

WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY

A 2 HOUR ONE SHOT RPG FOR 3-6 PLAYERS

IRON GAME CHEF 2006 ENTRY

MATT COWENS

TIME: One session of 2 hours

INGREDIENTS: Ancient, Emotion, Committee

Greetings

We Have the Technology is a quick 2 hour RPG requiring no preparation time. It was written as part of the 2006 Game Chef challenge by Matt Cowens. Early ideas were discussed with Debbie Cowens, and the final product owes much to her insights. Although the competition allows a week, for time reasons this game was written in the space of approximately 30 hours. Thanks are due to Mike Sands for introducing me to the Game Chef Challenge, and reminding me when it was on, and to Luke Walker, Mike Sands and Svend Andersen for feedback and corrections. Further information can be found at:

<http://www.1km1kt.net/GameChef/>

Premise

This game is set in the distant future. The human race is extinct, and the only form of intelligent life left in the solar system is a committee of genetically engineered cyber-dolphins. They live in a tank in a domed city on Venus which was once populated by humans. They are hundreds of years old, and can remember the final years of human existence. They are served by self-repairing robots, and have recently perfected a technique for creating life in bio-factories.

The dolphins remember that human emotion was the cause of the downfall of humanity. They are about to resurrect the human race, but they want to customise the range of human emotion to prevent another catastrophe. To analyse human emotions, they have built a group of androids who are programmed with artificial emotions. These are used to test out human emotions in various scenarios, and decide which emotions should be recreated, which destroyed.

The Role of the Players

The players take on the roles of the emotional androids. Through previous trials, each android has developed a specialty emotion. This is the only trait needed during character creation. This specialty emotion should be chosen from the Base Emotion chart below.

What Happens in the Game

The players will be assigned an emotion to champion as a group. If they are unable to prove that the emotion is valuable, it will be eliminated from the new breed of humans. The emotions which the players will have to

champion are to be taken from the Complex Emotion Table below.

To prove that the emotion is worthwhile, the characters will have to present a series of vignettes from different periods of history, where the emotion is central. To do this they will assume roles, and play out short scenes in a kind of holo-deck environment. They may include whatever props they choose, and may request NPCs. The dolphins are wired into the city's computer systems, and can control NPCs as they choose. The dolphins will control any requested NPCs, and may insert extra NPCs to challenge the androids' presentation of the emotion.

In effect, the players are taking the active role of creating a setting and scene, as well as characters. The GM takes on the reactive role of messing with their plans and trying to challenge their presentation of the value of the emotion. This reverses some of the traditional activities of players and GMs.

In order to persuade the committee, the players will have to present a convincing series of scenes. They will also have to meet the challenges presented by the GM.

Complication

As the androids have been performing this job for some time, they are starting to break away from their original programming. The emotions they have been programmed with are causing them to short circuit. After one hour, forty minutes of play, the androids will start to malfunction. Each player should be given a new command (listed below) to add to their character for the remainder of the game. At least one of these must be the 'Emotion Traitor' malfunction. This will essentially move one player onto the GM's side, upping the stakes on the last scene. After one hour and fifty five minutes, the committee will make a decision on whether to eliminate the emotion.

System

There are 2 very simple elements to the system: direct conflict, and persuading the committee.

In order to resolve direct conflicts during the simulations (between players, or versus NPCs), each party involved should roll 2d6 and add them together. The party with the higher result will win. The greater the difference, the greater the degree of success. Any

time a character wishes to overcome a challenge or demonstrate a point using their specialist emotion, they gain a bonus die. The GM may apply penalties or bonuses where they deem appropriate.

To determine whether the committee is persuaded, players will need to erode their natural cynicism. The dolphins begin the game with a cynicism rating of between 4 and 9. The GM may roll 1d6+3, or simply assign a rating. The players must reduce this to zero (or less) to persuade the committee. To erode this score, the players must enter conflicts with the Dolphins' NPCs, and win. Each victory will remove one cynicism point, each failure will add one. Conflicts must be personality or goal based - not simply physical contests.

Basic Emotions

Love	Hate	Desire	Happiness	Sadness
Anger	Confidence	Nostalgia	Shyness	Anxiety

Complex Emotions

Courage	Humility	Jealousy	Gratitude
Guilt	Honour	Embarrassment	Pride

Malfunctions

The first malfunction (Emotion Traitor) *must* be given out. Choose from amongst the others randomly:

Emotion Traitor - you are suddenly compelled to show the weakness of the emotion that the committee is judging. You must act in ways that show the foolishness of the emotion - either by parody or confrontation. You may wish to move to sit next to the GM, as you can now tag-team against the other players.

Does Not Compute - you have just lost all understanding of emotion. For the remainder of the game you must act only in ways that promote the greatest level of utility - measurable benefit for all involved. You may want to impersonate Mr Spock.

It's So True - your emotion circuits just kicked into overdrive. You totally, unswervingly, passionately believe in the value of the emotion you are championing. Go hard, overact like a soap star.

