OUR
DUST EARTH
A 24 HOUR RPG ENTRY

BY TODD SANDERS

THIS WORLD IS OLD, SO VERY OLD. IT HAS BEEN OLD SINCE BEFORE MY FATHER'S FATHER'S TIME. CIVILIZATIONS BEYOND COUNT HAVE FALLEN. ARE DUST NOW BENEATH US. WE ARE THEIR LEGACY. THE LAST OF OUR DUST EARTH, GROUND FROM THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY. WE LIVE BENEATH A RED SUN, IN A TWILIGHT WHERE EACH DAY ANOTHER STAR DIMS AND SLEEPS NEVER TO WAKEN AGAIN. WE ARE THE LAST RACES OF MEN.

THE SOPHONT - GENPURE WITHOUT THE TOUCH OF THE MACHINE
THE EIDOLON - MACHINEKIND POST SINGULARITY, AUTONOMOUS
THE BIOMEKA - THE BORDER BETWEEN NEITHER ONE NOR THE OTHER

IN THE LAST OF OUR CITIES WE LIVE AND WORK. WE FORAGE IN THE WILDS, IN THE RUINS FOR PASTTECH, FOR ENERGY SOURCES TO POWER OUR TOOLS AND OURSELVES. WE TRADE, WE WAR, WE LOVE LIKE THOSE BEFORE US, THOUGH WE KNOW WITH EACH PASSING SULLEN DAY THAT OUR SUN WILL EXTINGUISH ITSELF SOON. THAT THE END WILL ONE DAY COME TO A WORLD EXHAUSTED OF RESOURCES, EXHAUSTED OF HISTORY BUT STILL A WORLD OF MEN WHO STRIVE FOR SOMETHING MORE...

A GM DRIVEN RPG FOR A NUMBER OF PLAYERS

REQUIREMENTS
   A NUMBER OF D10 DICE
   CHARACTER SHEETS FOR EACH PLAYER
   RULE BOOK

INTRODUCTION

This is the Earth of the far future. When entropic heat decay is slowly turning off the fiery stars of the universe one by one. This is the Earth with a sun exhausted and sullen. Only a pale reddish light now reaches down across the lands.

With the evaporation of the seas, the continents have become one again. Societies live near the remaining coastlines, trading and farming. Boats sail the sea and this is the main avenue of commerce and culture. Inland there are redoubts, bulwarks of the old knowledge and fortress citadels where genetic purity is enforced and guarded; some scour and forage in the old ruins for surviving tech and items of value living in nomadic settlements.

People live and thrive in their way as civilizations have always done in the face of catastrophe. The spread of nano and femto culture has created 3 distinct races of men - Sophonts, Biomeka and Eidolon - who live and work together though sometimes in tension and conflict. Most of society is concerned with locating the energy to live on and power the remaining cities of the world. This is a world of the Post Singularity with a declining population that uses a science that would seem magic to their ancestors. Nanomachines deriving energy from quantum spin are as bacteria in our time, ubiquitous and quotidian. Those who understand the language of the machine, seemingly arcane spell lore to most of the populace, can command great power. Traders have formed their own guilds and are broken into clans who traffic in the last true natural resource to exploit, other men. The wealthy Sophonts of this time, marked by their use *Highspake* rather than the *Trade* language of the common Biomeka, attempt to remain genpure, with as few nanomachine infections, implants or meka adaptations as possible. Biomeka, those with some machine hybrid DNA are more common and there are various degrees of acceptable levels of this mix of the human and the machine. Lastly the Eidolon, the machine race who long ago developed autonomous thought, mix with the rest of humanity.

This is a world with the clock slowly running down to the end time. The GM and the players should approach this RPG with a sense of fantasy mixing with science fiction. The rules for combat and skill checks are loose. I am more interested in the groups creating whole cloth narratives out of my weft threads and seeing where that will take them.

