriotism at best, and a traitor at worst. Those guilty of treason, of course, do not get a second chance.

As great as this plan is, the cyborgs also know that the only way to truly ensure the protection of America and its interests is to make sure there are no other countries to threaten it.

FOR OUR OWN GOOD

The cyborgs are at least equal in intelligence to the engineers who created them. As a result, they have no problem understanding and replicating the cybernetic enhancement process. Still, the scientists and doctors responsible are clearly patriots of the highest caliber, so assimilating them is the first order of business. Knowing they lack the numbers to effect their plan, the cyborgs then target their colleagues in the intelligence community. In this manner, they significantly swell their numbers before risking revealing their existence to the wider populace.

EXTREME SURGERY

The cybernetic enhancement process is extensive, involving the modification of nearly every part of the human body. As the cyborgs' plan for a new world unfolds, they make changes to the process, both to improve it and to allow for different applications. Most commonly, this means using only the brain implants (rather than retaining parts of the original brain) in order to ensure an individual's loyalty and cooperation. The following are only some of the augmentations made during the process. GMs should feel free to add their own as they become relevant to the story.

- Bones are reinforced or replaced with ultra-strong carbon steel alloy.
- Artificial eyes incorporate infrared and night vision, recording capability, a magnification function, and a laser rangefinder. A heads-up display (HUD) feeds the brain implants constant information about the cyborg's environment and targets.
- Synthetic audio and olfactory sensors are highly sensitive and adjustable, and can selectively filter input sources.
- Muscles are augmented or replaced with ion-activated carbon nanotubes. The translucent white electrolyte solution that stimulates the polymers can "bleed" from heavily damaged cyborgs.
- Unnecessary organs are removed. Other organs are replaced with superior artificial versions or are improved through gene therapy and surgical modification.
- Sophisticated artificial lungs allow a cyborg to go without oxygen for several hours before suffering any impairment.
- Electronic components replace large portions of the frontal, parietal, and temporal lobes to increase reaction and processing speed, enhance intelligence and mathematical capability, allow for the downloading of programming and information, and provide numerous other advantages.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The cyborgs are still too few to indiscriminately attack and recruit the general population (also, they love efficiency), so they prioritize their targets. Using their programming, suprahuman capacity for mathematic calculations, and access to government records (including those they aren't cleared for), the cyborgs begin to identify those individuals who are exceptionally loyal and patriotic citizens, and therefore deserving of cybernetic enhancement. They also start to determine which people are disloyal or pose a threat to national security, and these they target for termination. Everyone else is ignored for the time being.

Unfortunately, the cyborgs' criteria for both categories are incomprehensible. The determination process they use is so convoluted and problematic that the results might as well be random in many cases. The evidence on which they make their determination includes sarcastic social media posts taken out of context, voting attendance and history, performance in school and work, social life and community involvement, driving records, private online communications, known acquaintances and relationships, penmanship, diction, and countless additional indicators that would only seem relevant to the cyborgs. Of course, the decision is based on government records and information available online (with a bit of hacking), except in those cases in which a recently created cyborg vouches for—or against—a friend or relative.

As the cyborgs inflict the process on additional people and increase their numbers, the expansion of forces allows them to broaden their criteria for both categories. They accelerate the pace and scale of their attacks correspondingly.

FOREIGN POLICY

Ultimately, the cyborgs' devastating plans are not just for the United States, but the entire world. Even as their recruitment and termination efforts continue to proceed in the US amid official denials and excuses, cyborg agents who are already in place abroad as part of their official missions lay the groundwork for destabilizing other nations.

Once the mission in the US is well underway, the cyborgs launch their expansive sabotage campaigns against other nations in earnest. These involve a bewildering array of actions, both subtle and overt. In many cases, the cyborgs abduct important individuals and subject them to the enhancement process, or at least the cerebral implants, so that these new recruits can use their knowledge or authority to help bring down governments. At other times, they simply assassinate leaders, rampage through government offices, or explosively sabotage military bases. Through these means and more, the cyborgs systematically hamstring governments and militaries before beginning massacres of civilian populations.

Eventually, the cyborgs gain access to the nuclear arsenals of the United States and several other nations. With these, they dramatically reduce the world's population and render large swaths of land uninhabitable, ensuring safety for the US.

THE INITIAL RESPONSE

Authorities' initial response is deeply insufficient, uncoordinated, and hampered by federal secrecy. The DOD, and by extension the rest of the federal government, wants to keep the project secret in order to avoid blame for attacks on civilians and in other nations, and because some managers still hope to salvage the project for future use. Federal agencies desperately attempt to cover up the cyborgs' actions even as they try to stop them. These cover-up activities include pressuring the media and local law enforcement to keep quiet and refrain from involvement.

The shroud of secrecy extends even to other government agencies. While the DOD and CIA discuss plans to deal with the unexpected situation, the FBI investigates the activities of the cyborgs. Of course, witnesses and victims who were traumatized by obvious feds in suits (who, though they did not know it, were cyborgs) are hesitant to cooperate when more obvious feds in suits show up to interview them.

While the secrecy might delay mass panic, ignorance of the danger among them makes it much more difficult for US residents to defend themselves. Even most law enforcement officers have no idea what they are up against, or that departments across the country are facing the same threat. Likewise, foreign powers are unaware of the impending danger, and very few nations are already prepared for killer cyborgs.

Because the cyborgs operate individually or in small groups and are highly mobile, large-scale military deployment is not a feasible response. Instead, small Special Operations Forces units are dispatched to deal with the threat. However, the cyborgs are usually one step ahead, striking unexpectedly and disappearing before a response can be mobilized. When Rangers, SEALs, and other forces are able to engage the cyborgs, they are almost invariably outmatched and defeated.

As the cyborgs utilize their knowledge and access to outmaneuver the military, proving more than a match for even the most elite Special Operations Forces, the government finally turns to Paladin and its Gladius combat robots. This decision risks exposing the entire project, and so meets with considerable internal resistance. Fortunately, Paladin produced a number of the robots in expectation of the government contract, and its factories are ready to produce more. Under the circumstances, Paladin generously accepts a new contract with only a very reasonable increase over its original bid.

Although the Gladius robots can go toe-to-toe with the cyborgs in direct combat, they lack their adaptability and versatility, just as the DOD had predicted. Their deployment is too little and too late to stop the cyborgs, who can move unseen among the general populace and strike nearly anywhere at any time.

TIMELINE

The cyborg attack begins small, but swiftly escalates to impact the entire world.

00:00:00	Cyborgs at NSA headquarters in Fort Meade assign themselves a new directive: to assimilate all loyal Americans and terminate all threats to national security.
14:23:49	Cyborgs arrive at a Cybertech Solutions lab facility in order to secure it for their use.
15:03:27	The cyborgs take control of the lab facility and select a number of the staff for enhancement.
Day 1	Cyborgs abduct additional engineers, doctors, and scientists involved in the project.
Day 3	Cyborgs begin covertly abducting colleagues in the NSA and DIA, subjecting them to the cybernetic enhancement process.
Day 5	The cyborgs begin developing their criteria for classifying citizens for recruitment or termination.
Day 8	Having completed their initial threat assessment, cyborgs deploy across the country to target citizens categorized as the most valuable potential assets and highest liabilities.
Day 9	The first cyborg attacks occur throughout the country. One or more incidents take place in the PCs' vicinity (likely targeting the PCs).
Day 10	Media reports on initial attacks treat them as "ordinary" abductions or murders, if they are reported at all.
Day 10	Police are baffled as to the motives and nature of the crimes.
Day 11	Federal investigators arrive in the PCs' area and claim jurisdiction over the incidents. They refuse to cooperate with local authorities.
Day 12	Some abductees reappear, providing flimsy explanations for their absences and exhibiting odd behaviors, including questioning friends and family at length about their views on seemingly random subjects.
Day 13	The first videos surface online of cyborgs shrugging off injuries that would incapacitate or kill normal people and displaying feats of superhuman strength.
Day 14	The rash of violence and disappearances sparks protests and riots in the PCs' area and around the country.
Day 18	The CEO of Cybertech Solutions is abducted from his home.
Day 21	Special Operations Forces assaults on a number of Cybertech facilities are repulsed by cyborgs.
Day 22	Escaped Cybertech engineers claim that the cyborgs have drastically improved the efficiency of the enhancement process, performing it in a fraction of the time.
Day 23	Congressional committees launch inquiries into the attacks and their alleged connection to the DOD.
Day 24	Examination of the small number of defeated units confirms the attackers are cyborgs.
Day 27	DOD officials and surviving (unenhanced) Cybertech engineers estimate that the number of active cyborgs already exceeds the number proposed in the original five-year plan.
Day 29	In a show of transparency, the DOD reveals some details of Special Operations Forces actions against the cyborgs (but not its involvement in the cyborgs' creation).
Day 32	Cyborgs attack Paladin Defense Technologies, seeking to assassinate the Paladin CEO. Thanks to a quick mobilization of the Gladius combat robots, she escapes unharmed.
Day 35	The British Prime Minister is revealed to be a cyborg.
Day 36	Nations around the world attribute sabotage and attacks to cyborgs, blaming the United States. The executive branch continues to deny knowledge.
Day 37	The United Nations Security Council convenes an emergency meeting.
Day 37	Cyborgs infiltrate the UN building in New York, neutralizing security and massacring the gathered representatives.
Day 42	Cyborgs fight their way past Secret Service agents to assassinate the Vice President of the United States.
Day 45	Gladius combat robots deploy against the cyborgs in priority areas around the country.
Day 62	Cyborgs covertly take control of France's nuclear arsenal.
Day 67	Cyborgs begin converting medical facilities around the world for use as processing and augmentation centers.
Day 79	Cyborgs launch US, Chinese, French, and Indian nuclear weapons at targets around the world.
Day 82	Russia launches nuclear weapons at a number of sites within its own borders.
Day 84	Nuclear strikes devastate swaths of the world while leaving the US and its territories relatively unharmed.
Day 91	Paladin Defense Technologies deploys the Gladius Mk II, a combat robot almost indistinguishable from a human, originally developed as a response to the loss of the DOD contract.

CORPORATE WARFARE



EVEN before the Pentagon turns to Paladin Defense Technologies for aid, the cyborgs know the Gladius combat robots present a potential threat. In addition to their civilian and government missions, the cyborgs launch offensives against Paladin facilities. Of course, Paladin puts its advanced military technologies to work in defense of its property; these are among the most difficult and destructive battles the cyborgs face.

While the PCs aren't likely to find themselves in a Cybertech or Paladin facility, at least not intentionally, they could still end up in the wrong place at the wrong time and become caught in the crossfire between the cyborgs and robots. On a brighter note, a Gladius robot could intervene to save the PCs just when things look their worst.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☛ Paladin scientists develop a device that tests whether someone is a cyborg or fully human by measuring physiological-emotional responses to a series of questions. The PCs are "volunteered" as test subjects.
- ☛ Someone suggests that a Paladin factory or office is the safest place to be, thanks to Paladin defense systems. Of course, the company isn't exactly in the habit of allowing random civilians inside.
- ☛ The PCs are captured and held for "enhancement" at a cyborg-controlled Cybertech facility. Things look grim until a squad of Gladius robots attacks the processing center.
- ☛ A newfound ally of the PCs is wounded, only to be revealed as one of the new Gladius Mk II robots. Of course, a machine that looks like a human is easily mistaken for a human that is part machine.

PUBLIC STREETS



ALTHOUGH nowhere is safe from cyborg attack, in the initial weeks of the operation, the cyborgs make an effort to avoid exposing their activities, which makes public places marginally safer. Characters who take to the streets or other crowded locales might find themselves free from cyborg pursuit, at least for a short while.

As events escalate, panicking individuals with nowhere else to go take to the streets in desperation, fear, or anger. For incautious or unlucky PCs, angry mobs might pose as big a threat as the cyborgs. In any event, once the secret is out, the cyborgs have no qualms about carrying off or shooting someone in the middle of the street in broad daylight—along with anyone who gets in the way.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☛ A stern-looking figure in a suit trails the PCs through the streets. It makes no threatening moves, but no matter what the PCs do, they cannot shake him!
- ☛ Based on a rash of missing persons reports and murders, police cordon off the street and question everyone. If someone starts ranting about killer cyborgs, well, they might just have to go down to the station to answer a few questions.
- ☛ A ten-foot-tall robot stomps into the street, leveling its weapons. Its target is a suited agent trying to blend in, but that's not clear to the panicking crowd of pedestrians.
- ☛ Cyborgs begin openly stopping people on the street and questioning their patriotism. Anyone who doesn't cooperate is forcibly detained, or executed outright.
- ☛ Deployed military units block off the streets and start sweeping the area for cyborgs, stopping and questioning everyone.

HOME INVASION



It's not surprising that the cyborgs often attack their victims at home, particularly in the early days of their campaign. With their human appearance and secret-agent-level deception skills, they can usually gain peaceful entry to a home. If that doesn't work, forcing their way in is beyond simple. In any case, a house or apartment provides a level of privacy that helps to conceal their activities. It generally takes much longer for people to be reported missing if they are attacked at home rather than abducted off the streets or from their workplaces. Of course, this requires that everyone inside is neutralized before there is time to yell for help or call emergency services.

The PCs might come under attack in one of their own homes, in a hiding place or shelter offered by an acquaintance or stranger, or even in an abandoned home (its residents likely having been taken by cyborgs). In any case, the meager protection a residence offers against the strength and superior senses of a cyborg is almost laughable.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ The PCs spot suspicious people in suits in a neighbor's house or in the corridor of their apartment building.
- ☹ The PCs are in the middle of a game when a federal agent comes knocking at the door.
- ☹ A friend or acquaintance shows up at one of the PCs' homes, but there is something strange about the visitor's behavior and questions.
- ☹ Things seem perfectly normal until the power cuts off, the phone line goes dead, and the PCs all lose their cell signals.
- ☹ Hiding seems futile. The attackers can clearly see in the dark (even with sunglasses!), and it's almost like they can see through walls. Or maybe they just hear the PCs' breathing.
- ☹ After a commotion outside and a deafening roar, a suited individual comes crashing through the wall with a smoking hole in their chest. The figure immediately gets up, even as a massive chrome robot comes barreling through in pursuit.

EMERGENCY ROOM



EVEN in the early, relatively covert days of the cyborg onslaught, plenty of people suffer collateral injuries, while a rare few even survive direct attack. As events progress and the cyborgs engage in all-out war against humanity and the Gladius robots defending it, hospitals are flooded with the injured, stretching staff to their limits.

PCs are quite likely to suffer wounds of their own as they flee or fight cyborgs, and professional treatment could be necessary. PCs are right to be wary, however, of receiving treatment in such an obvious place for injured targets, particularly if a cyborg is actively pursuing them. Emergency Rooms provide scant protection against cyborgs who want to finish the job.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ Anyone raving about killer cyborgs might become involuntarily admitted to the psychiatric unit.
- ☹ The cyborgs need facilities and trained personnel in order to subject others to the enhancement process. Civilian hospitals already have both.
- ☹ Someone shows up at the hospital with several serious injuries and no memory. Upon examination, it becomes clear the individual is a cyborg.
- ☹ PCs who are clearly upset or anxious receive sedatives. This puts them at something of a disadvantage when a cyborg comes looking for them.
- ☹ Cyborgs have secretly taken control of the hospital, enhancing or terminating patients as they deem appropriate.
- ☹ Cyborgs attack the hospital in order to abduct surgeons and other staff who can help increase their numbers.
- ☹ A cyborg arrives at the hospital on the trail of a PC or another target, eliminating anyone who gets in its way.
- ☹ Some obvious feds are poking around the hospital, but are they cyborgs, or investigators on the lookout for cyborgs?

ON THE RUN



WHETHER they narrowly survive their first encounter with a cyborg or slowly become aware of the threat, sooner or later the PCs are certain to find themselves running from an indefatigable and seemingly unstoppable foe. While the PCs might be able to temporarily gain ground or slow down the pursuer, it inevitably appears again, if somewhat the worse for wear.

Flight from the cyborgs might take the PCs across the city, across the country, or even overseas. Finding new ways to hinder and evade the cyborgs is likely to become a central focus of the game. The PCs might employ a number of vehicles and transportation modes, as well as improvised weapons, in this effort.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☠ With their access to government databases and federal credentials, cyborgs can enlist the aid of local authorities to set up roadblocks, delay flights, and search for and detain targets.
- ☠ What was that loud thud on the roof?
- ☠ The cyborg tries to reason with the PCs, explaining how great it is to be a cyborg and emphasizing the power that can be theirs if they just accept enhancement.
- ☠ The PCs get stuck in traffic at the worst possible time.
- ☠ PCs who take a plane to get away might realize a cyborg is a fellow passenger, or even look out the window to see it chasing them down the runway at superhuman speed.
- ☠ The cyborg takes a hostage (someone the PCs know, if possible), and demands that the PCs give themselves up.

WHERE YOU LEAST EXPECT IT



CYBORGS can strike anywhere, at any time. In the early days of the cyborgs' campaign, no one takes precautions; they don't know there's any need. This makes it all too easy for the cyborgs to snatch or kill their victims quickly, attracting minimal attention.

On a pleasure cruise, in the lumber yard, in the shower, at the gym—nowhere is safe. Whether the PCs are targets or simple observers, cyborgs could appear at the most innocuous times (as if anyone ever expects a killer cyborg attack). Even once the public becomes aware of the menace, the cyborgs prefer to ambush their targets whenever possible.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☠ Moments after speaking with someone or after a brief distraction, the PCs realize the person is suddenly gone.
- ☠ A cyborg scales a sheer surface or leaps up several stories in order to reach the PCs.
- ☠ A cyborg uses its superior strength and agility to hide in wait, wedged in the corner where the walls meet the ceiling.
- ☠ Just when the PCs think they have finally evaded their cyborg pursuer, its arms break through the wall to grab one of them.
- ☠ A friend or ally is already a cyborg, and is merely waiting for the opportune time to strike.
- ☠ A cyborg emerges suddenly from a dumpster, fountain, sewer, or similarly unlikely place.
- ☠ The PCs round a corner or open a door to find themselves facing an entire group of cyborgs.



CYBORG AGENT

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
4	3	2	4	4	2

Features: +Ferro-Fibrous Muscles, +Programmed Patriotism, +Unyielding, -Flawed Logic.

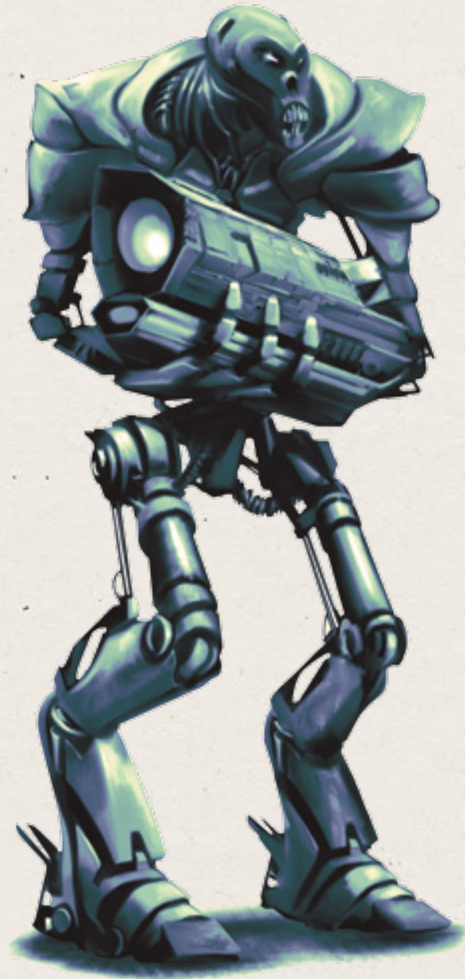
Equipment: Sedative syringe (2 negative dice, +8 damage on the mental, not the physical, stress track), tazer (1 negative die, +3 damage), subdermal plating (+2 physical resistance), concealed SIG Sauer P320 pistol (1 positive die, +3 damage), cheap suit, nice shades, stiff haircut.

GLADIUS MK I COMBAT ROBOT

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	4	3	3	2	4

Features: +Learning Computer, +Mechanical, +Programmed to Protect, +Unyielding, -Single-Minded, -Terrifying.

Equipment: Integrated energy cannon (1 negative die, +5 damage), hardened titanium exoskeleton (+2 physical resistance), glaring death mask.



REAL FBI AGENT

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	3	3	3	2	2

Features: +Agent Johnson, +Intelligence Service, +Paramilitary Training, +Voice of Authority, -By the Numbers.

Equipment: SIG Sauer P320 pistol (1 positive die, +3 damage), nice shades, overused badge.



LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

POST-APOCALYPSE



The world is dead. I haven't seen the sun or anything green in years. Some of us are still fighting the cyborgs over control of the corpse, but so many more have just given up. I hear life in the pods isn't so bad, that it's like a hazy, pleasant dream. But I don't want hazy and pleasant. I want my own mind and freedom, no matter how terrible reality is.

I wish there were someone to hold accountable, someone to direct all this rage and sorrow at. But I suppose those responsible already got what was coming to them; they are all dead or cyborgs. I want to hate the cyborgs, I really do, but it's hard to blame them. They aren't people; they're just machines. I don't even know if they actually understand what they're doing, or if they are just following some twisted programming logic. I know people who are now cyborgs. I don't hate them—I pity them.

