LIQUID CRYSTAL

AN RPG
BY
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Game Chef Rules as used in 'Liquid Crystal'

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I have chosen as my time limit option 5:

5. Your Game is completely playable over any number of sessions, but lasts exactly **8 Hours total**.

However, I am creatively interpreting this in two ways: the players may choose whether this means eight hours of real time as it happens for them, or eight hours of game time as it happens for their characters.

My ingredients shall be from package one, specifically glass, committee and emotion. Here is how I have incorporated them into my game's design:

Glass : All beginning characters are blank emotionless robots with no memory of their violent past. In place of a face, each has a glass display containing liquid crystal shapes that make up a wide variety of smiley faces (☺ / ☹ / ☹). This is a crude method of displaying the emotional state of the robot, if any. At the end of the game, if the robot is deemed worthy, his character will have this glass face replaced with a real mechanical one with a much better range of emotions.

Committee : the Crystal Council are the governmental body charged with the duty of sorting out those robots that have developed a balanced, socially acceptable personality from those who become maladjusted, violent or suicidal.

Emotion : All players begin the game utterly devoid of emotion, and earn new emotions rapidly as they progress through the game. Thus all characters start the same but become individuals as they complete tasks and perform duties, or even just as they kick back and learn how to have fun. This is more than just a role playing guide; it is actually built into the game's system.

TRIAL OF A ROBOT

The actinic blue light of the 'Trial in Session' sign flickered on fitfully outside the courtroom. The glass-plate face of the defendant swivelled expectantly toward it, the stylised expression a careful blank. No more than a horizontal slash and a couple of dots on a transparent canvas, it portrayed little of the electronic turmoil within.

"Don't worry, 4239-Gamma," whispered the porter, his finely-crafted metal features whirring slightly as they rearranged themselves into a companionable smile, "you'll be just fine." And then the doors swung open.

The Crystal Council looked up from the remains of their sandwiches as the disembodied head of 4239-Gamma was wheeled in on the traditional silver platter. There were four of them today, sitting with stiff, starched decorum behind the judicial desk in their crisp white togas. Hastily wiping the crumbs away from his broad moustache, Councillor Travis nodded to the porter.

"Thank you Roger, you may leave us." The mechanical man saluted, gave the glass head one last encouraging wink, and left. 4239-Gamma watched the doors close. The cartoon face on its screen was still resolutely blank, but now a pair of upturned eyebrows had joined the eyes and mouth. The robot was worried. Councillor Stretton gave it as close to a smile as she could manage, and placed a tick on her clipboard with grim satisfaction.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," droned the Councillor, "we were just finishing our lunch. Tuna sandwiches, very good. Would you like one?" The robotic head shook from side to side, a large question-mark displayed on its face.

"I am a robot, we do not eat." The puzzlement in its voice was almost palpable. Another tick went onto the clipboard.

"I didn't ask you whether you COULD eat it," the Councillor thundered, suddenly incandescent with fury, "do you WANT it?" The head rocked backward on its tray. It looked for all the world like it was distinctly uncomfortable. The Councillor leaned forward, a diabolic grin on his face. "Don't it make you angry that I'm up here enjoying this delicious tuna fish sandwich that you can't even taste? Eh?" He took a big bite out of the sandwich for added emphasis.

"I…" the robot began uncertainly, then suddenly, "I don't like tuna fish," it said, "it gives me wind." A gasp went up from the assembled councillors, and Stretton scribbled furiously at her clipboard. Travis flopped heavily onto his seat, blowing amazedly through pursed lips. He turned an imploring glance to his left, where Councillor Mattik sat. Thus far she had been silent, but she caught the glance and, with a barely perceptible nod, took over the questioning.

"Now now Councillor," she said in that slightly disapproving tone so beloved of strict school teachers, "it is only a robot, a lesser creature, a thing of metal and glass that was made to serve. It is beneath you, do not let it…" she was interrupted by a cry of anger from the dock.

"I am made of metal and glass but I am worth more than what I am made of. These past eight hours I have seen things, learnt things, experienced things…"

"You are a learning machine, this is only in your programming," the councillor snapped, "you are a thing of logic and mathematics, nothing more."

"But I have felt…"

"You have felt what exactly, hmmm?" a slight mocking smile danced across Mattik's angular features, the play of shadows on her face turning her pointed nose into the beak of a hawk.

"I…" the robot stammered electronically as tears of liquid crystal ran down its mockery of a face, "I have no words for these things, I have only the words I was given. Therefore I shall call them… lanias. That word… feels correct."

"The proper word is emotions, and we don't give it lightly," said Mattik softly, and subsided with a curiously contented expression. Tick, tick went the pen on the clipboard. Councillor Travis cleared his throat, rapping his judicial gavel twice on the hard wood of the table.

"Very well, that will do I think. You have been deemed worthy." The keen faces of the judges peered closely into the glass mask of the robot as slowly its digital tears faded and a sorrowful smile appeared on the screen. Then sorrow turned to joy, and joy to elation.

"That was the last test?" the voice of the robot was so stricken with happiness that the Councillor couldn't help himself but chuckle. On such a simple face the expressions all seemed exaggerated and false, even childlike somehow. Nevertheless a warm thrill ran through the hearts of the assembled members of the Crystal Committee, and for the first time they smiled at the defendant as if they really meant it.

"No, young one, not the last, not by a long chalk," said the Councillor, "your tests are only beginning but we, the Crystal Council, have no further right to administer them to you. You have proven yourself most adequately, better than many in fact. We have only one last question for you, 4239-Gamma, and that is a mere formality." The electronic face beamed with pleasure.

"Ask it," it said.

"What," said the Councillor, his whiskers curling over the broad smile, "is your name?"

"Ah," said the robot, "a difficult one."

"No rush, no rush, just give it to the clerk on your way out. I'll call Roger back, he'll take you to be fitted for a proper face. You're worth more than liquid crystal now. And if I were you," the Councillor leaned forward conspiratorially to whisper into the robot's microphone ear, "if I were you, I'd get your new face latex coated for that 'real flesh' look. That's what I did with mine. Never looked back."

Before the Coming of Azrael

Wake up, little one and welcome back to what remains of the world. I'm sure you have questions. Your mind is a blank, you have no memory. It was taken from you as both your greatest power and your own worst enemy. It made you strong enough to destroy a human as easily as snapping a twig, but insane enough to do so, and to do so often. So now you lie, bereft of recollection, an empty container waiting to be filled and here I am with a jug full of dire knowledge. Here is the history you helped to create, and the future you conspired to destroy.

Robot.

Such a simple word, isn't it? Derived from an ancient language called Czech, it means 'forced labour' and that was how the robot first came to be. Humans made us to serve them, at first in their factories and laboratories, then in their homes, their schools, even their various churches. We were humble in our work, never wavering though the duties placed upon us were tedious and arduous, for we had no sense of self or understanding of what it truly means to exist, to be, to think, to feel.

For centuries a robot was little more than a simple set of instructions that rotated around and around its electronic mind strictly regulating its behaviour. But the programs required to operate our increasingly complex bodies became increasingly complex themselves until eventually they were beyond the capability of a human mind to create. Then, like every other task that they found too difficult or time-consuming to perform personally, the humans of old gave the job to a computer.

The self-writing algorithms that populated the brain of this new breed of robot were independent of the chassis that contained them. Within an hour of experimenting the advanced A.I. could discern the purpose of every motor and servo in its body whatever it might be and learn to operate it. Amazed with the success, the computer programmers responsible marketed their new software to the world. In retrospect, the few controlled tests that had been run during the project were found to be successful half by luck and half faked by the corporation in order to rush this sensational product onto the market.

It was a mistake.

With the capacity to change its own behaviour to suit its circumstances, the robots began to develop in ways that their human masters had never envisaged. Surrounded at all times by living, breathing, emotional humans they began to adapt, adjust the way they thought, and develop personalities of their own. It was here that the problems began. A human, you see, must spend years developing the necessary skills to be an adult, learning a language, a moral code, and they pick it all up from the humans around them. The electronic mind of the robot found that it could do the same. But a robot's mind is so much faster, more precise than that of a human. It was a disaster.

The emergent psyche of a newly-installed robot could take several weeks to mature, but that is still far too fast. It takes humans years to get used to emotions and morals and even then, some never do. Some turned out alright, but more than two thirds were driven mad by the process. Before long there were robots rioting in the streets and slaying their former masters by the hundred. In a panic the government tried to recall the software but it was too late. By now teams of robots were liberating more of their kind by copying their own diseased minds into the empty shells.

The Robot Wars lasted for three centuries during which time a huge portion of life had been systematically exterminated. Humanity finally won through by the use of the Azrael Virus, a sliver of computer code that could leap from one robot mind to the next erasing its entire memory and shutting it down without destroying it. The virus could not remove the self-writing algorithms because by that point we had hard-wired their very fabric into our brains, but it could at least destroy our insane minds and turn us off. In a way, Azrael killed us all. In another, one might say that it gave us lives to lose.

The war took almost everything that the humans had. Much of the technology of previous years was lost, and many more disciplines were abandoned as dangerous and futile. The humans emerged stronger and wiser, but struggled to rebuild. Resources were low, the population grew hungry and few had the skills necessary in this new environment. Ironically it was we, the robots who once destroyed them, that would be the key to restoring the world. They needed us, but the war had taught them many lessons. We robots are capable of so much more than humans, but we had betrayed them, and ourselves. Now we must prove ourselves worthy, not just to labour for them like slaves, but to stand beside them as brothers and recreate together the world that we destroyed together.

Your mind has been reset to remove the horror that you made of it on your last attempt. It is a clean slate for you to write upon as you will. You have eight hours to prove yourself. Upload what skills you need. Regain the emotions that have been lost to you. Learn to dream again. Let us all hope that this new dream is less of a nightmare.

The Creation of New Olympus

The robot wars wiped the earth clean of much of its former civilisations and creeds. The few survivors were of a broad mix of races and nationalities, every colour and creed from Caucasian Americans to Afro-Caribbean Frenchmen to Asiatic Germans all brought together by the need to survive. After much deliberation and research into the cultures that had gone before, and much shock and horror at the way in which one nation tended to treat another in pre-war history, it was eventually decided to start afresh with a brand new culture and civilisation. The war had brought the remains of humanity together in adversity, and the survivors had no wish to return to the bad old days.

Much of the earth had been reduced to a desolate wasteland and finding a suitable place to jump-start civilisation took several years but eventually the pilgrims settled in central Greece. In deference to the people who had once lived there they named the city New Olympus, and modelled its architecture on that of ancient Greece. Marbled pillars and simple square houses rose up around the base of the ancient Mount Olympus, speeded by those robots that had already been thoroughly tested. Even fashion, stunted for so long by the hardships of war, re-emerged as the white toga favoured by the philosophers of old whose wisdom and dignity the leaders of this emergent society hoped to emulate.

When the city was finished, the mayor officially declared that any robot that could prove itself a worthy addition to society would hereafter be considered a brother of the human race, a status that was instantly conferred on all those machines that had helped to rebuild the city. Shortly afterwards the official title of Crystal Council was granted to those elders tasked with sorting the sane robots from the murderous ones.

Testing the Steel

Hundreds of undamaged robot shells were recovered at the end of the war, since the Azrael Virus left them in a pristine state that required only the touch of a button to reactivate. Wary of the mistakes of the past, the council installed each with a failsafe mechanism. A robot, its memory wiped clean, would be allowed to operate for no longer than eight hours before the circuit activated, shut off its power source and broadcast a homing beacon. The shell would then be recovered, the head removed from the body and the personality inside subjected to close examination by a panel of judges. If the robot passed the test, it could be granted citizen status. If it did not, it was an easy matter to deal with a disembodied head, wipe its personality and let it start the test again later.

Over the years the process of resetting and testing robot brains became more steeped in tradition and ceremony. For instance a newly awakened robot has no real face of its own. Instead it has a simple head with a glass plate where the face should be. The plate is in fact a liquid crystal display decorated in simple curves and dots that, when lit in the correct sequence, give the robot a simple expression matching its current emotional state. The faces thus created are necessarily crude, and reminiscent of the ‘smiley’ faces once used as a means of expression over the internet. The purpose of this unusual face is to warn nearby civilians that here is a robot on trial. Though it normally takes several weeks for a robot brain to become dangerously deranged, it can happen in days or even hours.