DICE

I use d10s in many of my games because they are adaptable to both probability curve d20 style combat rolls as well as straight d100 percentage rolls. Players will need a supply of d10s during the narrative, for combat, skill and encounter rolls. For d20 style rolls, 0 = 10, for d100 rolls - 0 1 = 1, 1 0=10, 0 0 = 100. When 1d5 is called for roll 1d10 and divide by 2. When 1d2 is called for roll 1d10 and divide by 5. Round up for both values.

LEGACY CODE

Inspiration for this RPG comes from William Hope Hodgson's THE NIGHT LAND, as well as Michael Moorcock's END OF TIME series, Jack Vance's DYING EARTH, Gene Wolfe's BOOKS OF THE NEW SUN, and the stories comprising Terry Dowlings TOM TYSON saga.

RACES OF MAN

SOPHONT
Sophonts are the most old-style human looking. They are the most free of any nanomachinery in their bodies and minds and this is a point of pride among the upper classes. Though this means they do not possess certain augmentations that would increase their language skills or give them more strength, they make up for this through cunning and an ability to integrate skills learned and see connections those more like the Eidolon might miss. They can use Pasttech recovered from ruins but will often have to employ the services of others to utilize these technologies fully. Those wasteland zones designated "Radiant" (former sites of intense nuclear destruction) will do the most harm to their health and mental states and the more 'genpure' a Sophont is, the more quickly their health will degrade.

BIOMEKA
Most of Earth's population falls into this category, some with a small amount of augmentation, nano-based illnesses and artificial implants, others are nearly Eidolon and retain little of their ancestors' genetic humanity. Biomeka adaptability means they can live most anywhere in this future time and have a greater chance to understand Pasttech and older stores of knowledge. They are conversant in different languages, possessing a wide degree of strengths and skills. Some try and hide their augmented state in order to pass for Sophont. Others feel more at home with Eidolon culture who do not shun them as the upper classes of purer humanity do. Radiant zones can affect Biomeka to varying degrees as can EM zones where magnetic flux and instability degrade nanomachinery.

EIDOLON
Born from the long development of AI, robots, and cyborg, mostly for military purposes, this sentient autonomous machine culture is rarely accepted or trusted by many level of society, they are nevertheless needed as operational interfaces to rediscovered Pasttech equipment and used for labor purposes deemed too dangerous for Sophonts. The Eidolon with traditions and mythologies not known to most, keep to themselves when in the remaining cities of men. While many times stronger and more durable than Sophonts or Biomeka, they must avoid high degree EM Zones which can quickly overcome their machine processing substrates.

RACE GENERATION

Though you may transcend your beginnings, in the Earth of the future you are born into one of the races of men. To begin a player will roll 2d10. The number rolled will determine a rating number for which race the character belongs to:

2 3 4 5 6 7 8	9 10 11 12 13 14 15	16 17 18 19 20
SOPHONT	BIOMEKA	EIDOLON

A roll of a 2 represents a Genpure Sophont without any machine influence and a roll of a 20 is a completely machine based Eidolon character, Depending on a character's rating, certain skill checks, health checks in Radiant and EM Zones may be altered. Players may wish to use a designation code for their character's race/rating - ex: So3, Bk12, Ei18

SKILLS

Next each player rolls 5d10 and divides the total value across 4 different skills used in the game: Cunning, Language, Ability and Strength. If any of the dice show a 1 the player may re-roll those dice again. Different skills will allow players to adapt to situations in the game and enable them to engage those they come in contact with, whether in trade, combat or for gaining information. Each skill number is the character's base skill number (which may be augmented by the use of Pasttech). No base skill number may ever be higher than 15.

CUNNING

The higher a player's cunning, the more likely they are to find a solution to a problem or deal successfully with others in an encounter. If your race is Sophont once you have assigned a number to this skill, add an additional 1d2 (round up) roll value to it.

LANGUAGE

The 4 main languages of the races of men are:

HIGHSPAKE - spoken primarily by Sophonts, this is a rarefied language of the upper classes.

TRADE - the everyday tongue of the people, this language is rich in allusions, puns and mixed meanings. The ability to say one thing and mean another was a useful adaptation during Trade's development.

NANSPAKE - a partially machine coded argot not spoken by many Sophonts in the cities. Useful to those who live near the wastelands and unpopulated areas because there can be some degree of communication between human and machine cultures when trade or cooperation is required.

