

Corrosion is a role-playing game of technological monstrosities. Machines stir from quiescence, propelled by evil. They stalk, terrorize and exterminate humans. Your characters are their human victims – and whether they run, hide, or fight back, they will come to realize what the machines MEAN...

Technological monsters One participant will be the moderator, charged with designing and controlling a machine monster. This entity will terrorize characters created and controlled by the remaining players. The moderator will pick a technology to manifest as a monster. Most significant technologies have potential as a locus of terror. You'll want to focus on technologies that can scare when transformed into an evil creature – and that can challenge and disrupt the ways that people look at the world. In other words, your monster will need to be both physically frightening and dangerous as well as socially and ideologically dangerous. Take a kitchen appliance like an oven. It can scare and threaten: breathing out gas to kill unsuspecting residents or swallowing and cooking them. Since stoves and their corollaries, the home cooked meal and domestic labor, play a symbolic role in debates over the role of women in families and society and the changing pace of modern life, a monstrous oven also has potential as an ideological threat.

To help choose a technology, consider a few questions. Does the technology look ominous? When you picture it moving, or re-sized, or modified, the thought should freak you out a bit – not make you laugh. Can the technology be dangerous? If used or misused or 'animated' in some supernatural way the technology should be able to harm humans physically and psychologically. Finally, has the technology had an impact on society, and is it a subject of any societal controversies? You don't have to pick a well-known type of machinery, but your choice should at least have the potential to shape modern life in some way.

Next, note down what your technology will do that is monstrous and scary. How will it threaten the characters? Is it a cell phone that grows teeth, burrows into its owner's head, and releases every conversation ever spoken through it to reverberate simultaneously inside its victims skull? A television that draws viewers in through the screen into dangerous programs? A personal computer that grows jealous when its owner is away and uses digital networks and data to spy on and control its human owner? If you want, also decide on a force or motivation that transforms the monster from an ordinary piece of technology into a dangerous animated killer. Finally, write down one type of physical harm that the monster is immune or resistant to, and one particular vulnerability or weakness.

Once you have a short description of the monster's underlying technology, the threat it poses, and its immunities/ vulnerabilities, rate the thing between 1 and 5 to show how scary it is in the game's four categories of fear: (1) Stomach: how grotesque does it look/ smell/ sound? (2) Nerves: how shocking are its actions? (3) Paranoia: how sinister and far-reaching are its intentions? (4) Worldview: how symbolically potent are its underlying social implications? Also rate the monster between 1 and 10 in its fighting ability (how easily can it harm or kill humans and how difficult is it to destroy the monster?).



corrosion

machines change minds

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a game by mark vallianatos

Sample Monster

Technological source: birth control, such as a pack of condoms, pack of pills, or IUD.

Threat: the demonic contraceptive can create and control physical children that might have been conceived if birth control had not been employed. One child of between 3 and 13 years of age can be summoned into being for each act of intercourse performed using the evil contraceptives. These 'might have been' children at first are only glimpsed in crowds or briefly interact with the characters, who will find them faintly familiar. Before long the children will stalk and try to harm the characters (perhaps after ingratiating themselves with characters).

Fighting: 1 for every 3 toddlers (3-5 year olds); 1 for every two 6-8 year olds; 1 per each 9-13 year olds.

Immunity: public authorities (other people will sometimes be able to see or talk to the children but public authorities like police officers, social service agents etc. will not be able to detain or institutionalize them).

Vulnerability: having unprotected intercourse will eliminate one of the created children. Conceiving a child will dissolve all of them.

Stomach: 2 (normal kids—but they look like you and your lover)

Nerves: 3 (fairly creepy to have a pack of kids after you);

Paranoia: 3 (are they clones? Do they want to be your friend or murder you?)

Worldview: 4 (how does this impact how your character feels about birth control, sex, parenting, population growth, etc.)

Characters Before creating your own character, talk to the other players about how all the characters will be connected. Why are they facing the same horror? Are they friends or family members? Do they live or work in the same building? Have they come together by chance (guests in a motel, strangers on a train)? Are they far-flung but linked by communication or shared interests? Once you agree on a context, each player can come up with a character concept, and flesh it out with a few biographical details: name, age, gender, job, etc. Players should also write down one thing that your character is especially afraid of and one common fear that doesn't affect the character as much as it does most people.