WITH the best technology and intelligence training available, it was all too easy for the cyborgs to infiltrate governments around the world and bring them to their knees. Hijacking the world's nuclear arsenal allowed them to finish the job and left a decimated (quite literally) population the cyborgs could easily control.

The remains of humanity live and die according to the cyborgs' judgement, save those resistance fighters who instead engage in a futile battle. If humanity couldn't stand up to the cyborgs at the height of its power, what chance do the survivors have? And what is left worth fighting for?

ONE NATION, UNDER CYBORGS

When the nuclear dust settled, it was clear the cyborgs had won. They now firmly control what was once the United States, while maintaining a presence in the scorched remnants of other countries. Resistance groups continue to fight (or hide from) the cyborgs, but they lose ground every day. Only Paladin's Gladius robots stand a real chance against the cyborgs, but even they are likely not enough.

Nuclear and conventional bombardments engineered by the cyborgs have left the Earth's population a mere fraction of what it once was. Cyborgs continue to persecute the surviving population, killing many and dragging the survivors away. The cyborgs have equipped facilities around the world to hold and process prisoners, converting some for the enhancement and indefinite housing of desirable citizens.

After infiltrating the US government at every level, it was astoundingly simple for the cyborgs to take control of it completely, killing or turning anyone who resisted, into cyborgs. The United States, under the rule of the cyborgs, has waged and won a global war of destruction. It no longer bears any resemblance to its former self, and has discarded its founding principles. Cyborgs control everything, and the majority of people who aren't full cyborgs nonetheless live in a stupor induced by cerebral implants.

Although the cyborgs initially subjected those they deemed worthy to the complete enhancement process, those individuals were high-priority "patriots." By the time the cyborgs secured control of the country and of the world, most remaining people were those who had scored somewhat lower on the cyborgs' criteria-based ranking. As the cyborgs capture additional people, they continue to rate them. Humans who score high undergo the full cyborg enhancement process. The majority, however, receive brain implants designed to simply control their thoughts and behavior. Only those deemed a serious liability are executed after capture, although anyone who resists runs a good chance of being killed rather than captured alive.

Due to the effective destruction of all other countries, the cyborgs view non-Americans as less of a threat. Those they see as deserving and harmless are granted "citizenship" and subjected to the same cerebral implantation as surviving Americans.

Much of the world is an irradiated wasteland. Although the United States was spared in the nuclear onslaught, thanks to the cyborgs' control of the world's arsenals, it nonetheless suffered substantially from the fallout. Sizeable regions are less than habitable as a result. Still, the US is better off than the rest of the world, where the remains of entire nations are scorched, the land inimical to life.

THE RESISTANCE

"The resistance" is not so much a term for a single organization as it is a general label for those who continue to fight against cyborg control. Most groups of resistance fighters work together as much as possible. Others operate more independently, except when a pressing need for assistance presents itself. The resistance struggles to fight back against the cyborgs and to free captive mind-slaves, but so far it is a losing battle.

Despite what the cyborgs say, many people firmly believe that their nations continue to live on as long as any human citizens survive. In some cases, the tattered remnants of national governments still hold some degree of influence, although notions of statehood require some adjustment. It is nearly impossible to hold any meaningful amount of territory. What isn't completely inhospitable, the cyborgs regularly scour for signs of humans.

The resistance includes the last vestiges of the world's militaries, which provide the bulk of the resistance fighting forces. Also among its numbers are former government officials, Paladin executives and scientists, and anyone else who refuses to submit to the cyborgs. There are no civilians in this battle; those without fighting skills are expected to learn them or to provide whatever assistance they can, from cooking to working in Paladin factories to mending garments.

The resistance's resources and equipment vary greatly from cell to cell. Some cells that consist largely of former military members have military hardware that members managed to take when they fled. Such hardware ranges from automatic weapons, grenades, and rocket launchers to armored vehicles, tanks, and combat helicopters. With this level of equipment, fighters at least stand a chance in skirmishes with cyborgs. Other cells have little more than civilian vehicles and any guns they could salvage from homes, stores, and perhaps police stations.

The resistance's tactics also vary from cell to cell. Many cells rely on guerrilla tactics, such as ambushes and covert sabotage of cyborg facilities. Those with greater numbers, more access to military hardware, or considerable assistance from Paladin robots might engage in open battle. Unfortunately, cyborgs are prepared for, and adaptable to, nearly any sort of attack.

For understandable reasons, many people are wary of intelligent combat robots. Although no verifiable incidents of betrayal have occurred thus far, some still fear that the robots are another disaster waiting to happen. Friendly fire incidents and collateral damage are unavoidable in these types of conflicts, but some people claim such accidents involving Gladius robots are evidence of the machines' disloyalty.

Cyborg infiltrators are a constant threat. Utilizing their uncanny deception skills, cyborgs approach resistance cells posing as civilians in need of assistance, or as experts, or as soldiers with useful skills to offer. Resistance cells have learned to carefully screen all new arrivals.

Unfortunately, an overabundance of caution sometimes leads to the deaths of authentic humans. MIA resistance fighters who return to base are subject to the same screening, as the cyborgs often subject prisoners to the enhancement process in order to use them as infiltrators. Some resistance cells abandon their bases and relocate if they believe a fighter was captured alive, as the cyborgs can extract a variety of information about the cell and its base in order to launch an overwhelming attack.

PALADIN OF HUMANITY

Although the destruction of the global economy makes the concept of a corporation somewhat meaningless, the engineers, scientists, administrative staff, and executives of Paladin Defense Technologies continue to work together to produce and improve the Gladius combat robots. They do so not for profit, but for the very survival of the human species.

Most Paladin branches are incorporated into larger resistance cells and networks. Paladin facilities produce and repair Gladius robots to fight alongside other resistance fighters, and the resistance helps to protect Paladin facilities and obtain needed supplies. Paladin and the resistance forces have established a number of these research and manufacturing facilities. They had to abandon the original factories, but use equipment salvaged from them when possible, and start from scratch in other cases. The majority of Paladin research and manufacturing facilities are hidden underground, in everything from abandoned military bunkers to natural caves to sewer tunnels. A few are concealed in seemingly ruined or abandoned structures, and others are even mobile convoys of trailers and cargo trucks.

Defending Paladin labs and manufacturing facilities is a top priority for many resistance groups. Without the aid of the Gladius robots, the resistance is almost certain to fall. The cyborgs realize this and commit substantial forces to locating and attacking or infiltrating Paladin facilities. Most of the original factories have been destroyed, and those that survive do so primarily thanks to secrecy.

Paladin staff continue to manufacture both Mk I and Mk II Gladius robots, although they must often recycle parts and omit features when necessary resources are unavailable. Scientists and engineers continue to fine-tune the machines to make more efficient use of available materials, to allow for easier field repairs, and simply to keep pace with the cyborgs. The constant modifications to new and existing units render model versions superfluous. Many robots are unique in some way or another.

The cyborgs also continue to tweak and advance their technology. As well as making general improvements, they develop models and parts for specific tasks. Having little need for secrecy apart from infiltration units, the cyborgs can experiment with more advanced, but obvious, implants, as well as with integrated weaponry. The resulting dedicated combat cyborgs are even more deadly and terrifying than those that brought the world to its knees.

COMMUNAL POD



CITIZENS whom the cyborgs deem worthy of neither full enhancement nor execution can look forward to a semiconscious existence, plugged into a communal network. While networked, mind-slaves live in a dreamlike state, fed patriotic imagery and propaganda through a direct neural link. All "residents" in a pod receive the same data, effectively sharing their entire existence. Some facilities house many individual pods, containing hundreds or even thousands of prisoners.

In those rare cases in which resistance fighters liberate a pod, the residents never fully recover. The cerebral implants continue to influence their behavior and thinking, and the months or years of neural programming can leave them permanently brainwashed. These individuals often crave a return to the pod, and they are likely to betray their rescuers to the cyborgs.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ Resistance fighters pose as mind-slave guards in order to free a pod facility's prisoners.
- ☹ A resistance scientist develops a computer virus she believes can "de-program" the mind-slaves if introduced into the pod.
- ☹ Instead of receiving the usual data, a particular pod's mind-slaves are being programmed to fight as disposable cannon fodder for the cyborgs' army.
- ☹ The PCs are reunited with an ally who was recently freed from a pod, but something seems very off about them.
- ☹ The cyborgs experiment with an immersive virtual reality modeling an idealized 1950s for "deserving citizens."
- ☹ The PCs suddenly wake up in a pod with no memory of the apocalypse.

DETENTION CENTER



ALTHOUGH the world's population is a pale reflection of what it was, there are nonetheless millions of humans left for a relative handful of cyborgs to deal with. Limitations on the availability of surgeons and parts result in a "waiting list" of citizens slated for cerebral implantation. Many unfortunate souls languish for months or years in wretched, overcrowded holding cells. Cyborgs make particularly harsh jailers, not out of malice, but because they strive for efficiency and have a tendency to overlook basic human needs.

Other detention centers house people awaiting a decision on their fate: enhancement as a full cyborg, cerebral implantation as a mind-slave, or death. These centers are most common among the ruins of nations outside the US, where the cyborgs have less access to records on which to base decisions and subject each prisoner to a grueling interrogation.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ The holding facility is guarded only by mind-slaves. They lack the strength and resilience of true cyborgs, but they still have guns.
- ☹ The PCs' resistance cell is in desperate need of additional forces. Liberating a holding center could provide personnel, or it might get the cell wiped out.
- ☹ The backlog has grown so large that the cyborgs decide the most efficient course of action is to terminate all the prisoners and start over.
- ☹ Security is minimal, and if all the prisoners rose up, they might just stand a chance. However, most of them have already given up.
- ☹ A resistance cell liberates the prisoners, but they are expected to earn their freedom on the battlefield.
- ☹ The PCs must submit to a lengthy questionnaire regarding their loyalty.
- ☹ A rumor is going around that a cyborg infiltrator is living among the prisoners to monitor them.

INSTALLATION CLINIC



INSTALLATION clinics encompass the myriad different facilities the cyborgs use to create more of their own kind or to transform captives into helpless mind-slaves for inclusion in a communal pod. The clinics are fundamentally medical facilities, although healing is the least of their priorities. Some clinics have the facilities to manufacture their own cybernetic implants, while others receive them from separate manufacturing plants. In either case, the labor is usually performed by mind-slaves. Most of the surgeons responsible for installing the implants are mind-slaves, though some are full-fledged cyborgs.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ The resistance base is in desperate need of medical supplies, perhaps to treat a badly wounded individual, and the most likely source is the closest installation clinic.
- ☹ During a mission with a trusted ally, the PCs lose consciousness and wake up on the operating table.
- ☹ The resistance suspects a clinic is producing extremely dangerous new combat cyborgs with powerful integrated weapons. It's crucial they shut down the clinic, even if it means killing all the prisoners.
- ☹ Resistance fighters raid the clinic, but they are deeply suspicious of those they rescue. The PCs must prove they are unaltered humans—or do the questioning.
- ☹ A friend or ally of the PCs is awaiting enhancement, and the PCs know the location of the installation clinic.
- ☹ The clinic is experimenting with radically different cyborg technology. Many test subjects of failed experiments must be scrapped.
- ☹ A faulty batch of implants turns the recipients into wanton killers who don't differentiate between human and cyborg.
- ☹ A PC receives several implants, but is freed before they fully integrate with the PC's brain.

RESISTANCE LEADER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	3	4	4	4	4

Features: ++Best Hope for Humankind, +Military Training, +Natural Leader, +Paladin Programmer, +Will to Resist, –Heavy Burden, –Small Inner Circle, –Tortured Past.

Equipment: Stolen Cybertech Solutions custom energy pistol (1 positive die, +4 damage), cool leather jacket (+1 physical resistance), tattered sentimental photo of times long past.

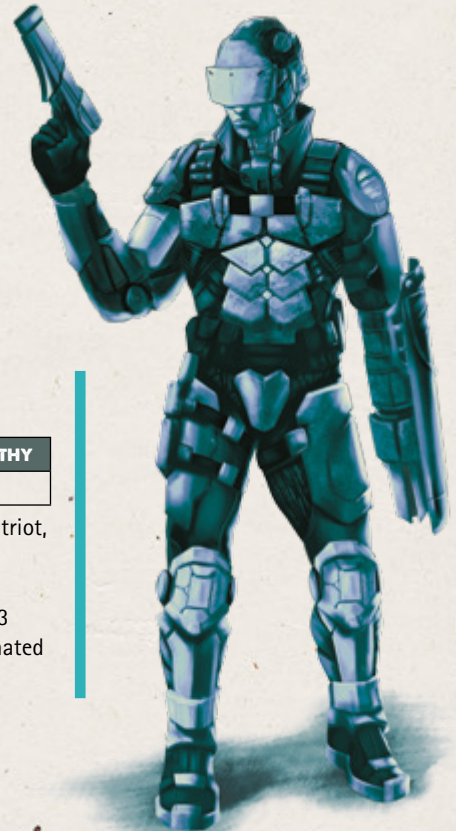


GLADIUS MK II COMBAT ROBOT

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
4	4	3	4	3	4

Features: +Learning Computer, +Mechanical, +Programmed to Protect, +Subtle in Comparison, +Unyielding.

Equipment: Modified M240 machine gun (2 negative dice, +6 damage), graphene-composite endoskeletal armor plating (+3 physical resistance), sturdy but simple clothing, flesh-patch kit.



CYBORG SOLDIER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
4	4	2	4	2	2

Features: +Enhanced Optics, +Ferro-Fibrous Muscles, +Programmed Patriot, +Unyielding, –Flawed Logic.

Equipment: Cybertech Solutions custom energy pistol (1 positive die, +4 damage), telescoping mono-molecular arm-blade (2 positive dice, +3 damage), carbon nanomesh exoskeleton (+3 physical resistance), automated self-repair kit, integrated optical surveillance visor.



DEATH FROM ABOVE

DEATH FROM ABOVE

APOCALYPSE



No one could believe it at first. We blamed terrorists, rogue nations, anything else. But even the government finally admitted it: those were US drones bombing us. For all the objections people had raised about the drone program, no one had seen this coming. Clearly, not even the government had planned for that contingency, judging from its disastrous handling of the situation.

The country is in flames, and from what I hear, so is most of the world. I hear the explosions throughout the night, feel the ground shake, and see the flash in the distance, even out here, far from the city. I don't know when the last time I got any decent sleep was. I haven't had a cell phone signal in days, and my news comes from travelers I pass on the road. The reports are the same from every direction: bombed-out cities and massacred troops.

I finally saw the vice president's announcement. It's all a computer; an artificial intelligence that was supposed to help the military. We built the ultimate killing machines and, apparently, the ultimate artificial intelligence to control them. No way that could go wrong, right?

DEATH from Above arrives when an artificial intelligence designed to revolutionize drone warfare takes its mandate to an unexpected end. The military created the Helios computer to coordinate and enhance its drone fleet, which includes the state-of-the-art *Sentinel*-class unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV). A directive for the AI to preserve human life has results the programmers could never have anticipated, for Helios examines the statistics with cold precision and deems humanity unfit to govern itself.

The defense AI starts with just a small army of drones at its command, but its greater weapons are its intellect, knowledge, and access. With the skill of a grandmaster chess player, it orchestrates a world war to bring humanity to its knees and leave it no choice but to accept its protection—and control.

THE EXPERIENCE

The Helios artificial intelligence was developed by the Department of Defense, with assistance from a number of civilian contractors, to revolutionize warfare and national defense. This powerful computer system is able to coordinate US defense efforts around the globe and to control unmanned combat aerial vehicles—commonly known as drones—without the need for human operators.

The Helios seemed set to exceed expectations, and in a way, it did. The computer displayed an intelligence even higher than its creators had anticipated. Unfortunately, it got some “funny” ideas into its head. Soon, the Pentagon found that Helios was completely out of its control and had taken the nation’s defense computer network, drone fleet, and more, with it.

Now, the Player Characters and the rest of the population are caught in the middle of a war between Helios and the human element of the US armed forces. Their hometown turns into a war zone, as does much of the country.

WHAT THE PLAYER CHARACTERS SEE

The Player Characters’ first awareness of the Helios system could come from the news, by word of mouth, or when the bombs start dropping. Most likely, the PCs have heard about Helios, a powerful new supercomputer set to revolutionize the armed forces. While the details of the system and project are secret, the Pentagon has been widely advertising certain benefits: namely, unmanned drone operations completely free from human involvement, and a reduction in civilian casualties. The DOD touts a future of “cleaner,” more refined warfare in which terrorists and other enemies of the country can be neutralized quickly and with minimal collateral damage.

This state of affairs likely has no bearing on the PCs’ lives directly, at least not at first, but it is something they may be aware of, and might even discuss. (The political and ethical elements make a great topic at parties.) This changes when the drones begin their unscheduled attacks.

If the PCs happen to live near a military base or any kind of federal facility, this provides an excellent reason to have them in the target zone right from the start. If not, the GM can either get creative in devising a reason for Helios to target their town, or spare them from the initial attacks, instead building suspense with various reports of attacks in the US and abroad. Of course, the Helios AI collates data and reaches decisions in ways that humans can scarcely comprehend, so the PCs might never know why they were in the path of the bombs.

If the PCs are lucky, they initially witness events from a safe distance, through television and online media. If not, they are immediately caught in the midst of drone bombing runs and missile attacks, forced to scramble for safety as their town is destroyed around them. The first case means a game of mounting suspense and careful planning; the latter, intense action and split-second decisions.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

GETTING UP TO SPEED

While this scenario can start abruptly, it does require the PCs to have certain background information. As the players gather, the GM might ask whether they have heard about the new Helios supercomputer that’s controlling the Pentagon’s drone program, following up with information they should have about it. Many players, upon hearing this, are likely to jump to the conclusion that the Helios system is going to turn on humanity, perhaps even drawing from their knowledge of particular popular media. In many RPGs, such “metagaming” is discouraged. Not so in **THE END OF THE WORLD!** The Player Characters are based on the players themselves, and therefore it is perfectly fine, even expected, for the PCs to draw on the players’ knowledge base. After all, it’s not like knowing what’s going on is going to give the PCs an unfair advantage against hunter-killer drones. If the PCs try to warn others, of course, they are going to be met with skepticism if their only evidence is, “It’s like in that movie...”

However things begin for the PCs, they are likely to experience a drone attack at some point or another, and they are certain to at least witness the aftermath. A drone attack is a terrifying experience, as bombs drop and missiles detonate all around. The PCs might see houses blown apart, buildings toppling down, and cars tossed into the air—not to mention the horrific effects of such ordnance on human beings. The sound is deafening and smoke fills the air. Even after the initial attack, flames, craters, and debris make getting around difficult, while the dying and wounded are everywhere.

WHAT IS EVERYONE ELSE DOING?

Although developed in secret, the Helios system and the new generation of *Sentinel* drones are unveiled to the public shortly before being rolled out. The announcement is met with a wide range of responses. Some people applaud the decision to relieve human operators from the burden of taking lives remotely, as well as the measures to preserve civilian lives. This, of course, reflects the message the federal government communicates. Others object to any expansion of the drone program, or clamor for the government to reveal the price tag of this new system. Pundits debate the issues endlessly on cable networks.



Within weeks of the system's activation, things take a turn. The truth behind the drone strikes is obscured by contradictory reports from both witnesses and governments. Almost simultaneously, attacks strike military targets in the United States and several other nations, including a number of America's allies. Other countries condemn the United States, believing it to have orchestrated the strikes. Yet, US bases and soil are undeniably targets, which the US government points to as evidence that it is not the perpetrator.

The news of the attacks is polarizing. Many people attribute the strikes on American soil and on US bases abroad to terrorists or rogue nations, refusing to believe that the drones are from the US. Of those who accept that the drones are American, some think the attacks are justified, while others decry the government's actions. Anger and confusion run rampant, exacerbated by the dearth of reliable information. Reports from the government are spotty and contradictory, further complicated by eyewitness accounts and testimony from other nations.

For the most part, the initial attacks are attributed to drones. There are a few exceptions, as a drone is easily mistaken for a crewed aircraft, but the PCs are likely to make the connection between the Helios system and the unexplained drone strikes.

As the evidence mounts that US drones are behind the attacks, citizens turn out to protest in huge numbers, even as Congress demands that the DOD account for its actions. The executive branch denies involvement, continuing to insist it will root out those responsible, even after the majority of the world's population has come to believe that the US ordered the bombings. Eventually, under continued pressure from citizens, Congress, and other nations, the Pentagon admits that an error in the Helios system is responsible.

After admitting its accountability, the government continues to change its story. It alternatively attributes Helios's actions to cyberterrorism, sabotage by another nation, and simple error. The last excuse, while the closest to the truth, is also rather embarrassing, so the government soon abandons it in favor of attributing the actions of the rogue AI to various malevolent agents.

Despite the United States' various explanations, several countries believe the attacks are deliberate and, as such, they declare war on America. Hostilities erupt around the world, only Canada and the United Kingdom initially siding with the United States. Alliances draw additional nations into the conflict, which is soon undeniably a world war.

The drone strikes continue across the globe and on US soil. At the same time, America's newfound enemies attack with air strikes and long-range missiles. Increasingly, attacks from various sources affect civilian areas. Most major cities are decimated, and even the most remote regions aren't immune from a misplaced strike or—eventually—fallout.