MACHINE - the primary language of the Eidolon. Those who speak it can utilize and control Pasttech as well as potentially unlock the knowledge of ancient civilizations.

The value assigned to a character's language skill represents their ability to speak a chosen language or languages well. Depending upon a characters race, they are able to speak 1 or more languages:

So1-6 - may only use Highspake
So7-8 - may choose 1 language in addition to Highspake
Bk9-13 - may choose any 2 languages
Bk14-15 - may choose any 3 languages
Ei16-17 - may choose any 2 languages in addition to Machine
Ei18-20 - may choose all 4 languages

ABILITY

This skill determines your ability to use the tools and technology of discovered Pasttech. If your race is Biomeka, once you have assigned a number to this skill, add an additional 1d2 roll value to it. If your race is Eidolon, once you have assigned a number to this skill, add an additional 1d2+1 points to it.

STRENGTH

Strength in this RPG determines your base dice number for combat encounters and general ability to lift objects, scale walls, open doors etc...

For combat encounters, the number assigned, is the number of d10s rolled during combat, the 2 highest rolled always taken for the combat roll value. See more under the Combat section.

CLASSES

Players may now choose one of 6 classes for the purposes of the RPG:

WALKER - Walkers exist mainly on the fringe of society and cities. If this were a true fantasy game they would be the Ranger class. They are ones scouring the wastelands for Pasttech, know the dangers that lurk there and have the most contact with Eidolon.
Skill Bonus: Adds 1d5 (round up) to initial Skill:Strength value.
Skill Bonus: Re-roll one die during ANY player's Combat roll.

TRADER - Traders hold society togther. They deal with both Sophonts and Eidolon and are most often Biomeka. There are honest traders as well as rogues and blackmarketers. They freely roam the land and sea, forming clans, not always derived by family ties.
Skill Bonus: Adds 1d2 to Skill:Language, player also makes an initial d100 roll: 80+ allows player to select an additional language during character creation.
Skill Bonus: Re-roll one player die during any Skill:Cunning roll.

PROCESSOR - Processors are laborers, engineers, soldiers and mercenaries, usually Biomeka (Bk11-15) or Eidolon (Ei16-18). They are employed by all and used for both benign and covert purposes. Processors are often the unseen in society, which gives them an advantage.
Skill Bonus: Adds 1d2 to initial Skill:Cunning value.
Skill Bonus: Re-roll one die during player's Combat roll.

ARBITER - Strictly a Sophont class, though enterprising Biomekas (Bk9) with a great deal of cunning and few visible augmentations or implants may have bribed their way into this strata of society, this is the de facto ruling class of Earth. its lawyers, governmental representatives, diplomats and generals.
Skill Bonus: Adds 1d5 (round up) to initial Skill:Cunning value.

SCHOLAR - Scholars delve deep into the secrets of the past, its people and its technology. They may speak Machine proficiently and have the ability to understand and control Pasttech. It is rumored they even possess the knowledge to control Eidolon programming. Scholars may be of any race.
Skill Bonus: Adds 1d2 to language, player also makes an initial d100 roll: 60+ allows player to select an additional language during character creation.
Skill Bonus: Adds 1d5 (round up) to initial Skill:Ability value.

ELDER - Elders also may be from any of the races of men. They are the ones who remember what brought mankind to this point. They often know secret ways through the wastelands and cities and understand the hidden intentions of those they deal with.
Skill Bonus: Adds 1d5 (round up) to initial Skill:Cunning value.
Skill Bonus: Adds 1d2 to initial Skill:Ability value.

HEALTH

For a character's initial health (HP), the number assigned equals 5d10 rolls (re-rolling all 1s and 2s) and adding the additional values:

Bk14-15 - roll an additional 1d10 and add that number to the character's HP
Ei16-17 - roll an additional 2d10, choosing the single highest number and add it to the character's HP
Ei18-20 - roll an additional 2d10 and add that combined number to the character's HP

EXPERIENCE

At the end of a game session, whether the scenario was successfully resolved or not, each player may roll 1d5 splitting the value into 2 numbers, adding each to the two skills they most benefitted from during the game, or they may add the original rolled value to their current HP. No base skill number may ever be higher than 15.

