

Synanthropes

Syn-an-thrope. Noun. \ˈsɪn-ən-thrōp\

- a) A creature which has evolved to survive in ecological niches created by humans (Ex.: Rats, cockroaches, crows, raccoons).
- b) Any of the various creatures commonly considered to be pests or vermin (Ex.: Rats, cockroaches, crows, raccoons).
- c) An animal which is just a little too human for its own good.

Synanthropes was originally conceived and written for Game Chef 2013, and uses the following elements:



A human figure with square eyes/glasses silhouetted in a double-sided arrow. I interpreted the figure as being an observer, with the arrows indicating a metaphorical distance—it is human and somehow not human. Additionally, it may represent a person literally moving up or down.



An insect with large mandibles emerging from a small apple. I interpreted this as representing mutation and change, with the strange insect indicating the unfamiliar emerging from the familiar.



A figure partially illuminated by a lantern. I interpreted this as representing discovery, as in a light being shined on something new. It also indicates the exploration of dark places.

The four synanthropes chosen—rats, crows, raccoons, and roaches—represent the most common synanthropic animals in the author's home city, and many of their legends are based on American media. Players in other areas of the world are encouraged to substitute their own local pests, as appropriate.

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Thanks for reading/playing/sharing/not locking your dumpsters!

About

Synanthropes is a story game about representatives of the four known sentient races of planet Earth: the Crows, the Rats, the Roaches, and the Raccoons.

Sometime in the future, somewhere between one hundred and a thousand years from today, humanity disappeared, for reasons unknown. Long after that, synanthropes—those animals who live in ecological niches that humans created --evolved, becoming intelligent communities in their own right, aware that they live in Humanity's cast-off ruins.

You play representatives from these species, each player from a different one, who came together on a scientific expedition, the first major cross-species undertaking since the end of the Resource Wars. There is a building, a skyscraper in the center of an otherwise abandoned wasteland, which has never been explored by any of your people. Your mission is to climb to the top and search for information about the Humans, their Artifacts, and possibly an answer to the question you have all been asking for generations: Where did the Humans go, anyway?

But be warned... the peace among your species is a fragile thing and the Wars weren't just about resources, but about utter cultural incompatibility as well. Your species are just *different*. Your mission is as much about trust as discovery, and if it's a failure, then quicker tempers among your people may once again call for war.

What you need

- Three or four players.
- Several six-sided dice.
- A standard deck of cards.
- Three index cards or slips of paper, each with a question written on top:
 - “What was the purpose of this building?”
 - “Why was this building abandoned?”
 - “What message did the Humans leave when they left this building?”
- One character sheet for each species (available at the end of this document), plus pencils or other writing tools.
- Four or more Human Artifacts per player.

What’s a Human Artifact?

In this game, you will be playing non-human species who are encountering the remnants of Humanity. Thus, anything that Humans used would be a Human Artifact... plates, lighters, screwdrivers, cell-phones, soda bottles, anything. For your game, you can pick anything that you can put on the table in front of you and invite the other players to look at. Use what’s in your pocket, or what’s in the room, or something you brought from home. There are a few things to keep in mind:

1. No two Human Artifacts should be the same.
2. Human Artifact should function; Synanthropes have learned to reactivate long-dead electronics.
3. Your characters aren’t human, and shouldn’t know quite what their artifacts are. Interpret Artifacts through the lens of your species; what can YOU do with them, how do they relate to YOUR world?

How to Play

Synanthropes is played as a series of scenes which represent the floors you pass through during your climb up a Human skyscraper. This doesn't mean there's a scene for every story of the building; most floors pass easily, but when you leave the staircase in order to camp down for a bit, find a new staircase when yours has become blocked or broken, or just engage in a little exploration, that floor will be the subject of a scene.

First, distribute one character sheet per player, and fill it out, following the directions on the left side. Remember that you can pick either the pre-generated legends to focus on, or your own. The ones you don't choose are legends you might believe, or might have doubt about, but the one you choose is something you hold dear. Likewise, the mysteries you don't choose are things you might understand to some degree; the one you choose simply baffles you. Take some time to work into the mentality of your species. Remember: you aren't human. How do you move? How do you speak? What matters to you?

Determine fairly someone to go first; she will be the first Narrator, and set up the first scene, which takes place as the characters enter the lobby for the first time. Turns will proceed clockwise from that player, with each Narrator describing a new floor.