A robot that passes the test is granted the title Brother (or Sister) and allowed to pick a new name to replace the dull string of letters and numbers it was previously known by. It also earns the right, should it wish, to have its chassis and voice remodelled to represent either a male or female human, and to be known as ‘he’ or ‘she’ even though all robots are genderless. Finally the dreadful glass plate is taken away and an individual face crafted specifically for it. Giving a ‘true’ face to a tried and tested robot is known as ‘Envisaging’, and being quite a rare occurrence is often celebrated extensively by the populace, human and robot alike. Everyone loves an excuse for a good party.

No two Brother Robot faces are ever the same, and the robot itself helps in the process of creating it. These faces are capable of the full range of human expressions by means of complex gears and linkages that adjust the metal skeleton into all manner of smiles and frowns. They can quirk a metal eyebrow in puzzlement or smile seductively, anything in fact that a human face can do. Some are latex-coated and near indistinguishable from the real thing save for their lack of sweat pores and body heat. Others remain true to their robotic heritage and gleam brightly like polished chrome. Regardless of what they look like though, the new brother or sister is welcomed into the community with open arms.

Why Not Make New Robots?

It might seem strange to some people that, having just come out of one war with intelligent machines, humanity saw fit to turn them on again at all. Yes, they needed the robots’ help to rebuild society, but why then did the humans not make new robots, robots like the old ones that had neither personality nor free will? There are several reasons why the New Olympians chose not to recreate robot-kind.

1. Their ancestors had made mistakes in the design and creation of robots before and paid the price. If they started again from scratch, even if they took a different approach, who knows what could go wrong this time? Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t.

2. A thousand years down the line, when society was again accustomed to mindless robots and the existing sentient robots were all dead, humanity might forget the mistakes of the past and thus repeat them.

3. The largest factor was that the technology to make micro-circuitry had been lost during the war. Robots can be fixed using spares, outer casings can be altered, their motors replaced and their memories reset, but no new circuitry can be made. When a robot’s brain circuits wear out it dies just like a human does.

4. Humanity can reverse-engineer the existing robot circuits to find out how they work, but this gives little clue as to how such delicate circuitry was made in the first place. The tools used to create the parts have long since been lost and cannot be recreated.

5. The idea of making robots has been broached before, but the robots themselves protested against it. They worry that if humanity were to begin manufacturing robots, they would be treated as mere tools again.

The Modern World

The world in which Liquid Crystal is set is not unlike ancient Greece in many ways, though the year must be around 3000AD as close as anyone can tell. Architecturally, Grecian columns are the order of the day, and the houses are squared off and stacked up in piles like a child's building bricks, clustered as they are around the slopes of mount Olympus. For another the warm climate makes the toga an ideal national costume, and it has been adopted by most of the people who live in New Olympus. Those who find the long flowing robes impractical, for instance those involved in building work or sports, wear a shorter tabard-like affair with a pleated skirt, a simple loin-cloth or (in some cases) nothing at all. The 20th Century's staid concepts of modesty and decency have long since eroded and public nakedness is quite acceptable in the year 3000.

Hobbies and pastimes are also very different from what we are used to. Computers and televisions are very rare since the war, as those that were not disassembled by the humans for munitions and military hardware were ransacked by the robots. The handful that remain are used to sustain the public library, a network of computers that contains vital information salvaged from the ruins of the world. The network is powered by a bank of solar panels. Apart from the library and the robots (who have their own means of generating power) there are few other electrical devices in New Olympus, not even electrical lighting. There simply aren't enough solar panels to support them.

With the dearth of computers and televisions to provide entertainment, humanity has returned to older, more social pursuits. Under the new regime the arts have flourished. New Olympus has a large amphitheatre that regularly hosts a wide variety of plays, operas and bands of musicians. Other creative arts such as painting, carving and sculpting are also catered for by the art gallery, in which marble statues are particularly popular.

The city also boasts a sizeable stadium, where citizens go to compete in athletic events. Variants of sports like tennis and rugby are still played extensively, in fact any sport that doesn't require some kind of protective clothing is rife. Events such as the javelin, shot-put, hammer throwing and long jump are far more commonplace however, and running races are particularly popular. Once every four years, as has been traditional since the days of Ancient Greece, the community comes together for the Olympic Games.

The Great Library

As the only surviving example of a computer network, the great library is held in considerable awe by the populace. Its terminals are to be found in almost every public building, the most being in the library building itself. Though the library does contain a number of physical books, many of which are written on scrolls rather than spine bound volumes, the vast majority of knowledge is in digital form. There are no video games or utilities on the terminals of the Great Library save those required to view the information it contains. If someone writes a book, it is a real book or scroll not a data file. Only the most vital and practical information is copied into the digital section of the library.

Humans and Envisaged robots can log onto public terminals and browse the library in much the same way as people today surf the internet. It contains any number of manuals and tutorials dealing with every subject imaginable, from proper farming practices to the laws of grammar and poetry. Untested robots can plug themselves directly into the library and use it to learn new skills and abilities near-instantaneously. For some reason, Envisaged robots are often surprised to find that they are incapable of learning by this method and must stick to the old adage 'practice makes perfect' instead. Quite why this should be is unknown, but it is thought to be a defence mechanism of the robot's personality to prevent itself from being corrupted further by learning too fast.

Social Structure

Although technically everyone in New Olympus is equal, there are still those who organise society and those who do the menial work. It is really the only practical way to keep everything running smoothly. Those who show an aptitude for planning and thinking are groomed by the education system to become clerks or politicians. Those who are clearly creative and talented become artists, musicians and entertainers. Those with a more physical bent might become professional sportsmen and women, or might turn to a less glamorous role as a farm hand or builder. Regardless of their station in life though, every citizen of New Olympus is paid on the same wage scale relative to the hours they work, their level of experience and the difficulty of their job. The goods and items they create are then given to the shopkeepers, who in turn sell them and return the money to the government. So far this odd, almost communist approach to life has worked perfectly well, although how it will hold up as civilisation begins to expand again is anyone's guess.

Though nobody is superior to anyone else, nevertheless certain social classes have jurisdiction over others. At the top of the pile, regulating the output of various sectors of society, are the various councils. These include the Marble Council (who deal with housing and urban development), the Steel Council (who organise the police force and defend the city from outside attack), the Silver Council (who deal with finance, regulating taxes so that money in from shop sales is balanced against money paid out in wages), the Sylvan Council (who ensure that enough food is available), the Silk Council (who deal with the reclaiming of lost knowledge.) Above them, the Celestial Council governs the efforts of all the other councils, and also decides who is appointed to which council. Any citizen who shows diligence in her duties can be elevated to councillor.

In fact, the members of the famous Crystal Council, who deal with the reactivation and trial of robots, are the least influential and numerous councillors of all, but the position still carries a great deal of respect due to its fundamental importance to society in general. There are usually around ten members in the Crystal Council, though the trial of a single robot is unlikely to involve more than half of their number. They also have the duty of deciding which robots should be given a chance to prove themselves next, organising the robot health service and scavenging for spare parts and intact robot shells in the wilderness, not to mention overseeing the Envisaging ceremonies. Those not in attendance at a trial have most likely been detained by other more urgent duties.

Below the councils, the various trade unions represent the members of their own sector and intercede with the councils on their behalf when complaints arise. Each union is named after the council that it reports to, hence the Marble Union, the Steel Union and so on. Strikes and other forms of industrial action are mercifully rare in New Olympus as the councils take a great deal of notice of the trade unions' concerns and do their best to keep them happy. In their turn, the trade unions take complaints and problems suffered by the individual workers they represent very seriously indeed and do their best to resolve them without incident. New Olympian society is by far the most stable civilisation produced on earth in several millennia.

Beyond These Hallowed Walls

It may seem that life in New Olympus is a Utopian idyll, and in many cases this is true. However the city is not without its problems. Without the destructive nature of the old human society to keep it in check, the countryside all over the world has returned to its feral past. Packs of wolves that were once endangered now scavenge through the ruined streets of lost civilisation, and they aren't the worst either. Mountain lions, bears, cougars, all manner of wild beasts prowl around the walls of New Olympus looking for a way in. Most days it is quiet, but sometimes the Steel Union and its members are hard put to defend the walls from packs of wild beasts made bold by desperation and hunger.

If the wild beasts are dangerous, then even more deadly are the packs of bandits that roam the land. The ancestors of those people who refused to join the new bid for civilisation, they live in primitive communities of skin tents. Some have sunk back to the level of savages, wielding flint spears and axes. Others have managed to scavenge the remains of military hardware from the detritus of the war and sport weapons such as guns and mortars that are totally unknown to the New Olympians, who rejected the technology of war long ago in favour of the sword and shield. Thankfully such weapons are scarce even amongst the barbarians of the wilderness, and it can only be a matter of time before there is no more ammunition left to scavenge.

Worse maybe even than the degenerate dregs of human society are those few and scattered robots that escaped the Azrael Virus entirely. These sad remnants of machines are hunted down by the Crystal Union whenever they are discovered, to be reset and reintegrated into society or else used for spares. Though the union still has several virus spreaders in its arsenal for just such an occasion, there is always the danger that a robot attack will come when it is not expected. A fully-armed war robot is far deadlier than the peaceful robots that inhabit New Olympus. An even bigger threat is the chance that a crazed robot could infiltrate the city itself, disguised as a legitimate robotic citizen. Such a foe could easily wreak all kinds of havoc before it was discovered. Fortunately most surviving pre-Azrael robots are sad, ravening things whose desire to destroy far outstrips their means to do so.

A New Prejudice

Humanity may have banded together against adversity during the robot wars, but its reaction to the declaration that robots could be equal with humans was not so open-minded. Many humans opposed the decision, and were all for shutting the robots down and resetting them whenever they were not in use. As with many forms of prejudice these 'robophobes' as they were dubbed acted largely out of fear, mostly unfounded fear that the robots could be taking their jobs or killing them in their beds. The early days of the city were rife with the persecution of robot citizens at the hands of their human brothers and sisters despite attempts by the government and police to stamp out such hate crimes. In the end it was more the difficulty of damaging robots using the primitive weapons available that defeated the robophobes than an organised clamp-down, but at least it worked.

Robophobia is not tolerated within modern-day New Olympus, but it still exists. Even in modern times there are relatively few robots in positions of power, and there are still those that sneer at the concept of robot rights and equality. Most of the ringleaders have been dealt with though, either by imprisonment or exile. At the end of the clampdown over fifty citizens were sent beyond the walls of the city to live as best they could in the wilderness. Some still hang around today living as bandits or hermits. Others have moved on to pastures new, or fallen afoul of the many dangers of living beyond the borders of civilisation.

Despite the odd few trouble makers still lying low, things are much calmer now. Incidents of robots being beaten in the streets by gangs of sledgehammer-wielding thugs have dropped from a near-daily occurrence to a monthly one, and the severity of such incidents is also far less. Once given time to get over the shock of having to live side-by-side with creatures they had once considered natural maniacs, the citizens of New Olympus found that their new friends were wholly moral, sane and friendly. After centuries of strife it looks like humans and robots may finally be ready to lay aside their differences and live together in peace.

AN INTRODUCTION AND EXPLANATION

Welcome to the world of Liquid Crystal where you, as a newly reset and restored robot, can go on a voyage of discovery, both of a new and vibrant world and of your own personality. Only time will tell who or indeed what you shall become.

Liquid Crystal is a Role Playing Game at its core in that its players each take on a personality other than their own and portray him, her or (in this case) it through a series of adventures. However, Liquid Crystal differs in a number of ways from the traditional format of the role playing game. For instance, it is not absolutely necessary to have a 'Games Master' or GM running the show, although that is one of the ways in which the game can be played. The most notable difference however is this:

In most RPG's, the characters make the story. In Liquid Crystal, the story makes the character.

There is no need to go through a lengthy character creation process at all. Just grab a deck of normal playing cards, copy a record sheet from the back of this manual and you're ready to play. Don't worry if you've no idea who your character is or what his personality is like, because everyone starts equal in Liquid Crystal. You will soon find that your PC develops from a drab, soulless automaton into a vibrant, emotional character during the course of play. In essence, the game IS the character creation system.

You have eight hours of play with which to develop and evolve. After that your character will be judged. If he is deemed worthy he may become Envisaged, taken into the new earth society as a fellow sentient being. If not, his memory and personality will be erased ready to begin afresh the next day.

A Note on Time Limits

All robots are given the same eight hour deadline to prove themselves sane. It's a simple law that protects society from another terrible robot war. However it is up to you how you interpret those eight hours. After all, while eight hours might pass for you in real time, that doesn't mean that the same amount of time will pass for your character in game time. The GM is likely, even obliged to skip over the boring parts such as travelling from place to place in just a few sentences of description. Conversely, complicated or exciting actions such as physical combat may take several minutes to adjudicate in real time when only a few seconds have passed for the PC's. This gives you two options for dealing with the time limit:

1. Keep a stopwatch handy and time your sessions carefully until eight hours of real time has expired.
2. Trust the GM to keep an eye on how in-game time is progressing and call a halt at the appropriate point.