SKILL CHECKS

The most common resolution to any task or encounter, for trade or information, is a skill check. When a skill check is called for consult the character sheet for the base skill number of the character, adding any augments or Pasttech value gained, then roll as directed below. Players must roll **below** a character's base skill number to succeed in the skill check. When testing a skill a 0/0 result is always a critical failure. A roll of a 1/1 is always a critical success.

Cunning:
Roll 2d10, reroll for any ties to skill check.

Language:
If character does not speak the given language in the situation
Roll d100 and consult the following table (adding base skill number + any augmentations):

Skill number 1-4 - roll is less than 90%: character has misunderstood, misspoken or misread the situation
Skill number 5-8 - roll is less than 60%: character has misunderstood, misspoken or misread the situation
Skill number 9-12 - roll is less than 40%: character has misunderstood, misspoken or misread the situation
Skill number 13-15 - roll is less than 60%: character has misunderstood, misspoken or misread the situation

If character does speak the given language in the situation
Roll 2d10, reroll any ties to skill check.

Ability:
When identifying or using unfamiliar Pasttech item or interface
Roll 2d10, reroll any ties to identify/understand/utilize item

If the skill check fails roll d100 roll and consult the following table to determine if Pasttech item or interface is dangerous:

Roll is between 50-80%: character is injured 1d5 HP by item
Roll is between 20-49%: character is injured 1d2 HP by item
Roll is between 0-19%: if character is So2-8, character is injured 1HP by item

Strength:
Roll 2d10, reroll for any ties to skill check. If player possesses and Pasttech item that adds additional strength and the skill check roll fails, roll d100 roll and if the roll is less than 20% the item has broken and will need to be discarded or repaired.

COMBAT

Combat rules have been kept loose and flexible. The GM should guide any combat encounters in the session.

Ranged weapons have initiative during combat. In all other situations higher strength base skill number has initiative during combat. In situations where there are more than 2 individuals involved in combat, players and GM must specify who is in individual combat.

Any characters and GM controlled individuals/groups involved in combat roll d10 dice equal to their total strength value (adding base skill number + any augmentations/weapons). From these rolls, each character chooses the 2 highest

values for their total combat roll value. In the event of a tie, remove the single highest die from the individual rolls and use the next 2 highest values.

Compare values and damage to HP is taken by whomever has the lowest combat roll value. If combat is hand to hand, consult the diagrammatic tables at the end of the rules for base HP damage.

Weapons will have their own damage ratings and it is up to the GM to define the particulars.
Pasttech armor/weapons may remove rolled dice, add or subtract from totals or cause rerolls to occur.

ENCOUNTERS
Below is a small sampling of the kind of groups/individuals and dangers the player group may encounter. It is left to the GM to define specific strengths, HP, combat values and specifics for any encounter.

GENPURES - Genpures are a fanatical 'end of the world' cult devoted to genetic purity. They are strictly So2 and refuse all augmentation and machine adaptations. They will refuse entry into their protected citadels to any Eidolon within the player group. They will only deal with the least augmented Sophonts among the players. They assiduously guard all military Pasttech and will pay large sums for more.

FEMTOSWARM - These are disassembler clouds of EM damaged femtomachines. They present a danger primarily to Sophonts. If attacked by a swarm, the character has a percentage chance of developing an augment illness and their base character rating number may change. This can mean a loss of prestige or position in society. Consult the diagrammatic tables at the end of the rules. The character attacked must make a d100 roll check, rolling above the listed number to remain unaffected.

MANSCHLAGERS - Low intelligence but extremely dangerous military Eidolon left from ancient wars. These units should be avoided at all costs. They possess infrared and ultraviolent sensory equipment as well as motion detection and a variety of bladed and concussive/spectrum-based weaponry. Characters who possess Nanspake language knowledge may be able to temporarily disable these machines but it is an extremely risky proposition.