Corrosion is set by default in the present, though you can play in any society that is being impacted by technological change. The moderator should pick specific locations that provide opportunities for interesting and scary scenes. As an example, for a two player game the players choose to be a young couple on their honeymoon in Hawaii. The wife will be particularly afraid of heights but about drowning since she is a strong swimmer. The husband will be fearful of insects but fine with the dark.

Next, create a portrait of your character (either a head shot or a full length portrayal) by drawing a portrait on a piece of paper, cutting a picture out of a magazine, printing a image from the internet, or reproducing a picture from a book. If you have the materials, glue the picture to piece of cardboard or manila folder so that the pieces will be easier to handle.

Turn the picture over and draw a grid on the back so that the picture is divided into 9 approximately equal-sized squares or rectangles. Cut along the

lines and reassemble the 9 pieces picture side up. (Figure A).

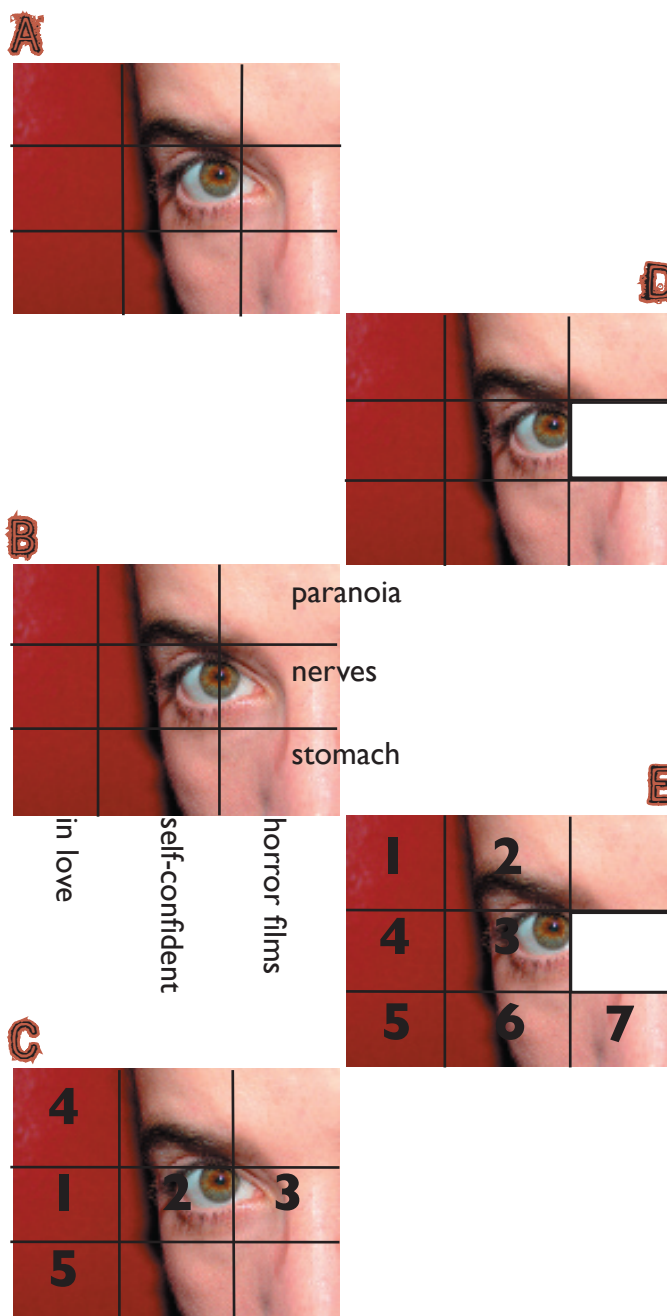
This puzzle/ portrait is a visual map of your character's capacities – especially the character's mental state. The horizontal rows each symbolize how a character deals with a different kind of fear. The top row represents paranoia, the character's reaction to dread, the unknown, and the suggested. The middle row represents nerves, the character's reaction to shock. The bottom row represents stomach, the character's reaction to the grotesque. Characters' worldview, the solidity of a character's conception of reality and their ideological outlook, is measured differently (see the changing minds rules below). The three vertical columns each represent a quality or experience that the character can draw upon to help cope with fear. Players choose these qualities/ experiences for their characters. For example, the newlywed wife character gets the qualities: in love; self-confident; and all those horror movies she has watched growing up. (Figure B).