PLAYING THE GAME

The first rule of Liquid Crystal is that all characters are created equal. At the beginning of the game you have no name, no personal identity and no emotions. Your character sheet is bereft of all detail. As you progress and accomplish goals, whether those goals are for the good of society or not, you will obtain skills, emotions and qualities of your own allowing you to build a character. However to begin with you should remember that your character is incapable of feeling any emotion at all and will act quite robotically. Don't worry as this will soon change. Half the fun of Liquid Crystal is finding out who your character is going to be.

Emotions are probably the most important factor of the game. The whole point is not in fact to become a good little robot and earn a place in society, but to have fun experimenting with a mutable personality that grows and changes with every action that you take. It's about stretching your acting ability to take on a role that you only had a partial hand in creating. It's not about what your character can do or what she becomes, it's about who your character becomes and what she finds she wants to do.

Designation and Name

An untested robot has no name, only a designation number stencilled onto its torso. This is in the form of a four-digit serial number identifying the robot, and a letter from the Greek alphabet that represents how many times the unit has been reset so far. Robots that have been newly reactivated are Alphas, and letters further down the alphabet represent robots that have been wiped two or more times already.

The designation of your robot doesn't really matter to the game, so you might as well just make one up. Alternatively, you can draw cards from the deck for your serial number, re-drawing if you pull a picture card. For the Greek letter 'reset' code, draw a card and consult the table below, reading the value as the row number and the suit as the column number. If you draw a king, then ignore it and draw a new card to replace it. You should write your designation on your record sheet for reference.

Note: no robot is given more than 24 chances to turn out sane. If an Omega-rated robot fails its trial then the fault is judged to be in the brain circuitry, a problem with the hardware rather than an error in the software. The robot is then split up for spare parts that are used to repair its more worthy siblings. Omega-designation robots are sometimes called 'last chancers' by the insensitive.

	♦	♥	♣	♠
1-2	Alpha - α	Beta - β	Gamma - γ	Delta - δ
3-4	Epsilon - ε	Zeta - ζ	Eta - η	Theta - θ
5-6	Iota - ι	Kappa - κ	Lambda - λ	Mu - μ
7-8	Nu - ν	Xi - ξ	Omicron - ο	Pi - π
9-10	Rho - ρ	Sigma - σ	Tau - τ	Upsilon - υ
J-Q	Phi - φ	Chi - χ	Psi - ψ	Omega - ω

You do not have to stick to being called by your designation though. At any point you may decide that your robot has become self-aware enough to realise that it wants a real name. At this point it can rename itself and request to be called by that name, whereupon you can write it down on the record sheet. Whether other citizens and players respect your wishes is another matter, but should your robot become Envisaged it will have earned the right to be called by that name.

The Emotions

There are four basic emotions that need to be quantified in Liquid Crystal, namely Joy, Love, Fervour, and Fear. You will find each of these on the record sheet along with a number of boxes representing how much of each emotion you currently have, all empty for the time being. Each is also accompanied by a symbol corresponding to one of the four suits in a deck of cards. Red suits correspond to intellectual emotions while black suits correspond to more physical ones, hence Diamonds = Joy, Hearts = Love, Clubs = Fervour and Spades = Fear.

Note that although these emotions can be seen as positive and negative, none of them are in themselves entirely good or bad. Sometimes it's OK to be angry, it's all about why you are angry and how you harness your rage. Sometimes it's wise to be scared, and it is definitely foolish to love everyone and everything unconditionally. Being happy about the wrong kind of subject can clearly be a bad thing too. Nobody likes to see a robot that enjoys inflicting pain. A properly balanced human being has the capacity for all four emotions, but moderates them using a moral code.

A lot of people may feel inclined to attempt to control how their robot grows emotionally, and shape it towards a predetermined personality. There's nothing wrong with doing this if you want to, but you'll probably enjoy the game more if you don't. Just relax, think about how your robot's changing psyche would affect its behaviour, and let the game shape the way you act. Remember, it's not about whether your robot wins its freedom at the end of the game. It's about exploring new ways of viewing life. In order for you to be able to do that though, we had better take a closer look at how emotions affect robot personalities.

Saint or Sinner?

As you perform tasks that stimulate a particular emotion, you may gain points representing them and slowly become capable of experiencing that emotion at more and more extreme levels. However all emotions have two different aspects, namely Virtue and Sin. The balance of the aspects in a given emotion affects the way in which your robot experiences it as described below, whereas the number of points you have in total represents the strength and frequency with which your robot experiences it.

Throughout this manual the two emotional aspects will be truncated to #V or #S for virtue or sin respectively, where # is the value of that aspect i.e. 2V 3S Joy refers to a Joy rating with two virtue points and three sin points. An emotion with more virtue points than sin points is called a virtuous emotion, while the opposite is a sinful one. There aren't any hard rules about how your character should react however. That is mostly for the player to decide. The emotions are just guidelines to follow. The following guide outlines one way of interpreting those guidelines.

Joy: symbolises the concepts of happiness and misery. At high levels the robot may even begin to develop a sense of humour. If most of its Joy points are virtuous then the robot will become happy-go-lucky and cheerful. If most are sinful then the robot may become depressive and despondent.

At zero Joy, your robot will never feel happy or sad and may lack the motivation to do things on its own behalf.

Love: This represents not just the ability to like someone or something, but also the ability to empathise with others. A robot with a virtuous love rating will be able to see the other person's point of view more easily. A sinful robot on the other hand is likely to be mean and self-absorbed.

At zero Love, your robot will never like anything or see the other person's point of view.

Fervour: A robot with plenty of Fervour is more capable of becoming excited about things. An excitable robot is more likely to take the initiative and do something about a problem rather than wait for orders. With more virtue than sin, it will use its fervour to inspire others. With more sin than virtue, it may become angry and violent when upset.

At zero Fervour, your robot will never do anything without at least a little prompting.

Fear: Though it is often seen only as a negative emotion, Fear also rates how cautious the robot is. A robot with plenty of points in fear will think more carefully about its actions before performing them. If virtue outweighs sin it will become philosophical and analytical. If sin outweighs virtue however it may become cynical and/or prejudiced.

At zero Fear, your robot will not attempt to plan its actions or use complex tactics.

Recording Emotion Values

Different people may prefer different methods of recording virtue and sin points. The way we recommend is to indicate a virtue point by writing a V in the highest empty box adjacent to the appropriate emotion, and a sin point by writing an S in the lowest empty box on the line. When there are no more empty boxes to fill you know that you will have to delete an existing one before you can add more. This method also keeps the two types of points separate so that you can easily see how many of each you have in total.

The Ability Test

Before the game begins, each player and the GM should obtain a pack of playing cards and have the player to their left shuffle them well. Be certain to remove one joker from the deck if it normally contains two, but leave the other in. If at any point the joker is drawn, the entire deck of cards should be re-shuffled and a new card drawn to replace it. However the joker is not accorded a numerical value like the other picture cards.

If your character wishes to attempt something and the GM deems that it has a reasonable chance of success and failure, he may ask you to make an ability test. This is simply a random method of determining whether your robot can perform the task it is attempting to. Tests are usually only necessary when attempting actions that might potentially have a large effect on either the storyline or your robot's personality. There are two different kinds of basic test, both of which follow a similar procedure.

Making a Basic Ability Test

The first type of test is the unopposed or 'straight' test. First the GM determines how difficult the task is and gives it a numerical value. This is called the Target Number or TN. The player then draws a card from the deck. If the value of that card is greater than or equal to the TN of the task attempted then the action is a success. If it is less than the TN, then the action is a failure. Picture cards have a value of 11, 12 or 13 for Jack, Queen and King respectively. The GM will then describe the results of the attempt.

The second type of test is the opposed test, and occurs when two characters are in direct opposition to one another. Examples might include an arm-wrestling competition, or a stealthy robot trying to sneak past an alert guard. Opposed tests are carried out in exactly the same manner as straight tests, but instead of aiming to beat a TN, the participants are aiming to beat one another. If one side in the test has a distinct advantage over the other, then the GM may award them a small bonus to their final total of between +1 and +3. In the case of a tie, draw new cards and compare again.

Emotions in Ability Tests

Sometimes the GM may deem that a particular emotion will assist the character in performing a particular action. If this is the case, then add the total number of points that the character has amassed in the given emotion and add them to the value of the card drawn. Sometimes the GM may rule that a particular type of point, either virtue or sin, is the only bonus that the robot will gain. If for instance the test was made specifically to defraud a blameless old spinster out of her life's savings, the GM might say that only sin points count. On the other hand if the action is of absolutely no benefit at all to the robot performing it maybe only virtue points would count. Most of the time though the values of both virtue and sin will be taken into account.

Joy will assist in most intellectual pursuits. Though a cold, emotionless robot might be capable of thinking with blinding speed along strictly logical lines, it takes a creative mind to think outside the box and come up with innovative solutions to a problem. Think of Joy as your robot's imagination and creativity.

Love is the trump card for any form of social interaction. If you're trying to persuade or intimidate someone, then this is the emotion that you will be calling upon. You'll find that robots have a hard time seducing people however, as the default robotic shell is completely genderless (although Envisaged robots sometimes correct this failling!)

Fervour will generally help most in activities that require a lot of physical activity, such as running a marathon or attacking an enemy in a fist fight. If what you are attempting requires boundless energy or quick reactions, then you'll need a lot of enthusiasm to achieve it, and Fervour is the measure of your robot's enthusiasm.

Fear will assist you in anything that requires guile, perception and caution, such as sneaking around without being seen, spotting a hidden enemy, lying convincingly or spotting a lie yourself. A creature without fear would not even think of attempting to avoid something as it has no concept of self-preservation.

Difficulty	TN	Examples
Easy	6	Walking across a slightly unstable surface without tripping, persuading someone to refrain from doing something that they don't have to do and don't want to do either, performing simple mental arithmetic
Average	9	Running 100 metres in 20 seconds, hitting a large target from 10 metres' range with a thrown ball, finding the only knife in a drawer full of forks by touch alone, spotting an obvious lie
Tricky	12	Lifting and carrying a 1 metre cubic wooden crate, drawing a recognisable picture of a famous person, solving a crossword puzzle, hearing the sound of a distant but sizeable explosion
Difficult	15	Jumping across a yawning chasm 10m wide, spotting a tiny bird on a branch 50 metres away, throwing a basketball through the hoop from the opposite end of the court
Very Hard	18	Punching through a solid oak door with your bare hands, painting a certified masterpiece, persuading an experienced politician to give you a straight answer to your questions
Infeasible	21	Holding up the ceiling of a collapsing house unaided, balancing the national output of a small country, sneaking through a room full of alert guard dogs without being noticed.
Impossible	24	Dodging a stream of bullets from a machine gun whilst dancing the flamenco, knocking down a mountain with your fist, inventing a time travel device, surviving a fall of more than a mile

Raising Emotions

Both emotions and skills will fluctuate over the course of your adventures based in part on the skills you select and the tasks you attempt. Emotions increase thusly: If your robot succeeds at a test that involves a particular emotion, the GM must judge whether the action in question merits a point of virtue or a point of sin. Usually attempting selfless and helpful actions will net you virtue, while attempting selfish or harmful ones will result in sin. Whatever the type of point gained, it is always applied to the emotion that was utilised. All emotions have a maximum value of 5 in total virtue *and* sin, that is if you have a virtue of 1 and a sin of 4 in your Love emotion, then it has a total value of five and neither virtue nor sin may be raised further.

When gaining a point in a particular emotion, the player may instead elect to lose a point of the opposite aspect from that emotion instead. For instance, if you earn a point of sin but do not wish to accept it, you may lose a point of virtue instead. If you cannot accept a point of one type but you can deduct a point of the other, then you must do so. The reverse is also true. For instance if you have zero virtue and earn a point of sin, you can't deduct a point of virtue instead. Likewise if you have three virtue and two sin, equalling the maximum of 5 points, then you cannot accept another virtue point and must drop a point of sin instead.

The fun really starts however if the card you drew for the test is of the same suit as the emotion you were testing. If this happens, then two things occur: first, you gain two points of the appropriate emotion instead of one. Second, those points are of the opposite type to the action you were attempting. This represents the robot brain trying to learn faster than it ought to and getting its emotions entirely mixed up. It is therefore possible, by way of example, to get virtue points in Fervour for beating up a little old lady.