CRYOSLEEPERS - Often found in ruins of arcologies or in deep underground bunkers and cave networks, these are human travellers from older civilizations. When found they are usually enslaved and forced to work in Sophont strongholds repairing Pasttech. Pasttech items may often be found near or on them.

PASTTECH - Any technology from an older civilization, often beneficial to the owner. Pasttech may include translation devices, weapons and personal armor, codexes, disks and quartz storage matrices as well as medicines and diagnostic/healing equipment. Potentially dangerous to identify, these items also may require power sources no longer easily obtainable.

ROGUES - Roving pirate bands of Biomeka, often with ties to black marketeers and slave traders.

THROWBACKS - Sophonts and Biomeka with severe genetic abnormalities, often due to close proximity to EM Zones during birth. Some are rumored to possess psychic powers and dangerous virulent augment illnesses.
RADIANT ZONES - Wasteland zones with high degrees of radiation due to past nuclear bombardment and conflict. Potentially lethal and extremely dangerous to Sophonts and lower rating Biomeka. Consult the diagrammatic tables at the end of the rules for HP loss while travelling in these areas.

EM ZONE - Wasteland zones with high degree of electromagnetic disturbance due to past Eidolon purge weaponry by Sophonts and their ancestors. Potentially lethal and extremely dangerous to Eidolon and higher rating Biomeka. Consult the diagrammatic tables at the end of the rules for HP loss while travelling in these areas.

These are some brief suggested scenario start points for a GM to develop a game session. GMless groups of players may also use these story elements as initial narrative ideas:

a. Rumors of a cache of cryosleepers in the Barrens has come to the attention of Sophont factions in the capitol city of Giliath

b. Rogue Eidolon, subverted by someone unknown are roaming the wastelands, killing travellers

c. A delegation of Biomeka traders is touring the coastal settlements and cities to open up new trade routes

d. Sophont Scholars hire the player group to recover recently discovered Pasttech in a ruined Arcology

