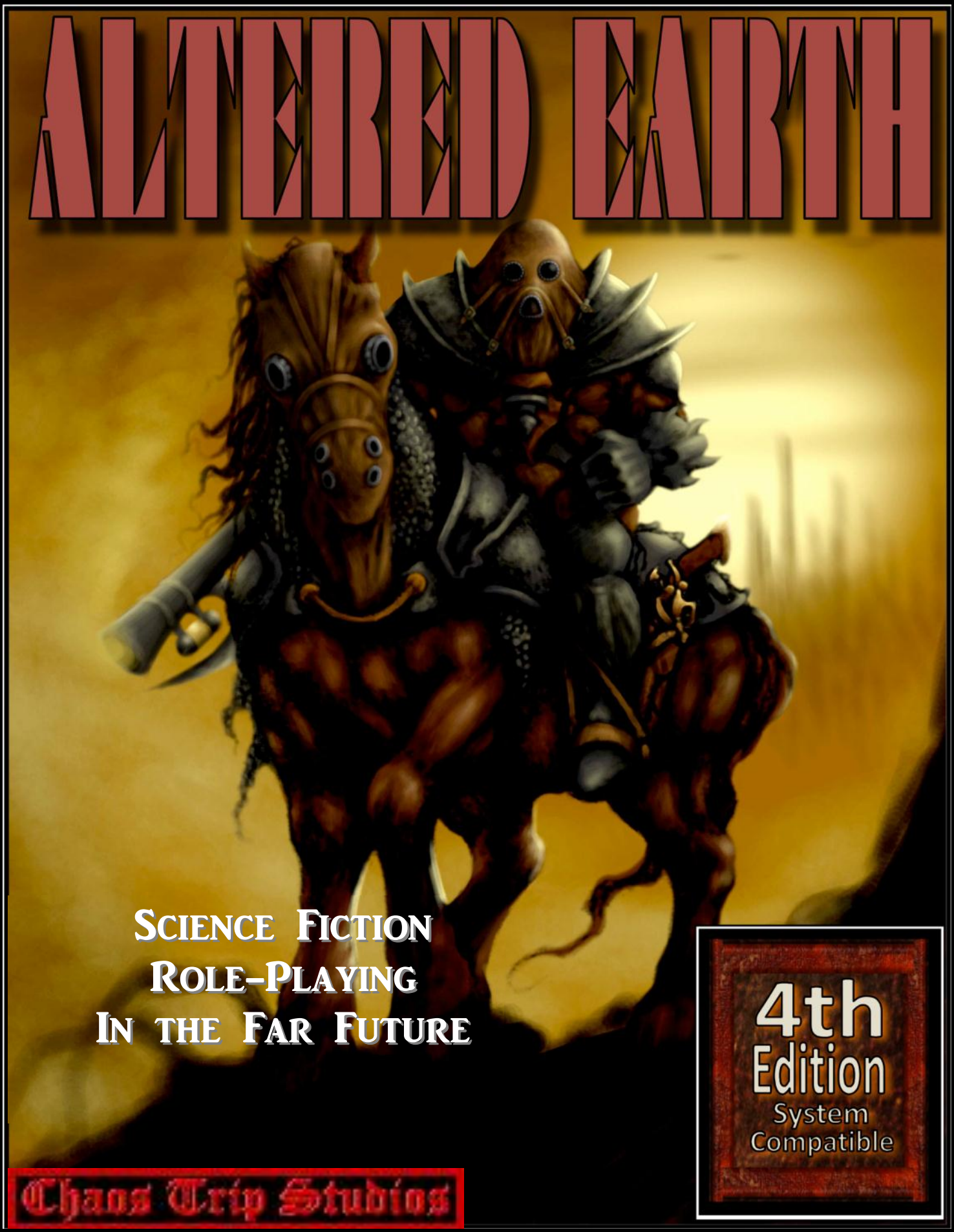
ALTERED EARTH



Science Fiction
Role-Playing
In the Far Future

4th Edition
System Compatible

Chaos Trip Studios

ALTERED EARTH

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CHAPTER ONE: SETTING INTRODUCTION

Altered Earth is a role-playing game of high energy battles and thrilling adventures set against an epic science fiction background. The action takes place in a futuristic world filled with endless possibilities. Any kind of adventure that you can imagine is waiting for you in a setting that is filled with dangerous wastelands, high tech cities, awesome war machines, and unexplored ruins.