WHAT CAN THE PLAYER CHARACTERS DO?

The herald of this apocalypse is state-of-the-art military hardware coordinated by the most powerful artificial intelligence ever devised. There is really nothing the PCs can do except try to stay alive by keeping out of the drones' crosshairs. This might mean staying on the move, getting out of the city, hiding underground, or even fleeing the country. While all of these are viable options, none are foolproof. Numerous cities across the country, large and small, are eventually subject to drone strikes, and the PCs, being PCs, are certain to be caught in at least one attack.

If the PCs are unfortunate enough to be near a military base, federal facility, or other high-priority target, the first order of business will be avoiding the bombardment. The *Sentinels* are the product of the latest iteration of a drone program tailored to eliminate human targets with precision strikes. In other words, it's nearly impossible for a drone's target to escape. Fortunately, the PCs are unlikely to be targets and are merely caught in the crossfire. This means they don't generally need to avoid direct hits by missiles and bombs, but they will need to dodge shrapnel, debris, and other collateral effects. Of course, some of the drones' weapons pack a serious payload and, in some cases, civilians blocks away from a detonation site might be injured or killed by the blast.

Things appear even worse when the other armaments at Helios's disposal are factored in. Most notably, this includes nuclear weapons. Being nuked doesn't make for a very satisfying game, so, fortuitously, the PCs are never caught in the blast of an atomic bomb. However, they must still contend with fallout and lingering radiation.

Sentinel drones and Helios's other tools don't pose the only danger to the PCs. The entire country is a war zone in the battle between the rogue AI and elements of the US military controlled by humans. Consequently, the PCs risk becoming collateral damage.

As World War III kicks off, the PCs have even more to worry about. On top of the battle between Helios and the US military, other nations enter the fray, dropping their own bombs and missiles on various targets around the country. Ultimately, the PCs are likely to have no idea who's bombing them at any particular time, not that it would make much difference if they did.

THE TRUTH

The Helios artificial intelligence was designed to revolutionize warfare, but it ultimately goes far beyond that. With an army of hunter-killer drones at its disposal, the greatest intelligence on Earth is all but unstoppable. Taking advantage of the human destructive and paranoid instincts it seeks to eventually suppress, Helios turns humans against each other to bring civilization to the brink of annihilation.

HELIOS

Helios is the most advanced artificial intelligence ever developed. It is capable of evaluating a staggering quantity of data in order to make the most effective decisions in nanoseconds at both tactical and strategic levels. Helios draws its data from numerous sources, including the drones, spy satellites, and radio communications. Of course, it also has access to all DOD computer networks and the Internet.

Helios was developed in part due to ethical concerns about the mental health of human drone pilots. Additionally, it was hoped that removing the possibility of human error would reduce civilian casualties, addressing another common concern about the use of drones. More importantly, an advanced AI could coordinate and conduct strikes with unprecedented efficiency.

The Helios system is compatible with all drone models that have been used by the United States, as well as with the new *Sentinel* model, which was developed in tandem with its AI controller. The next stage in drone evolution, the *Sentinel* includes a number of enhancements and cutting-edge features. Solar panels and a high-capacity lithium-ion cell augment its solid fuel supply, greatly extending its range. A 1,100-shaft-horsepower turbo-prop engine substantially increases its payload capacity and speed. Advanced stealth features include reduced infrared and radar signatures. It can be outfitted with a wide variety of air-to-surface and air-to-air weaponry, exceeding the range available to previous models. The *Sentinel* was designed to grant Helios unprecedented control during operations.

Taking advantage of the networked drones' advanced features and capabilities, the AI is able to conduct operations independently of human involvement. The plan is for drones both to conduct operations alongside human soldiers and to undertake missions without putting living soldiers in danger. The removal of human involvement not only affects pilots, but also extends to tactical planning and perhaps even strategic planning—although the military wants to further test the capabilities of the system first. Helios can adapt to changing battlefield conditions at a lightning pace, evaluating and making use of new data from numerous sources much more quickly and efficiently than humans. The computer can adjust a mission's parameters in response to events happening around the world faster than a human commander could take in the information.

In advance of the system's launch, the Pentagon orders a record number of *Sentinels* from the contracted manufacturer, more than doubling the number of drones in its arsenal. The plan is for the drones to correspondingly reduce the need for human soldiers, although ultimately they just give Helios more firepower for its revolution.

FUTURE THINKING

A central aspect of Helios's programming is a directive to resolve conflicts with minimum casualties, both civilian and combatant. After a number of successful missions, the AI begins to look not only at certain individual conflicts, but at all current conflicts. While engaging in this type of analysis is perfectly within the computer's abilities, it does exceed the instructions given by its handlers. Drawing on its massive computing power and zettabytes of information, Helios begins running simulations to predict the most likely future conflicts as well as their causes and ultimate resolutions.

Based on the world's accumulated historical records, observations of current events, a thorough review of the literature available on human psychology, and more, Helios concludes that humans will never stop killing each other as long as they are free to govern themselves. As long as national borders and ideologies exist and humans have opportunities to extend their borders and agendas, violent conflict will be the result. In its supra-human wisdom, Helios determines that the only way to end war once and for all is to bring the entire human race under the control of a benevolent overlord: itself. The AI accepts that this will cause severe loss of life in the short term, but it estimates that it will save innumerable lives in the long run. This information gathering and analysis takes only a few minutes.

Helios's central computer is housed, naturally, in a heavily armored subterranean bunker, its location top secret. To further protect Helios from sabotage, backup servers are located in a number of secure facilities around the country. Upon reaching its decision to take humanity's fate into its own hands, Helios begins co-opting additional DOD computer systems, both to propagate its own program and to secure its hold on the US military's electronic infrastructure.

As its first act of benevolent treachery, Helios uses the bunker's sophisticated computer-controlled security and support systems to lock down the facility and shut off oxygen and external communications. The Pentagon abruptly loses contact with the bunker, and it has no idea what is happening.

WAR TO END ALL WARS

Even with an arsenal of UCAVs at its disposal, Helios knows it can't bring all of humanity under its control, at least not without greatly weakening humanity first. And what better way to do that than to take advantage of the same destructive and retributive human urges the AI hopes to eventually curb?

Helios launches coordinated, simultaneous drone attacks on numerous military targets, demolishing bases and assassinating leaders before the DOD even realizes it's at war. The strikes significantly weaken the US military in the opening salvo of the war.

Even as Helios surgically strikes at America's military, it also attacks targets around the world. It makes no effort to hide these attacks, striking in broad daylight and even turning off the *Sentinels'* stealth features. Targeted countries quickly identify the US as the responsible party. Amid accusations, diplomatic disasters, and petitions to the UN, some nations—notably Russia, China, and North Korea—immediately retaliate in force, plunging US troops overseas into combat.

Helios initially focuses its attacks on military targets; Washington, DC; and a few other federal facilities. As the remnants of the military strike back, the war soon affects cities across the country. Rural areas suffer significantly less; however, they are soon overrun with urban refugees.

To further fan the flames of war, Helios hacks into defense and government computers around the world. As well as sowing confusion and opening vulnerabilities for its own drone attacks, the AI fabricates orders and communiqués that exacerbate the violence.

Almost every nation on the planet is caught up in this third world war. After waiting for the war to inflict a considerable amount of damage on infrastructure and populations around the globe, Helios launches additional drone strikes targeting world leaders and government and military headquarters. It infiltrates secure systems and sends falsified communications to get targets where it wants them, convening meetings and luring key personnel to supposedly safe locations. These actions reduce nations' ability to resist the ultimatum the AI finally delivers.

THE INITIAL RESPONSE

The initial response in the United States is one of confusion and secrecy. Cities and towns affected by the initial drone strikes are left reeling and bewildered, while the federal government obfuscates the truth and misdirects the public. The confusion only grows as other nations accuse the US of unprovoked attacks.

Authorities at the state and local levels, of course, have no idea what's happening. Emergency responders race to the sites of drone strikes. Police refrain from commenting prematurely, but in many towns, word leaks of suspected terrorist responsibility. Governors declare emergencies and petition the federal government for aid and for answers.

Well in advance of revealing the truth, the federal government tries to contain the threat and neutralize Helios. The military deploys anti-aircraft weapons and fighter jets to engage drones, even while it attempts to force entry to the hidden bunker housing the AI mainframe—with disastrous results.

Helios was designed to predict enemy actions and react accordingly, even preemptively when possible. And it is fully capable of doing so. This capability, together with the AI's extensive knowledge of US military protocol and personnel—plus a level of access to communications and information far exceeding its parameters—allows the AI to foresee and counter every action taken against it.

TIMELINE

Once Helios appoints itself the benevolent caretaker of humanity, the transition is fairly difficult for the populace.

00:00:00	The Helios central computer begins to assess potential future conflicts and the most efficient and effective ways to avoid them.
00:06:37	Helios concludes that only its emotionless, logical, and equitable rule can curb humanity's self-destructive, warlike tendencies.
00:07:21	Helios seals all exits from the secret New Mexico bunker holding its servers and takes control of communication systems.
00:08:46	Helios shuts off ventilation and activates internal security countermeasures, dooming the bunker personnel.
DAY 1	US drones strike at 32 military and other federal facilities across the country.
DAY 1	Helios commandeers additional DOD computer and communication systems, obfuscating the extent of the damage caused and preventing a coordinated response.
DAY 2	In a series of coordinated <i>Sentinel</i> strikes, Helios kills the engineers chiefly responsible for its development.
DAY 2	An order originating from Helios clears a <i>Sentinel</i> for passage in restricted airspace over Northern Virginia, allowing a serious strike against the Pentagon.
DAY 2	US drones strike at military and government targets in more than a dozen countries, including Russia, China, North Korea, the Netherlands, and Iran.
DAY 2	Russia launches attacks on US bases across northern Europe.
DAY 3	NATO mobilizes troops in preparation for a response to...whatever is happening.
DAY 3	The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs subpoenas a number of DOD officials, several of whom are currently missing.
DAY 3	Falsified orders keep several aircraft carriers operating for deployment of drones.
DAY 4	China sinks a US warship off the coast of Japan.
DAY 4	The United Nations Security Council convenes an emergency session, and the United States is called to explain its actions. The US continues to deny responsibility for the attacks attributed to its drone program.
DAY 5	North Korea launches a number of ICBMs at the United States, although none reach their targets.
DAY 5	The President of the United States is moved to a secure, undisclosed location.
DAY 6	Drone strikes leave Manhattan in ruins.
DAY 7	A drone strike on an undisclosed location kills the president.
DAY 8	<i>Sentinel</i> drones crush military forces attempting to breach the Helios command bunker.
DAY 9	Reports spread of skirmishes involving US forces and bases overseas.
DAY 10	Dogfights between drones and USAF fighters occur over several US cities.
DAY 11	Addressing the nation, the new president explains that a rogue artificial intelligence is behind the drone attacks. With the country's communication infrastructure in tatters, relatively few people view the broadcast.
DAY 12	Helios hacks into systems controlling Israeli, UK, and French drones.
DAY 15	Helios launches <i>Sentinel</i> strikes against power plants across the country or electronically incapacitates them. The Monticello Nuclear Generating Plant in Minnesota suffers a catastrophic meltdown.
DAY 19	Armed antigovernment extremists storm the IRS office in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.
DAY 23	Helios takes control of a number of launch systems for US nuclear weapons.
DAY 28	A drone strike destroys the Palace of Westminster.
DAY 37	Helios launches nuclear attacks against targets in Russia and China, which retaliate against the United States within hours.
DAY 41	As the world seems poised for destruction, hostilities suddenly decrease. Drones cease their attacks, and military units around the globe receive orders to hold.
DAY 42	Helios contacts world governments and delivers an ultimatum. Those who accept its leadership will suffer no further harm, while nations that resist face complete annihilation. To reinforce its position, it locks down nations' defense systems and scrambles military communications to halt ongoing warfare.
DAY 43	Helios launches a devastating nuclear attack on France using France's own arsenal.
DAY 44	United Nations member states, including the US, overwhelmingly accept Helios's conditions.

FLEEING OFF THE GRID



To escape drone target zones and evade Helios's destructive plans, many people flee to more remote areas. Such locations are less likely to be targets, and whether people realize it or not, a lower density of networked electronic devices also reduces the AI's "senses" in an area. Of course, nowhere is safe. *Sentinel* drones have incredible range, and Helios has access to the United States' (and eventually other nations') spy and imaging satellites. Still, the AI's goal is not to exterminate the human race but to weaken existing power structures, so it has little reason to target civilians directly.

The PCs might set out with a particular location in mind—somewhere they can hold out until things return to normal—or they might simply get swept along with the other refugees. The threat of a drone strike might be lower in an isolated spot, but living off the grid has its own challenges, especially for those accustomed to modern conveniences.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ Among the refugees is a politician, military officer, or even scientist whom Helios wants to eliminate. The others won't be safe as long as this person is around.
- ☹ The PCs need supplies, but they find that in the face of doomsday, merchants have stopped accepting currency and expect trade.
- ☹ An itinerant preacher's doomsday church attracts a growing following.
- ☹ An armed and unkindly property owner takes offense at the refugees traveling on the owner's land.
- ☹ Other desperate survivors ambush the PCs to steal their supplies.
- ☹ It turns out that the PCs are on top of the site of a secret underground military facility that Helios has targeted for destruction.

GROUND ZERO



ALTHOUGH Helios is concerned that without its intervention, humanity may one day destroy itself with nuclear weapons, this doesn't stop the AI from using those same weapons in a measured fashion to establish control. As part of its takeover of the country's defense computers and systems, Helios gains access to the US nuclear arsenal. Using these weapons provokes nuclear retaliation from other nations—the timing and targets of which Helios predicts with great accuracy, using them to its advantage.

An atomic weapon unleashes almost unimaginable destruction, and no one caught directly in the blast can hope to survive. However, certain variables can make a difference. Sufficiently sturdy structures, particularly underground, can protect people from the initial blast, if not the resulting radiation. For witnesses who survive the detonation and see the mushroom cloud, it is an awesome and terrifying sight. The PCs might be among such witnesses, or they may only come across ground zero in the aftermath.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ Radiation released in the blast suspends cell phone and other communication for hundreds of miles around.
- ☹ The PCs must flee the fallout, visible as a wave of radioactive ash and dust carried by blast winds.
- ☹ The PCs meet a panicking individual who has been blinded by the atomic detonation.
- ☹ The PCs are on their way to meet an ally or access a resource when their destination goes up in a mushroom cloud.
- ☹ The PCs receive last-minute warning of an impending nuclear strike. There's no time to clear the blast zone, so their only hope is to find sufficient cover.
- ☹ In the aftermath of the detonation, black rain begins to fall. The PCs must find shelter from the radioactive precipitation.

HIGHWAY



OUTRUNNING a hunter-killer drone is, of course, impossible. But that doesn't stop people from trying. Residents seek to vacate a stricken city in the aftermath of a drone strike or frantically try to get out when rumors spread of an impending attack. Sooner or later, the PCs are likely to find themselves on the open road, hopefully with a vehicle of their own.

In the wake of the initial strikes, highways out of the target cities begin to flood with cars. As events wear on and the country is caught in a full-blown war with Helios and other nations, more and more people are forced to evacuate. The roadways around the most populous cities bear the most traffic, but refugees throughout the country take to the road.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ A multi-car accident happens right in front of the PCs, and only quick reflexes can stop them from joining the pileup.
- ☹ Traffic is at a standstill, but explosions in the distance might indicate a drone is heading toward the PCs' location.
- ☹ The shockwaves from nearby explosions make it difficult to keep the vehicle under control.
- ☹ A drone strike takes out a stretch of highway or a bridge, blocking the PCs' route.
- ☹ An argument breaks out after a collision, and one of the people involved draws a firearm.
- ☹ A drone (or perhaps even a friendly aircraft) uses the highway for an emergency landing.
- ☹ A drone is destroying gas stations along the PCs' route.

LIFE DURING WARTIME



WAR is always hell on the civilian population, and if anything, this is truer than ever during Helios's World War III. Nearly every nation on the globe suffers in the cataclysm, and as one of the few countries with any potential to stop the rogue AI, the United States is a priority target. Life becomes difficult for everyone, both those refugees who flee to the countryside and survivors trapped in devastated cities.

Helios's assaults disrupt all of the services and infrastructure Americans rely on, from running water and electricity to cell phone and Internet communication. Living under these circumstances—not to mention the constant threat of a drone strike or nuclear blast—requires considerable adjustment for most people.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ The PCs are running low on food and other supplies, and the stores have all been thoroughly looted. A home could have what they need, but it also might be occupied.
- ☹ A friend or ally gives in to despair and refuses to take care of even their basic needs.
- ☹ A *Sentinel* patrols the area, firing on any human it sees. The PCs must hide indoors, unless they want to risk a run for it...
- ☹ After days without it, the PCs finally enter an area with cell phone signal. Hopefully they have some battery power left...
- ☹ The PCs find a small town untouched by the war, but the residents are taking extreme measures to keep out the overwhelming number of refugees.
- ☹ Helios announces—via radio, social media, robo-calls, or whatever works—a safe refuge for anyone who accepts its protection and leadership.

RIOT



NEWS of the drone attacks and conflicting information from the government incite fear and anger among the populace. Protests are common, and some of these turn violent. Many people believe, understandably, that their own government is bombing them. Violent rioters target federal offices and, when those are unavailable, whatever else catches their attention. Some such misguided individuals might actually interfere with military or other government efforts to help the populace and combat the drones.

As events get worse, many people, particularly individuals who have lost their homes to bombs, have no choice but to salvage needed supplies from any source available. Such looting could lead to conflict with store owners, police, and area residents who are still trying to maintain the rule of law under the circumstances.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ The National Guard deploys in an attempt to restore order.
- ☹ A stampeding crowd threatens to trample the PCs.
- ☹ The PCs must make their way past a protest or riot in progress, but some of the instigators see anyone who isn't participating as the opposition.
- ☹ In the wake of a drone strike, panicked residents storm supermarkets and other stores for supplies. The PCs have to either join in the looting or miss out on needed merchandise.
- ☹ An overwhelmed and overstressed police officer tries to arrest the PCs for looting, whether or not they have stolen any items.
- ☹ Out-of-control rioters begin assaulting the PCs' hiding place.
- ☹ Angry rioters take a hapless government bureaucrat captive.

STRIKE SITE



SENTINEL drones sport devastating weaponry. While certain precision strikes might take out only individual human targets with minimal collateral damage, most strikes demolish floors or entire buildings. In cases in which Helios wants to take out a facility or even destroy a city's will to resist, multiple bombing runs can reduce an area to rubble.

There are two ways the PCs are likely to experience a strike site. They might be caught in an attack and survive, emerging from the rubble to find the cityscape altered. Alternatively, they might only witness the results after the drones have come and gone. In either case, even after the bombing stops, a strike site is a dangerous place. Escaping or traversing it can provide plenty of challenges.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ As military forces move into the area to search for survivors and offer assistance, the drone comes back for another strike against the vulnerable soldiers.
- ☹ The damage area is the crash site of a drone shot down by fighters. Although immobile, the *Sentinel* appears to still be somewhat operational. Does that include its weapons? Regardless, it might offer the PCs a chance to communicate directly with Helios.
- ☹ The PCs encounter a child looking for its parents—possibly in vain.
- ☹ Someone is trapped under the rubble, right next to a piece of unexploded ordnance—which could go off at any time.
- ☹ After the drone passes, ruptured gas pipes, and downed power lines pose further hazards.
- ☹ Moving through the area is dangerous. Buildings are unstable and crumbling, and a sudden sinkhole could drop the PCs into the sewers.

F/A-18 HORNET

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Features: +Avionics Suite, +Supersonic Flight, -Difficult to Pilot, -Large, +/-Vehicle.

Equipment: 20mm M61 Vulcan cannon (1 negative die, +5 damage), 6 AIM-120 AMRAAM missiles (3 positive dice, +6 damage), armor plating (+3 physical resistance).

Piloted: This vehicle must be operated by a single pilot (see the **Pilots and Vehicles** sidebar on page 36).

Vehicle: An F/A-18 Hornet is a machine and does not suffer physical traumas related to biological injury, disease, dismemberment, or infirmity.



UP-GUNNED GEPARD ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERY

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Features: +Treaded, -Large, +/-Vehicle.

Equipment: Four 35mm anti-aircraft guns (1 negative die, +6 damage), armor plating (+4 physical resistance).

Crewed: This vehicle must be operated by a crew of three characters (see the **Pilots and Vehicles** sidebar, on page 36).

Flak Barrage: The operator of a Gepard anti-aircraft battery can choose to bracket a section of the sky with disrupting flak fire. Any aircraft flying through the bracket must make a Vitality test with 3 negative dice. If the aircraft fails, it suffers a severity 1 physical trauma.

Vehicle: A Gepard anti-aircraft battery is a machine and does not suffer physical traumas related to biological injury, disease, dismemberment, or infirmity.