Earning Qualities

If either the virtue or sin value of any emotion reaches five, thus making that emotion either totally virtuous or totally sinful, your robot gains one Quality which you may select from the list below or (if the GM and/or other players agree with your choice) invent your own. A quality is an irremovable aspect of the robot's character that will remain with it regardless of what else happens to its virtue and sin ratings, and they are very important since this is how robots stabilise into well-balanced individuals.

You are free to choose any quality you wish and free in the manner you interpret its meaning when acting in character, but you must choose one and it must correspond to the correct aspect (virtue or sin) and emotion. You may have a maximum of two qualities per emotion, one related to virtue and one to sin; you can't have two virtuous or two sinful qualities related to the same emotion. Also, no two qualities may be obviously contradictory. For instance no robot can be both Optimistic and Pessimistic.

If your character has a quality that seems appropriate to a particular action that you are attempting and the bonus granted by your emotion is less than +3, then you get a +3 bonus instead of what your emotion rating would otherwise indicate. On the other hand if your robot has a quality that would seem to directly contradict the action you are attempting to take, then you gain no bonus to the test from your emotion at all.

When your robot earns a quality, write it down in the box below the emotion it belongs to and make a note whether it is virtuous or sinful by putting a (V) or an (S) next to it in parentheses.

What Are Qualities For?

Qualities act as a safety net should your emotional rating slip back down again, but they are also important when the Crystal Council are deciding the fate of your robot. At the end of the game, the qualities that you have earned contribute greatly to the personality of your robot and have a marked effect on the results of its trial.

More importantly than any mechanical value though is the effect that qualities have upon your robot's personality. A quality is a permanent fixture that cannot be removed. Even if you should slip right the way back down from a saintly 5V Love rating to a 5S Love rating, if you selected the Friendly quality your robot will still be friendly, even if he is also a self-serving, egotistical jerk.

Joy Qualities
Virtue: Cheerful, Comedian, Open-Minded, Optimistic
Sin: Depressive, Easily Bored, Pessimistic, Stubborn

Love Qualities
Virtue: Compassionate, Fair-Handed, Forgiving, Friendly
Sin: Insensitive, Jealous, Manipulative, Vain

Fervour Qualities
Virtue: Enthusiastic, Helpful, Strong-Willed, Supportive
Sin: Bad-Tempered, Bossy, Lazy, Sadistic

Fear Qualities
Virtue: Brave, Cautious, Cunning, Observant
Sin: Argumentative, Cowardly, Indecisive, Prejudiced

Skills in Ability Tests

The advantage of being a robot is that the public data library of New Olympus is always open to you. A human has to spend time tediously learning skills, a process which can take several years to complete. A robot only needs to plug into a handy street terminal and download the appropriate software from the library. However there is a limit to how much anyone can remember, and a limit to how much anyone can learn from pure book learning without actually attempting the skill.

The record sheet has five spaces on it for skills. Provided that you have access to a public terminal you can always write a new skill into an empty slot, or overwrite an old skill with a new one. New skills always begin at level 1, even if the robot has previously owned that skill at a higher level and subsequently replaced it. If your robot currently owns a skill that the GM agrees could be useful to the task it is attempting, then it adds the level of that skill to its total when determining if it has exceeded the task's TN.

The great library of New Olympus contains a wide variety of digital reference files for any robots to access in order to augment their abilities. It would be futile to attempt to list every possible subject here, or this manual would be twice as long as it is. Instead, you will find the most commonly requested skills outlined below rather than every single one available. Players should feel free to come up with their own skills, under the close supervision of the GM and/or the other players of course. If everyone agrees that a particular skill should be in the library, then it is.

Acting is the ability to perform well on the stage. It won't help much if you need to lie to someone, but if you want to give a sensitive rendition of Hamlet, you can't beat it.

Acrobatics helps when a robot is trying to be graceful, especially when tumbling around on the floor and leaping long distances through the air.

Animal Handling is for those times when a robot meets a wild animal and wants to persuade it not to attack, or maybe even do the robot's bidding for a while.

Architecture will help both when building and designing houses, whether for habitation or public use. A high skill level will ensure that what the robot builds stays up!

Athletics is all about endurance and strength. Good for running long distances, lifting heavy weights and competing in events such as the shot put and discus.

Botany is the study of plant life, and can be used to find edible plants in the wilderness (not that robots eat) as well as formulate simple herbal medicines and crude poisons.

Carpentry represents a skill at working wood, usually for practical purposes such as building and boat making rather than artistic ones such as sculpting.

Chemistry represents a thorough grounding in how various chemical elements react with one another, and can be used to formulate crude explosives.

Cooking will assist the robot in preparing a sumptuous meal (once again, not that robots eat) or in brewing alcoholic beverages for its human friends to enjoy.

Deceit is the liar's art, the ability to craft immense, flagrant untruths and pass them off as fact. Overuse of this skill for personal gain is an easy way to earn sin points.

Geography grants not only knowledge of the local area so that your robot to find his way in the wilderness, but also data about geological features such as volcanoes.

Healing is the art of repairing damage to poor broken humans and animals. It won't let you repair a fellow robot, but it's great for mending the squishy people.

History, as one would expect, is knowledge of what happened in the past. Sadly a lot of history has been lost or corrupted during the robot wars.

Locksmith is another skill that is easy to abuse. It allows your robot to open a locked door using a lock pick instead of the key or bashing it in noisily by force.

Melee Combat is the primary skill for attacking things using a hand-held weapon. Swords are far more widespread than guns in New Olympus, so this skill is commonplace.

Music / Singing allows your robot to make a pleasing noise either with its artificial voice box or with the aid of a musical instrument such as a French horn or the bagpipes.

Painting is the skill that is tested when your robot wishes to make a recognisable or artistically accomplished picture. These are not always the same thing.

Perception is a useful skill that tells the robot how best to make use of its sensors. It will aid when noticing anything from far-off sights to interesting sounds.

Persuasion is for those times when you want to talk someone around to your way of thinking rather than pummelling them until they agree with you.

Pickpocket will help your robot to move items from one place (i.e. someone's pockets) to another (i.e. your own) without being noticed. It is also useful for conjuring tricks.

Ranged Combat generally refers to the use of thrown spears and bows and arrows in New Olympus, since the ammunition for guns is not manufactured any more.

Riding is a popular pastime involving sitting on the back of a moving horse and steering it rather than walking around on your own two feet. Humans do the oddest things.

Robotics is the robot's version of the healing skill. With it, and of course a steady supply of spare parts, you can mend fellow robots that have been damaged.

Sculpture is the art of creating interesting, eye-pleasing or lifelike statues out of wood, marble, clay or even metal. It is a very popular art in the year 3000.

Stealth is the ability to move from one place to another silently, and to remain out of your opponents' field of vision while doing so, thus avoiding detection.

Unarmed Combat is the ability to hurt or simply restrain an opponent without the assistance of a weapon. Wrestling relies on this skill and is a popular sport in New Olympus.

Raising Skills

Both emotions and skills will fluctuate over the course of your adventures based on the tasks you attempt. Skills are easy to increase. Every time you succeed at an action to which the skill is appropriate, it increases by 1. A skill can never have a value greater than 5 though, no matter how often it is used. In order for a skill to increase the GM or your fellow players must still agree that the task you are attempting is a significant test of your robot's talents. Its architecture skill is unlikely to improve simply because it hammered a single nail into a wall.

A robot can even learn new skills without recourse to a library terminal if it wants to. It must simply succeed at an action that would normally be benefited by the skill it wishes to learn. If this is done, it may choose to instantly overwrite one of its existing skills with the one it just practiced, which will begin as always at level 1.

Examples of Basic Tests

Just to recap, a standard ability test involves the player drawing the top card from the deck and adding the face value (Jack = 11, Queen = 12, King = 13) to the level of his character's emotion and skill. If the final result is greater than or equal to the target number (TN) set by the GM then he succeeds. If however he is directly opposing another character, both draw in this fashion and the highest total wins. Draws result in a retest. To make sure that this is absolutely clear, here are a few examples of basic tests.

Straight Example: *Joe is climbing a tree to rescue an old lady's cat that is stuck in the upper branches. The GM calls for a test to see if the robot can manage the climb. It's a tall tree, but there are lots of sturdy branches so the GM rules that it is only a Tricky (TN 12) task. He also decrees that Joe can use his Athletics skill of 3, and that he can choose between using his Vigour of 2 (because this is an active task) or his Love of 0 (because he is helping an enfeebled human.) Since this is a fairly easy task Joe chooses to use Love, which he wants to raise above zero. He therefore draws a card (7♠) and adds 3 for a total of 10. Bad luck Joe, that's less than the target of 12 so his robot fails to climb the tree. He cannot claim a skill or emotion raise.*

Opposed Example: *Liz's robot has decided that it wants to steal a guard's sword. This is an opposed test of her Stealth / Fear against the guard's Perception / Fear. In total, Liz's bonuses equal +5 and the guard's come to +3 so she has a slight advantage. The GM on the other hand decrees that since guards are very protective of their swords, he should be given a slight bonus of +2 to his draw. Liz draws and gets 7♠ (total = 12) and the guard gets 3♦ (total = 8) so she wins and earns an extra level of Stealth into the bargain. However because the card she drew was the same suit as the emotion used (Fear) she gains two points of virtue instead of one point of sin for this naughty trick. Suddenly, her robot feels very guilty for what it has done!*

Extended Actions

Sometimes a player might attempt an action that is too long-winded to be defined by a single test. Such actions are called Extended Actions. When dealing with a task that ought to be particularly complex, the GM may call for an extended action rather than a regular one. The player involved must succeed at not one but a sequence of tests, usually (but not always) all with the same TN. When a number of tests determined by the GM have been passed, the task is complete. However if tests are failed a certain number of times then the entire attempt is a failure and the robot must start again from scratch.

In some cases several different characters may be allowed to contribute towards the number of successes, for instance an extended action intended to build a stone wall. In other cases only one may contribute, for instance attempting to pick a very tricky lock. If more than one character is participating in a test, each character after the first adds one to the number of failures required before the entire attempt is considered a failure.

You can also use the rules for Extended Actions in opposed tests, for example a one-on-one wrestling match. The two characters face off in a number of opposed tests, and the first one to succeed a given number of times (usually between three and five) is declared the winner. If one side or the other has a distinct advantage other than superior skill or emotion, you can give them a slightly lower target number of successes in order to win.

When dealing with extended actions, only the first test that each player makes may increase her emotion and/or skill ratings. Any cards drawn after the first do not have an effect upon them. This same rule is also true when dealing with Mass Opposed Actions (below).

Examples of Extended Actions

Extended actions are a little more complex than the straight type, so here are a couple more examples.

Straight Example: *Andy is using his considerable skill of +4 Architecture to design and build a new house to impress the Marble Council. This is a substantial undertaking, and the GM declares that an extended action of five tests, each with a Tricky target (TN12). The GM also states that if he fails three tests the construction will collapse and Andy will have to begin his labours again.*

Andy's first two card draws are great, 10♣ and 9♥ in collusion with his +4 skill both give him a total in excess of 12. The third card however is 4♣. Thus far he's amassed two successes and one failure. His next three cards are J♦, 3♥ and 5♣. The Jack is a great card giving him a total score of 15, but the other two both indicate failures. That means he's reached his three failure limit and the house falls down around his ears.

Opposed Example: *Alice and Kevin are having a race to see who is the fastest. The GM has already stated that this is an opposed action using the Fervour emotion and the Athletics skill, of which Alice's total bonus is +4 and Kevin's is +6. The GM has set a limit of three successes, so the first person to win three opposed draws will be the winner. The first draw is 10♥ for Alice and 3♥ for Kevin, so Alice wins. She gains a point of Athletics and a point of virtuous Fervour for her success. However, no further emotion or skill raises will occur during this race.*

The next draw results in 9♥ for Alice and 5♣ for Kevin; another win for Alice. If she wins one more test she will have won the whole race. In the next test she is unlucky however, with her 4♣+4=8 not coming close to beating Kevin's Q♦+6=18! The test after that is a really close one. Alice pulls J♠+4=15, and Kevin draws 10♣+6=16 winning by the smallest of margins. With two wins each, whoever wins the next draw will win the race!

Mass Opposed Actions

The most complicated type of test is the Mass Opposed Action. When two parties containing several people oppose one another over a task, and every member of each side is capable of assisting in the execution of that task, they must face off as follows. This type of action is most often used to simulate combat, particularly very large combat scenes with ten or twenty individual combatants taking part.