Setting up a Scene

The Narrator is the GM for each scene, describing what is on the floor; select one of the Human Artifacts you brought. This is the centerpiece, an unharmed piece of history worth looking at. Describe its surroundings; they should make sense given the real nature of the Artifact, though to the *Synanthropes*, the logic may not be clear.

There is also a Danger on this floor; draw a card to determine if it is:

- Decay (Hearts): invasive natural elements, including simpler tribes of animals.
- Devastation (Diamonds): massive structural instabilities, falling rafters and missing floors.
- Defense (Clubs): Things Humans left to ward off intruders and pests (of which you are both).
- Dissent (Spades): Arguments and infighting among the explorers, which the Narrator's character should be a part of.

The Narrator may determine the specifics of the Danger (Optional: Consult the chart at the end of this document for an Oracle of potential dangers) and how it stands between the characters and the Artifact, the next floor, or both.

The Narrator is also responsible for ending the scene when everyone seems ready to head on to the next floor.

Challenges

When any character attempts an action which carries with it a serious risk of failure, the Narrator may call for a die roll to determine whether the character succeeds.

You should roll if one or more of the following is true:

- The character is attempting something which would be very difficult or against his or her nature.
- The character is directly confronting the floor's Danger.
- Another character is acting to oppose the character.

...AND one or more of the following is true as well

- The Narrator can think of an interesting consequence for failure.
- The character would take an injury if he fails

...then the character must roll to succeed.

The character sets the stakes for his success; he describes what he is attempting to do, and what he'll achieve if he succeeds.

The Narrator will set the stakes for failure, describing the interesting consequence and, if it makes sense, cause of injury.

Characters start with one die and add more as follows:

- 1 die for being assisted in a meaningful way by another character.
- 1 die for using a Human Artifact in a fundamental way.
- 1 or more hoard dice if they wish and are able to.
- Add 1 to the value of each die rolled for each circled Trait being used.

Characters must roll at least one 5 or 6 to succeed. Any hoard dice which are rolled are discarded.

Injuries

When you are injured, mark one of the "Injury" boxes next to a set of Traits, and describe how you've injured yourself. You get no benefit from those traits until the injury clears. Injuries last two scenes before you can heal them.

To heal an injury, describe yourself finding something within the ruins you can use to recover. Using it is a Challenge; if you succeed the injury goes away, and if you fail it becomes permanent.

If at any point you take three injuries, your character is mortally wounded. You cannot participate in any challenges or heal for the remainder of the game. You MAY sacrifice yourself, immediately succeeding in any

attempt to get a Clue; if you do so, your character must die or flee before the end of the scene.

Clues

A “Clue” is a partial answer to one of the questions surrounding this building:

1. What was the purpose of this building?
Several structures have survived from Human times, but this one is so large, so isolated, and in such good repair, it must have been important.
2. Why was this building abandoned?
The Humans would not likely have left such a building easily. Something must have pushed them out.
3. What messages have they left for us?
There must be a message, right? Surely! Implicit in the question is “Which race is the message for?” but you know that nobody will agree on that one.

Once per floor, any character EXCEPT that played by the Narrator may describe themselves searching for a Clue.

Be explicit when you say you’re searching for a Clue, and remember that Clues are always going to be challenging to come by: hidden, distant, guarded, or otherwise inaccessible.

Gaining a Clue is a special challenge roll: you MUST roll a hoard die, and you MUST get two or more successes.

If you succeed, describe what the Clue is (a document, a photo, a tool, a mark on the wall, etc.), and which question it might apply to.

Write down the Clue on an index card, beneath the appropriate question. When a question has its third Clue, take a moment to discuss what the answer to the question might be. Your characters should have this discussion before the scene ends, as they begin to climb the stairs to the next floor. If the building has a stash of weapons, some bullet-riddled walls, and an ancient human corpse as Clues for “Why was this building abandoned?” you might come to the conclusion that there was an invasion of some sort.

Your answer doesn’t have to be specific and exact, and there can be some disagreement between the species. Write the answer you come up with on the bottom of the card.

The Final Scene

The final scene takes place when one of two conditions occurs.

- Your characters have answered all three questions.
- Your characters are all unable or unwilling to gather additional Clues.

If the mission ends in failure, each player, in turn, describes how their people hear of the mission’s end, and how their species reacts. Each vignette should be kept brief and open-ended, but by the last player’s turn it should be clear that the Synanthropes are again on the road to war.