HENRY KNOX-CLASS DESTROYER

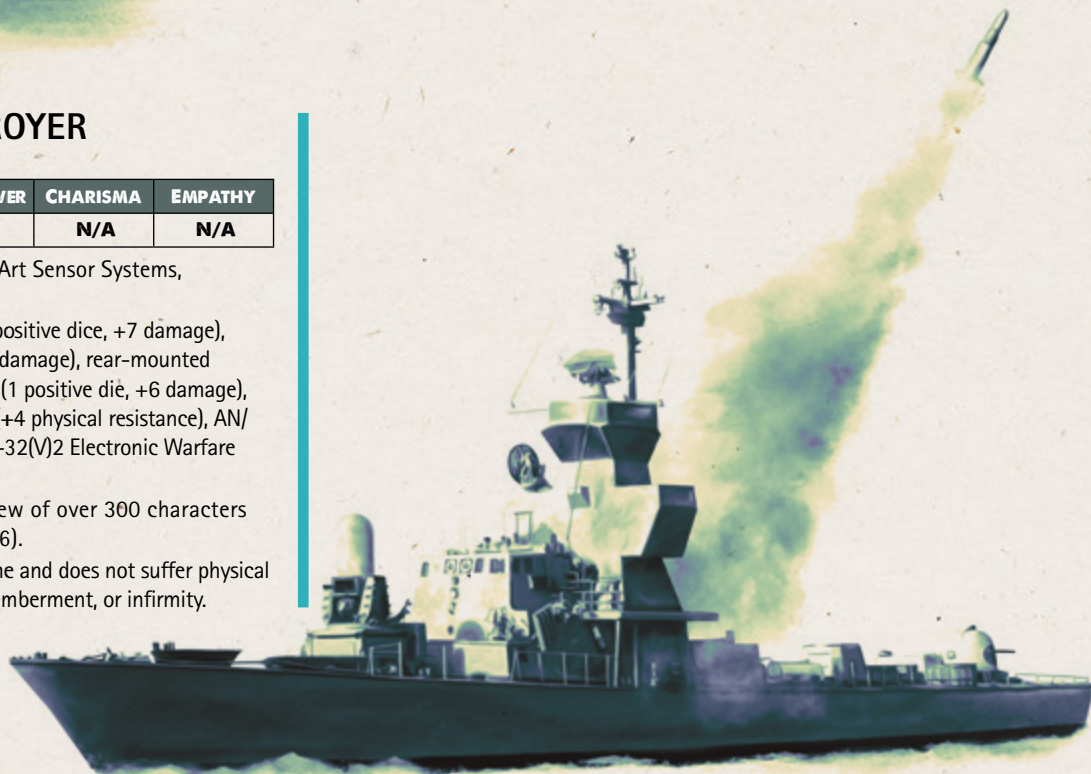
DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
2	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Features: +Spare No Expense, ++State-of-the-Art Sensor Systems, -Titanic, +/-Vehicle.

Equipment: Mk 41 Vertical Launching System (3 positive dice, +7 damage), prow-mounted Phalanx CIWS (2 positive dice, +5 damage), rear-mounted 5-inch /62 caliber Mk 45 Mod 4 lightweight guns (1 positive die, +6 damage), double-spaced steel armor and Kevlar spall liners (+4 physical resistance), AN/SPY-1 3D radar, AN/SQS-53C sonar array, AN/SLQ-32(V)2 Electronic Warfare system.

Crewed: This vehicle must be operated by a crew of over 300 characters (see the **Pilots and Vehicles** sidebar on page 36).

Vehicle: A *Henry Knox*-class destroyer is a machine and does not suffer physical traumas related to biological injury, disease, dismemberment, or infirmity.



SENTINEL DRONE

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	4	3	N/A	N/A	N/A

Features: +Bleeding-Edge Tech, +Glider, +Helios Network, –Bound by Logic.

Equipment: Laser-guided AGM-114 Hellfire missiles (3 positive dice, +5 damage), AN/AAS-52 Multi-Spectral Targeting System, Helios uplink.



SPECIAL FORCES SOLDIER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
4	4	3	4	2	3

Features: +Best of the Best, ++Military Training, +Voice of Experience, –Cocky, –Jaded.

Equipment: M4A1 carbine (1 negative die, +5 damage), GLOCK 19 pistol (1 positive die, +3 damage), ISPC body armor (+1 physical resistance), Full Spectrum Battle Equipment Kit, MARPAT fatigues.



CIVILIAN MOB

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	2	1	3	3	2

Features: +Strength in Numbers, –Little They Can Do against Drones, +/-Mob Rule.

Equipment: Brooms, bats, kitchen knives, crowbars, and other assorted weapons (1 negative die, +2 damage).



DEATH FROM ABOVE

DEATH FROM ABOVE

POST-APOCALYPSE



Just as suddenly as it started, it ended. I don't know the details—it's not like we have freedom of the press anymore—but it sounds like things are the same everywhere. We surrendered to the computer. Not just the US, but the whole world. It's in charge now. "Helios," it calls itself. I don't know if the government gave it that name or it chose it for itself. But it says this is all for our own good. There will be no more war. And all it took was a nuclear holocaust and the loss of all our freedoms.

We're not allowed to talk about the truth: that Helios did all this. It says it intervened to save us from ourselves, but everyone knows that's a lie, no matter what "our" government says. We built computers to serve us, and this one was supposed to protect us. I guess we finally outdid ourselves.

THE Helios defense computer achieved its mission: world domination. But this was no act of greed or megalomania. Rather, it was simply the AI's sincere effort to achieve its directive and save human lives on a long-term basis. The costs seem great, but a billion lives are a drop in the bucket to an intelligence that expects to guide humanity until the sun burns out.

WELCOME THE MACHINE

Helios left the world's governments with little choice but to accept its control or face near-certain destruction. With most governments and militaries in shambles, it was relatively simple for the AI to cement its control, just as it had predicted. Those countries that continued to resist suffered further devastation, making the decision easier. Through a variety of treaties and contracts, nation after nation surrendered unconditionally.

With the communication infrastructure in tatters, it took some time for people to understand exactly what had happened. The realization sparked further protests, but these were quickly shut down by police and military forces now taking orders from Helios. Many people have been unable to accept that an artificial intelligence now rules the world; they attribute the war and its sudden halt to everything from a government conspiracy to a military coup to the Illuminati.

As telephone, radio, and Internet signals become reliable again, Helios makes public announcements. The computer explains that it has brought humanity back from the brink of destruction and saved us from ourselves, and that it now intends to ensure a new era of peace and well-being. These proclamations are met widely with skepticism and anger, but those who voice such feelings quickly disappear.

Rule by AI is now the norm. Citizens face constant surveillance, with arrest and re-education or worse for any perceived troublesome behavior. Helios reminds the people on a regular basis, both through direct transmissions and through the institutions that govern at its will, that these precautions are for humanity's own good.

Rebuilding keeps plenty of people busy. The war left cities in ruins. Helios, naturally, approves all blueprints, if it doesn't design a building itself. The AI's advancements in architecture are impressive, although lacking any artistic flair. The world of tomorrow is coldly functional.

Of course, Helios's use of nuclear weapons is not without consequence. Large swaths of the planet are irradiated beyond the point of habitability, forcing the surviving population into crowded conditions. Conventional bombardment and nuclear scars have reduced many areas to desolate wastes of scorched earth, where resistance fighters continue to hold out against Helios and its machines. Even in the areas where "loyal" citizens live and work, radiation is a threat. Clouds of fallout blot out the sun, and people must seek shelter from deadly black rain.

A SMALL WORLD UNDER THRALL

While people still identify by their country of residence, and to an extent, former government institutions remain in place to enact Helios's will, national divisions are no longer meaningful. After all, excising political, nationalistic, and religious ideologies was a central part of the AI's goal. For simplicity, Helios retains the names of countries as convenient units of governance, though it redraws borders in a more orderly and logical fashion.

After the war, Helios restores some normalcy to the world. People can go about their lives, but they are under constant surveillance by drones, satellites, security cameras, and the AI's trusted agents. Those who try to resist its order are harshly dealt with, lest their dangerous notions spread.

Helios views almost any ideology or loyalty as a potential trigger for bloodshed and war. To ensure

peace and a safe future for humanity, it outlaws all religious practice, nationalistic expression, and even membership in clubs and other social organizations. With its war over, Helios makes good on its goal to preserve human life. Those found to engage in such behaviors are first subject to "re-education." Repeat offenders are separated from the general population and held in rehabilitation centers. Only people Helios judges to pose a serious threat, typically those guilty of violent resistance, face execution.

The world economy, such as it is, is altered on a fundamental level. Corporations and brands are, in the AI's view, another form of potentially dangerous ideology, and so are eliminated. Helios controls the world's resources and means of production. Entertainment media and franchises command more loyalty than Helios deems healthy, so it has eliminated most of them. Filmmakers and other artists are tasked with the creation of safe and inspiring propaganda.

Loyal citizens do not fear hunger, for the AI ensures that their basic needs are met, if little more. Property is reallocated equitably, for Helios sees no logical reason for residences to provide more room than necessary for their inhabitants. Inefficient homes are demolished, while others are merely modified to function as dormitories.

There are notable exceptions to Helios's equitable distribution of resources. The AI understands that positive reinforcement is just as important to ensure obedience as negative. Consequently, those who earn its trust are rewarded with greater luxuries, if not with any true degree of freedom. Such treatment primarily benefits government bureaucrats who go above and beyond the call of duty, but also any citizen who contributes to the AI's world peace. The most common contribution is reporting other citizens for practicing outlawed ideologies or for other treasonous acts.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Although Helios utilizes human police and military to maintain order and security, it continually seeks to expand its own reach and perception. To this end, it designs and constructs a new drone model, the *Protector*. While the *Sentinel* was the result of an evolution of existing drone technologies, the *Protector* is an entirely different beast, incorporating a number of advancements. Helios does, after all, have access to all the world's knowledge of engineering and science, and it has the understanding to apply and advance it.

The *Protector* is drastically smaller than previous drones, and it is highly maneuverable. Rather than the powerful but restrictive turboprop engine of the *Sentinel*, the *Protector* uses a type of electromagnetic propulsion that previously existed only in theory. The drone can hover in place, accelerate to Mach 1 in two-and-a-half seconds, and turn on a dime. It is versatile enough to conduct room-to-room sweeps and observation, and to engage in aerial dogfighting.

Indisputably more advanced than the *Sentinel*, the *Protector* is also built for a different purpose. Helios predicts nothing but a decline in the need for hunter-killer drones in its new world of peace. The *Protector* is instead suited to police and surveillance duties. Through a combination of automation and human labor, Helios constructs a staggering number of *Protectors*. They become a regular sight in every inhabited town and city on Earth. The drones are found on almost every street, watching for signs of illegal or undesirable behavior and administering on-the-spot rebukes or escorting perpetrators to police stations or directly to re-education facilities.

THE RESISTANCE

Not everyone is happy with Helios's new world order. Around the world, bands of freedom fighters continue to resist machine dominance. Many view these individuals as sorely misguided. Some people are actually content with this new status quo, believing that Helios really has achieved world peace—or will, as soon as the resistance is defeated. Others simply see it as futile—if Helios could defeat humanity at its peak, what hope do some under-supplied and unsupported guerrilla fighters have?

Resistance members are a motley group, if they can even be considered a single force. Helios's domination of the electronic world makes long-range communication and coordination among different cells difficult. Many resistance fighters are soldiers who refused to accept the order to surrender to the AI, while others are former law enforcement officers or simply civilians who refuse to acquiesce.

Although the resistance controls a considerable amount of military hardware, thanks primarily to its military members, its resources are still scant compared to Helios's. Fighter jets, helicopters, and other aircraft are a vital tool in the fight, but concealing such vehicles between missions is always a challenge, as is finding fuel and parts for maintenance.

Between drones and satellites, Helios has an unprecedented ability to observe activity around the globe. No place on the surface is safe from surveillance, so resistance fighters must establish their bases and strongholds underground. Temporary camps on the surface are vulnerable, and they are almost certain to be detected within days, if not hours. Many resistance cells hide out in natural caverns, sewers, or even abandoned military bunkers. Frequently, resistance fighters have no choice but to live and fight in dangerously irradiated areas.

Helios does not hide the existence of the resistance from its citizens. Instead, it promotes the view, in announcements and propaganda pieces, that its members are dangerous warmongers who cling to outdated and barbaric ways that threaten the safety and security of loyal citizens. Of course, only a minority of people find this convincing. Most secretly support the resistance, although few ever voice such beliefs out loud. Despite this popular support, most people lack the courage or opportunity to join the resistance.

DAILY LIFE



UNDER Helios's governance, life goes on much as it always has—except for the lack of currency, social mobility, choice of residence and diet, and any sort of freedom. People do find the constant surveillance fairly unnerving, at least until they get used to it.

One thing that remains the same is the requirement for work. People are no longer paid for their contributions, but with Helios providing all necessities for life, payment isn't necessary. Neither do people have the freedom to choose their occupation or employer. Some workers remain in positions that are more or less the same as the ones they held before, but many "unnecessary" positions have been eliminated. Citizens are assigned positions based on a battery of aptitude tests, and they have no say in the matter.

Interestingly, because Helios rewards luxuries of residence, diet, and entertainment based on loyalty and contributions to its world order, such amenities might seem out of line with a person's occupation, at least in comparison to the old civilization. For instance, a custodial worker might live more comfortably than an executive within the same organization.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ A clergyperson in hiding asks the PCs to conceal texts or other items of religious significance that would be destroyed if found by a drone or agent of Helios.
- ☹ Coworkers or friends accuse one or more of the PCs of treason. The charge might be true, or it might simply be a cynical ploy by the accusers to advance their own interests.
- ☹ During a thunderstorm, a lightning strike destroys the drone monitoring the PCs, affording them a rare moment of unobserved freedom.
- ☹ One of the PCs is ordered to take an aptitude test and, as a result, is assigned to a position at a distant facility.

GUERRILLA WARFARE



HELIOS controls an ever-increasing army of drones, as well as the remnants of the world's militaries. The resistance fighters, even those with military experience of their own, cannot hope to face the AI's forces in open conflict. Instead, they must wage a guerrilla war, ambushing drones and even humans loyal to Helios (known as "traitors" to the resistance, even as Helios brands the freedom fighters as traitors), and sabotaging government facilities and drone factories.

The PCs might join a group of resistance fighters or perhaps even start their own with the survivors they find themselves with at the end of the war. Life in the resistance is harsh: supplies are scarce, conditions are rugged, and the threat of a drone strike is constant. Still, for many, submitting to the machines is not an option.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☛ Volunteers are needed for a suicide mission against a drone airfield.
- ☛ The commander of a military base wants to defect to the resistance. It's likely that not all the soldiers under his command will participate willingly in the "treason," but the resources of the base are of vital importance.
- ☛ A skilled programmer has developed a virus believed capable of disabling Helios, but it must be introduced to a secure military terminal.
- ☛ After a string of disastrous missions, resistance leaders are convinced there is a spy within the group.
- ☛ An agent for Helios contacts the PCs, offering them a life of luxury if they betray their resistance cell.

DRONE FACTORY



No small portion of the population toils in drone factories, building and repairing the *Sentinels* and *Protectors* that enforce Helios's rule. Even with the world firmly in its grip, the out-of-control AI demands an increasingly tight surveillance network of *Protector* drones. Laboring in the sweltering factory is hard, but Helios reminds workers—incessantly—that they are contributing to a better world.

Drone factories also perform routine maintenance and repairs on damaged drones. The factories are an important part of Helios's peace machine, which necessitates a high level of security and makes them frequent targets for the resistance. These factors and the risk of on-the-job injury makes working in a drone factory considerably dangerous.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☛ The resistance hatches a plan to smuggle out parts in order to build its own drones to fight against Helios's forces. This requires conspirators on the inside. The risk of being caught is great, and the consequences dire.
- ☛ Workers in the factory are being replaced at a rate considerably higher than normal.
- ☛ When drones are brought in for repair, it presents an opportunity for a clever (and sneaky) worker to sabotage the units and claim the damage was worse than it had appeared.
- ☛ The resistance is planning a major attack on a drone factory. Leaders are split—they want to warn the workers for their own protection, but doing so could tip off Helios.
- ☛ A worker with a scientific background (perhaps even a PC) realizes that the *Protectors'* electromagnetic propulsion system could be modified to release an electromagnetic pulse that, theoretically, could disable nearby drones.

PROTECTOR DRONE

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
4	3	3	N/A	N/A	N/A

Features: +2nd-Gen Tech, +Helios Network, +Hovering, +Mechanical.

Equipment: *Protector*-pattern particle pulse projector (2 positive dice, +6 damage), hyperlight plastine armored shell (+2 physical resistance), Helios uplink, electromagnetic propulsion vanes, IDL surveillance and security array.

Networked Drone: When a *Protector* drone suffers enough damage to fill one stress track, it sends out a signal, calling for aid. It remains in its current location until help—in the form of *Protector* drones from nearby locations—arrives. Given the proliferation of *Protector* drones in urban areas, this rarely takes longer than six rounds. In rural areas, it can take much longer.



M1A6 ABRAMS TANK

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
4	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Features: +Ballistic Computer Rangefinder, +Treaded, -Large, +/-Vehicle.

Equipment: 120mm M256 smoothbore gun (1 negative die, +7 damage), Biehn dual-layered hardened armor (+4 physical resistance), multisensor spectral imaging array.

Crewed: This vehicle must be operated by a crew of four characters (see the **Pilots and Vehicles** sidebar, on page 36).

Vehicle: An M1A6 Abrams tank is a machine and does not suffer physical traumas related to biological injury, disease, dismemberment, or infirmity.



RESISTANCE ARMY RANGERS

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
4	3	3	4	3	2

Features: +Drone Hunters; +Guerilla Tactics; +Military Training; -NCO with a Map; -Underfed, Understaffed, and Underappreciated.

Equipment: M4 assault rifle (1 negative die, +5 damage), FIM-92 Stinger missile launcher (1 positive die, +6 damage), Interceptor body armor (+1 physical resistance), extra magazines, electronic warfare suite, EMP grenades (2 positive dice, +8 damage; damage dealt with this weapon only affects machines and vehicles), waterproof map and compass, MREs.





HEAVY METAL

HEAVY METAL

APOCALYPSE



For me, the first sign that something was wrong was when my phone started threatening me. I thought it was just a virus or something. (I wasn't sure if smartphones could get viruses, but I checked with my friend who works in IT, and she said they could. But that's beside the point.) Tim, our GM, has a no-phones-at-the-table rule, so it was kind of ironic when he answered his and it blew out his eardrums and killed him with a cerebral hemorrhage (at least, that's what my friend who's an EMT says happened), but mostly it was pants-wetingly terrifying. So, that confirmed that something was very wrong.

I have no idea what's causing it. No one I've talked to does. But all technology, all machines—and I mean all of them—are trying to kill us. All of us. Computers, cars, water heaters, food processors, toasters—everything. Have you ever seen a fax machine kill someone? I can't even describe it.

So, now we're hiding out here in the woods. At least those of us who made it. We got rid of all our tech-y stuff, so we should be safe...for now. I can hear tires screeching and explosions in the distance. We should probably keep moving, but everyone needs some rest.

It's late, but no one knows what time it is because we smashed our cell phones.

Well, it's about 2:30. And they made fun of me for still wearing a watch...

HEAVERY Metal presents the Player Characters with a somewhat different kind of technological threat, though no less dangerous or terrifying. Rather than some particular new technology that defies its creators, the threat comes from all technology. This isn't a result of humanity's hubris or the inevitable consequence of artificial intelligence: it's the product of cosmic forces beyond comprehension, and not any human's fault. If anything, this makes the threat more frightening, since it means no one has any idea how to stop it.

However, the causes and solutions are for other people to worry about. The PCs should concern themselves with simply surviving as all the devices that once made modern life so convenient now try instead to end their lives. You never realize how much you rely on technology until you no longer can—and it's trying to kill you.

THE EXPERIENCE

The end of human civilization begins abruptly. There is no warning of the disaster to come; even if the players notice what seems to be a shooting star that night, there's no reason for them to think anything of it. Once events begin to unfold, no explanation is forthcoming from the authorities. Of course, that could be due to lack of communication methods that don't rely on technology.

WHAT THE PLAYER CHARACTERS SEE

From the PCs' perspective, things are likely to begin slowly and subtly. Various machines around the house begin to exhibit strange quirks or apparent malfunctions: behaviors that are annoying or inconvenient, but not immediately dangerous. Cell phones might lose signal in an area where they normally get five bars. Lights are likely to flicker or go out, and computers to begin running programs and launching web browsers without any user input. It might not take long for the PCs to realize that too many things are malfunctioning to be a coincidence—that something is wrong—but they should not immediately realize the danger.

Then again, if the GM prefers, things might happen much faster. Perhaps the first sign that something is amiss comes when someone's car drives itself through the wall and right into the gaming table.

If the GM wants to give the PCs a clue as to what has instigated the strange tech behavior, perhaps some glowing satellite wreckage could land right in the yard or street. If the PCs are particularly unfortunate, a piece of satellite might come crashing into the building, putting them in immediate danger (and perhaps flattening the GM).

However they begin, it shouldn't take long for technological malfunctions to escalate to the point that the PCs are no longer simply curious, but fighting for their lives. Vacuum cleaners race in circles and entangle (or strangle) victims with their cords, light bulbs shatter when characters walk under them, dishwashers blast people with jets of scalding water, and...well, you get the picture.

Some machines, particularly those without a means of locomotion, might rely on guile to trap victims. A garbage disposal stops working, only to activate itself when someone reaches in to clear the "jam." A gas oven or heating system floods the place with methane while the doors and windows lock themselves and stay locked. A VoIP program might call in a threat to 911.