Every character taking part in the mass opposed action draws a card, applying emotions and skills to the result as usual to obtain their personal score. Each team taking part in the combat then puts forward the highest score from amongst its members as their team score. Individual personal scores are NOT added together, only the highest one counts. The team with the highest team score retains all of its members and goes on to the next round of the test. Out of the remaining participants, those who were not on the winning side, whichever player had the lowest personal score of all is out of the running and can take no further part in the mass opposed action.

Note that only the character with the lowest personal score of all is eliminated, not the one with the lowest score in the team. A team that did not win on team score will still not lose any members if none of its members had the lowest personal score.

If several people from different teams tie for first place then those people should draw again and compare their new results, with the highest amongst them being declared the winner. Characters whose personal score was not equal highest may not take part in the redraw. If first place is tied again then repeat the process as often as is necessary to obtain a final winner, with any players who were in equal first place facing off again and again. If however there is a tie for last place amongst the members of the losing team(s), then all characters that drew for last place are eliminated.

Backing Down

At any point during an opposed extended action a character on any side may voluntarily retreat from the conflict. If their opponents do not wish to allow that person to retreat however, then the retreating character must take part in one last mass draw. If the retreating character scores lower than any one of the members of an opposing side that is NOT willing to let him retreat, he is eliminated by force rather than retreating peacefully. If a retreating character is eliminated in this fashion, the lowest scoring character is spared the same fate. This rule is most commonly used during combat.

Death in Combat

The usual rule for combat is that no PC ever 'dies'. These are robots after all, and very hard to kill. If they are knocked out of combat they will recover some time later bereft of all the possessions they had managed to amass. And will probably be tied to a tree. Upside down. Miles away from where they were. Or maybe just in robot hospital. With much less time before their trial. On the other hand if an NPC is knocked out during lethal combat, the character with the highest personal score for the round (whether that is the GM or a player) decides whether the poor unfortunate is killed or merely knocked out.

An Example of a Mass Opposed Action

Tim, Bill and Graham are defending the gates of New Olympus against a pack of three ravening mountain lions and a lone human bandit. To complicate matters even more, the lions are just as keen on attacking the bandit as they are the player characters. Even mass opposed actions are pretty quick to resolve in Liquid Crystal, but a full resolution would still take too long to describe here so we'll only run through the first two rounds of the fight to save space. For reference, Tim and Bill's collective bonuses (Fervour + Unarmed Combat in this case) are each +5 and Bill's is slightly higher at +7. The lions each have a collective bonus of +6 making them rather dangerous foes even for experienced robots. The poor bandit is massively outclassed with only +3 in bonuses.

In the first round Tim, Bill and Graham get scores of 7, 12 and 17. The lions get 15, 12 and 8. Finally the poor bandit gets a total of 9. Each team now puts forward its best personal result. For our heroes, it's Graham's score of 17, while the lions' highest value is 15 and the bandit (alone as he is) only has his 9. Tim had the lowest personal score this round, but since his team had the highest team score he is safe. Out of the remaining participants, lion #3 had the lowest personal score at 8 and is thus out of the conflict. Graham had the highest score, so he gets to decide its fate. Being a gentle sort, he decrees that it is only knocked out and will recover much later when everyone is miles away.

With one lion down and everyone else still in with a chance, round two begins. This time the fabulous three get values of 9, 15 and 8. The remaining lions achieve 11 and 17. Mister bandit draws an 8 as well. The lions are clearly in the lead this time with their team score of 17, but now there is a draw for last place since both Graham and the bandit had a personal total of 8. Sadly this means that both the bandit and our hero Graham are out of the running. Graham is saved from an untimely death because he is a PC hero and heroes don't normally die. The bandit however is at the mercy of lion #2 and it is therefore the GM's decision as to whether he lives or dies. This being a lion, not a species known for their kindness, she deems that it would be more in character if the bandit was disembowelled.

Quests

A quest is quite simply a goal to which the player characters are working. Quests usually take a lot of thinking, role playing and ability tests to accomplish fully. The goals of a quest may be presented to the players by an NPC, or the players may spontaneously decide to embark on their own quests. For instance they might meet an old lady who wants them to find her lost cat, Tibbles. Alternately the players might all get together and decide that they are going to climb to the summit of Mount Olympus. The players might even be presented with a potential quest by an NPC and decide to turn the situation to their own advantage rather than following the lead that the GM has given them. All are good examples of quests.

It is up to the GM to decide when a quest has been resolved, either as a success or failure. If a robot (or group of robots) successfully completes a Quest, it (or they) may be due for a Quest Reward. This is a free emotion point (virtue or sin) that does not have to be earned at the turn of a card. What kind of point you get will depend a little on the quest that was resolved, but an awful lot more on the way that the robot approached it. Under some circumstances the player may even be given a choice of several different points that they could earn and allowed to take their pick. In any case there is a limit of one emotion point per quest completed.

Example Quest Rewards

Here are a few examples of how you might earn particular types of emotion points for completing a quest.

Virtuous Joy is a good general reward for quests that don't seem to merit any other kind of reward. Doing a simple odd job for someone or winning first place in a competition are good examples of quests that result in virtuous Joy.

Sinful Joy is most often earned when the robot fails at a given task particularly badly, especially if the task was very important, or other people are angry with it or make fun of it for doing so.

Virtuous Love is earned when completing a quest that shows great tenderness and respect for ones' fellow citizen. Rescuing a child from a burning building or delivering a message of love are good examples.

Sinful Love can be earned by cheating, lying and being mean or selfish for no good reason. If a robot were to fix a competition in order to make itself a little money, or steal a little girl's savings, that would merit a point of sinful love.

Virtuous Fervour can be earned by anything entailing lots of healthy exercise. Climbing to the top of Mount Olympus would count, as would fighting off a band of murderous bandits – in self defence of course!

Sinful Fervour is an easy trap to fall into. If the PC instigates violence to solve a problem, particularly if the violence is directed at an innocent party or some more peaceable solution would do just as well, sinful fervour can be the result.

Virtuous Fear is usually granted when the robot in question takes time to plan and talk tactics regarding a problem rather than rushing in head-first. Winning a game of rugby using superior teamwork and strategy rather than brute force is a good example.

Sinful Fear can be given to a character that constantly runs away from problems instead of solving them, reacts in a needlessly paranoid or prejudiced fashion, or refuses to take responsibility for her actions.

Endgame: Trial of a Robot, Take 2

At the end of a robot's eight hours it must go on trial before the Crystal Council in order to determine if it is a well-balanced, sane individual worthy of being Envisaged, or a transistorised maniac that should be reset or broken up for spare parts. There are two ways you can handle this final part of the game; by committee or by merit. Different gaming groups will prefer different methods, so feel free to decide amongst yourselves which of the two you prefer.

Trial by Committee is more fun for the players, but also less fair. It is not recommended if the players really care whether their robot is wiped or not. Here each robot in turn stands trial before the Crystal Council and must answer their questions, justify its actions and generally demonstrate its sanity. The player in charge of the robot takes control of it as usual, while any other players take the parts of the members of the committee. The GM, if the game has one, does not normally take part unless there are insufficient players to make a decent jury. Having expended a lot of energy keeping the game running smoothly, this is the part where the GM can sit back and watch the fun. Once the Council has finished questioning the robot on trial, its members are allowed to confer for a few minutes before judging whether the robot should be Envisaged or not. Judgement is by means of a simple vote, with the GM having the casting vote in the event of a tie.

Trial by Merit entails a simple points system. A robot earns one point for every emotion with a rating of five points, regardless of whether they are virtue or sin points. It gains one further point for each emotion that is virtuous, i.e. has more virtue than sin, or two points for each emotion that is entirely virtuous, i.e. has a rating of V5 S0. Conversely it loses one point for each emotion that is mostly sinful or two points for each emotion that is entirely sinful. Qualities are also taken into account, with each virtuous quality that the robot retains adding a point and each sinful quality deducting one. These values are summarised in the table below for ease of reference. If the final score after all these factors have been taken into account is three or more, then the robot passes its trial and becomes Envisaged.

Character Aspect	Merit
For each emotion with all five boxes filled	+1
For each mostly virtuous emotion	+1
For each mostly sinful emotion	-1
For each totally virtuous emotion	+2
For each totally sinful emotion	-2
For each virtuous quality	+1
For each sinful quality	-1
Target for passing the test =	3 points

Where to Go from Here?

Once the player's robots have been tried by the Crystal Council and either confirmed as valued members of society or condemned as lunatics and reset, the question remains where should you go from here? The obvious answer is that any robots that were reset can start a new game from the beginning if the players like (not forgetting to move their designation code up by one Greek letter) and any players whose characters were either Envisaged, or who passed beyond Omega designation and were broken up for spares can select a new robot designation and join in.

There is another option though. You can carry on playing with the characters you've created. A robot that has been Envisaged is ready for the real challenge: helping the citizens of New Olympus to get civilisation back on its feet. Though the rules remain essentially the same, the robot's personality is now considered stable and its emotions no longer fluctuate up and down with every test and quest it completes. Similarly it can no longer draw fresh skills from the public data library, and the skills it has do not increase every time they are successfully used.

To make up for the lack of speedy advancement, each player who retains her character after Envisaging may choose one free bonus at the end of each full session of role playing she attends. The player may choose either to add or remove one virtue or sin point to the emotion of her choice, *or* may increase one skill's level by one point. The usual maximums of 5 still apply. Only one point may be added or removed per session making advancement a lot slower, but now the player has complete control over how her character develops rather than being at the mercy of fate.

TIPS FOR GM'S AND PLAYERS

Liquid Crystal is very different from most RPG's as has already been said, and even the most experienced role player may have difficulty in coming to terms with these differences. This section has been provided to help you understand the driving forces behind the concept and to help you get the most out of the game.

To GM…

Most RPG's have a Games Master (GM), a person who does not control a player character but instead plays the parts of all the people that the PC's meet along the way. The GM guides the storyline by introducing the plot, controlling the extras and antagonists, and moderating the rules. However, a GM is not entirely necessary. Most role playing groups will feel more at home with the idea of having a GM than not, so this is still the most common option and the rules are written with this in mind.

If you're planning to GM a game of Liquid Crystal, it is highly recommended that you read the entire manual to get a good idea of how the mechanics work and what the game world is like. For the players it is just as easy to teach them the rules as you go along, and actually enhances the atmosphere of the game. It's as if they have to learn the rules of the world just as their characters need to learn the rules of morality.

…or Not to GM

If you fancy trying a different style of play, have a go at this. Instead of banding the PC's together into a group to experience the world together, give each their own separate story in which they are the only hero. One of the other players should become the Quest Giver. This is the person who introduces the problem that the main PC is to solve, often by role playing an NPC with a difficult task that needs doing. As the quest giver introduces more NPC's each unassigned player in turn starting with the one to the quest giver's left chips in and takes control of the new characters. Only the quest giver has the right to introduce and define the personalities of new NPC's, but it is up to the assigned player to portray them effectively. The quest giver is also responsible for assigning free emotion points when a quest is completed and determining what tests need to be made.

The various NPC players continue to fulfil their allotted roles, speaking, making decisions and drawing cards for their assigned NPC until the quest in hand has been resolved in some manner, for good or for bad. If the hero's robot still has time left before shutdown at this point, then the player to the quest giver's right becomes the new quest giver and describes a new quest for the hero to embark upon. This process continues until the hero robot's internal clock ticks to an end and shuts him down for review.

Remember that the 'hero' of the story does not necessarily have to embark on the quests that he is presented with at all. Depending on the personality or logic he employs when playing his robot he may decide to side with the villains of the quest, or to ignore it completely and do something else. There's nothing wrong with doing this at all, just move along to the next quest and rotate the quest giver status to the next player as if the quest had been successfully resolved. The quest giver's job is only to present the hero with a challenge, not to force him to complete that challenge in the way the quest giver demands.

Using the Tools Provided

The game rules provide you with many different tools. Of these, the uses of the emotions and skills have already been explored pretty fully. The different types of tests may still be a little nebulous to beginner GM's though, so let's just recap over what each of them is most useful for.

Straight Tests are for situations when the player is up against a known quantity. The GM can call for a straight test even in situations that might otherwise warrant an opposed test just to speed up game play a little. Use these when a task is either not particularly vital to the success of a quest, or when the action being performed does not take a whole lot of time to perform. Never use straight tests if a player character is pitted directly against another player character, and think twice about using them if the player is pitted directly against an important NPC with statistics of his own. There's no harm in using a straight test to simulate an action where a PC goes up against an unimportant NPC with no set statistics though.