Terror When a character is faced with a frightening situation, the moderator will roll dice (more dice the scarier the situation is). Players will also roll dice and try to get a result that is equal to or higher than the moderator's roll. The moderator decides if the fear being faced primarily affects a character's paranoia, nerves, or stomach. Roll a number of dice equal to the monster's relevant rating (or lower if the monster has not fully revealed its horrifying nature) plus 1-3 dice based on how frightening the setting and situational details are. (For example, if one of the spooky kids runs after the wife holding her husband's severed head, it's going to be scarier that the kid alone.)

Players roll one dice for each face-up piece of the relevant row of their character's portrait. Players can also roll additional dice by drawing upon any of the portrait columns that intersect with the row being tested. This will give players two or one extra dice. A player can use qualities to gain extra dice if they can justify why a given quality will help their character cope with the frightening situation at hand. Character receive 1 extra die if the situation involves the fear that they are not worried about and they lose 1 die if the situation involves their worst fear.

For example, the characters are snorkeling at Tunnels beach on Kauai. As the wife watches a turtle glide past, she feels a splash by her side where her husband is floating. She turns and sees that he is being dragged down to deeper waters by four children, their soaked full length pants and shirts clinging to their thin bodies. The moderator rolls 5 nerves dice (three for the monster's nerves rating plus 2 for the shock of seeing her beloved in danger (if they weren't in such an idyllic setting the moderator would have granted 3 situational dice). The wife's player calls upon her 'in love' quality and rolls 5 dice: 3 dice for the face-up pieces on the middle row of the portrait plus 2 dice for the intersecting quality plus 1 bonus die since the character is comfortable in the water. (Figure C).

Add together the dice rolled by the moderator and compare to the sum of the player's dice roll. If a player loses a nerves or stomach fear roll by between 1-6, turn over one piece from the relevant row of their character's portrait. Turn over 2 pieces if you lose by between 7-12, and turn 3 pieces if you lose by 13 or more. The player chooses which piece(s) to flip. Until the



piece is turned back over, the player can not roll a dice from an upside-down piece. Paranoia rolls follow the same numerical scale, but when players lose the rolls, the moderator takes one or more pieces. In future fear tests (all tests, not just paranoia tests) the moderator rolls the dice for that piece and adds it to the fear result. When a piece is turned over or taken, it disrupts the connection between rows and the intersecting motivation column. In our example, the moderator rolls a 20 and the player gets an 18. The player has to turn one piece from the wife's middle row and flips the rightmost piece. (Figure D). Until the piece is turned back, the player cannot use the horror films quality to boost paranoia, nerves, or stomach.

Fighting monsters Monsters can physically attacks a character and characters can attacks monster.s Fighting is resolved by the moderator rolling the monster's fighting dice vs. the player rolling their character's health dice. A character's physical health equals the maximum number of face up pieces in either either of the two diagonals of the grid. If the player can make the case that nerves or stomach would help them fight in the situation, then they can add one or two dice from the relevant row that intersects the health diagonal. When a character's health is reduced to zero, they fall unconscious. Any subsequent physical harm will kill them. When a monster's fighting rank is reduced to zero it is immobilized and can be destroyed.

Changing minds Whenever a **player** has a 'eureka' moment on behalf of their character, realizing that the monster confronting them is raising an ideological issue, player and moderator roll a worldview test to see if and how the character is impacted. Worldview represents the solidity of a character's conception of reality and their ideological outlook. A character's worldview score equals the maximum sequence of face up pieces that can be joined by moving vertically or horizontally along the grid, without touching any piece more than once or crossing over a missing square. This value ranges from 0 – 9. (Figure E shows that the wife character with one piece of nerves turned over would have a worldview rating of 7).

For worldview tests the moderator rolls the monster's worldview rating plus 1-3 bonus dice. The player facing the test decides how many bonus dice to give the moderator based on how seriously their character's mental outlook was impacted by the revelation or realisation that sparked the test. The player meanwhile rolls a number of dice equal to their character's worldview score. If the player loses the roll, flip over pieces following the rules given in the terror section.

If a character loses all their worldview (when all pieces are flipped or taken), the character has cracked and is removed from the game.

Getting better When a character loses one or two pieces of nerves or stomach, they will get better as soon as they are away from the frightening situation. The first will return after 10 minutes of rest/calm; the second returns after an hour. 1-2 lost pieces of paranoia or health will also get better but will take a day and a week of calm/rest. If a character is reduced to zero pieces in any of these categories they will require medical/psychological intervention, type and duration to be determined by the moderator. Worldview cannot be regained independently (although as nerves etc. are restored worldview will rise).