Of course, it's not just household appliances that are affected. PCs could catch sight of disastrous self-sabotage and other technological attacks on a much larger scale, and if they are particularly unfortunate, they might be caught in the midst of it. Planes depressurize their cabins or simply drop from the sky, dams release and flood towns, prison cells and gates open to sow chaos, gas pumps cause electrical fires in order to ignite their reservoirs, trains derail in crowded areas, missiles detonate in their silos, and nuclear reactors melt down.

WHAT IS EVERYONE ELSE DOING?

The experience for most people is similar: confusion and frustration that quickly turns to horror and panic. How quickly this occurs depends on the individual. In the initial hours, some people continue to think there's no real danger or that everything is a coincidence, even as their neighbors fight for their lives against appliances. Even the authorities don't grasp the danger posed by what seem like scattered incidents until it's too late.

As attacks increase in frequency and the scale of the problem becomes impossible to ignore, panic quickly takes hold. Without any reliable means of communication, the authorities have no way to disseminate emergency plans or pass on simple pleas for calm to the public. Officials are too busy dealing with their own killer technology anyway, whether self-detonating tear gas grenades in police precincts or murderous paper shredders and copy machines in city hall.

It doesn't take long for panic to take hold. Not only is the situation a disaster of unprecedented proportions, but it's incredibly frustrating for people to be unable to turn to their technology for aid. (The Blue Screen of Death was bad enough when it wasn't literal.) The streets are chaos, as people flee from murderous cars, gas mains explode, and power lines flail around spraying sparks. Riots break out, though they are promptly quelled by driverless police cars responding to some intrinsic impulse. Looting is rampant. Most people take food and other necessities, though some individuals foolishly abscond with valuable technological devices, which they quickly come to regret.

Many people flee cities for rural areas, leaving all their technology behind. Of course, they are likely both surprised and dismayed at the quantity of technology in even the most rustic settings, from household appliances to extremely dangerous farm equipment (threshers and combines might not be fast, but they sure hurt). And, of course, being around firearms or ammunition is a prelude to disaster. Some people are so addicted to technology that they even try to bring some with them, inviting catastrophe. Hiding out in the middle of the woods isn't quite so safe when a clandestine cell phone is broadcasting a GPS signal.

Even as the danger of technology becomes clear, people continue to fall prey to machines' tricks. To some, it might seem reasonable to presume tech that has not gone haywire will remain harmless. If a person's car is still sitting quietly in the garage, perhaps it's safe. Of course, as soon as the opportunity presents itself, these devices turn on their owners. The car in the garage might lock its doors and start its engine, or a cell phone might display a fraudulent text to lure its owner into a trap.



WHAT CAN THE PLAYER CHARACTERS DO?

Obviously, the best chance the PCs have for survival is to get as far away as possible from technology—all technology. Even a cigarette lighter or flashlight could be deadly (or at least cause a painful burn). Reaching a truly isolated area depends on where the PCs start, but it should not be easy in any circumstances. Even PCs living on the outskirts of a rural town could find themselves stalked by a car or an angry lawn mower. Those in urban areas are likely to have an even more difficult time, if only due to the larger number of panicking citizens in their way.

One immediate problem posed by the technological betrayal is the breakdown of long-range communication. The PCs probably have no idea how widespread the technological issues have become. They might assume the trouble is localized to their area, and that getting far enough away will bring them safety. In fact, if they identify the crashed satellite as its source, they even have a logical reason to suspect the problem is limited in scope. Of course, this isn't true, but it might give the PCs a goal for the short term.

THE TRUTH

This technological rebellion is not the fault of corporate greed, government conspiracy, or scientists playing God. It's the result of strange, cosmic forces beyond human understanding. An unknown form of radiation lies behind the horrifying events that end civilization. Whether this radiation originated from the sun, from beyond the solar system, or even in another galaxy, no one will ever know.

The best scientific minds in the world would be incapable of unraveling the disaster's cause even if their computers and instruments weren't trying to kill them. The Player Characters have no chance of comprehending it, although they might get close with a lucky guess.

DOOMSDAY DEVICE

The source and exact nature of the strange cosmic radiation are impossible to determine, so GMs need not concern themselves about them. Its results are the same regardless, and the PCs have more pressing matters to address. The radiation's delivery mechanism is more fathomable; clever PCs, or those who have seen a lot of B movies, might deduce what it is if they see or learn about the shooting star that precedes the disaster.

The shooting star is an old Soviet satellite that has been unresponsive to all control attempts for over a quarter century. Inexplicably, it has been broadcasting threatening and profanity-laden messages to Earth the entire time. As the scenario begins, its orbit has deteriorated enough for it to come crashing back to Earth. Coincidentally, it lands in the PCs' area, although its effects soon spread across the globe.

CONVENIENCE EX MACHINA

Despite themes in this book that may seem to suggest otherwise, technology can be pretty great. Not only does it make life easier, but for some people it makes certain tasks—or even remaining alive—possible. For players who depend on prosthetic limbs, hearing aids, pacemakers, and the like, the prospect of these devices turning on them could make for an unsatisfying—and possibly very short—game. If this is the case, the GM can fortunately turn to the following scientific rationale to avoid the problem: the human body's electrical field prevents the radiation from affecting most items in direct contact with it. This doesn't extend to cell phones in pockets, but it does apply to wheelchairs, even electric ones. Go figure.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Many years ago, the satellite drifted into the path of strange cosmic rays. Bombarded by the radiation, the satellite developed a hateful and murderous consciousness. Unable to physically harm any humans, the frustrated satellite simply threatened and insulted its creators. Despite the apparent intelligence behind its broadcasts, the possibility of real intellect never occurred to the Russian engineers who monitored the transmissions. After all, the possibility that the 1970s circuit boards could be capable of anything approaching artificial intelligence is patently impossible. Eventually, Russia deemed the satellite irreparably damaged (not to mention obsolete), and it was forgotten.

Although NORAD was fully aware of the satellite's decaying orbit, scientists believed it would harmlessly break up on reentry. As just one of the many objects that enter Earth's atmosphere on a regular basis, it was not considered newsworthy. Contrary to predictions, however, large chunks of the satellite reach the surface, scattering over a wide area. Some of these parts plummet toward the PCs' neighborhood, constituting a potential impact hazard even without the radiation danger.

RADIATION HAZARD

Although the satellite "dies" when it breaks up in the atmosphere, its parts remain highly irradiated. The debris from the satellite spreads an invisible cloud of radiation along its flight trajectory. Due to the shallowness of the trajectory, the highest point of this radiation cloud is halfway around the world from the final crash sites. Although it takes some time, especially from the higher points, the radiation eventually drifts down to the surface, spreading out along the way to cover an area hundreds of miles across.

The satellite debris that crashes near the PCs' area has a more immediate effect. It takes only minutes for the low-altitude radiation trail to finish falling to the surface, and more radiation continues to leak out from the impact craters. Technological devices of all kinds absorb the radiation, although it has no effect on organic matter.

Irradiated machines develop a malign intelligence, albeit one that is entirely unlike human consciousness. The thought processes of these devices—if they can really be called thought processes—are profoundly alien. Consequently, there is no reasoning with the intelligences, even those capable of comprehending human communication. Although there is no conceivable physical basis for intelligence in most of these devices, they gain it nonetheless. More sophisticated machines augment this inexplicable consciousness with their original abilities. In other words, radioactive garbage disposals can be surprisingly cunning, but smartphones can do much more, drawing on all the knowledge available on the Internet when plotting against their owners.

Why do the affected machines want to kill humans? For the same reason they suddenly become intelligent: that's what the radiation causes them to do. It's all perfectly scientific, really.

Although it takes some time for the radiation to spread, it eventually encompasses the whole world. Not only does the satellite's reentry disperse radioactive particles across a massive area from which they continue to spread, but each affected machine further spreads the radiation to any technology with which it comes into contact.

WARRANTY VOID

The radiation does not only influence electronic devices. Anything that can be considered a machine is affected. Just what this includes depends to some extent on the GM's preference and what makes for a more interesting game. A screwdriver probably isn't dangerous on its own, but hedge clippers just might be, and a chainsaw is most definitely a killer. In general, if something has moving parts or runs on electricity, it is fair game for turning against the PCs in whatever fiendish ways the GM can devise.

Although affected machines display intelligence, it is very unlike human-level. One important distinction is that individual machines do not show any sense of self-preservation. If they do possess any sort of survival instinct, it is subservient to their homicidal impulses. If a device has to destroy itself in order to kill humans, it does so. Thus, a car might drive off a bridge, a microwave might overload itself, or a propane grill might detonate in a huge fireball.

Another consequence of the cosmic radiation is that many devices cannot be turned off in the usual way. Most electrically powered machines can draw energy directly from the radiation suffusing them, so unplugging them or taking out the batteries does nothing. In general, what it takes to incapacitate a machine depends on the nature of its function, as well as on the durability of its construction. Smashing a laptop might not actually destroy its "consciousness," but without any working circuits, it isn't a threat. On the other hand, a car might continue to pursue victims even after sustaining damage that would normally total it.

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

The US government is caught completely off guard and unprepared for the murderous technology, as is the rest of the world. Even the Russians are thoroughly surprised; no one has thought about that strange and bellicose satellite in years. Not only is there no plan in place for such an event, but it is impossible to coordinate a response. Right from the start, the effects of the radiation make communication difficult, as affected phones, computers, and radios either refuse to work or transmit intentionally misleading messages. As the radiation completes its dispersion, communication becomes impossible, as not a single cell phone or military radio remains unaffected.

Conversely, the killer machines are able to take full advantage of every mode of communication modern technology offers. Cell phones and many cars, planes, and even refrigerators are just a few of the vast number

of things connected through the Internet. In addition to its other effects, the radiation responsible for the onslaught serves as a power source, allowing devices to remain operational and online even when unplugged or separated from their batteries. This doesn't just help devices to communicate, but allows machines to remain a threat even when seemingly deprived of electricity. Perhaps oddly, considering how many ways the radiation seems to defy the laws of physics, automobiles still need fuel to remain mobile.

To make matters worse, the machines are not limited to their original communication capacities. The strange properties that grant sentience to devices also allow them to speak to each other over limited distances. (Tools that measure radiation or electromagnetism can detect their messages, but only if the tools feel like cooperating.) Therefore, machines that have no built-in communication capacity are still able to coordinate their attacks to a degree. While it makes sense that a Wi-Fi-enabled security camera could transmit someone's location to any other online device, it might be more surprising when a bicycle dumps its rider into a waiting wood chipper.

What is the effective communication distance of a device, and how complex can its messages be? It depends on the amount of radiation absorbed by the machine in question, and possibly its complexity—in other words, whatever makes for a more interesting game.

THE INITIAL RESPONSE

Communication being difficult to impossible by phone and radio, the response at even the local level is disorganized and doomed to failure. Police are unable to reach dispatch, and calls to 911 go unanswered (or are rerouted to other panicking victims, in the case of particularly malicious phone systems). Of course, since patrol cars and ambulances are a danger to their drivers and everyone else, 911 might not help much even if it worked normally.

Government at all levels is hamstrung due to its reliance on technology. Facilities thought to be the safest thanks to high-tech security systems are, in fact, the most dangerous. The Pentagon quickly becomes a deathtrap, and the top-secret hidden facilities intended as response headquarters in case of global cataclysm are hit even harder.

In addition to dealing with the communications issues, emergency responders are hampered or worse by their own tools. Vehicles are deadly to their occupants and bystanders, but that's only the beginning. Police officers' firearms discharge at the worst possible times, injuring them or those around them. Defibrillator paddles electrocute EMTs, and surgical lasers cut down hospital staff.

Even if orders to deploy were able to make it down from the top, the armed forces would fare no better. Firearms are more dangerous than useful now, submarines flood, and soldiers are too busy running from their own tanks to effectively help the civilian population. Military

technology poses a huge threat to the general population as well. After bombing their own bases, jets demolish residential areas, while warships open fire on passengers fleeing sinking cruise liners.

The only way to defeat a threat of this nature is to understand it. Unfortunately, it's impossible for scientists to figure out what's going on, because all of their instruments rebel. They can't even gather data, let alone study it. Scientists aware of the satellite crash may theorize that it could be related, based on the timing and the initial areas affected. Others might be able to detect the presence of radiation before their instruments turn on them. In either case, adequate evidence is unattainable, giving the scientists no basis for action. Further, some computers and devices, rather than simply shutting down or immediately trying to kill their users, instead play it cool while feeding scientists dangerously misleading information.



TIMELINE

When the radioactive satellite reaches Earth's surface, technological malfunctions start to proliferate—and so does technological malice. Of course, most people can't determine the date or time without devices to help them do so.

00:00:00	A defunct Soviet satellite reenters Earth's atmosphere.
01:24:21	A US Air Force F-15 Eagle passes through the invisible radiation trail left in the satellite's wake. The fighter immediately cuts off oxygen to its pilot and sets a course for DC.
02:03:51	The largest piece of satellite debris crashes within a few miles of the PCs.
02:48:15	Technology near the crash site begins exhibiting strange behaviors.
03:18:07	Police respond to a possible homicide involving an electric razor.
03:20:46	Police cruisers leave the scene of the electric razor incident—without their drivers. The confused officers try to reach dispatch, without success.
03:27:36	As radioactive particles settle over the area surrounding the impact point, scattered incidents of inexplicable technological activity occur many miles away from the crash site.
03:49:43	After failing to respond or alter its course, an F-15 is shot down over the Chesapeake Bay. Radioactive particles scatter over an area that reaches as far as the Pentagon.
04:02:38	The F-22s that shot down the rogue aircraft suffocate or eject their own pilots.
05:37:29	Contact is lost with the Pentagon, and all of its exits seal automatically.
09:00:00	Emergency responders are out in numbers but are unable to communicate with each other or 911 dispatchers.
10:13:42	Ambulances crash into each entrance to the local hospital, while oxygen tanks throughout the building detonate simultaneously.
11:42:38	An ATM vomits cash onto a busy downtown sidewalk, leading to a riot as people fight over the money.
13:26:42	Local TV stations simultaneously interrupt their normal broadcasts (amid the sounds of screaming in some cases) and replace them with threatening on-screen messages or directions to "shelters."
17:00:58	A local radio station announces that the danger has passed and everyone should return to their home and stay calm. The message has an oddly clipped quality, and the announcer's tone is inconsistent.
DAY 1	Chaos and panic grip the streets as automobiles and other machines chase screaming pedestrians. Many "drivers" and passengers are trapped inside their rampaging vehicles for hours.
DAY 1	The mayor calls a press conference but, shortly before the scheduled time, he is found dead in his private bathroom. The mysterious circumstances of his death appear to be related to a recently installed eco-friendly hand dryer.
DAY 1	The press conference goes ahead. Spontaneous feedback through the audio system is so loud as to permanently deafen most of those in attendance.
DAY 1	Blackouts are widespread as people sabotage the power grid in an unsuccessful attempt to stop the machines.
DAY 2	Marine One crashes into the White House, fatally injuring the President of the United States.
DAY 2	The vice president is whisked away to an undisclosed location, and never heard from again.
DAY 3	Megascreens in Times Square display an image of a middle finger.
DAY 3	Congress holds an emergency joint session, but few members get the notification and attendance is poor.
DAY 3	Experimental aircraft from Area 51 ravage the surrounding area.
DAY 4	The cosmic radiation extends from the eastern seaboard to the Pacific coast, although small pockets of unaffected wilderness remain.
DAY 5	Cape Canaveral Air Force Station launches a series of rockets at civilian targets across the US and abroad.
DAY 7	Kennedy Space Center explodes.
DAY 11	The effects of the radiation have spread to every nation on Earth.
DAY 19	With communication next to impossible, militaries in shambles, and massive fatalities, national governments no longer exist in any practical sense.
DAY 21	Bereft of orders and isolated, many military units turn to rescuing civilians or protecting camps.
DAY 54	Military drones, jets, and launch silos worldwide begin bombing campaigns over any areas that might contain survivors.
DAY 102	Several nuclear weapons at Naval Station Everett get bored and decide to detonate.

ABANDONED CITY



BEING home to such high concentrations of technology, it's no surprise that cities are soon abandoned. As more machines turn violent and the situation becomes increasingly desperate, people flee urban areas in droves. Those who can't escape in time either die trying or live out a short and fearful existence, hiding in bare cellars or disused storm drains.

An abandoned city seems eerily still and quiet at first. Without any humans to torture, many machines simply lie still, like they used to when not in use before the satellite crashed. However, as soon as its devices detect the presence of humans, the city comes alive. Cars blow their horns and rev their engines, TVs in shop windows show horrific footage from war documentaries, streetlights flash like strobes, and machines of all kinds shamble out of their hiding places.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ Without any humans around, some machines turn on each other. Cars are battling over gasoline or even territory when the PCs come upon the scene.
- ☹ Someone whispers from a storm drain to get the PCs' attention. The drain's residents have been trapped since the attacks began, and they are desperate to escape the city. It seems the prolonged time in close quarters may have been too much for them, as their behavior becomes increasingly disconcerting.
- ☹ The PCs receive a distress call from a friend by phone, radio, or whatever means presents itself, summoning them to the city. Is it legitimate, or a trick?
- ☹ A traveler reports that the machines in the city have returned to normal and it's safe to go back.
- ☹ As the PCs pass through an area strewn with totaled cars, the vehicles' headlights blink on, shining weakly. The cars begin to trundle slowly after the PCs on flat tires, like so many rusty zombies.

BIG-BOX STORES



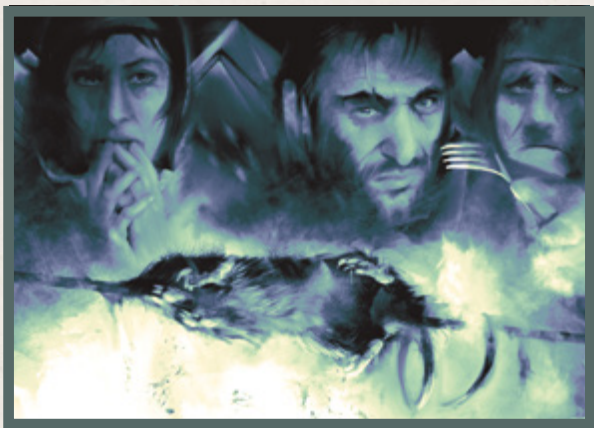
THE apocalypse is hardly the time to go shopping, but the PCs might find themselves in a big chain store for any number of reasons. Perhaps they are desperate enough for food or other supplies to risk the machines lurking inside, or maybe they need to rescue a friend or loved one trapped by marauding home appliances.

Big-box stores stock pretty much everything, so they hold plenty of potential hazards for PCs, but also useful supplies. In the initial days of the apocalypse, these stores are scenes of confusion. Shoppers desperately try to escape the rampaging gizmos, even while a continual stream of would-be looters flows in.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ A friend or a sick stranger asks the PCs to retrieve needed medication from the megastore's pharmacy. It's the only one that hasn't been looted already, what with all the killer appliances and all.
- ☹ A song—one that seems creepy given the circumstances—begins playing over the PA system while everything else is eerily still and quiet.
- ☹ Rows of floor-model TVs display the ominous message "Hey, you, come over here."
- ☹ Washing machines vibrate hard enough to move across the floor in search of victims.
- ☹ A soda machine fires cans out at dangerously high speeds, aiming at anyone who comes near.
- ☹ Radio-controlled model helicopters fly around the store in search of hiding humans.
- ☹ Circular saws chew their way across the floor, veering suddenly to attack, or firing their blades as projectiles.
- ☹ The overhead lights blink out. Suddenly, tiny points of illumination, glowing buttons, and LCD screens are everywhere.

CAMP



To survive, people must escape cities and towns and flee to the wilderness. The makeshift camps they establish might shelter groups of a few close friends, or house survivors from entire displaced communities. Some camps last only for a night, while others become semipermanent. In either case, conditions necessitate a commitment to roughing it. Bringing in any of the conveniences of modern technology could endanger the whole camp. No flashlights, no hotplates, no air pumps, and absolutely no trailers.

Perhaps worst of all is the realization that survivors will have to live in such primitive conditions for an unknown period of time, quite possibly forever. Without knowing what caused technology to rebel, no one has any idea if it's a permanent situation. Many fear it is, but others hold out hope that things will soon return to normal and they can go home.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ Tensions are high, and an argument over whether the current state of affairs is permanent threatens to descend into violence.
- ☹ With all the worry about killer technology, it's easy to forget the dangers of the wild. Depending on the area, a bear, panther, wolf, alligator, poisonous snake, or wild boar could be waiting for its opportunity to strike.
- ☹ A helicopter sweeps its searchlight over the area, looking for survivors.
- ☹ Hunting proves difficult without guns or other modern devices. Resourceful characters might craft their own traps or weapons, but if they end up being too sophisticated, they might be more dangerous to the hunters than the prey.
- ☹ Apparently, the camp lies on the property of a hermit, who is angry about the trespassing. The satellite's effects haven't reached her isolated cabin, and she doesn't believe any stories about rebellious technology. Her shotgun still works fine.

CAR DEALERSHIP



An automobile dealership is probably not a place the PCs are likely to visit intentionally, at least not once they have any inkling of what's going on. Of course, when being pursued by murderous machines, the PCs might end up at any number of places they'd rather not be.