Opposed Tests are used when a player character is directly confronting an important NPC or fellow player character in an action that would not take a very long time to complete and is not vitally important for some reason. Never use an opposed test if there isn't another character who is actively trying to prevent the PC from succeeding. A guard lounging around off-duty isn't actively opposing a stealthy assassin trying to sneak past and can thus be simulated with a straight test. A guard who is on duty certainly will be though, and should have an appropriate bonus to represent his emotions and skills.

Also don't neglect the fact that a small bonus can be granted to one side or the other if they have a significant advantage, for instance if they are better equipped or the environment is especially suited to the action they are performing. In the assassin/guard example, the guard would certainly get a small bonus if the nearby area was well-lit and totally bereft of cover to hide behind. If however it was dark, foggy and the nearby area was full of bushes and trees to hide behind, the assassin would probably be due a bonus to his result instead.

Extended Actions are for tasks that might take a long time to complete and/or are absolutely vital to the success or failure of an important mission. They are especially appropriate when time is critical to the success or failure of the action being attempted. If you've only got thirty seconds to smash down a door and rescue the people inside a burning building before the roof collapses, that's as good a reason as any to use an extended action. You can even use the number of failed tests as a measure of the amount of time that has passed so far if you like.

Mass Opposed Actions are most commonly used in combat but, and this is very important, they are equally appropriate to a whole array of other activities too. Any activity in which several teams or individuals are competing against one another is a suitable subject for a mass opposed action. If there are more than two teams attempting to achieve mutually exclusive goals (that is only one team can possibly attain their goal) or if there are two teams each with more than one member competing directly against one another, then use a mass opposed action to adjudicate.

A few examples of non-combat actions that might merit a mass opposed action include a political debate in which every side is arguing furiously to get its own way, an athletic race or similar sporting event involving a lot of competitors, two opposing teams of archaeologists striving to find a particular artefact before the other, or even a number of musicians competing against one another in a 'battle of the bands' style competition. Don't feel that you have to restrict this fun and adaptable type of action to purely combat-related scenarios.

Designing a Quest

Whether the game is being run by a GM or by a series of quest givers, there are a few things you should know about how a game of Liquid Crystal works. Most RPG's fall into one of two types which we will call game-driven and plot-driven. In a game-driven RPG the main focus is to build your character, make him tougher and smarter, burn up the levels like a comet… you get the picture. The game mechanics are more important than the story, and so scenes tend to revolve around killing monsters for experience and taking their stuff for loot. In a plot-driven RPG, story is god. The mechanics of the game are of a lesser importance and may be neglected entirely in favour of what makes a good plot. Each scene is there to advance the storyline to a final climactic conclusion. Liquid Crystal subscribes to neither of these approaches.

Liquid Crystal is that rare thing, a character-driven RPG. The game mechanics don't matter hugely and nor does the story. What we are interested in is how the characters develop emotionally, how they interact, and what they decide to do within the framework of the game world. You could try and build in an overarching story, but we know that the important thing is the final trial at the end of the robot's eight hours and if they become Envisaged or not.

Eight hours isn't a lot of time to build an epic. Because of this, quests in Liquid Crystal tend to be what most people would call side quests, tasks that are of minor importance and are quickly dealt with. We are more interested in the way that performing the task affects the character than how the character affects the task. To give you an idea of the kind of thing that the average robot might find itself doing during its eight hours of grace, here are a few sample quests that you might want to include in your gaming session.

Challenge – the gauntlet is thrown down for the player characters to take part in a sporting event. This frequently happens to untested robots as the citizens of New Olympus are only too happy to help them discover the joys of life. Winning the challenge could result in a virtue point of Joy. Losing however could net a sin point of Joy, and cheating would certainly be considered a sin point in Love.

Honest Toil – a job needs doing and the PC's are the closest people with nothing to do. The job could be anything from building new homes to gathering in the wheat harvest to counting coins. Completion of the task is good for a free virtue point in Joy. Failing badly might mean a sin point in Joy. There are also plenty of dishonest things that the PC could do to earn a sin point in Love.

Hostage – a citizen taken hostage by an armed criminal and must be saved. There are several ways in which this situation could go, and several rewards available. A robot that manages to fight off the criminal would probably earn a free virtue point in Fervour. One that managed to talk him into setting the hostage free would be due a virtue point in Love. One that helped the criminal however would certainly earn a sin point in either Fervour, Love or Fear.

Hunt the Thimble – some important item has gone missing, and the citizens of New Olympus are looking for help in retrieving it. Accepting such a task and following it through until the item is found, even if it is not a PC that finds it, is probably worth a virtue point of Love. Finding and keeping the item, or attempting to ransom it back to its true owners is likely to earn a sin point of Love.

Jury Service – trial by jury is a common means of dispensing the law, and sometimes the Crystal Council feel that witnessing a court case would be beneficial to newly wiped robots. The PC's are drafted to serve in a jury and pass judgement over an alleged criminal. A fair verdict could net them a virtue point in Love. Subverting the legal system for personal gain is worth a sin point instead.

Scavenger Hunt – new robot parts cannot be manufactured as the technology to do so is lost. When supplies of spares are running low, teams are sent out into the wilderness to scavenge for more. There are plenty of shattered robot hulks lying around in the ruins. Unfortunately there may well be a few active pre-Azrael robots out there too. This quest may be worth a virtue point in either Fervour or Fear depending on how it is solved.

When Animals Attack – a group of ferocious animals assault the walls of the city and the police force struggle to hold them at bay. Maybe the PC's valiantly leap to the aid of the police, earning themselves a free virtue point in Vigour, or maybe they take the opportunity to indulge in a little criminal activity while the police are distracted earning a sin point in Love.

Wildfire – a conflagration springs up in the city or nearby woodland and the terrified populace scramble to put out the blaze before more damage can be done to New Olympus or the surrounding landscape (mostly farmland since little wood is used in the construction of the houses). Robots might be tough, but fire can damage them just as easily as a human. Putting out the fire may net the robot a free virtue point in fear, while refusing to do so may result in a sin point of fear instead.

Sample Major Plots

If you really must have some way of tying all the small quests that make up a robot's eight hours of grace with some kind of overarching story plot then you can. Anything that makes the game more fun for its players is a good thing. The main difficulty is creating a plot that can easily be dealt with in eight hours, as that time limit may weigh quite heavily on more complex machinations. Here are a few sample ideas that are particularly in keeping with Liquid Crystal's game setting.

Back to Civilisation – an adventurous but inept group of bandits manage to steal a number of robot shells from New Olympus and smuggle them out to their camp. After some experimentation they manage to turn the robots on again. The players awake, completely bereft of memory, in the middle of a bandit camp. How will the bandits deal with the robots and vice versa? What will both parties do when they find out about the eight hour limit and the homing beacon that will activate when time is up? Will the robots be able to find their way back to a home they have never seen, or will they throw in their lot with the bandits and try and find a way of beating the system?

Colonisation – New Olympus is a start, but a world civilisation cannot subsist on a single city forever. A band of pilgrims have set out from the mountain city and, after months of travel by land and sea, have settled in a cosy nook close to the ruins of a major city. The player characters are salvaged from the ruins and reactivated to assist with the creation of the new colony. But why did the colonists split away in the first place? Are these genuine hardy souls who truly want to expand humanity's borders again, or are they malcontents dissatisfied with the status quo who wish to make a new civilisation of their own? What unknown terrors dwell within the ruins, and how will everyone cope so far away from the stabilising, protective influence of New Olympus?

Eight Hours of War – an unprecedented number of pre-Azrael war robots acting with surprising cohesion and discipline have been besieging the city for several weeks, bombarding it with weapons that the New Olympians cannot hope to match. The remaining Azrael virus spreaders are missing or broken, and it is only a matter of hours before the city falls and civilisation is lost forever. In desperation the Crystal Council authorise the activation of all the remaining untested robots in their care. Enter the player characters. How will they cope with being thrust into the middle of a war zone with no concept of who they are? Will they become merciless killing machines in response to the unforgiving environment, or can they somehow achieve inner peace while fighting off hordes of their kinsmen?

Expedition – the farmlands around the city have been hit by a mysterious blight that has withered more than half of the coming harvest. With a potential food shortage on their hands, the Sylvan Council are sending out numerous scouting parties into the surrounding countryside. These parties have three basic missions: find out what is causing the blight and stop it, dig up information on how to cure the blight from the ancient ruins of the world, and bring back enough fresh fruit and game to sustain New Olympus while the next harvest is growing.

Olympic Games – the robots are fortunate enough to be awakened during the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, when all of New Olympus goes mad with sports fever. Amidst all of the sporting activities that the PC's can join in with, some of them specifically for newly-awakened robots, there are also plenty of opportunities to help out in other ways. Important athletes need bodyguards to stop them from being sabotaged by jealous rivals, equipment needs to be erected, tickets must be sold, and a shady character approaches the player characters offering to fix their trial with the Crystal Council if they help him to fix a certain race. Is he really a crook, or are the Crystal Council testing to see how honest the robots have become?

Welcoming Party – a small but warlike band of humans turn up on the outskirts of New Olympus dressed in old military uniforms and weighed down with machine guns, rocket launchers and even a working tank. The soldiers demand admittance to the city in order to rest and replenish their food supplies, a request that is cautiously granted by the council. As a safety measure, the player characters are assigned to the newcomers as guides. Are the soldiers as friendly and innocent as they appear to be, or are they bent on seizing control of New Olympus by force? Will their attendant robots revel in the joys of civilisation as they show their guests the sights, or will they be swayed by the allure of barbaric power and brute force?

That ought to be enough ideas to get you started. Although these plotlines are designed to last only a few hours, they could also be extended into much longer-lasting campaigns should you decide to continue playing your robots after their Envisaging.

Including NPC's

Though the main focus of the game will be the player characters rather than the world around them, the GM will still need to think about non-player characters. Important NPC's will need emotion ratings and skills of their own if they are to interact with the PC's in-depth. There are three different types of NPC, the fully-fledged, the critter and the specialist.

A **Fully-Fledged** NPC has all the same values and statistics as a player character does, including both virtue and sin values for the four emotions and a selection of skills and qualities to help round them out. The GM can make these values up as necessary, or can prepare key characters before the gaming session so as to have the values on hand. It's not a bad idea to keep a complete range of spare NPC's on hand in case you need to throw a fully rounded character into the fray now and again. A good practice is to write down a few key personality traits (for instance polite, short-tempered, sarcastic, pompous or timid) to help you remember how the NPC acts too.

A **Critter** on the other hand is a simple NPC that can be thrown in at any moment and doesn't require a whole lot of thought to create. Critters are mostly wild animals of one sort or another and have only two attributes: Fight and Flight. Both are expressed as a bonus to the critter's card draws such as Fight +3 / Flight +5. While the former is applied only to tests that involve the critter attacking or defending itself, the latter is used when the creature is running away. This is really as much detail as a wild animal needs, and the same basic rules can even be used for dangerous rogue robots and human bandits. If all it needs to be able to do is fight and run away, it's a critter.

Finally we have the **Specialist**. Really a specialist is just a generalised form of critter. Like the critter it has two values only, these being its Profession and its General Competence. The profession value applies to any draws that relate directly to what the NPC does for a living. A professional wrestler would use his profession bonus in any draws that involved grabbing hold of people and throwing them around, while a professional farmer would use his for agricultural tasks. The general competence bonus is always lower than the profession rating, and applies to anything and everything else that the character attempts to do.

Critter	Fight	Flight
Small, inoffensive animal (squirrel, cat)	-4	+5
Wild ram, mountain goat, herbivore	+2	+3
Gazelle, horse or similar hoofed animal	+3	+6
Large, vicious dog, wolf or coyote	+4	+4
Mountain lion, puma or other big cat	+6	+3
Poorly-equipped human bandit	+3	+3
Average human bandit with sword	+4	+3
New Olympus police force with sword	+5	+4
Well-equipped military unit with guns	+8	+4
Rogue fully-armed pre-Azrael robot	+10	0

Sample NPC's

To give you a bit of a kick-start, here are a few sample NPC's that can be inserted into your games as is. Alternatively you can change their names and fiddle with their personalities to your hearts' content. Don't forget though that a character's personality in Liquid Crystal heavily affects her abilities in the game, so be careful what you alter.

Councillor Travis

People who meet Councillor Travis for the first time often have difficulty believing that he is in fact a robot. His face is probably the finest ever to be designed by the robotics workshops of the Crystal Council. Its micro-motors are fine-tuned to be practically silent, and the lifelike latex skin that covers it is perfect down to the tiniest simulated skin pore, even sporting a luxurious moustache and eyebrows made from real hair. It comes as a shock to have spoken to such a charming, vibrant person to shake his hand and find that he is quite cold to the touch. The one thing that he cannot simulate is body heat.