e. A Sophont daughter of the ruling magistrate of Osprey has fallen in love with an Eidolon and run away with it. The magistrate hires the player group to bring her back unharmed and unaugmented
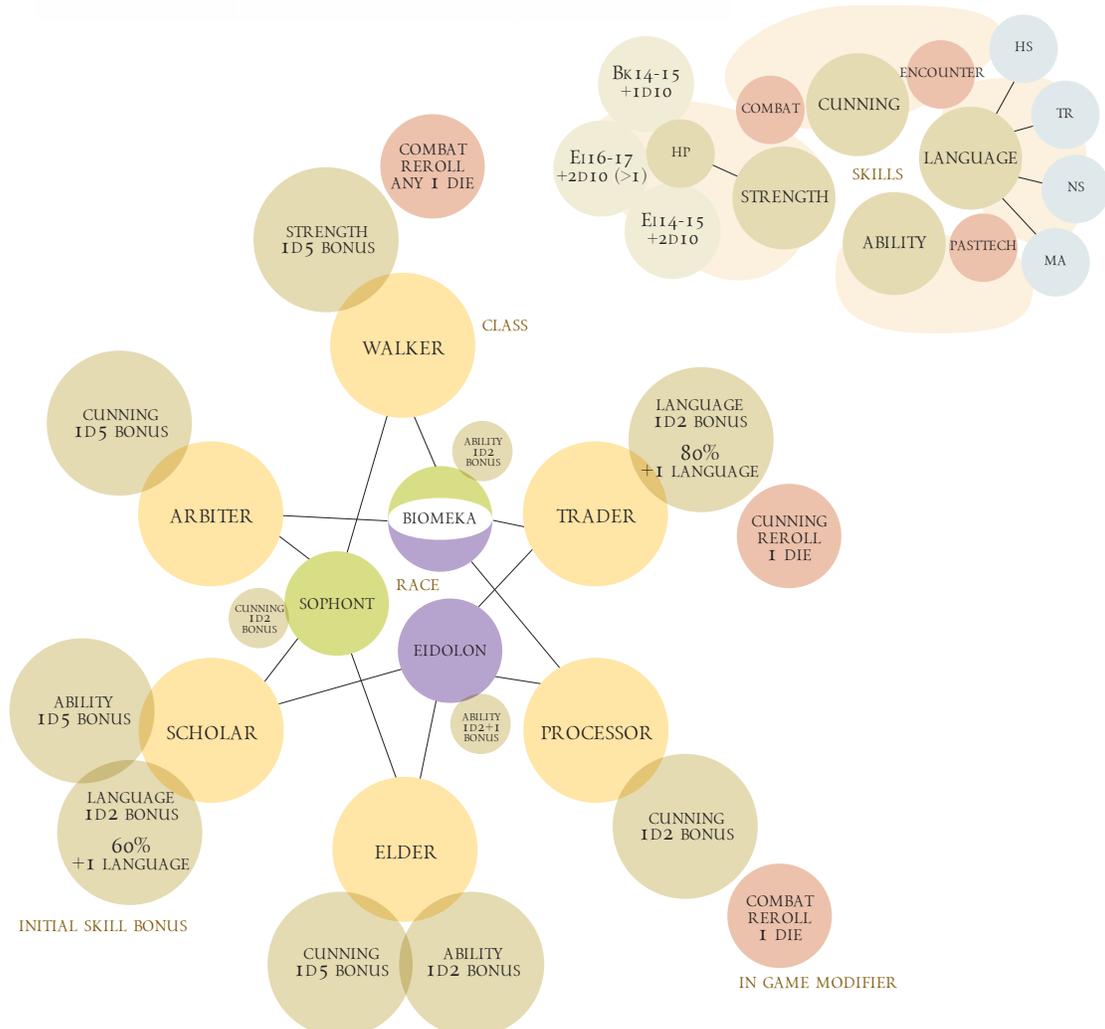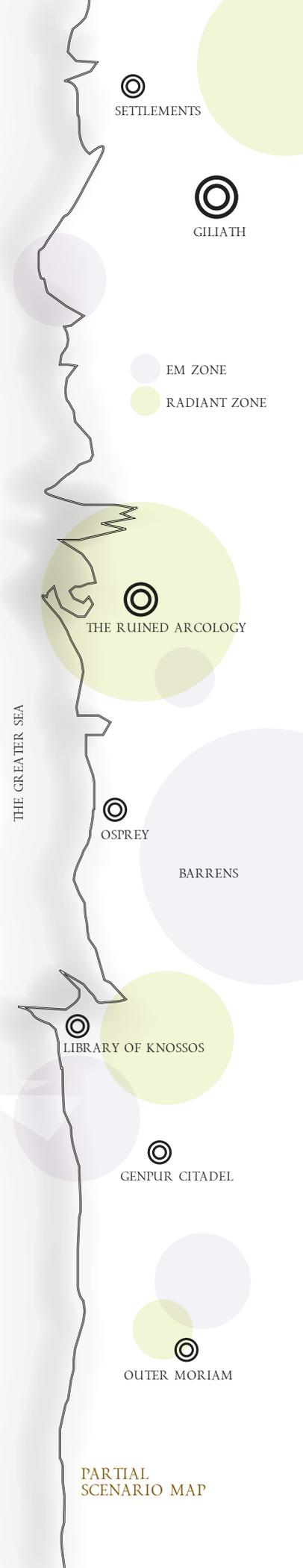
OUR DUST EARTH - DIAGRAMATIC TABLES

2 3 4 5 6 7 8	9 10 11 12 13 14 15	16 17 18 19 20	**2D10** (RATING #)
SOPHONT (SO_X)	BIOMEKA (BK_X)	EIDOLON (EI_X)	**RACE OF MEN** RATING ABBREVIATION

LANGUAGES
- HIGHSPAKE (HS)
- TRADE (TR)
- NANSPAKE (NS)
- MACHINE (MA)

HS	HS+1	ANY 2	ANY 3	ANY 2 +MA	ALL 4

ZONE DAMAGE (-HP/DAY)

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	RADIANT ZONE
0	-1	-2	-3	-4	EM ZONE