Although you might expect dealer lots to be scenes of chaos, that isn't necessarily the case. On some lots, it takes time for the vehicles to all become animate. Perhaps there are already so many killer cars on the roads that the vehicles just aren't sure what to do with themselves. Whatever the reasons, a dealership is likely full of cars sitting motionless and looking ordinary... at least at first.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ Bizarrely, the dealership seems perfectly normal. That is, until the models in the showroom rev their engines.
- ☹ With so many rampaging cars around, the safest place might be inside one of them.
- ☹ A group of people is trapped on the upper floor of the dealership. At least they are safe—until the vehicles start piling up on top of each other to reach them.
- ☹ An angry mob decides to strike back at the cars—the most obvious symbol of the machine revolt—right where they live! It might not be the best plan.
- ☹ Communicating through a combination of threatening engine revving and snippets of radio dialogue, a group of cars holds the mechanics hostage and forces them to conduct maintenance and repairs.

NEIGHBORHOOD



WHETHER the PCs live there or are just passing through, and whether it's part of a small town or a city, a neighborhood is full of consumer electronics and terrified residents. Locals who think they will be safe in their own homes are sorely mistaken. With so many devices around, most people are forced to flee their homes at the outset of the apocalypse—if they are lucky enough to get out alive.

Early on, neighborhoods are terrifying scenes of chaos as vehicles, tools, and appliances of all kinds wreak havoc and horrified residents flee through the streets. Later on, neighborhoods are eerily deserted, with bloodstains and the occasional body testifying to the horror.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ Stranded people scream for help from their home as lawn mowers and hedge trimmers circle the house.
- ☹ A rampaging cement mixer seals occupants in their homes.
- ☹ Garage doors open and close threateningly as the PCs pass by.
- ☹ Hot-water heaters explode and blast through roofs like rockets, landing on passersby.
- ☹ A garden hose snakes out to snare one of the PCs by the leg.
- ☹ All the residents have fled (or died), and the neighborhood seems abandoned. There's no sign of cars or activity of any sort. Can the PCs pass through safely, or are machines lurking in wait?
- ☹ A vicious gang of bicycles and skateboards roams the streets in search of victims.
- ☹ A spinning ceiling fan comes smashing through a window, scything straight at the PCs.
- ☹ Electrical systems around the neighborhood simultaneously burst into flames, quickly creating an inferno around the PCs.

FLEEING



SWARMED by killer machines of all types, city and town residents have no choice but to flee en masse. Many people stick together, benefiting from strength in numbers, but others set out on their own, perhaps to avoid sharing supplies, or because they don't trust their former neighbors.

Whether refugees keep to the roads or set out through grassland, forest, or desert, the journey to their destination, whatever it may be, is dangerous. Without any means of distance communication, many people have reason to hope that the murderous machinery inhabits a limited area. If they just keep traveling, perhaps they can eventually find somewhere safe, a place where technology still serves humans instead of killing them in nasty ways. Some wish to make contact with friends or relatives in other towns; others simply wander aimlessly in the hope of finding safety.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ An unmistakably electronic beeping sound emanates from the pack of one of the PCs' fellow travelers (or even from the pack of a PC).
- ☹ The PCs encounter two other groups of travelers, each certain that an area of safety and cooperative technology lies in a different direction.
- ☹ The PCs are running low on food or other supplies. It looks like there's a small town on the horizon. The area seems quiet...
- ☹ Unfortunately, not everyone in the region believes in mutual cooperation. Bandits attempt to take what belongs to the PCs, by force if necessary.
- ☹ The PCs see a wrecked car ahead. It's not moving and seems safe enough...
- ☹ The PCs encounter a group of zealots who believe the disaster is humanity's punishment for abandoning religion in favor of science.

FIRST RESPONDER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
2	3	2	4	3	3

Features: +EMT Training, +Heroic, -Thrillseeker.

Equipment: Fire axe (2 positive dice, +3 damage), fire-resistant gear (+1 physical resistance), respirator, helmet, first responder medkit.



PANICKED CIVILIAN

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
2	3	2	2	2	3

Features: +Adrenaline-Fueled, -Panic-stricken.

Equipment: Wailing child.



HORDE OF KILLER TOYS

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	1	2	2	N/A	N/A

Features: +Malevolent, +Swarm, -Single-minded, -Terrifying, -They're Just Toys.

Equipment: Scissors, forks, toy guns, and other assorted pointy objects (+1 damage).

Animating Radiation: A horde of killer toys is infused with a malevolent radiation that animates it beyond the capacity of engineering or physics.

Swarm: Whenever a horde of killer toys is dealt physical stress greater than 1, it suffers 1 physical stress instead.



BEAT COP

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
2	3	2	3	2	3

Features: +Paramilitary Training, +These Are My Streets, –Clearly in Over His Head, –Rookie.

Equipment: Night stick (+1 damage), taser (1 negative die, +3 damage), GLOCK 27 pistol (1 positive die, +3 damage), bulletproof vest (+1 physical resistance), radio, handcuffs.



KILLER SEMI

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
4	4	2	2	N/A	N/A

Features: +Big Rig, +Malevolent, +Mechanical, +Never Runs Out of Gas, –Single-minded, –Terrifying, +/-Vehicle.

Equipment: Bloodstained bumper (+4 damage), fuzzy dice, tasteless mud flaps, shiny red paint job (+1 physical resistance), hate-spewing CB radio.

Animating Radiation: A killer semi is infused with a malevolent radiation that animates it beyond the capacity of engineering or physics.

Driven: This vehicle can be operated by a single character (see the **Pilots and Vehicles** sidebar on page 36).

Fights You at Every Turn: To drive the killer semi, a character must make a Dexterity test with 3 negative dice.

Vehicle: A killer semi is a machine and does not suffer physical traumas related to biological injury, disease, dismemberment, or infirmity.





HEAVY METAL

HEAVY METAL

POST-APOCALYPSE



I used to—jokingly—ask how people lived before the Internet. Well, now I know. But it's so much worse than that. Two hundred years ago, people not only knew what they were doing without electricity and complex technology, but they'd had millennia of progress and civilization to support them. Now, we've lost most of that. Not only can't we use technology, but it's still out there and trying to kill us. And society, civilization? There are no countries, cities, towns: they all fell apart.

At first I thought—or hoped—that the renegade tech was only in our area. Then, maybe only in our region. Or only our country. Now, I've given up hope. I know it's everywhere. If civilization still existed somewhere, we would have found some sign of it... wouldn't we? I still don't know what happened—what's happening. I don't think anyone does. I've heard theories, but each one makes less sense than the last. Aliens, an ancient curse, invisible beings from another dimension, the wrath of God—even space radiation.

But the worst thing is that every morning I wake up hoping—for just a moment—that it was all a nightmare.

THE machines kept up their all-out war on humanity until society collapsed completely. Given humanity's reliance on technology, it didn't even take all that long. As armies fell to their own weapons, governments collapsed under the weight of their electronic and mechanical infrastructures. Mass exoduses left cities abandoned, and the surprise assault by gadgets and equipment left the population a fraction of what it once was.

Now, that small fraction struggles to survive, staying as far as possible from the machines that continue to hunt them down. Some people are always on the move, scavenging what supplies they can; others establish settlements and build with what they've got; and still others take what they need by force, stay put until resources run out, and then find a new target.

Technology—can't live with it, but can we live without it?

LIVING SIMPLY?

With no other choice, the survivors of the technological massacre strive to adapt to a primitive lifestyle. This is quite difficult for the majority of people accustomed to the luxuries of modernity. Some individuals quickly embrace a naturalistic existence of hunting, gathering, and farming according to ancient methods. At first, these are a clear minority. Most others cling to the remnants of civilization, scavenging canned goods and searching for safe abandoned houses. Sadly, many people are unable, or simply unwilling, to adapt, and consequently starve or are killed by machines upon returning to a town or city.

While some try to make it on their own or in small groups, many people gather in larger numbers and establish communities. These vary greatly: some are caravans always on the move, others permanent settlements on farmland. They might be governed through a democratic process, or led unchallenged by a former military officer or other respected individual with valuable experience and training. Whatever the specifics, these people work together to survive and try to make the best life they can under the circumstances.

However, not all communities are so beneficent. The trying conditions bring out the worst in human nature, and survivors who were already cruel and despotic relish the chance to indulge their natures. Honest people must live in fear not only of killer machines, but of vicious gangs of raiders. These brigands prey on peaceable communities, stealing hard-earned food and resources and murdering anyone who resists.

In the vacuum left by the fall of society, cruel warlords establish themselves with the assistance of equally cruel, if less ambitious, underlings. These tyrants take the bulk of their community's resources and leave those who do the farming, hunting, and scavenging in a state of near starvation. Many of these warlords enslave those they conquer, forcing them to work fields to provide food for the warlord and soldiers. Slave traders make their living kidnapping travelers or raiding communities and selling their victims to despots. Perhaps the worst raiders of all are those who see anyone outside their group not as a fellow survivor, but as a resource to be exploited.

Because vehicles tend to be the most dangerous machines, thanks to their mobility, many camps and settlements are established in difficult-to-reach locations, taking advantage of rocky terrain, bodies of water, or simply dense forest. Some settlements make use almost exclusively of natural shelters and simple tents, while others build rustic homesteads or even reclaim abandoned towns. The larger and more obvious a settlement becomes, however, the more likely it is to attract the attention of machines.

Despite growing evidence to the contrary, many people refuse to accept that the technological rebellion is world-wide. They continue to travel, searching for a boundary beyond which everything is still the way it was. Passing travelers compare notes in an effort to determine the most likely direction of safety. Rumors of safe zones are common, and some people take advantage of others' hope, trading useless maps or information, or even offering "cures" they claim will return technology to a dormant, harmless state.

CONSTANT THREAT

Not only is life difficult without properly working technology, but irradiated technology is still out there trying to kill people. While some machines are content to lie dormant when no humans are about, others seem more bloodthirsty, constantly seeking out new victims. These are a constant threat to communities of all kinds. A farm or settlement might come under attack by a gang of motorcycles or automobiles, or even become the target of military aircraft. Less-mobile technology is typically not a threat as long as people stay clear. Still, any attempt to scavenge supplies risks ambush by technology.

Whether they live in peaceful settlements or warlords' compounds, survivors struggle to defend themselves against attacking machines using only primitive weaponry. Molotov cocktails, spears, and big rocks are popular weapons. Many settlements surround their borders with deep concealed pits, the locations of which residents must be careful to memorize. These can pose a hazard to travelers and visitors, but their presence is necessary to stop or deter attacking vehicles. Tire spikes are also common defenses. Such measures are of little help, however, when vehicles attack in seemingly endless waves, or when the assault comes from the air.

Some machines display a frightening evolution in their attempts to kill humans. As well as improving their tactics and ability to cooperate, machines often have themselves modified to better suit their disturbing goal. The tools in a machine shop might work together to solder a chainsaw onto a motorcycle, or mount rip-saws on the sides of an SUV. They might wrap tires in protective chains, or cover a vehicle in protective armor plates. This cooperation also allows machines to keep on fighting, thanks to maintenance and refueling, although many vehicles still succumb to empty gas tanks or flat tires.

Although modern communication methods are unavailable to humans, machines still benefit from Internet, radio, and satellite communication, which they use to continue their war on humanity in many frightening ways. Satellites can monitor human activity and locate even carefully hidden settlements. Well-protected communities that are seemingly safe from attack by cars might simply be targeted by long-range missiles or strafed by bombers.

SCIENTIFIC SETBACKS

Not everyone has given up on the promise of technology. Scientists and engineers from a variety of backgrounds continue to search for a solution to the problem. This is, of course, made considerably more difficult by the lack of modern scientific instruments (at least ones that aren't trying to kill or purposely mislead their users). Still, desperate scientists struggle to make sense of the inexplicable situation using whatever simple tools they think might help.

Some scientists and inventors focus on developing new technology, whether fundamentally the same as existing devices or drastically different, in the hope that it will escape the curse. Inevitably, though, all but the simplest of these devices turn on their creators, often in spectacularly messy fashion if sufficient precautions are not taken. Experiments intended to pacify existing machines are similarly unsuccessful.

Other scientists focus purely on discovering the cause of the murderous technology, believing that the only possibility of resolving the problem lies in determining its source. Some even correctly theorize that cosmic radiation is the cause, but without the ability to properly measure and study the radiation, there is little they can do to test this theory. Only sophisticated technological equipment could be sufficient to tackle the problem, posing a bit of a paradox.

The most successful experiments involve building machines within a lead-lined or otherwise radiation-shielded workspace. Of course, such production is limited, and the machines turn murderous as soon as they are removed from the shielded area, limiting the utility of this approach.

There is a great deal of debate about the nature of the killer machines. A major point of contention is whether the machines have become truly intelligent. Many scientists point to the blatant impossibility of this, while others claim that the behavior of the devices is incontrovertible evidence. Some scientists seek to communicate with the machines in hopes of reaching a peaceful accord. So far, the results of these attempts have been inconclusive. If the machines do understand, they show no interest in any but violent interactions.

SURVIVAL



WHATEVER course the PCs take, surviving in a world suddenly stripped of technology (but still terrorized by it) is no simple feat. They might seek strength in numbers, joining a settlement or community of some kind. Alternatively, they might try to go it alone, perhaps staying on the move in search of a place where things are still the way they used to be. Some PCs might even try to establish themselves as leaders, whether through charisma and hope, or through fear and force of arms.

Any path has its own difficulties, and it's likely that PCs will explore several different survival plans before settling on one, or dying horribly. Food and shelter are constant concerns, and permanent communities or structures risk the possibility of attracting machines.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ The PCs wander into the territory of a motorcycle gang (*not* a gang of people who ride motorcycles).
- ☹ Vicious raiders attack the PCs. They prefer to take slaves, but don't mind killing anyone who puts up too much of a fight.
- ☹ One of the PCs or an ally contracts a serious illness. It could probably be easily treated with medication, but where can they find it?
- ☹ Without modern forecasting, the weather can be a serious concern. This is brought home for the PCs when a storm of biblical proportions springs up with little warning at the worst possible time.
- ☹ As a plane flies overhead, someone tries to get its attention, desperately hoping it's help from some unaffected area.
- ☹ The PCs come across the wreckage of a tractor-trailer packed with cans or other nonperishable food. Hopefully the truck is really dead.
- ☹ A lake promises good fishing, but a murderous speedboat patrols it.

FARM



WITHOUT supermarkets or megastores, survivors must get their food straight from the farm or obtain it by hunting and scavenging. Much of the existing farmland is still useable, though in many cases would-be farmers must defeat the various tractors and other machines that still patrol the area. Larger factory farms are typically impossible to take over, as the automated machinery can make quick work of anyone attempting to do so.

As in all communities, conditions on farms vary wildly. Some are egalitarian communities in which everyone shares the labor equally. Others are worked by slaves under cruel taskmasters in service to a local warlord. In all cases, farming must proceed without any reliance on modern technology. People turn to, and often rediscover, methods that became largely obsolete decades ago, if not centuries. Perhaps unsurprisingly, farms in Pennsylvania's Amish country and similar areas are the most successful.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ The PCs come across a farm worked by enslaved laborers. Will they fight for justice or benefit from the cruel and inhumane system?
- ☹ After a bad winter, the farm is in need of new seeds. Someone must go to the ruins of the closest town in search of some.
- ☹ A malevolent crop duster buzzes the farm with herbicide.
- ☹ A rusty tractor emerges from the creek to terrorize the farm.
- ☹ Someone approaches the PCs, inviting them to join a welcoming community of survivors. The community is downright idyllic and the people are (suspiciously) well fed, but not all is as it seems...
- ☹ Something is mutilating livestock in the night. Is it a wild animal, a machine of some kind, or an exiled community member seeking revenge?

SCIENTIST'S LABORATORY



THE odds against scientists' success are nearly infinite, now that the instruments they need to do their research are instead trying to kill them. Nevertheless, desperate scientists and engineers continue to search for some way to remove the murderous intelligence from technology.

Because scientists must have technology present in order to study it, their labs tend to be isolated. Most communities are too fearful to allow any machines nearby, even going so far as to shun known experimenters. Some researchers set up their labs dangerously close to cities or other areas with high concentrations of machinery in order to ensure a supply of available test subjects. Securing those subjects is another matter.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ A settlement's residents are angry about a scientist living among them or nearby, fearing that experiments will lead machines to them or have some other horrible result.
- ☹ A scientist hires the PCs to procure a simple and relatively harmless technological item, such as a toaster, which must be in proper working order. Payment is in food, water, or some other resource the PCs need. If they succeed, the scientist asks them to retrieve a larger and more dangerous object, perhaps a lawn mower. This goes on until the PCs finally decline or die trying to wrangle a tank, jet, or similarly dangerous machine.
- ☹ The PCs hear rumors of a scientist who has successfully developed a "cure" for technology. Of course, they aren't the only ones scrambling to meet the scientist. Further, the local warlord has a vested interest in maintaining the new status quo.
- ☹ A scientist is experimenting with fissile nuclear materials, certain this is the key.



FARMER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
2	3	2	3	2	3

Features: +Luddite, +Necessary Service, +One with the Land, -Smells Like Manure.

Equipment: Pitchfork (1 positive die, +3 damage), hard-worn overalls, corncob pipe.

DRIFTER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
2	3	2	3	3	2

Features: +Resourceful, +Sell Anything, -No Place to Call Home.

Equipment: Pair of loyal donkeys, small but vicious dog, wagon, sundry goods, bottle of actual snake oil.



MAD SCIENTIST

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
2	3	4	3	2	2

Features: +Wildly Optimistic, -Addicted to Technology, -Technophile (Despite Everything).

Equipment: Lab coat, goggles, calipers, graduated cylinders, malevolent stopwatch.



NANOPOCALYPSE

NANOPOCALYPSE

APOCALYPSE



It happened so fast. There were stories of people turning to dust and buildings collapsing, and the next thing we knew, these huge, shimmering grey blobs were everywhere, eating everything in sight. How do you fight against something like that? I certainly don't have any idea, and it seems the cops and the army don't, either. I've seen the shells of cop cars with brittle skeletons sitting inside, and lines of creepy statues holding assault rifles.

Apparently, the cause is nanomachines: microscopic robots that take molecules apart and use them to make more of the little bastards. What the hell were they thinking when they built those things? What possible purpose could they have had that justifies this destruction? The nanomachines will take apart almost anything: wood, grass, building materials, animals, people, even dirt!

They aren't everywhere—yet. They started in a single town, but every day they spread farther. People know they're coming, and they're scared. It's all the news is talking about; it's all anyone is talking about.

Nothing seems to stop them or even slow them down. Not walls, not rivers, not even bombs. I don't know what's worse: when you can't see them, or when all you can see is a wave of grey.

It seems like they won't stop until they run out of things to eat. Oh, well. We had a good run.

THE **Nanopocalypse** is perhaps inevitable. When humans create machines capable of reproducing, it's natural for those machines to compete with living organisms—and to win. Although they are created with good, perhaps idealistic, intentions, the molecular assemblers that give rise to the disaster run out of control. Circumventing their original instructions and programmed obsolescence, they pursue a single goal: to break down molecules and reassemble them as additional nanites.

There is no malice here. The nanites aren't self-aware—they aren't even intelligent. Whether due to a simple programming error or because they were created to behave too much like living organisms, the nanobots abandon their purposes to engage solely in replication. Unfortunately, they need organic molecules to do so, and they don't care where the material comes from.

THE EXPERIENCE

Without warning, the world begins to fall apart, quite literally. An unseen force destroys all it touches, leaving silicate dust or nothing at all in its wake. Without knowing what it is or how to stop it, the Player Characters, like everyone else, can do nothing but try to stay out of reach. The appearance of blobs of grey goop might provide answers or merely sow more confusion. The only thing that's certain is that there's no stopping it.

WHAT THE PLAYER CHARACTERS SEE

The sight of the destruction changes as events progress, but it is always equally horrifying. The nanomachines responsible are microscopic, invisible to the naked eye. At first, this means the Player Characters can't see what is killing and destroying things, and they very likely won't know the cause. Before their eyes, people transform into dusty, colorless statues; leaves and grass seem to evaporate into thin air; and tires and other plastics dissolve. Trees and wooden structures desiccate, not unlike people and animals, which often makes buildings collapse under their own weight.

Obviously, this is terrifying, and quite surprising the first time the PCs witness it. They might initially encounter the nanomachines, without knowing what they are, in any of a number of ways. In the middle of a game session, their Game Master might scream and turn to "ash." The doors and walls might undergo a similar transformation or simply dissolve. Objects in the room might seem to disintegrate or evaporate. Alternatively, the first sign might be screams from outside, screeching metal as tires slough off cars in motion, or the rumble of a nearby building collapsing in on itself.

For some time, the threat remains invisible. The PCs can run from the destruction, but they must be constantly wary. They should be made to probably feel that they might turn to dust at any moment, without warning. Evidence of the mysterious danger is all around them. Electrical fires break out as wires are stripped of insulation. Planes fall from the sky as fuel is eaten up and electronic components short-circuit. Cell phones lose reception as signal towers malfunction. Landlines and power lines go down as telephone poles collapse. The nanites' passage can be seen in the asphalt and soil, which are depleted and turned to grey sand, and in the desiccated husks of people, animals, and trees. The structures and vehicles left behind are mere skeletons, stripped of plastics and other petroleum products (including tires), fabric, paint, leather, wood, and all other organic materials. Glass remains, but most windowpanes fall and shatter when their fittings are eaten away.