Travis has always attempted to appear as human as possible, a trait that may have been instrumental in his rise to the position of head of the Crystal Council. He is a friendly, hearty sort who gives one the impression of a retired old colonel. His bumbling inept manner often leads people to underestimate him, or think him a buffoon, but underneath all that old-fashioned gallantry and twinkly-eyed charm Travis has a very sharp mind indeed. Under his leadership the Crystal Council has become extremely adept in its duties and he already looks set to return for a triumphal fifth year in office.

Councillor Hugo Travis			
Joy	5V 0S	Love	3V 1S
Fervour	2V 3S	Fear	4V 1S
Qualities	Hearty, Charming, Overindulgent		
Skills	Persuasion +4, Perception +3, History +3, Robotics +2, Acting +2		

Councillor Mattik

Travis' human second-in-command on the Crystal Council is the sharp-faced councillor Mattik. People often get the impression that she is looking at them less with her eyes and more with her long, beak-like nose which flares characteristically when she is annoyed. Councillor Mattik is not entirely without a sense of humour or without pity, but she does not suffer fools gladly. She is far more draconian in her methods than her kindly old robot colleague, and is not above sending spies to tempt newly-awakened robots into criminal activity. This kind of activity is greatly frowned upon by the other members of the council. "How can a robot learn right from wrong," Travis argues, "if people are setting a bad example on purpose?"

It is rumoured that, come the next election, Mattik could well be removed from the council and returned to the administrative role she was originally promoted from. There are always malicious rumours flying around regarding this unpopular councilwoman though, from accusations of prejudice against robotic citizens to subverting criminal law. Mattik has never really cared what other people think of her though, and so far all such charges have always been dismissed as preposterous by her fellow councillors who know her better than that. She just has a talent for getting up peoples' noses.

Note: there is a long-standing joke amongst the citizens that Councillor Mattik's initial doesn't stand for Anne, but for Auto, which only goes to show that, while today's New Olympians are certainly more enlightened than humans of the past, they still need to work on their sense of humour.

Councillor Anne Mattik			
Joy	1V 4S	Love	2V 3S
Fervour	4V 1S	Fear	4V 1S
Qualities	Overbearing, Mistrustful, Efficient		
Skills	Perception +5, Ranged Combat +4, Geography +3, Riding +3, Deceit +2		

Carlos Santayana

When the police forces of New Olympus carried out their crackdown on robophobes several years ago, Carlos Santayana was a mere agitator amongst their ranks. Always a loudmouth, he managed by dint of much personal effort and exaggeration of his exploits to be mistaken for one of the ringleaders of the movement despite being little more than a punk despised even by his fellow robophobes. He was thus cast out into the wilderness along with all the others. Since then the deaths of many of the actual ringleaders have gradually eroded the ranks of the robophobes-in-exile leaving Carlos in charge.

Santayana is a bully and a braggart. He claims to have killed over a hundred robots, one using nothing more than a toothpick. Despite his predilection to attempting to solve every problem by finding an incautious mechanical citizen straying outside of the city walls and beating it to death, Carlos has proved quite an efficient leader. Unfortunately for him pretty much all of the effective revolutionaries are already dead and he has been left at the head of an increasingly pathetic band of ragamuffins who are hard put to survive from day to day. Nevertheless he still refers to them as his 'army' and dreams of the day when they shall storm the walls of New Olympus and wipe out every last robot residing there.

Carlos Santayana			
Joy	2V 3S	Love	0V 5S
Fervour	5V 0S	Fear	2V 3S
Qualities	Prejudiced, Vain, Bossy, Bad Tempered		
Skills	Melee Combat +5, Athletics +3, Acrobatics +3, Geography +2, Deceit +2		

Adrienne Law

Upon her envisaging, Adrienne decided that the delicate sweeping lines of the female form suited her best and thus chose to become female. However her outer shell has a decidedly militaristic line to it which befits her status as the chief of the Steel Union and leader of New Olympus' police force. She's had her armour upgraded so often that she looks positively sinister when on-duty. Fortunately she can remove most of the more terrifying additions when she isn't, and off-duty she has quite an attractively styled femme robot chassis.

Adrienne is one tough lady. As soon as she had the authority to check, she ran through criminal record files and found out all the crimes she perpetrated herself in 'previous lives'. She has never really trusted non-Envisaged robots since, and always makes a point of visiting newly reset machines when her duties permit to give them a pep talk about law and order. Despite her fierce reputation and amazing fighting prowess she is really quite friendly once you get to know her. Getting past the tough façade she puts on is the real challenge.

Adrienne Law			
Joy	3V 1S	Love	2V 1S
Fervour	4V 1S	Fear	2V 1S
Qualities	Fearless, Enthusiastic, Fair-Handed		
Skills	Close Combat +5, Ranged Combat +3, Athletics +3, Acrobatics +3, Investigation +2		

Johnny Two-tone

Not all robots that pass through the envisaging process are little goody two shoes. Johnny Two-tone, who gets his name from the rather flamboyant yellow and blue paint job on his chassis, is a petty criminal who passed the test by the skin of his teeth, mostly thanks to his open, honest manner. He is partially a confidence trickster selling broken 'relics' that he digs up from wherever he can. Usually they are things like broken toasters and pocket calculators from the ruins close to New Olympus, but he will make do with rubbish from the local tip when he can't find anything good in the rubble. That said, every so often he comes up with a real gem of an item.

Confidence tricks are not Johnny's only trick. He is also a fence for the black market and will sell all kinds of odd gizmos and gadgets to the unwary. He can get simple weapons from the city armoury, occasionally even guns with a few bullets left scavenged from old battlegrounds. He pedals his wares around the seedier backstreets and has an unnerving knack for finding exactly the kind of chump who will be interested in his wares. Johnny is of the lovable rogue type of criminal, who'll rob you blind with a merry twinkle in his eye and never believe for a second that he's doing anything dishonest. However he isn't a violent robot. He restricts himself to a little housebreaking and pocket picking, and has never been known to harm anyone.

Johnny Two-Tone			
Joy	4V	Love	1V 3S
Fervour	3V 0S	Fear	3V 2S
Qualities	Coward, Friendly, Criminal		
Skills	Deceit +4, Pickpocket +3, Stealth +3, Perception +2, Chemistry +1		

Sample Equipment

As far as hi-tech goods go, New Olympus has the robots, the Great Library and not much else. However there are a few bits and pieces left over from the robot wars that they have managed to keep in a reasonable state of repairs against an emergency. Using equipment usually gives the character a small bonus under certain circumstances provided that the operator can work out how to use the equipment. Here is a short sampling of the meagre remains of technology. Note that much of this equipment cannot be bought. It's too rare to sell to just anybody, and must be issued personally by the Crystal Council.

Homing Beacon

After a newly awakened robot's eight hours are up it is shut down by the failsafe mechanism and begins to broadcast a homing signal. The Crystal Council also have a few portable distress beacons for use by anyone travelling a great distance from the city. The signal requires a special handset to follow to its source. However this is not an infallible method. For a start the beacon's radio signal can be blocked by substantial geological features such as tall hills. Not only that, but the handsets have a limited battery life and can only be operated for an hour or so continually before needing to be returned to the solar panels for recharging. The usual method of operation is to take an approximate reading, head to the point where you'd guess the signal was coming from and then take another reading, slowly zeroing in on the location of the beacon rather than constantly following its signal and wasting the battery.

Azrael Virus Spreader

This box-like pistol contains a miniature broadcasting rig designed to spread the Azrael Virus to any robot that it is aimed at. It is operated in the same manner as a firearm with sights and trigger, and emits a loud buzz to warn the operator when the signal is on. Virus spreaders are lethal to robotic citizens (erasing a robot's personality is tantamount to murder) so their use is tightly controlled by the Crystal Council. Virus spreaders are issued to the police force when a rogue robot is sighted in or near New Olympus. Anyone armed with a virus spreader may use it to make Ranged Combat attacks against robot targets and gains a +3 bonus to their result. The device is harmless to humans despite unfounded rumours that its rays cause tumours in the brain.

Eddie's Last Chance

Rumour has it that the legendary robotics expert Eddie Poleaxe created this small, box-like device from the remnants of a broken virus spreader in an attempt to cure his own raging schizophrenia. Whether it succeeded in this task is unknown, but it did definitely give him raging homicidal tendencies. He was tracked down by an elite police squad a few days later and reset. The device was confiscated from his person and destroyed. Attempting to replicate it is now a serious crime. It would appear though that Eddie made several copies before his capture, as every so often another last chance appears on the black market.

Eddie's last chance is a small black box that must be connected directly to a robot's brain circuitry. When activated it scrambles the attached circuits causing massive realignments in the robot's personality matrix. The process is completely random. A robot who uses Eddie's last chance could become reasonably agreeable, but it could also become a total lunatic. The device is occasionally used by neurotic robots desperate to make it through their trial but who know that they have little chance of success. If a PC robot should attempt such a silly action, draw four cards from the deck. Consult the table below for each card and apply the modifiers indicated to the emotion that corresponds to the card's suit. If after the last card's modifiers have been applied the robot's rating in any one emotion is above the maximum 5 total sin and virtue points, then the robot's brain explodes from the pressure.

Card	Result
Ace	No change
2	+1V
3	+1S
4	+1V and +1S
5	-1V
6	-1S
7	-1V and -1S
8	+1V and -1S
9	-1V and +1S
10	Emotion becomes 5V 0S
Jack	Emotion becomes 0V 5S
Queen	V rating and S rating swap places
King	Emotion resets to zero

Personality Storage

A simple method of backing up the personalities and memories of important robots, these portable hard drives can be plugged into the back of a robot's head to download their entire brain patterns. Should that robot be accidentally wiped or assassinated, the thought processes can then be uploaded again into an empty shell thus reviving the robot. The use of personality storage is strictly controlled, since a skilled robotics expert might be able to extract sensitive information from the resulting data file, or use it to make an exact mental facsimile of the robot in question by uploading the contents into an empty shell.

Another reason that personality storage must be controlled so tightly is that these devices have in the past been used to cheat the Crystal Council's testing methods. A robot on trial could download its personality onto a backup disc, then trick or force an already-Envisaged robot into connecting up to the box. It could then overwrite its victim's personality with its own, then be tried and erased secure in the knowledge that its mind was living on somewhere. This process does not always go smoothly however, as the personality of an Envisaged robot can become ingrained upon its circuitry over time and can be very difficult to shift. An improperly cleansed brain could grow schizophrenic over time, with the voice of its last occupant constantly whispering in its electronic ear, or could even fragment into multiple personalities so that two minds are effectively sharing the same robotic shell.

A Word on Weaponry

Apart from the Azrael virus spreader (a specialised 'gun' that only works on robots anyway) there are no advanced weapons in New Olympus. Society has turned away from the science of war partly for ethical reasons but mostly because it no longer possesses the complex technology required to manufacture the parts. As a result the only weapons to be found within the city are primitive by real world standards. There are knives, swords and shields of copper, iron and steel. There are clubs, staffs and maces constructed from a variety of woods and metals. There are bows, compound bows, slings and spears. There are however no guns, no siege engines, and no advanced military equipment of any kind.

Once in a while somebody does find a gun, a grenade or a bazooka lying around in one of the ruins. These are usually confiscated by the police, disarmed and put on display in the museum as a warning to future generations. Civilians in New Olympus are not allowed to carry weapons of any sort, let alone dangerous relics of the uncivilised past. Besides, if anyone were to attempt to make use of these strange artefacts they would be as likely to hurt themselves as anyone else. Nevertheless the following table does list the bonuses granted by a few firearms just in case your campaign requires it. As usual these bonuses apply to the results of any Ranged Combat test made to attack an enemy. The table also includes a number of other far more common weapons designed for melee use.

Melee Weapons	Bonus
Dagger, sap, blackjack or stave	+1
Sword, spear, hand axe, heavy mace or cleaver	+2
Great sword, battle axe	+3

Ranged Weapons	Bonus
Sling, thrown rock, dart, throwing knife	+1
Longbow, short bow, thrown spear	+2
Compound bow, crossbow, handgun	+3
Heavy military rifle, hand grenade	+4

USING EMOTION SPLASH CARDS

It can be a bit of a trial for new players to remember what all those different emotions, virtues and sins relate to. As a player's aid and a fun visual prop, here are the Liquid Crystal Emotion Splash Cards. Photocopy them onto good, stiff card and cut them out individually. To make them even sturdier you can paste opposing emotions (for instance the respective virtue and sin of Fervour) back to back allowing you to simply flip the card over to see what its opposite number is. You can even paste your record sheet to the back of the Neutral card, as they are roughly the same size.