If the mission is a success, the players should take a moment to discuss the questions they have answered. Each answer is, itself, a Clue for the greater question that they hope to answer: “What happened to the Humans?”

Certainly, they won’t have a perfect answer. How could they, with such limited evidence? But it’s all the evidence they have, and so they will use it to fashion some sort of guess. The characters need not agree at all, but each must come up with an interpretation he or she finds fitting.

Each player then, in turn, narrates a brief vignette describing NOT their arrival at the top floor, but their return to their own people, at which point they report what they discovered, and the reaction of their species. The different vignettes shouldn’t openly disagree with one another about what they discovered, but the players are free and encouraged to focus on different aspects of the top floor, and different interpretations of what they found there.

You are _____, a Crow

You come from the clever, tool-using birds which pushed pigeons out of big cities. The modern Crows are trappers and hunters, who value clever ideas and the Crows who create them. They've grown too large for true flight, but they still glide between the hollowed-out ancient skyscrapers they call home, looking down on the rest of the world.

Choose a name. Your TRUE name is in Crowsong, untranslatable. To outsiders Crows usually name themselves after the Human streets they live over: Rodway. Sethenth Street. Thigarō. Altic Athenu. Sunset Oulethard.

Circle three Traits. Circle one Trait from each set; all start uninjured.

Create your Grudge. Crows have a special grudge against the species to your left. What did they do to your people to cause this hatred?

Create a legend. These are stories all Crows have heard, which define their worldview. Pick one of the three as something you find truly meaningful.

Create a mystery. These reflect aspects Crow culture just doesn't have, which make Humans baffling. Pick one of the three as something you find especially strange or impossible to believe of Humans.

Start your Hoard: Think of a special skill you have which will benefit you on this journey, like wriggling open an elevator door or disabling a guardian droid. Write this down under your hoard.

A Crow's "hoard" represents its skills, those which it has learned from its parents, the clever members of the Crow community, and especially those it developed for itself. Crows value education and sharing of skills, but they also know that the greatest good is to oneself, then one's family, then the Crow, in that order. When you spend a hoard die, you must reveal a skill you have kept to yourself; thereafter, all other players know how to do this, and you must cross it out.

Crows are inspired by Human ingenuity; when you get your talons on a Human artifact, you can write a new skill that it has taught you. Let the other players (but not the other characters) know what it is, and write it down to generate a new hoard die.

Pick a Human Artifact. You've brought a single Artifact with you. Keep it in front of you, and think about why you brought it and what it means to you.

TRAIT		Injured?
Your Binocular Vision lets you...		
Spot objects at a distance	Throw accurately	
Your Short but Functional Wings let you...		
Glide short distances	Quickly evade danger	
Your Straight, Strong Beak lets you...		
Manipulate objects	Break objects	

GRUDGE	
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CROW LEGENDS	
Willar and Orrille, two Human brothers, together discovered the secret of flight... before this, all creatures lived on the ground, but the brothers opened the skies to Humans and their allies, the birds.	The greatest hero of Humanity was a man named McIyver, who could fashion tools and traps from everything around him, and fathered a foundation of phoenixes.
<i>Your own:</i>	

CROW MYSTERIES	
To a crow, the importance of oneself is followed by one's family, then one's community, then Crowdom as a whole, and THEN the world. The concept of hierarchy or servitude is foul, and something no Human would have believed in.	Sexual dimorphism, the tendency for males and females to look or act differently, is almost nonexistent in Crows outside of the laying of eggs. They can't believe the Humans could have such an absurd divide.
<i>Your own:</i>	

YOUR HOARD

You are _____, a Rat

You come from the wild rodents who followed humans for centuries, and outnumbered them in most cities. Modern Rats let their preoccupation with old Human culture develop into reverence and then emulation; Rats alone have learned the basics of agriculture. The Rats are the most inclined to study Humans, both from historical and religious viewpoints.

Choose a name. A Rat, by tradition, earns its name by venturing into Human ruins and returning with an ancient food label or other bit of human writing: Runchy. Eanut. Sheez-It. Nountain Dew. Coke (very common).

Circle three Traits. Circle one Trait from each set; all start uninjured.

Create your Grudge. Rats have a special grudge against the species to your left. What did they do to your people to cause this hatred?

Create a legend. These are stories all Rats have heard, which define their worldview. Pick one of the three as something you find truly meaningful.

Create a mystery. These reflect aspects Rat culture just doesn't have, which make Humans baffling. Pick one of the three as something you find especially strange or impossible to believe of Humans.