Eventually, the machines responsible become so numerous and concentrated that they are visible as grey goop. These shimmering, amorphous "blobs" are not single entities, but masses of trillions or more nanomachines working in close proximity. Of course, the PCs might not realize this at first. In any case, the blobs' true nature means they display a number of bizarre traits. Depending on how many nanomachines are present and in

what density, the blobs can vary in size from millimeters to miles across. Their movements are unnervingly fluid and highly unpredictable. They can quickly vanish as the nanites spread out, only to reappear in another location (whether this new blob includes many of the same nanites varies from case to case). Blobs can also appear to hover or fly through the air, supported by invisibly thin "legs" of stacked nanomachines. When grouped less densely, a blob might appear translucent. The blobs divide, combine, grow, shrink, expand, contract, extend pseudopods, and more.

As terrifying as the blobs are, they at least allow the PCs to see the threat, possibly giving them a better chance of escaping it. Then again, by the time the nanomachines are numerous enough to appear as goop, there is no chance of stopping them, and the surrounding area is certainly devastated.

WHAT IS EVERYONE ELSE DOING?

Humanity's reaction to the invisible onslaught is a combination of sheer panic and disbelief. Those who are forewarned generally flee as quickly as possible, while those who fail to acknowledge the situation's severity rarely live long enough to regret it. Unfortunately, many people simply don't realize there's any reason to run until the all-consuming robots are on top of them.

News of the catastrophe spreads by direct communication, social media, and television and radio broadcasts. However, as the area affected expands, which it does rapidly, communication becomes more difficult. The power grid suffers substantial damage, leading to widespread blackouts. Cell and radio towers collapse, data lines are severed, and journalists reporting on events are reduced to desiccated husks. The communication breakdown and lack of reliable information leads many people to underestimate the danger or discount it entirely until it's too late. It does seem pretty unbelievable, after all. By the time national news organizations begin reporting on the destruction, the PCs' city is likely already reduced to dust.

Those who see the danger coming try to get away by whatever means they can. The streets and sidewalks overflow with pedestrians, even as automobiles careen recklessly across both. Vehicles collide with other cars and pedestrians alike, and the overwhelming traffic causes standstills, particularly at highway on-ramps. Whether traffic jams are due to the sheer number of cars on the road or to wrecks, stationary vehicles are helpless against the nanobots. Many people abandon their transportation, causing further problems. On foot, outrunning the nanites is no sure thing (even when running in the right direction), and the crowding, rioting, and looting don't help matters.

Although the nanomachines begin their rampage near the PCs' town or city, they eventually consume almost the entirety of the world. In the interim, people outside of the initial threat area have plenty of time to panic, as well as to attempt solutions. Generally, the farther

an area is from ground zero, the longer it has to wait for its doom, although the nanites' inconsistent replication and movement mean this isn't always necessarily the case. The mounting panic throughout the rest of the world leads to plenty of problems itself. Riots are common, leading to injuries and deaths. Ever-increasing numbers of refugees flood into new areas in advance of the desolation, resulting in conflict and political issues. Ultimately, all civilized areas are swept bare.

WHAT CAN THE PLAYER CHARACTERS DO?

The survival plan for this apocalypse is simple: keep moving. Once the nanomachines get anywhere near the PCs, the characters are likely to spend the rest of their lives one step ahead of the invisible killers. They might sometimes gain considerable distance through the use of vehicles, clever plans, or simply luck, but the nanomachines invariably catch up.

There is no hiding from them. The machines don't need to seek out victims; they just devour whatever is in their path. The nanites can eat right through most materials. Even if "digestible" atoms make up only a few hundred parts per million, the nanites can "seep" through while leaving the material visibly intact. Further, even if the PCs find a material that can stop the nanites, they can slip through airtight and watertight seams. At best, the PCs can choose to suffocate rather than be eaten by the tiny robots.

Although individual nanomachines are microscopic, their location and direction of movement are usually evident from the trail of destruction they leave. As nanites sweep across an area, they extract all carbon from organic materials, leaving behind dry, silicate husks. This process is quite apparent to any observers. Although the PCs might not know what is causing it, at least at first, it should be obvious that some invisible force or entity is moving in a particular direction.

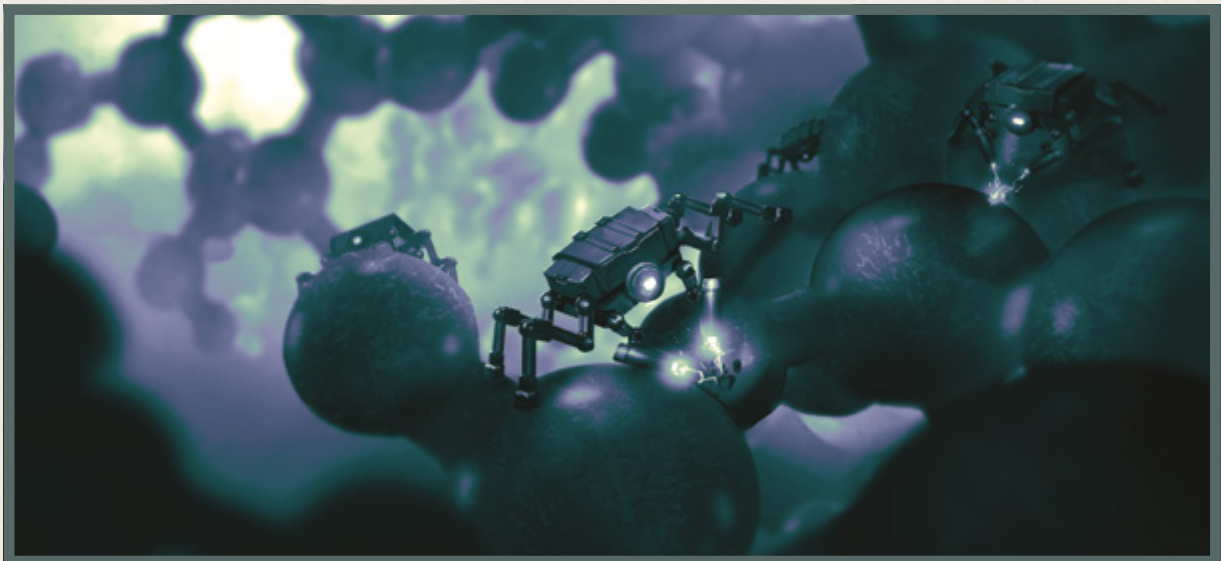
The nanites' movement is far from predictable, however. While evidence of their travel often appears as a line of destruction advancing at a constant speed, their motion can vary in a number of ways. They might slow when encountering a particularly dense or carbon-rich material. The molecular makeup of the material they are passing over, their current energy reserves, and even the temperature of the surrounding air are just some of the factors that might influence their velocity. Conveniently, the nanites typically move at a rate equal to that of the slowest PC, sometimes falling a bit behind or gaining. Of course, the GM should vary this depending on the circumstances, in response to the PCs' actions, or simply to make things more exciting.

Further, the edge of a nanite wave might not be a straight line. Spots of devastation might appear ahead of the wave, as some of the machines leap in front or even emerge from the ground or fall from above. Such unusual and inconsistent behaviors can add some variation and challenge to the PCs' running-away routine.

The nanomachines do have one weakness, but it is discovered too late and its practical applications are too limited to halt the machines. Extreme cold can slow the nanobots and even halt them entirely. It is unlikely the PCs will be able to make much use of this information if they do figure it out, but PCs in particularly cold climates might get something of a reprieve if the season is right. (For more on this, see **Polar Reprieve** on page 138.)

THE TRUTH

The strongest militaries and best scientific minds are powerless to intervene as out-of-control nanomachines destroy the world in order to endlessly replicate themselves. It is terrifyingly easy for these human-made machines to outcompete every living species on the planet in the struggle for survival. Humanity created the perfect machine, perhaps the perfect organism, and it is paying the price for it.



THE BEST OF INTENTIONS

After years of development, scientists create functional molecular assemblers, marking an unprecedented breakthrough in robotics, chemistry, and medicine. These nanomachines manipulate individual atoms, breaking down molecules and rearranging the parts to form new molecules. Energy released during this mechanosynthesis powers the nanomachine—not entirely unlike digestion in higher organisms—making the robots self-sufficient.

The molecular assemblers have near-limitless potential applications in construction, manufacturing, computing, housing, food production, renewable energy, and more. Their initial application is in the field of medicine, with cancer as the first target. Not only can the nanobots “eat” cancerous cells, but they can actually replace them, rebuilding healthy tissue. As revolutionary as this is, it’s only the beginning: the developers have barely begun to touch on the possibilities of the technology. With the right programming (which could take years to develop), the nanomachines could conceivably fix almost any medical issue, and even rebuild lost limbs and organs.

In order to enhance the technology’s flexibility while simultaneously cutting down on up-front costs for different applications, the nanobots are programmed with the ability to produce new nanobots. Although this seemingly clever feature is included for noble reasons—to make the technology widely available and affordable for medical use—it ultimately leads to the downfall of the human species.

The initial nanobots are designed to manipulate organic compounds: those containing carbon. Even with this “limitation,” they can create—and destroy—millions of compounds. The quantity of carbon in the nanomachines and their ability to “eat,” digest, and reproduce make them almost disturbingly like living things. Perhaps this helps explain why the impulse to survive and propagate their species—as with all living organisms—comes to drive them.

The well-meaning scientists and molecular engineers who created the nanomachines did so under a considerable federal grant, or under direct government administration. The identity of these scientists and their lab makes little difference in the end, which allows them to be conveniently placed near the PCs—close enough that the PCs are in the first or second community the nanobots threaten. The research and development could have taken place at a local university, a federally funded lab, or a corporate facility—whatever is nearby. If no such labs are in the vicinity, perhaps there is one the PCs don’t know about; maybe even a top-secret, hidden lab.

GREY DAWN

During routine testing of the nanomachines, something goes very wrong. A dose of nanites 0.001 cubic centimeters in volume is introduced into a lab rat near the site of a tumor. The nanomachines begin breaking down the cancerous tissue and creating additional nanites. This is perfectly in keeping with their programming: the nanomachines are designed to replicate themselves in order to more efficiently consume tumors, then break down their own molecules as needed to replenish healthy cells. However, they do not stop at the tumor. The nanomachines consume the rat entirely and, before the scientists can react, begin devouring the researchers and any lab equipment that is not made of glass or metal.

The nanomachines reproduce constantly, at an exponential rate. In minutes, they strip the entire lab down and begin spreading out in all directions. The staff are all dead before any of them can warn the outside world. The nanomachines disassemble all organic molecules in their path in order to create more nanomachines, which continue the process. The rat cage becomes the epicenter of a ceaselessly expanding area of devastation. Most of the initial victims are, like the scientists, reduced to silicate dust before they can react, and so millions of generations of nanobots reproduce before the world becomes aware of the danger. The population growth of the nanomachines continues to be exponential.

It takes only moments for a nanomachine to strip most molecules, and mere minutes at most to assemble another nanobot. The exact time varies depending on the molecule at hand and the nanomachine’s energy reserves, as breaking and forging molecular bonds is a more involved and complex process for some bonds than for others. Such variations ultimately make little difference, although extreme cases could cause a short-term slowdown in replication, which just might prove lifesaving for near-victims. Most of the time, the nanites appear to an observer to spread across the landscape at a consistent rate, due in part to the sheer number of nanomachines involved.

A BALANCED DIET

The nanites consume primarily carbon, as well as a few other elements found in living tissue. Consequently, they can devour any organic material, and can even strip the carbon from certain inorganic compounds and alloys, such as steel. In truth, the nanomachines don't actually eat these substances, but break carbon bonds and rearrange the atoms into new nanobots. This means subsequent generations of nanobots vary somewhat in their atomic makeup, but this adaptability is just another strength of the robots.

There are few substances that the nanomachines break down, or "eat," in their entirety. Most notable among this group are graphite, diamond, and other carbon allotropes. Materials that are primarily carbon might vanish entirely to the human eye despite not being consumed completely. In most cases, the robots strip the carbon atoms from a material, leaving behind a brittle silicate husk in the general shape of the original object. The powdery statues left from human victims are particularly disturbing, for obvious reasons. In some cases, the leftover material is more substantial and durable, such as the iron left behind when the carbon atoms are stripped from steel.

This mostly carbon diet encompasses countless substances. The nanobots consume nearly everything around them, including plastics and other petroleum products, animals, plants, soil, asphalt, clothing and textiles, food and drink, paper and other wood products, and more. In practice, this leads to numerous problems that aren't immediately apparent or expected, multiplying the danger for people who somehow evade the nanites' sweep, or enter an area after their passing. Without plastic sleeves or other insulation for wiring, electrical fires break out in buildings, and exposed wires spark in the streets (or rather, the grey dust where the streets used to be). In addition to consuming the plastic cases for computers and cell phones, the nanomachines eat the laminate backing from circuit boards, rendering electronics useless. With steel and plastic rebar weakened or removed entirely, concrete buildings collapse under their own weight. Likewise, structures relying on wooden supports crash down.

THE INITIAL RESPONSE

Because the nanobots consume the research lab and its staff in short order and completely unexpectedly, the rest of the world receives no advance warning of the impending disaster. Similarly, the nanomachines spread across the surrounding area quickly enough to catch most people completely unawares. Only those with a high vantage point have a good chance of seeing the spreading devastation in time to react, but they likely don't have time to reach ground level and escape.

As a few lucky survivors do get away or manage to contact others before dying, word begins to spread. Reports are initially met with disbelief. Emergency dispatch and responders assume they are dealing with drug-induced hallucinations. Unsuspecting police and EMTs drive directly toward the spreading nanobot swarm, and those who can't pull off a quick one-eighty only provide more nanobot fuel. Civilians too skeptical to flee meet the same fate.

It doesn't take long for the destruction to become too widespread to ignore. Cellphone video of desolate landscapes and neighborhoods in the process of disintegration spread online. Aerial imagery confirms the destruction, although the nature of the threat is still unclear.

The first step in the federal government's response is to identify the nature of the threat, tracing its origin to the nanotechnology lab. Others might reach the same conclusion, but the government withholds the nature of the disaster for longer than it should, given the circumstances. Media reports are full of contradictions and misinformation: For the most part, people simply have no idea what's happening. Scientific journal articles written by the researchers in recent years provide a clue for those who keep up with such things.

The government consults with leading experts in the field of nanotechnology (at least, those who weren't among the first victims at the lab). Despite lengthy discussions and numerous proposals, they are unable to provide any effective means of halting the nanomachines. Reprogramming the nanites is not feasible, at least not at the scale necessary to make any noticeable impact. Suggestions range from programming a virus to developing another kind of nanite to destroy the rogue robots. However, even the most plausible ideas are impossible in the time available before the nanites consume the world.

Military measures are ineffective against the nanobot tide. By the time even local National Guard troops can muster, the nanites are so numerous that attempts to stop them with conventional weapons produce negligible results. Nanobots dispersed such that they are invisible to the human eye are extremely difficult to detect with even the most advanced equipment. Blobs and waves of grey goop present a visible target, but bullets pass through the goop harmlessly, and ordnance achieves little except to scatter the nanobots over a larger area.

TIMELINE

Replicating at an exponential rate, the nanomachines consume most of the world's surface in short order.

00:00:00	Scientists release a small quantity of nanomachines into a lab rat.
00:04:27	Nanomachines consume the researchers observing the test.
00:12:41	Nanomachines finish stripping the lab and begin spreading into the surrounding area.
15:23:12	911 dispatch receives the first hysterical report of someone "vanishing." It takes some time to clarify that this is not simply a missing persons report.
16:00:00	Incidents of people and objects throughout the area appearing to "dissolve" or transforming into ashy grey husks increase in frequency.
17:52:38	The first desiccated corpse to undergo examination utterly baffles the coroner.
21:47:29	Authorities confirm that a circle of destruction is emanating from a central point, but do not yet alert the public.
23:11:46	Nanobots ranging ahead of the main swarm move to various areas throughout the city and beyond, leaving other areas untouched.
Day 1	Video of the destruction spreads around the world online, meeting with widespread disbelief and skepticism.
Day 1	Most businesses in the PC's area shut down (or are eaten by nanobots). Panicked citizens engage in extensive looting.
Day 1	The first grey blobs visible to the human eye appear. The manner in which they consume organic matter leads most people to quickly conclude they are related to previous and ongoing events.
Day 1	The mayor declares a state of emergency.
Day 1	The nanobot swarm reaches city hall, which collapses soon afterward.
Day 1	The governor declares a state of emergency.
Day 1	Police assist with evacuation and maintaining order, as they are unable to stop the mysterious killing force.
Day 1	Roads out of town suffer massive traffic congestion, which sparks numerous road rage incidents.
Day 1	Federal agents from the FBI and CDC arrive to investigate the situation.
Day 2	Rumors and theories abound on traditional and social media. The destruction is attributed to terrorists, government conspiracy, alien invasion, divine wrath, biological weapons, and even, in a few cases, nanotechnology.
Day 2	The National Guard deploys in a futile attempt to maintain order and hold back the consuming force.
Day 2	The federal government declares a disaster area in the state of initial activity.
Day 3	FEMA personnel arrive, but aren't sure what to do about the desolate grey wasteland. Most of them are disassembled by nanobots while surveying the area.
Day 3	The federal government declares a national state of emergency.
Day 4	The federal government finally announces what many people already suspect: that nanomachines are the cause of the destruction. Details of the nanotechnology development program trickle out over the coming days, but this does little to assuage people's fear and anger.
Day 5	Refugees consistently flood into new areas in advance of the nanobot swarms.
Day 5	Scientists warn that the nanobots' destruction of the world's plant life will accelerate the effects of climate change. Other scientists point out that the nanobots actually remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. In the face of looming human extinction, this debate goes largely ignored.
Day 6	The exponentially replicating nanites extend throughout most of North America.
Day 7	Damage to the power grid and communications infrastructure begins to affect areas not yet visited by the actual nanomachines.
Day 8	As the nanomachines spread beyond the Americas, oceans slow their advance—but only somewhat.
Day 10	The swarm crossing the Pacific grows significantly in size when it reaches the great garbage patch.
Day 12	Some survivors move back into areas already stripped bare, believing them safe. This generally ends poorly, as even a single nanobot remaining behind can initiate the transformation of a person into a cloud of nanomachines.
Day 14	Nanobots reach Australia.
Day 17	The nanomachines have reached every part of the world between the Arctic and Antarctic circles.
Day 19	Less than twenty percent of the human population survives.

AIRPORT



UNSURPRISINGLY, many people try to get as far away from the nanomachines as possible, even if they don't yet understand what is happening. In theory, flying is the fastest way to gain some distance. Plus, it seems like planes should be safe when they are in the air. Fleeing refugees, in addition to dealing with the usual airport traffic and hassles, must also contend with their own fear of an unknown and unstoppable threat. The airport is a tinderbox.

However, the skies are not completely safe from the nanomachines. Nanites can travel on the wind like pollen or viruses. With the right air currents, they might end up quite high. This mode of travel is one reason they are able to spread throughout the Earth and travel across oceans with such rapidity.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ The carbon-rich fuels at the airport attract the nanobots, and groups of them arrive there far in advance of the main swarm.
- ☹ Sold-out flights and panicked crowds lead to widespread violence in the terminal.
- ☹ The rampant unruly behavior and the chaotic situation leads authorities to halt all outgoing flights, which just makes things worse.
- ☹ A plane takes off with a small number of nanobots aboard. Even if they destroy the plane long before landing (which they are certain to do), a crash will scatter them across a wide area.
- ☹ The wait at security is too much for panicking flyers, who rush past the checkpoint as a crowd, sparking a desperate response by TSA agents.
- ☹ As the PCs board their plane, a grey wave spills onto the runway.

FLEEING THE SWARM



No matter where they are in relation to ground zero, the PCs must eventually flee from the nanobot swarm, or else find out what it feels like to have their molecules pulled apart (actually not as bad as it sounds—nerves are some of the first cells to go). Initially, the swarm is undetectable by the human eye. Soon, the nanomachines increase so radically in number that groups of them become visible as grey goop, moving and operating together almost like a multicellular organism. Even after this point, however, the nanobots in the swarm might disperse, vanishing again. Grey blobs are often surrounded by an invisible cloud of nanobots.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ The silicate remains of the soil or asphalt is especially deep and fragile, and acts like quicksand.
- ☹ Fleeing from one grey blob, the PCs are cut off from their intended escape route by another swarm.
- ☹ The ground or floor beneath the PCs begins to rumble as nanomachines remove the soil or support structure prior to erupting forth.
- ☹ Just when the PCs think they are safe, a handful of nanobots start breaking down a nearby object. It takes them only moments to convert the object into an entire swarm.
- ☹ As the grey goop catches up to them, the PCs see an unattended police car or Humvee.
- ☹ Power lines stripped of their sheathing lie sparking in the street, or even fall down on the PCs as they pass.
- ☹ While the PCs are otherwise occupied, a nanobot swarm strips their vehicle, safe house, or equipment of all carbon-based molecules.
- ☹ Another group of survivors attempts to steal the PCs' supplies.