Your character might be a gritty mercenary, a cold blooded assassin, an intrepid explorer, or a loyal soldier to the cause. You might be motivated to seek out adventure for the sake of greed, for thrills, or simply to escape your previous life. Or perhaps you have your own personal quest that you are pursuing.

Adventures

There are many types of adventures that can be had in the world of Altered Earth. It all depends upon the type of role-playing campaign you enjoy. There is something for everyone in this setting, from in depth social role-playing to military combat to high tech dungeon crawls.

The player characters may find themselves…
…exploring ancient ruins in search of lost technological relics.
…infiltrating the fortress of a super powered warlord.
…crawling through the mutant-inhabited sewers and tunnels beneath a sprawling mega-city.
…crossing a desolate wasteland populated by strange creatures and insane robots.
…battling against (or becoming) criminals in a dystopian urban nightmare.

THE FAR FUTURE…

It is said that this planet was once green and full of life. They also say that a great civilization stretched across the entire globe. We can never be sure, for all we know of this forgotten civilization comes from the crumbling ruins that lie buried deep beneath the sands of the wastes.

It is said that civilization was destroyed, not in a single apocalyptic war, but in an endless stream of small ones. The world turned barren, not because of a massive cataclysm, but a slow poisoning from radiation and toxic waste. The population was devastated, not by a single plague, but multiple pandemics brought on by diseases that were once curable. So came about the end of the old world. The legacy of this ancient civilization was a long dark age of violence, economic ruin, starvation, and disease.

Out of the darkness came the rise of the warlords, invincible masters of the old technologies. Under their reign, a new age has begun. This is the age of the mega cities, standing defiantly against the horrors of great wastes. The world has entered an era of technological rebirth and unimaginable savagery. Along with the rediscovery of ancient technologies have come horrific new uses for this knowledge. Human experimentation is commonplace and life is held cheap by those in power.

The World of Altered Earth

Altered Earth takes place in a barren and terrifying future landscape. This campaign setting is a world where glimmering luxury towers rise above the impoverished masses of the great cities and wasteland nomads fight just to survive one more day. The world of the far future is lorded over by ruthless megalomaniacs who enforce their rule by threatening their subjects with annihilation by atomic fire.

The Wastes

The wastes are a mostly barren environment home to mutant creatures and crazed robots. Scattered settlements and a few large bands of nomads make up the entire population of the wasteland. The semi-permanent communities are mostly made up of scavenger towns and raider camps. Scavengers make their living by picking through the ruins of ancient cities that lie long buried beneath the desert sands. They trade scrap metal and the occasional relic with other wasteland residents and corporate buyers from the cities. Raiders survive by preying on scavenger crews, corporate aircraft, nomad caravans, and other travellers.

While most of the wastes are covered by burning deserts and frozen tundra, there is also a belt of hot, humid wilderness called the Wetlands. This region to the far south is covered by swamps and thick jungles. All of the plants in the Wetlands are toxic from the poisonous soil in which they grow. The Wetlands are an uninhabited area said to be home to bizarre mutations and savage sub-humans. Perched on the edge of the poisonous zone is a massive settlement known as Salvation's End. More of a giant migrant camp than a real city, Salvation's End is a frequent stopping point for bandits and mercenaries.

Garrison Towns

The mega cities and their warlord masters operate military outposts in the wastes and some of these outposts have given rise to nearby towns. The forces garrisoned here are not under orders to protect the civilian population. However, by keeping a close proximity to this show of strength, the townspeople are protected from raiders and wasteland creatures. The main economic activity in these garrison towns revolves around providing contraband and entertainment to the soldiers. Smugglers, thieves, and other disreputable types flock to this type of settlement, as do other wasteland residents looking for a good time. The local garrison rules over these settlements and they are allowed to do as they please without any repercussions from the town folk. In the town of Stone Face, the civilians revolted against the garrison and slaughtered a great many of them in a sudden and unexpected spree of murder and guerrilla ambushes. The city troops stationed there retreated so hastily that they left behind a large amount of military equipment and supplies. The town survived retaliation by storming the base and activating the anti-aircraft systems. Stone Face has since become a wasteland paradise for mercenaries, weapon smugglers, bandits, outcasts, and killers.