Start your Hoard: Turn to the player to your right. You know a secret about this character, something they told you or you saw, which any other characters don't know. Together, work out what it is. Then create a secret about yourself, something you're ashamed of. You may let the other players know it, if you wish. Write both of these down under your hoard.

Rats hoard many things... food, Artifacts, tools, currency. Anything they choose not to share with their community. Hoarding is not, strictly speaking, forbidden, but it is taboo, so what they are really hoarding is secrets. When you spend a hoard die, you must make a shameful admission (for instance, that you took an Artifact without telling the others) or reveal a secret you've learned about one of the other players. Once a secret is shared, cross it out.

Gain a hoard die whenever you discover a new secret, or do something you must keep secret.

Pick a Human Artifact. You've brought a single Artifact with you. Keep it in front of you, and think about why you brought it and what it means to you.

TRAIT		Injured?
Your Sharp Nose lets you...		
Track someone	Sniff out food	
Your Strong Hind Legs let you...		
Climb vertically	Leap very far	
Your Sharp, Chiseling Teeth let you...		
Gnaw through barriers	Bite hard and hold fast	

GRUDGE	
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RAT LEGENDS	
Humans were, themselves, the favored ones of an even more ancient species, the Titan. In the same way that Humans gave ancient rats homes and food and intelligence, it was the Titan Ronethius who gave Humans the freedom to run the world.	Humans were like Rats in that they sought to understand where they came from, and revered their ancestors. The Human explorer Indiana Yones was one such historian, who warned of the dangers ancient knowledge could have in the wrong hands.
<i>Your own:</i>	

RAT MYSTERIES	
Rats are social creatures, drawn to their clans and reluctant to leave home for long periods. The idea of a Human preferring solitude or privacy is unlikely in the extreme.	A Rat's instinctive response to danger is, quite rightly, to flee, with fighting as a last, desperate resort. Bravery is a sort of madness, one the Humans would not have suffered.
<i>Your own:</i>	

YOUR HOARD

You are _____, a Roach

You come from an insect which predated history by three hundred million years. A Roach is a single sentient bug sometimes called the queen, surrounded by a thousand or more worker cockroaches which she directs through complex pheremonal control. Though the worker bodies are expendable and replaceable, the queen doesn't see herself as a ruler among many, but as a single hive mind... albeit with one especially essential neuron. The seething mass is a true scavenger's scavenger, finding value in the most desolate and deadly wastes.

Choose a name. Your name is an untranslatable chemical signal, but the Roach have developed a means of "speaking" by properly manipulating their member bodies to make consonant clusters: K'k't. Kr'T. D'rd. J's'p.

Circle three Traits. Circle one Trait from each set; all start uninjured.

Create your Grudge. Roaches have a special grudge against the species to your left. What did they do to your people to cause this hatred?

Create a legend. These are tales all Roaches have heard, which define their worldview. Pick one of the three as something you find truly meaningful.

Create a mystery. These reflect aspects Roach culture just doesn't have, which make Humans baffling. Pick one of the three as something you find especially strange or impossible to believe of Humans.

Start your Hoard: Start with two Hoard dice. Roaches have one true hoard: themselves. Their power stems from the ability to throw hundreds or thousands of tiny bodies at a problem until it goes away. When you spend a hoard die, you are sacrificing workers... many, many worker cockroaches will die in this action; to that end, you can only spend Hoard dice in situations which will be aided by the sacrifice of a thousand little bodies. When you spend a die, write down how the workers were slain.

You can regenerate hoard dice at any time: take an injury. This represents the queen mentally tagging some of her workers as "expendable." You may attempt to heal this injury any time after the next scene.

Pick a Human Artifact. You've brought a single Artifact with you. Keep it in front of you, and think about why you brought it and what it means to you.