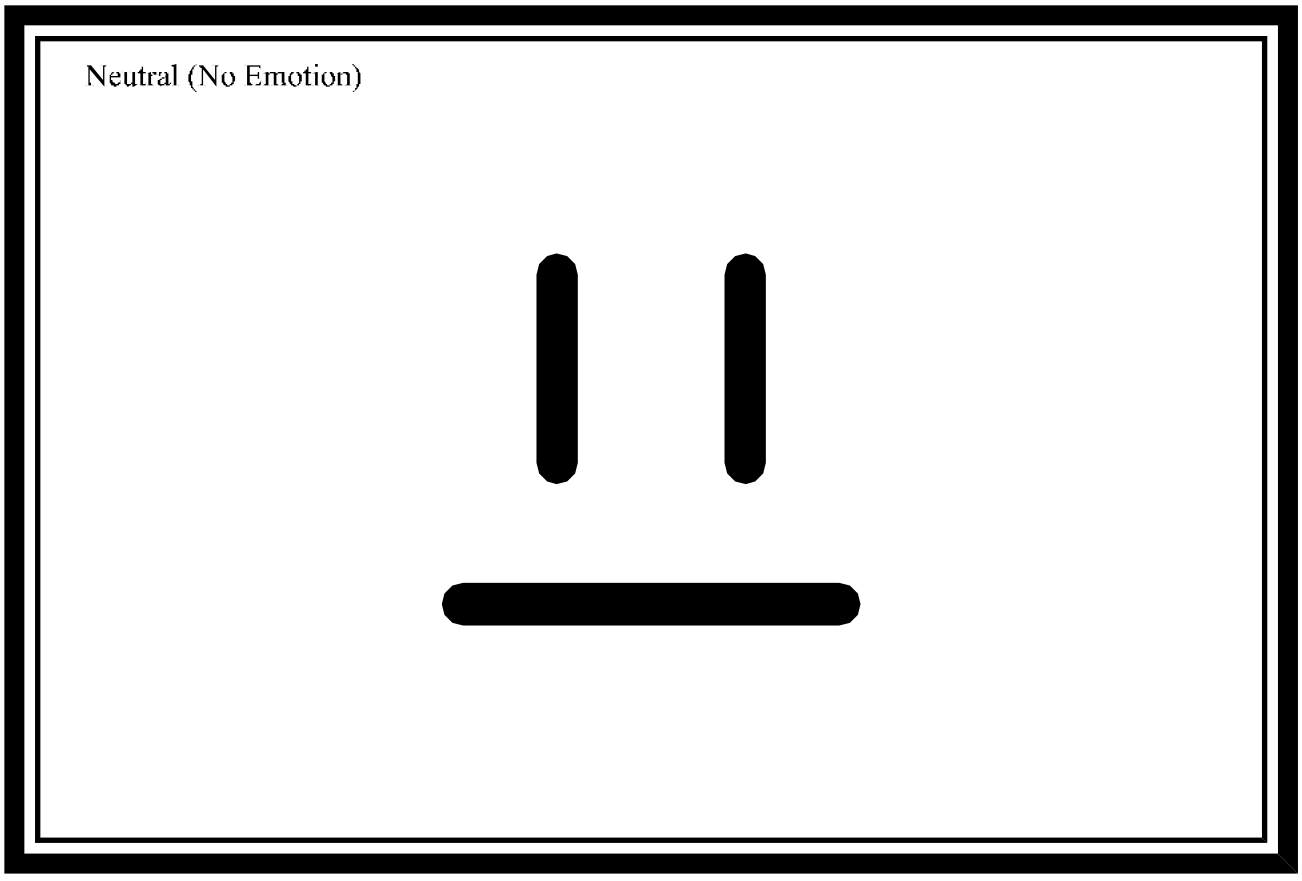
300gsm card is probably the best stuff to print the splash cards onto and will result in a good, sturdy game tool that will see many sessions of use without becoming grubby and bent. You can laminate the cards to make them last even longer, which also has the advantage of turning your character sheet into a wipe-clean marker board, provided that you remember not to use permanent markers!

Each splash card represents one of the eight aspects of the four emotions. A simple description of what that emotion represents can be found in the top left hand corner, along with the emotion and aspect in parentheses. There are also cards for Neutral (currently experiencing no emotion at all), Puzzled (trying to figure out what emotion you should currently be feeling), and Confused (experiencing the horrible turmoil of feeling several conflicting emotions all at the same time).

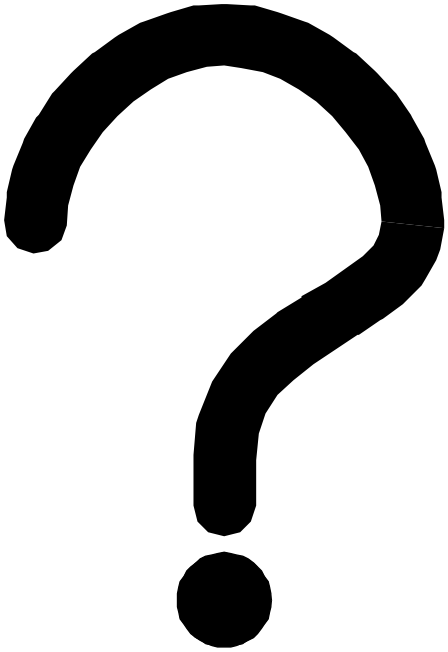
You can use these splash cards purely as a visual reference tool to help you learn the many different emotions in the game, but you can also use them to enhance the gaming experience. Each card depicts a simple smiley face as used by the liquid crystal faces of the average untested robot. Why not select one from time to time when your character is experiencing a particular emotion rather strongly and hold it up in front of your own face so everyone can see what your robot's face currently looks like? This will help to give everyone in the room a feeling of what it's like to be a robot with only a limited range of expressions.

Another fun use for the splash cards is in deciding how a confused robot might cope with its emotions. If you feel that your robot would be Puzzled or Confused by the current turn of events, hold up the appropriate flash card for a few seconds while you shuffle the remaining cards, then pick one at random without looking. Lift the card up in front of your face as you would with any other emotion card and, still without looking at it, try and work out which expression you have selected from the reactions of the people around you.

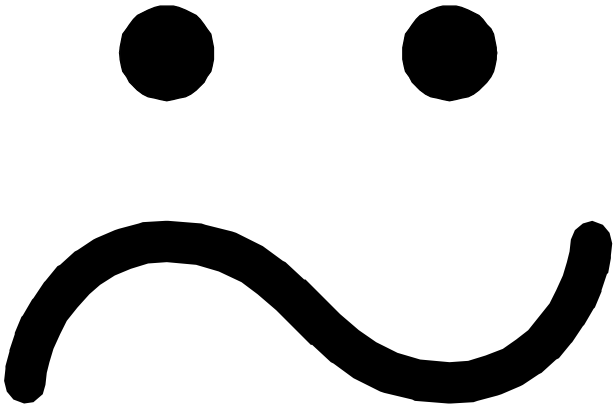
Note: one way of ensuring that a randomly selected card is the right way up without having to look at it is to paste them back to back in such a way that the one facing you is upside down and the one facing away is upright, then round off the top right and bottom right corners. You know then that if you are holding the top right corner and it is rounded, whichever face is showing will not be inverted.



Puzzlement (working things out)

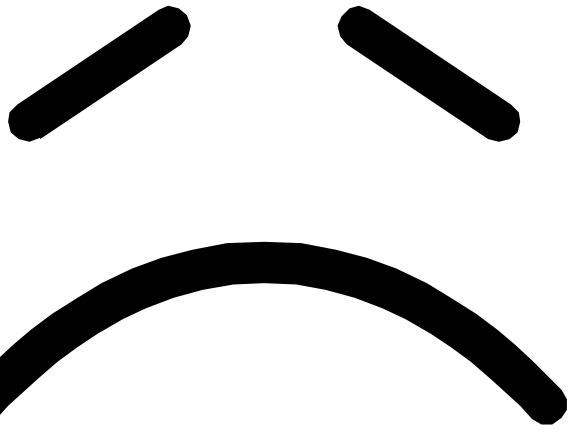


Confusion (Mixed Emotions)



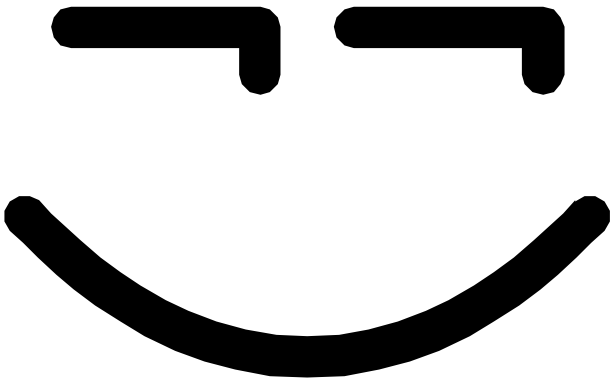
Happiness (Virtuous Joy)

Sorrow (Sinful Joy)



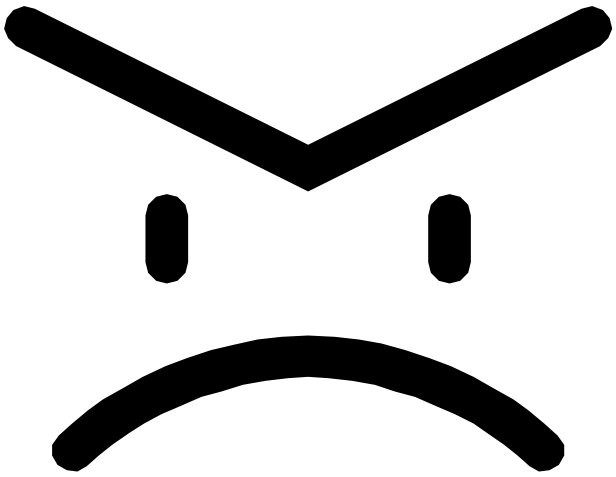
Compassion (Virtuous Love)

Scheming (Sinful Love)

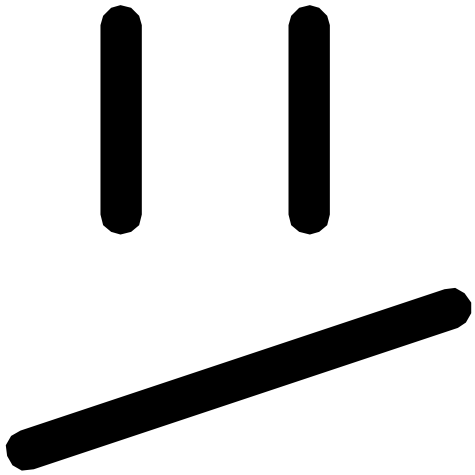


Enthusiasm (Virtuous Fervour)

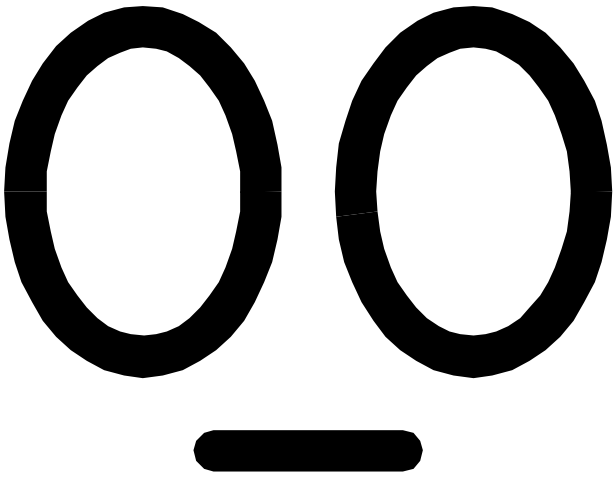
Rage (Sinful Fervour)



Caution (Virtuous Fear)



Cowardliness (Sinful Fear)



LIQUID CRYSTAL
Record Sheet

Player _____

Chosen Name _____

Designation __ __ __ __ -- __

Skills	Lvl

♦ Joy

♥ Love

♣ Fervour

♠ Fear

Skills	Lvl

LIQUID CRYSTAL
Record Sheet

Player _____

Chosen Name _____

Designation __ __ __ __ -- __

Skills	Lvl

♦ Joy

♥ Love

♣ Fervour

♠ Fear

Skills	Lvl