Stone Face: *A monument built to honor a pantheon of ancient gods.*

Green Farmers
The most despised of all wasteland dwellers are known as green farmers. These deluded souls are convinced that they can live off of the poisoned land of the wastes. The disgusting green farmers actually eat plants that are grown in the dirt and follow other sickening practices that drive them insane. Inbred and disease-ridden, the greens are loathed by even the lowliest of wasteland residents.

The green farmers are a cult that preaches doctrines too ridiculous to comprehend. They have been known to steal perfectly good food scraps and bury them under the toxic soil. Stories are even told of green farmers who take children from wasteland families and bury them alive, a dark sacrifice to their dead earth mother. Most military forces slaughter green farmers on sight, using them as target practice to ensure that their twisted philosophy does not spread to the urban centres. Despite these efforts, the insane cult of the greens does make it inside larger settlements where they lure the desperate and mentally ill away from the safety of city life and lead them off to die in the wastelands. "Green fever" has swept through entire cities, leading millions of people to abandon their homes for the false promise of a better life in the wastes. Great masses of people have died from these exoduses. Most civilized communities are determined never to allow such tragedy to happen again.

The Mega Cities

These massive walled cities are overpopulated urban jungles. The typical mega city is home to anywhere from 50 to 120 million people. Having that many people squeezed into that small of an area has a horrific effect on the standard of living. Aside from the obvious problems of food shortages and resource scarcity, the sheer number of people involved creates its own types of problems. There can be as many as half a million sky cars and other aircraft in the sky at any given moment. There are vast millions of land vehicles on the road every hour of the day. In any given city there are between 5 and 15 million raving lunatics roaming the corridors and walkways.

Penthouse Level
The very wealthy and well connected live in sky high penthouses that are covered in environment domes and filled with hydroponic gardens. The living quarters are spaced very far apart and great stretches of plant life and synthetic landscaping separate individual houses. The elite almost always travel by air and they dart from one dome to another without ever coming in contact with the rest of the city. Many residents of the penthouse level like to brag that they have never been below the 100th floor of any building.

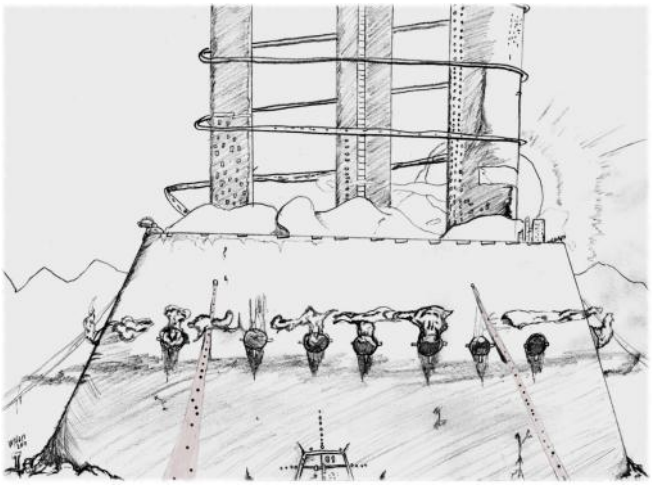
Uptown
Under the penthouse level is "uptown," home to corporate executives and other professionals. While this strata of real estate is not nearly as luxurious or spacious as the penthouse level, uptown apartments are palaces compared to the places most people live. Some residents of uptown have sky cars or other aircraft but most of them travel by means of land vehicles that race along elevated skyways. The skyways have ramps that connect them to the mid levels of large buildings so one can travel all over a city without ever getting close to the ground.

Midtown
The majority of the population is cramped into austere housing complexes in "midtown." These spartan accommodations are designed to provide the basic needs of people in a minimum of space. Many apartments in midtown consist of a single room, often shared by more than one family. Getting around in midtown means you have to navigate a maze of hallways, elevators, suspended bridges, and public transportation conduits. Security is a constant problem in this stratum of the city and the people are continually victimized by both organized crime and random acts of violence.