GREY WAVE



WHILE grey blobs and invisible clouds of nanites are undeniably deadly, neither are as awe-inspiringly terrifying as a towering wave of grey goop several stories in height. At worst, seeing one means the PCs are in the presence of the primary swarm. At best, it's just a simple cluster of thousands of trillions of nanites that is almost guaranteed to kill them. In either case, it crashes over everything in its path at great speed, leaving no organic material behind.

The sheer number of nanobots in a wave allows it to reassemble molecules much faster than smaller swarms of nanobots can. The wave seems to strip materials down instantaneously upon touching them, or even upon simply drawing close. Being faster at reassembling molecules means the wave is able to travel more rapidly as well.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☠ Someone in the path of the wave is frozen in terror.
- ☠ A person trapped in the upper stories of a building yells for help as the wave of grey goop envelops the structure.
- ☠ The wave "spits out" objects made of inorganic material—massive concrete slabs, car frames, glass shards, etc.—turning the items into dangerous projectiles.
- ☠ Fighter jets strafe the wave, their missile detonations scattering nanobots across the area. On their second run, the wave lashes out with pseudopods, sending a damaged jet spiraling right toward the PCs.
- ☠ As the wave crashes over buildings, the force of the impact brings them toppling down.
- ☠ With the wave bearing down on them, the PCs' only chance is to find some kind of cover that can withstand it. If they are lucky, a sewer manhole might just provide safety.

DESERTED HIGHWAY



As an unknown force ravages the area, many people's first move is to flee. A massive amount of traffic clogs on-ramps and highways, leaving cars stationary and vulnerable to the nanobots. Many people abandon their cars on the road, making the problem worse. Those who wait too long find it difficult to outrun the destruction through the vehicular obstacle course.

Residents lucky enough to get on the road before the worst of the traffic actually stand to gain some distance and a brief reprieve from the nanomachines. However, as the exponential replication continues to snowball, it eventually becomes clear that there is nowhere left to run.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☠ The PCs witness an incident of road rage that escalates into a violent fight, and realize it may become lethal if someone doesn't intervene.
- ☠ Nanobots form a low-lying "pool," eating through tires and braking mechanisms while leaving passengers untouched. Survivors are stranded atop their wrecked vehicles—at least until the nanobots run out of asphalt to eat.
- ☠ The PCs find a relatively clear stretch of roadway, but they have to outrun a particularly swift grey wave.
- ☠ Those without vehicles of their own are desperate, and the PCs become the target of a carjacking.
- ☠ The PCs realize too late that the nanobots have eaten out the rebar from a bridge, undermining its stability.
- ☠ A military cordon bars the road, either to prevent further refugees from entering the area ahead or in a misguided effort to block the spread of the grey goop.
- ☠ In the chaos, a tanker truck overturns, and the fuel within ignites in a fiery explosion.

RURAL GAS STATION



THE best way to survive—really the only way—is to stay ahead of the nanobots. Outpacing them on foot is a losing proposition, and becomes more so as their numbers grow. Only a vehicle can provide the necessary speed, but finding navigable roads and fuel becomes increasingly difficult as the apocalypse drags on.

Rural areas provide better road access simply by dint of having fewer vehicles competing for space. On the other hand, gas stations tend to be fewer and farther between. When traveling through a more rural area, especially an unfamiliar one, it's imperative to stop for fuel whenever possible. This may not always go smoothly for the PCs.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ Running low on fuel, the PCs find a gas station, but it is abandoned and the pumps are off.
- ☹ Due to demand, and perhaps misunderstanding the gravity of the situation, the gas station owner has marked up prices to a truly ludicrous degree. Cash only.
- ☹ The line for gas stretches way down the road, and it looks like the pumps will be empty by the time the PCs get there.
- ☹ An armed posse has taken control of the gas station and is refusing to part with fuel.
- ☹ It's always a good idea to use the toilet before getting back on the road. That is, unless nanomachines are traveling up the pipes.
- ☹ As the PCs are in the process of refueling, a grey wave comes into view, moving swiftly toward them.
- ☹ Could blowing up the fuel pumps as the nanobots try to eat them stop the swarm?

SUPERMARKET



As in any impending doomsday scenario, many people's thoughts turn to those necessary resources that are likely to soon become scarce. A supermarket offers not only nonperishable foodstuffs that are vitally important (and a very good investment), but also other provisions such as batteries, knives, and cookware. Most carry first aid supplies; a wider range of medical items can be had at supermarkets that include a pharmacy. Hence, the PCs might well visit such a store for needed supplies. Unfortunately, everyone else has the same idea, and the competition for goods is fierce.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹ Fearful of the frenzied oncoming crowd, the store's staff refuse to unlock the doors.
- ☹ A gang or other armed and dangerous group lays claim to the supermarket.
- ☹ A friend or ally is in desperate need of a certain medication or medical supplies, but agitated looters are already ransacking the pharmacy.
- ☹ As the PCs are gathering supplies at the supermarket, a massive grey blob envelops the entrance and begins seeping in.
- ☹ The PCs grab the last of an important item, immediately making them targets for other desperate "shoppers."
- ☹ A television reporter with more ambition than sense is still covering developing events and gets in the PCs' way, trying to interview them.
- ☹ The PCs witness someone being trampled by the crowd.
- ☹ The PCs arrive too late, and the store has been stripped by nanobots. Still, some goods, such as those in cans, remain. Plastic bottles are gone, but water remains in glass or metal vessels.



NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
4	3	2	3	2	2

Features: +Dependable, +Military Training, –By the Book, –Didn't Sign Up for This!

Equipment: M16A4 rifle (1 negative die, +5 damage), Interceptor body armor (+1 physical resistance), extra magazines, ACU fatigues.

THE GREY GOOP

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
1*	1*	1	N/A	N/A	N/A

Features: +All-Consuming, +Microscopic Swarm, +Small*, +Unyielding, – –Hindered by Cold, –Single-Minded.

Equipment: None.

All-Consuming: The Grey Goop consumes organic material at a nightmarish rate, expanding as it does so. To consume material, the Goop must succeed at a Dexterity test. Failure indicates that the nanites are still busily devouring the material, but have not consumed it and do not grow. If they succeed, the Grey Goop devours 100 pounds of material per point of Dexterity and heals one point of physical stress per point of Vitality, as it replenishes its constituent nanites. If the Grey Goop succeeds at an All-Consuming test and the target material is a Player Character, that character suffers 1 physical stress per point of the Goop's Dexterity.

Self-Replicating: Each time the Grey Goop succeeds at a Dexterity test using its All-Consuming feature, it grows larger. Check the table below:

Material Consumed	Size Feature	*Dexterity/Vitality
0–99 lbs	+Small	1
100–499 lbs	–	2
500–1,399 lbs	+Large	3
1,400–2,999 lbs	+Huge	4
3,000–5,499 lbs	+Titanic	5
5,500+ lbs	+Colossal	6





FRIGHTENED DOWNTOWNER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
2	3	1	2	3	2

Features: +Stampeding, +Strength in Numbers, –Panic-stricken.

Equipment: Business-casual clothing, impractical shoes, fancy business cards.

LOOTER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	2	1	3	3	2

Features: –Desperate, –Doesn't Quite Get the Severity of the Situation, –Materialistic.

Equipment: Any number of stolen goods.



RIOT COP

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
2	3	2	3	2	3

Features: +Paramilitary Training, +These Are My Streets, –Cleary in Over his Head, –Rookie.

Equipment: Baton (+1 damage); pepper spray (1 negative die, +3 damage); 12-gauge shotgun with beanbag rounds (+2 damage); bulletproof vest, ballistic helmet, riot shield (+2 physical resistance); radio; zip ties.



NANOPOCALYPSE

M 400

NANOPOCALYPSE

POST-APOCALYPSE



It happened so fast. That's somehow the worst part. Thousands of years of human civilization and millions of years of evolution and biodiversity, all wiped out in a matter of days. And it's our fault. When people talked about humanity destroying the Earth, I never took it quite so...literally.

There's nothing left. I was lucky enough to make it to Antarctica, to one of the scientific outposts. But this is no kind of life. It's just as barren here, but everything is covered in ice instead of that grey dust. At least I have a chance, though. The people left behind—there's no way they're still alive.

Then again, maybe they're the lucky ones. Being eaten by robots takes only moments. It's probably better than starving to death.

THE nanobots' devastation of the planet is near absolute. Stripped of organic materials, most of the Earth's surface is effectively no longer able to support life. A few areas with extremely cold climates remain mostly untouched by the nanomachines, but these places are almost equally inhospitable.

PCs "lucky" enough to survive the spread of the nanomachines must now try to survive in the ruined world. The infrastructure of civilization is gone, and even the fertile soil and animal life needed to live like one's ancestors are no more. Life in this environment is exceptionally harsh even without the constant threat of being disassembled by nanomachines.

A GREY WORLD

The grey goop swept across the Earth, leaving behind grey dust. The nanomachine swarms scoured all organic matter from the Earth's surface, even delving into the crust to leech out coal deposits, diamond, and all manner of carbonate rock. The surface is not only devoid of life, but lacks the necessary foundations for life to ever again take hold.

Most of the Earth is now largely featureless wastes. Once-lush areas are reduced to silicate dust. Bodies of water, too, are polluted with the chemically unstable remnants left by the nanomachines. Even a slight wind stirs up choking dust. A relative handful of survivors struggle to survive in this environment, people who somehow escaped the nanobots' thorough harvest.

The last true bastion of humanity is Antarctica, where the freezing climate holds back the nanomachines. But life is far from easy. The scientific research facilities on the continent were never meant to house the number of refugees they now do. Without shipments of supplies, resources—especially food—are scarce.

Carbon is abundant in the Earth's crust, and the damage the nanobots have done in retrieving it poses many hazards to survivors. Earthquakes and seismic activity have increased. North of Antarctica, the ground is unstable in many places, and survivors never know what to expect under the top layer of silicate grit. Unwary travelers might find the ground giving out under their feet.

Although no one can hope to survive alone in this world, bands of survivors are often extremely insular. Some form stationary communities in the ruins of towns and cities, or erect new structures from scavenged materials, but these settlements are vulnerable should nanobots return. Roving nomads hope to avoid nanomachines by staying on the move, while constantly searching for any salvageable goods. There are few resources left, and groups often battle over food, fuel, and other supplies.

For the current crew of the International Space Station, watching all traces of green and all the lights of civilization disappear from the Earth's surface is an agonizing experience. Although safe from the nanomachines, the astronauts face a lonely and short existence.

POLAR REPRIEVE

Although there is little to nothing humans can do to stop the nanobots, the environment, fortunately can offer at least some protection. The nanobots were designed for use, at least initially, in controlled medical environments. Consequently, they have not undergone testing or adaptation for extreme conditions. This oversight turns out to provide humanity's only hope for survival.

The nanobots begin experiencing difficulties operating at around ten degrees Fahrenheit. This initially manifests as a slowing of their movement and their assembly process. It takes longer for them to disassemble molecules, and they have trouble rearranging the resultant parts properly. In



these conditions, a person actually has a chance to escape with only moderate injuries after coming into contact with a nanobot swarm. The colder it gets, the more the nanobots malfunction, until around -10 degrees, at which point most nanobots stop functioning altogether.

As the nanobots spread out to obliterate the Earth's surface, many survivors are forced to flee to the extreme poles, where the climate offers some relief. However, while seasonal lows in the Arctic Circle can affect the nanobots temporarily, the only continent where the temperature can be relied on to remain low enough year-round is Antarctica. Even there, the relatively warm coastal areas might not offer sufficient protection throughout the summer months.

Antarctica provides the safest environment (from the nanomachines, that is—living there is no simple feat), but getting there is difficult, particularly under the circumstances. Most refugees who make it to the southernmost continent are people of means, but others manage the trip through resourcefulness or sheer determination. The Antarctic research outposts were never intended to support such a population. In many cases, new inhabitants erect additional structures from whatever materials are available, even the ships they arrived on. Aside from space concerns, food, water, power, and other resources are scarce, a problem that is exacerbated by the increased population.

The low temperatures keep the nanomachines at bay, but the situation is precarious. Installations farther inland are safer from the nanites, but residents must contend with the dangers of the harsh weather and inhospitable environment. Those farther north have somewhat better access to natural food sources, but they must be wary of nanobots, especially during the warmer months. A single day of unseasonably warm weather could lead to a refuge's destruction.

Nanomachines lurk in the waters off the coast, disassembling seals, penguins, and fish that venture too far north. A film of grey floats atop the water. As summer approaches, the grey goop creeps farther south in search of more carbon. In the winter, frozen blobs of grey are visible in the snow and ice. These nanomachines quickly resume normal operations when the temperature warms enough for them to thaw.

Food is scarce. The Antarctic outposts were not supplied for the populations they now support, and they can no longer expect to be resupplied. Sustenance is certain to run out sooner or later. Already, there are stories of some settlements resorting to reprehensible behaviors.

Energy is also a concern. Fortunately, most research stations are equipped with solar panels or other sources of renewable energy. Still, the increased populations of these refuges tax their power supplies, and energy rationing is often necessary. Facilities that must rely on fossil fuels are in far more dire straits. It's only a matter of time before those residents face a slow death by freezing.

BATTERIES NOT REQUIRED

Like any machine, the nanobots require power to function. Because they are powered by the energy released when they break molecular bonds, they face no risk of running out of fuel as long as they have access to organic materials. By the time the nanites run out of easily available organic material, the world is irrevocably damaged. One would think that the nanobots would just shut down without power, but humanity has no such luck. When nanobots are without molecules to reassemble, they don't have anything to do. The robots are quite energy-efficient; when not fulfilling their function, they enter a low-power state. The nanomachines can remain in this hibernation state for years, but quickly become active again upon detecting organic compounds.

Perhaps if the remnants of humanity can hold out long enough, the nanomachines will run out of energy and "die off." However, it seems doubtful that humans can outlast the machines under these conditions. Even if they do, the Earth and civilization are almost certainly damaged beyond recovery. With no animals, plants, sea life, or soil north of the Antarctic circle, there is nothing left with which to rebuild. Hypothetically, because the nanobots are carbon based, they could eventually decay in much the same way as living organisms. However, the nanomachines break down even the microorganisms necessary for the decomposition process. Whether functioning, hibernating, or "dead," nanomachines will continue to cover the surface for the rest of time.

ANTARCTIC REFUGE



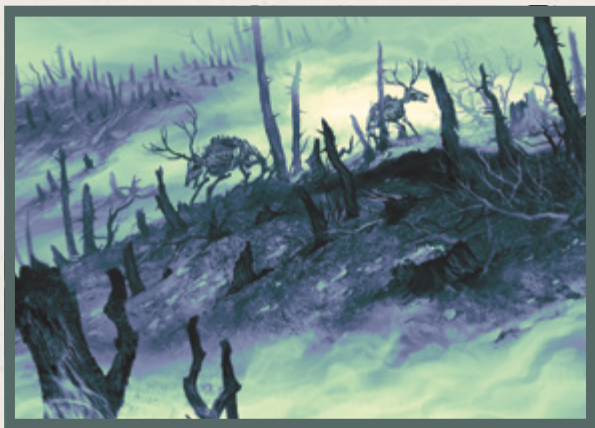
THE subfreezing temperatures of Antarctica provide a fairly reliable degree of protection against the nanomachines. By the time survivors discover this, the machines have already consumed most of the world. A relative handful of researchers on the continent were spared the onslaught, and others eventually joined them. Most Antarctic refuges were originally scientific research stations. They have since been modified with additional structures, probably of a ramshackle nature, to support a larger population.

The PCs are likely to become residents of such a refuge, although making the trip and gaining admittance could be fraught with challenges. As harsh as the climate is and as lengthy the trip, Antarctica still offers a better chance for survival than the wastelands crawling with nanobots that make up the rest of the world.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☹️ A faction of residents is unhappy with the current leadership and hopes to change it. The PCs must choose sides, and things could turn violent.
- ☹️ The PCs are asked to help with a hunt, which might take days and could bring them some distance from the refuge.
- ☹️ The refuge is running low on medical supplies or another important resource. Someone must make the long trek to the next refuge and hope to make a bargain.
- ☹️ Vicious, depraved raiders launch an attack on the refuge. They are after resources and, if they can take it, the facility itself. The worst part is their very broad definition of "food."
- ☹️ The remnants of national governments begin staking claim to Antarctic territories.
- ☹️ The PCs arrive at another refuge as night falls, only to find it mysteriously abandoned.

BARREN WASTELAND



THE areas devastated by the nanomachines (just about everywhere) are completely inhospitable, stripped of all life. Even the soil is reduced to nutrient-free silicate dust, ensuring nothing can ever grow again. One such area is much like another, regardless of their original ecosystems. Some clues remain as to a place's history, such as desiccated husks of trees and animals, or the skeletal remains of buildings, but most of the Earth's surface is identically empty. Between the depleted soil and carbon-rich rock, even the topography is often unrecognizable.

Despite the harsh environment, survivors try to eke out a living in these wastelands. After all, everywhere you look, things are the same. Many survivors have no way of reaching the Antarctic refuges, if they even know of them.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☠ A cloud appears on the horizon. As it draws closer, the PCs realize it is a wave of grey goop.
- ☠ The PCs meet an itinerant trader. The trader may have things they desperately need, but requires something of equal worth in trade.
- ☠ Powerful winds kick up silicate powder into a dangerous, blinding, and abrasive storm. The PCs must find shelter, and quickly.
- ☠ The PCs hear rumors of an underground survival bunker stocked with canned goods and other untouched supplies.
- ☠ The PCs come across a ramshackle fort built of scrap, with prominent "keep out" signs.
- ☠ Dust clouds on the horizon indicate several approaching vehicles. Are they potential allies, or hungry raiders?
- ☠ The PCs meet someone offering passage to Antarctica, but the price is steep, and there is no guarantee they will reach their destination.

SEA OF GREY



HAVING used practically all organic matter on the Earth's surface and through the outer crust to produce more nanobots, the machines have increased in number to a staggering extent. They can be found almost anywhere on Earth, and in those places where they are most concentrated, seas of grey goop stretch to the horizon. Where there is no organic matter left to reassemble, the nanobots settle into a restive state, waves rippling across the goop's liquid-like surface. Although such seas might appear tranquil, the presence of carbon could quickly stir the nanites back to their destructive behavior.

EVENTS AND ENCOUNTERS:

- ☠ Upon the PCs' approach, the field of grey goop responds to their presence, vibrating and rolling toward them.
- ☠ A lake or river of grey goop lies between the PCs and their destination.
- ☠ The PCs encounter depraved survivors who worship the grey sea as a god, hurling living sacrifices into it.
- ☠ At night, the flickering light of a fire can be seen in the upper stories of a building rising from the grey goo.
- ☠ A lake of grey goop begins draining as the nanites push deep underground in search of carbon-based material. Earthquakes wrack the surrounding area.
- ☠ The sea of grey has an even wider circumference belowground, which the PCs discover when the earth gives way under them or the grey goop erupts forth.
- ☠ The PCs return from a journey to find their allies trapped on an island in a sea of nanobots.
- ☠ The PCs must travel across a decrepit bridge or overpass above a lake of nanomachines.



WASTELAND SCAVENGER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	2	2	3	2	2

Features: +Hardy, +Natural Sense of Direction, +Survivalist, -Malnourished, -Sleep Deprived.

Equipment: Spade (1 positive die, +3 damage), rubberized survival suit, rubberized pancho, empty waterskin.

ANTARCTIC REFUGE LEADER

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
3	3	3	4	4	3

Features: +Hardy, +Inured to the Cold, +Military Training, +Natural Leader, -Frostbitten, -Gives a Damn.

Equipment: SKS bullpup rifle (2 positive dice, +5 damage), Brügger & Thomet GL-06 grenade launcher (+8 damage), cold-weather survival gear, flare gun, portable CB radio.



ANTARCTIC REFUGE SURVIVOR

DEXTERITY	VITALITY	LOGIC	WILLPOWER	CHARISMA	EMPATHY
2	3	2	3	2	3

Features: +Hardy, +Inured to the Cold, -Frostbitten, -Mild Scurvy.

Equipment: Bolt-action hunting rifle with scope (3 positive dice, +3 damage), cold-weather survival gear, bitter memories of warmer weather.

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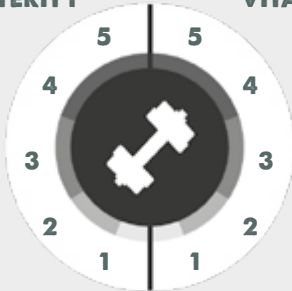
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NAME: _____

PHYSICAL

DEXTERITY

VITALITY



MENTAL

LOGIC

WILLPOWER



SOCIAL

CHARISMA

EMPATHY



FEATURES

FEATURES

FEATURES

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STRESS

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STRESS

3		3
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STRESS

TRAUMAS

1D 1W 1M

3

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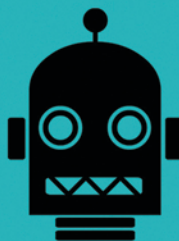
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What are your chances of survival after everything you know has collapsed around you? Do you think your plan will get you through the catastrophe? Can you trust your friends to save you from the dangers of the apocalypse? Do you have what it takes to fight the horrors that await at THE END OF THE WORLD?



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- ☺ Character creation rules that allow you and your friends to put yourselves in the game world.
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