It's all Binary - your emotion circuits are acting up. You still believe in the mission, and are committed to

getting the emotion approved. Unfortunately you have a binary reaction to those around you. You can only agree or disagree for the rest of the game. You can no longer see shades of grey, everything is absolute.

This is the Best Day Ever - your emotion circuits are acting up. You are now ecstatically happy about everything. For the rest of the game you will continue as normal, but in a totally happy way.

The Paranoid Android - your emotion circuits are acting up. You are now entirely paranoid about everything. For the rest of the game you will continue as normal, but in a totally paranoid way.

Anachronism - due to a malfunction, you must now act as if you were from a different era of history. Perhaps you are from the middle ages? Or from Ancient Greece? Or the materialistic 1980's?

Timeline of Play

Minute	Action
0	Explain premise of game.
5	Players choose a specialty emotion - no double ups!
7	Dolphins explain to PCs which emotion they are to champion. The holo-deck setup is described.
10	Players discuss emotion, eras to use, characters to portray.
30	Scene 1 - players describe setting, begin interacting as characters. GM messes with them.
60	10 Minute break for players to set up scene 2.
70	Scene 2 begins. GM messes with players' intentions even more.
85	10 minute break for players to set up scene 3.
95	Scene 3 begins.
100	PCs Malfunction! Hand out malfunctions to players (be sure to include Emotion Traitor).
115	PCs go before the committee tank, dolphins make their decision.
120	Game End.

If the players wish to have more than 3 scenes, or if they wish to extend one of the early scenes as it is going particularly well, be sure to let them know that their time is limited. Whatever happens, the dolphins will make their decision after 2 hours of play.

An emotion hangs in the balance. Will the PCs prove its worth, or will it be relegated to ancient history?

This game is the intellectual property of Matt Cowens. It represents his second attempt at time-pressured game writing. © March 2006

WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY - SUPPLEMENT ONE

EXAMPLE OF PLAY, FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Example of Play

Luke has decided to run a game of *We Have the Technology* for his friends **Sam**, **Svend**, **Jenni** and **Morgue**. He has spent minutes reading the rules, and feels prepared to take on the challenge. He has a stopwatch ready to time the game.

Luke: OK, We're going to play a game called *We Have the Technology*. We have exactly 2 hours to play, starting... now. You are all playing androids in the far future on Venus. The human race is extinct. You work for a committee of dolphins, who are about to start making new humans in biofactories. Your job is to help the dolphins choose which emotions to keep, and which to eradicate in their new race. Tonight you will be defending the emotion of... [consults Complex Emotion Chart] **Gratitude**.

Svend: Huh?

Luke: Trust me, it'll be fine. You have to prove to the dolphins...

Jenni: Like, actual dolphins? The not-fish but kinda-fish?

Luke: Yes, but they're ancient bio-engineered cyber-dolphins. They're also 133t hackers who are wired into the city's computer systems. They have, like, hundreds of robots to do their bidding.

Jenni: 'Kaaayyyy....

Luke: So anyway, oh, I only have 30 seconds left to explain this. You have a holodeck, right, which can recreate any historical time period and costumes and everything. You also have an extensive library on disc, so you can recreate any scenario you want to show why this emotion is worth keeping. You create a scene, and then take on roles within the scene, like an improvised play.

Sam: And our play has to be themed on 'gratitude'?

Luke: Right. And you have to prove that 'gratitude' is an emotion worth having. But the dolphins don't want it to be too easy for you...

Morgue: The ancient hacker cyber dolphins?

Luke: Yes, those ones. So they will generate hard light hologrammatic NPCs to mess with you. And I just took 2 minutes of your planning time. So, you have to do 3 scenes. Questions? No? Good.

[players confer for 3 minutes, with much frowning and consternation]

Morgue: So we can do anything, in any time period?

Luke: The dolphins reply "Yes, android servant."

[players confer for another 5 minutes]

Svend: We want our first scene to be in the Renaissance, in Italy. We are all philosopher poets, and we have a meeting with our patron. Actually, Morgue will be the patron.

Luke: Excellent. OK, describe the scene, and begin.

[eloquent immersive roleplaying ensues]

Luke: OK, stop there. As you are conferring over the masterpiece, a haggard looking beggar enters the room. Sam, you recognize him as your birth father, whom you left when you were four to go to art school. He appears to have leprosy.

Sam: Oh, father? Can that be you? I remember you as a vigorous, powerful farmer. Now look at you!

Luke: You have been gone twenty years, and we heard nothing of you. Your mother died, I lost the farm, and yet I find you here in fine silks?

Sam: But I sent money to you every time I sold a painting. What has happened?

Luke: OK, there's a conflict here in your stories. You'd better roll. What's your emotional specialty?

Sam: My what?

Luke: Oh yeah, you each have an emotional specialty. Everyone pick one from this list. You get a bonus d6 when you're using that emotion.