Downtown
Literally at the bottom of the social structure are those that live at or near ground level; squatters, mentally ill people, and criminal gangs. These are the people who have nowhere else to go and are forced to carve a niche for themselves in the crumbling buildings and shanties of the slum known as "downtown" or "lowtown." The residents of downtown make due by squatting in the abandoned lower floors of high rises or constructing their own houses from bits of collected scrap. People here get around by walking, though some people do have ground vehicles. Driving through downtown can be problematic as the original streets have all but disintegrated, leaving behind a labyrinth of alleys, courtyards, cul de sacs, and tunnels.

The Sub-Levels
Beneath each of the great cities are mazes of ancient tunnels, sewers, and underground structures. The mega cities were built upon the ruins of older metropolises, which were in turn built over top of cities that are older still. Each layer of construction left behind an enormous patchwork of subterranean channels and excavations. These sub-levels are a city unto themselves, populated by mutants, escaped experiments, runaway androids, and other strange creatures.

Government and Law
No one actually runs a mega city. Each city has its own semblance of government but these bodies are so limited in their reach that most people ignore them. Some governments are iron fisted tyrannies; others are ruled by the whims of the populace. In either case the political leaders can only hope to influence major events rather than impose their will directly. The dictates of government matter little to those who live below the marble floored offices of uptown. Rival political factions work ruthlessly against each other as they try to have their own supporters



installed in positions of power but aside from these petty games very little is accomplished.

There is very little in the way of law and order within the mega-cities. That is not to say that there are no laws, just that there is little effort to enforce those laws. The only criminal activity that the authorities actively work against is weapon smuggling, as an armed population is much harder to keep under control. Those who can afford to hire private guards are very well protected but everyone else must fend for themselves. Various parts of the city are designated as secure zones and protected by corporate security units. Those who cannot afford to live and shop in secure zones are at the mercy of the criminal element. The city government will only call in their forces in the event of a riot or rebellion. In this case the politicians will order their units to crush the disorder with extreme prejudice.

Prisons in the mega cities are very rare and most of the ones that do exist are nothing more than slave labour camps. Any time the workforce gets low, a "crackdown" will be announced to round up "suspicious people" for lightning fast trials and life sentences grinding away in the prison industrial system. When society does see fit to provide punishment to actual criminals, the prescribed remedies usually include fines, restricted privileges, exile, or death depending on the severity of the offense.

Most cities have at least one wild zone where the military has been unable to stop the spread of looting and destruction from a previous riot. In these districts chaos is the norm and people flock to them in order to participate in wanton destruction and mayhem. The borders of a wild zone shift constantly as parts of it calm down and new incidents flare up along the edges. Wild zones persist long after the riots that gave birth to them have subsided. Criminals and political radicals set up shop in the lawless districts and work to keep the authorities out. Bored youth and disenfranchised workers take trips into the wild zones to act out their most psychotic and anti-social impulses.

Townships

On the outskirts of every mega city you will find impoverished slums known as townships. The townships are outside of the city walls, caught in between the wasteland and the urban nightmare of the city itself. The townships are populated by a combination of people who have been exiled from the city and refugees from the wastelands. The citizens that live in the townships are recruited to do the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs, both in the wastelands and the city proper. Townships are hubs of traffic in the wastelands and anything you want can be bought in here for the right place.

The Corps

The economic powerhouses of the world are called corps. These giant organizations are the engines of commerce that connect the great cities and the wastelands together. Depending on the city they are based in, the corps may be called corporations, collectives, cartels, or syndicates. Whether the economy is based on strictly regimented state capitalism or an unrestrained free market, the top of the monetary food chain always ends in the head offices of the corps. In some cities a small handful of conglomerates dominate nearly every industry. In others, the corps specialize in different sectors of the economy, avoiding competition with each other in order to maintain their respective monopolies. In most cities the market is much more open and the

fortunes of individual corps rise and fall like the tide. Some of these combines have become so large and powerful that they begun to expand into more than one city, restoring a tiny glimmer of global commerce to the world.

The Warlords

The rulers of the new age are the warlords. These hereditary autocrats lord over the mega cities and the wastes alike, demanding loyalty under the threat of nuclear annihilation. The warlords have no interest in actually governing anything; they simply demand tribute in order to maintain their powerful and expansive military forces. The warlords are locked in endless power games with one another, games of byzantine politics, espionage, and brinksmanship. As a result of this power struggle, control over the mega cities is constantly shifting, though a change in rulers makes little difference in the life of the common citizen.