SKILL CHECK: ABILITY
% CHANCE FEMTOSWARM LOWERS RACE RATING # -1

90	70	50	40	30	20	10	0

1/0 OR 1/1 OR 0/0 = BINARY CODE = MASTERY   IDENTIFY PASTTECH ITEM

COMBAT
BASE HP DAMAGE

1	1D5-1	1D5+1	1D5

SKILLS

- BK14-15 +1D10
- EI16-17 +2D10 (>1) — HP
- EI14-15 +2D10
- COMBAT
- CUNNING
- STRENGTH
- ENCOUNTER
- LANGUAGE — HS, TR, NS, MA
- ABILITY — PASTTECH

CLASS / RACE — INITIAL SKILL BONUS

- COMBAT REROLL ANY 1 DIE
- STRENGTH 1D5 BONUS
- CUNNING 1D5 BONUS
- WALKER
- ABILITY 1D2 BONUS
- ARBITER
- BIOMEKA
- CUNNING 1D2 BONUS
- SOPHONT
- EIDOLON
- TRADER
- LANGUAGE 1D2 BONUS / 80% +1 LANGUAGE
- CUNNING REROLL 1 DIE
- ABILITY 1D5 BONUS
- SCHOLAR
- ABILITY 1D2+1 BONUS
- PROCESSOR
- LANGUAGE 1D2 BONUS / 60% +1 LANGUAGE
- ELDER
- CUNNING 1D2 BONUS
- COMBAT REROLL 1 DIE
- CUNNING 1D5 BONUS
- ABILITY 1D2 BONUS

INITIAL SKILL BONUS

IN GAME MODIFIER

PARTIAL SCENARIO MAP

- SETTLEMENTS
- GILIATH
- EM ZONE
- RADIANT ZONE
- THE RUINED ARCOLOGY
- THE GREATER SEA
- OSPREY
- BARRENS
- LIBRARY OF KNOSSOS
- GENPUR CITADEL
- OUTER MORIAM

CHARACTER

CLASS

2 3 4 5 6 7 8	9 10 11 12 13 14 15	16 17 18 19 20
SOPHONT	BIOMEKA	EIDOLON

OUR DUST EARTH

BASE SKILL #   AUGMENTS

CUNNING   ⬤ HIGHSPAKE (HS)

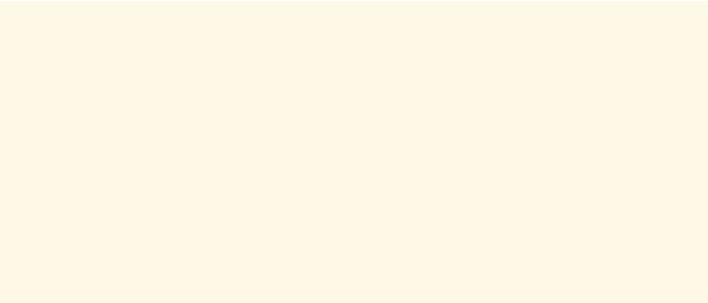LANGUAGE   ⬤ TRADE (TR)

                   ⬤ NANSPAKE (NS)
ABILITY
                   ⬤ MACHINE (MA)
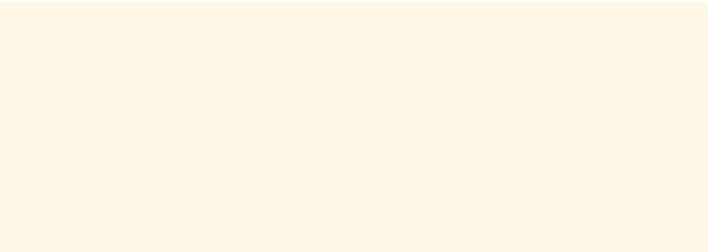
STRENGTH

COMBAT DICE #   MODIFIERS

BASE DAMAGE

HP
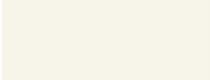
PASTTECH/FOUND ITEMS/POSSESSIONS

ADDITIONAL AUGMENTATIONS/IMPLANTS

SPECIAL POWERS/AUGMENT ILLNESSES

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/BACKGROUND