Sam: Um, I'll take Happiness.

Luke: Well, that's not really relevant to this conflict, so you only get 2d6, same as me.

[they roll and add their totals. Sam gets 9, Luke gets 6]

Sam: Like I said, I sent you money every time. How can this be?

Morgue: Some ungrateful cad must have stolen the money! Can't messengers be trusted? They should be thankful for the jobs they have, and yet this happens? My specialty emotion is indignance! Give me 3 dice!

Luke: That's not on the list. And it's not a real word?

Morgue: Language and rules be damned, the ingratitude of this messenger fires my loins to action!

Svend: Loins?!?

Jenni: He means lions. He is going to set his lions on the messenger.

[another hour passes, with a Neolithic scene followed by a Napoleonic scene]

Luke: You sense a sudden whiff of ozone and sulphur in the air.

[hands out malfunctions]

Sam: (now paranoid) What are you looking at me for, Bonaparte? What are you hiding inside your *coat*!

[a fracas ensues. Conflicts centred on gratitude evolve. The dice favour the players.]

Luke: OK, that's 1 hour 55. You all see the sumptuous chambers of Napoleon melt away, revealing a stark chamber. At one end a Perspex wall reveals a huge tank filled with water and dolphins. The dolphins have wires coming out of their heads, with antennae attached. The tank appears to be connected to tubes leading out of the chamber through which more dolphins are entering.

"Androids, you have done well. Thanks to your efforts, the emotion of gratitude will be kept in our newly designed humans. Please erase your memories in preparation for tomorrow's trial, when we shall test the value of greed."

Everyone: That was the best RPG I ever played in!

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this a joke? Is it really supposed to be a game?

Good question. This is a serious game. Some of the trimmings may be silly, but at its core it is a game that deals with the value of human emotion. It puts a lot of responsibility into the players' hands.

Can you play without a GM?

There is the option to play the game with 2 teams of players, representing the prosecution and defence. If you choose this option, play as normal, but keep a public score. Some of the malfunctions may need to be amended.

Can you use different emotions?

Of course. Feel free to supplement the options given as you see fit.

I thought the androids were made of glass at one point?

An early draft of the game did include androids who were made from a crystalline substance that was transparent, that was commonly referred to as 'glass'. They still can be in your game, if you like.

What do the cyber-dolphins eat?

They are fed vegetable based synthetic fish, which robots make in factories and deliver fresh daily.

How did you choose those emotions anyways?

I googled for 'emotion list', then looked at the first few results. Wikipedia was especially helpful.

Why isn't there a better rules system?

I thought I told you that question was unacceptable? I mean, come on. I told you in advance, I was only going to do this if that question, and the one about monkeys, were left out. I'm sorry, but I'm outta here.

WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY - SUPPLEMENT TWO

ADVANCED WHTT!

Advanced Rules

For those groups who are looking to increase the challenge of the game, there are several optional rules that you may want to explore.

Team Play

If you wish to play competitively, there are 2 obvious structures that will work:

Defence versus Prosecution

Half the players take on the roles of the defence. It is their job to convince the dolphins (GM) that the emotion should be retained. The other players take on the role of the prosecution. Their job is to prove that the emotion is worthless, or even harmful.

Androids versus Dolphins

Half the players are androids defending the emotion, while the others take on the cynical role of the dolphins. This will be very similar to the above variant. The GM may arbitrate disputes and help set the scene.

GM-less Play

Some groups may see the merit in removing the role of GM altogether. In this case you may choose a team approach as above, or you may opt for the most adversarial form possible - every android for themselves!

No Android Is An Island

In this form of the game, each android will be defending a different emotion. Players pick specialist emotions as usual, but rather than having one emotion that the group is defending, each player will defend their specialty emotion in their own scene. The other players will take on the role of dolphins trying to mess with them.

A scoring system, whereby one android per set of scenes is the 'winner' and therefore has successfully defended their emotion would be useful. A suggested system would be for each player to have to vote for the other player who they felt best defended their emotion. Ties would be decided by a simple show of hands vote, or a contest of strength and wits such as Twister.

Public Performance Androids

Some of the more dramatically inclined may wish to perform their play Live Action style, in front of an audience. Be sure to don authentic costumes, and remember that an audience likes to be able to hear every word. Why not perform to a school class or assembly? School children are never judgmental.

A Timely Reminder

Whatever version of the game you choose to play, remember that there is one rule which must be adhered to above all others:

The game lasts 2 hours. No more, no less.

A Word On Multiple Versions

It was the author's intent to present a game which could be played and enjoyed by a variety of groups. The suggestion that players each defend their own emotion was made early on, and has some merit. However, for those groups with a more traditional approach, having the basic version of the game presented by a GM, and the players working in collusion rather than in competition, was judged to be valuable.

The extra options presented here represent a kaleidoscopic view of a fundamentally simple game. You are invited to pick and choose as you see fit.

- Matt Cowens