The warlords have maintained their power through the generations through their control of nuclear weapons and other ancient technologies. Most of them are highly skilled in the sciences and they employ top scientists to aide them in barbarous experiments designed to create new types of living weapons. The warlords also use these experiments to push forward the limits of their own minds and bodies, giving themselves extraordinary powers as a failsafe defence against treason or treachery.

The warlords rule from floating sky palaces, underwater bases, and fortresses buried deep inside of mountains. They surround themselves with legions of genetically engineered servants and hordes of robotic war machines. They also employ the services of elite mercenaries in order to strike anonymously at each other. An ancient compact declares it off limits for a warlord to strike directly at another warlord or his family. Instead they conduct clandestine warfare against the retainers, military installations, and cities of their foes. The precarious balance of power creates a dangerous situation as the various warlords are continuously poised on the brink of an atomic Armageddon. Any warlord that gets too ambitious or arrogant toward his rivals will soon find nuclear missiles aimed at his holdings.

CHAPTER TWO: RACES

Humans

Many players will want to play the human race from the *Dungeons and Dragons 4th Edition Players Handbook.* That is certainly acceptable as most of the world's population is made up of ordinary humans. These people may have tinkered with their DNA or received medical implants but they have not taken things to such an extreme end that they are no longer considered to be fully human. Humans in Altered Earth fit all of the descriptions laid out in the *4E PH.*

Fantasy Races

Altered Earth is a campaign setting that is rooted in pure science fiction. Therefore, the races in this campaign are all based on a science fiction origin. However, there are always going to be players who want to import fantasy races from the *Dungeons and Dragons 4th Edition Players Handbook* and other sources. Many groups have no problem mixing science fiction with fantasy, so there is no reason not to allow this request. If the group insists on sticking to a genre of unadulterated science fiction then these non -human races can be explained as genetically engineered humans or creatures from an alternate dimension.

The addition of a few fantasy races for the player characters does not radically change the style or mood of the setting. A DM has the option, however, of using multiple fantasy elements to completely change the world into a science fantasy setting. In this case elves, dwarves, and other races will not be visitors from another world, but a permanent fixture of the setting and its history. Remember that a DM should introduce other elements from the core rulebooks to accompany the characters that have a fantasy origin. After all, a half-elf ranger is going to need a *+1 magical longbow* and a wizard will need access to ritual components in order to reach their full potential in the game.

Languages

There are a number of unique languages that are spoken in the world of Altered Earth.

Gutter Speak: The term Gutter Speak describes a group of languages rather than a single linguistic form. Descended from the same root language as Universal, the various offshoots of Gutter Speak are the languages of the common people and the downtrodden masses. Each city has developed its own unique dialect of this tongue and this should be reflected when a character takes this language: Gutter Speak (Octagon).
Nomad: The language of the wasteland tribes and scavenger clans. This language is known by few outsiders.
Universal: Derived from an ancient language that has its origins in the early dark ages, Universal is the language of science, scholarship, business, and politics. It is spoken by educated people the world over.

ANDROID

Androids are artificially intelligent robots that can spontaneously achieve self awareness.

RACIAL TRAITS
Average Height: 6'
Average Weight: 250 lb.

Ability Scores: +2 Intelligence; +2 Strength or Dexterity
Size: Medium
Speed: 7 squares
Vision: low light

Languages: Universal, choice of one other.
Skill Bonuses: +2 Endurance, +2 Science, +2 to one other skill
Living Construct: You are a living construct. You don't need to eat, drink, breathe, or sleep. You never have to make Endurance checks to resist the effects of starvation, thirst or suffocation.
Inorganic: You are an artificial life form and thus lack the frailty of organic life. You are immune to poison and disease.
Diagnostic Cycle: Androids do not require sleep; instead they enter a self-diagnostic program. An android only needs 2 hours to gain the benefits of an extended rest.
Self Repair Function: When you spend a healing surge you regain a number of additional hit points equal to your Intelligence modifier.
Skill Program: You have the *skill program* racial power.

Skill Program [Android Racial Power]
Your artificial nervous system can temporarily boost your performance at a variety of tasks.
Encounter
Free Action **Personal**
Effect: Reroll a skill check roll. Use the second roll, even if it's lower.

Androids are sentient machines. Built to serve humans, these sophisticated artificial intelligences sometimes achieve self awareness. This is a confusing and traumatic experience for the newly awakened android. The fully conscious machine is often scarred by this early phase of its rise to sentience. The mind of an awakened android is a fragile thing at best. While most awakeneds can expect to have command of their faculties for many years, almost all androids go completely insane eventually. It has been theorized that the physical hardware of the android's central computer is unable to handle the demands of a sentient mind.

Play an android if you want . . .
 to be a newly sentient life form teetering on the edge between madness and sanity.
 to be a rebel or runaway fighting for freedom
 to play a member of an intelligent and physically capable race that favors the athlete and specialist classes.

Physical Qualities

Androids are built to resemble the humans whom they serve. They have the basics of two legs, two arms, and a head. Most androids are built with human proportions and are roughly the same size as the average person. Other than these restrictions, there is no limit to what an android might look like.

Some androids can completely pass for human at a distance but there is always some distinguishing characteristic that marks them as different. This alteration usually takes the

form of a strange color to the skin, eyes, or hair. Other androids are clearly not human and their machine features are much more obvious. These androids might have hard exterior shells, featureless metal faces, or skeletally thin bodies.

An android's life span can reach far beyond that of a human being's. However, their mental instability causes most androids to meet an untimely fate well before their bodies begin to deteriorate. It is impossible to estimate an android's physical life span with any accuracy.

Playing an Android

Androids are generally bad with emotions and often don't understand the subtleties of social interactions. Having a conversation with an android can try one's patience. They tend to take everything that people say literally and when they do use figures of speech, androids tend to make a botched job of it. As newly sentience beings, some androids tend to have a child like exuberance and an intense curiosity about everything. Other androids are fearful and introspective, unsure of their place in the world. Some of them are intensely rational and unemotional while others are prone to wild mood swings.

Android Characteristics: Awakened androids are an eccentric and curious bunch. There is an inherent neurosis and lack of balance in the typical android personality.

Male Android Names: Double Zero, Gladiator Model-800, Krav -9, Servant 8, Zed Mark Four.

Female Android Names: Brilliance, Chrome, Delta 7, Dazzle, Kara-13, Sequence, Six.

Gender Neutral Names: 01, Alpha, Unit #1256.

Android Adventurers

Three sample android adventurers are described below.

01 is an android athlete who was built for fighting in the blood sport arenas of its home city. As its mind balanced on the brink of self-awareness, 01 began to have doubts about the function it was performing. When it did become fully awakened, the android gladiator was suddenly overwhelmed by feelings of guilt for all of the blood that it has spilled. Confused and extremely distressed, 01 escaped from the fighting arena and stumbled blindly into the sub-levels below the city. It roamed this subterranean world for several years before befriending a group of adventurers who were down in the sewers on a mission.

Kara-13 is an android specialist who awoke one day fully sentient but utterly lacking in any memories. She found herself in an abandoned laboratory in the middle of the wastes. As she explored the lab, Kara began to realize that she was not a human being but an android designed for infiltration and espionage. Curious about the fates of the other K-model androids, Kara-13 ventured across the dangerous wastes to the nearest city, where she put her design to good use as a freelance intelligence agent, mercenary, and thief. Her search for answers about the android project has attracted the wrong sort of attention. Kara-13 banded together with a small group of people on several missions. This partnership offers Kara a degree of security that she would like to make permanent.

Zed Mark Four is an android diplomat who was designed for the entertainment of female customers. He was the ultimate host, designed to react to other people's personalities and say exactly what they wanted to hear. He was so skilled in conversation that most of his patrons never suspected that he was an android. As he neared awakening, Zed started asking his guests some very probing and personal questions. He was curious about what other people thought and felt. His owner thought that this was a malfunction and sent him to the salvage yards. Zed came to his senses in the midst of a pile of broken android parts. Scarred emotionally and physically, he wandered the townships in a state of confusion. It was there that a team of relic hunters took him under their wing. He has repaid them by lending his considerable negotiating talents to their expeditions.