TRAIT		Injured?
Your thousands of Sensitive Antennae let you...		
Hear extremely well	Analyze chemicals	
Your Sturdy Carapaces let you...		
Resist environmental effects	Survive impacts and falls	
Your Seething Mass of Bodies let you...		
Stretch yourself	Flank someone	

GRUDGE	
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ROACH LEGENDS	
In times of danger, Humans could become the worker bodies of an even greater protector organism. There are many such protectors, but they are commonly referred to by the Roach as V'ltr'n.	One of Humanity's most ancient heroes was, like the Roaches, a wanderer, doing great deeds wherever he went. His name was H'rc'l's, and his journeys were legendary.
<i>Your own:</i>	

ROACH MYSTERIES	
While the Roach cannot tell a lie amongst themselves, they have learned of falsehoods from the other species. Still, they don't believe a Human capable of such an unnatural act as lying.	Roaches live off of... anything. Really, it is hard for a Roach to starve, and though they know not all species are as resilient as they, they also can't believe creatures as rich and clever as Humans could have such a thing as starvation or poverty.
<i>Your own:</i>	

YOUR HOARD

You are _____, a Raccoon

You come from the crafty little bandits who made a home in suburbia. The Raccoons' natural curiosity and inability to ignore locked and bolted doors has led them to be the ones who explored Human technology; they survive by operating equipment that the other Synanthropes can't, from farming machinery to plasma weapons to phonographs to simple robots.

Choose a name. A Raccoon's native language and given name is written, with no spoken form. Spoken names are self-given affectations based on favored technologies: Shamshung. Ford. Canon. Hewlett. Shony.

Circle three Traits. Circle one Trait from each set; all start uninjured.

Create your Grudge. Raccoons have a special grudge against the species to your left. What did they do to your people to cause this hatred?

Create a legend. These are tales all Raccoons have heard, which define their worldview. Pick one of the three as something you find truly meaningful.

Create a mystery. These reflect aspects Raccoon culture just doesn't have, which make Humans baffling. Pick one of the three as something you find especially strange or impossible to believe of Humans.

Start your Hoard: Look at the player to your right. Immediately before your characters embarked on this expedition, they did something which made your character look like a fool, perhaps by demonstrating knowledge or skill you SHOULD have, but didn't. Between then two of you, figure out what it was, write it down, and take a hoard die.

Raccoons excel where they aren't invited. Locks, bolts, unlabeled switches and deactivated machines... Raccoons love them all, because of their insatiable curiosity and natural inclination to show the heck off. When you spend a hoard die, it must be one such an act of discovery: opening a locked drawer or activating an unknown machine.

A Raccoon's curiosity has, tied to it, stubbornness. When you fail at a task in a way that doesn't hurt you, but DOES make you look foolish, write down what happened and gain a hoard die. You CANNOT gain a hoard die when you fail to gather a Clue, however.

Pick a Human Artifact. You've brought a single Artifact with you. Keep it in front of you, and think about why you brought it and what it means to you.

TRAIT		Injured?
Your Tactile Paws let you...		
Operate technology	Forage without looking	
Your Nimble Body lets you...		
Keep your balance	Run quickly	
Your Dark Stripes let you...		
Hide in shadows	Cause a distraction	

GRUDGE	
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RACCOON LEGENDS	
Humans had a special hatred for the sea, and those who voluntarily lived on the waters were dubbed "pirate," or non-Human. Their punishment was the most severe imaginable: their hands were cut off and replaced by hooks!	There was a Human hero, so adept with his mastery of technology that he became part machine in order to protect his fellow Humans. His Human name was Alex Murphy, but he was known to all as "RoboCop."
<i>Your own:</i>	

RACCOON MYSTERIES	
Raccoons test everything, and though they can't understand it all, they try to, and will seek out an explanation wherever possible. Taking things on faith, that's abnormal and certainly not Human.	Raccoons like to wander, spreading their expertise, collecting adulation from the multitudes, and rarely sleeping in the same place twice. That's boring and, well, a bit dangerous. Raccoons just don't get the appeal of permanent homes.
<i>Your own:</i>	

YOUR HOARD

Optional: Disaster Oracle

Draw a card and compare it to the element on this table; use that element to influence your description of the floor. You don't need to put it in right away (indeed, some Devastation and Dissent options, especially, are best left to fester for a few tense moments), but it should come into play before too long. If a Disaster is, in your opinion, extremely similar to something that has already happened, or illogical given the building you've created so far, or simply uninteresting, you may discard and select a new card.

HEARTS	An element of DECAY
A	A tribe of irate starlings don't welcome your arrival.
2	A jungle born of potted plants bars the way.
3	Leaky plumbing and water damage renders this floor a virtual swamp.
4	One lone, burly opossum holds an Artifact and fears you will steal it.
5	For some reason, the air on this floor is murky and hard to breathe.
6	A fire alarm, stuck on, is unbearable to creatures with sensitive hearing, like Rats and Roaches.
7	The entire floor is covered in... something sticky. Very sticky, enough to catch fur and bugs.
8	This floor is lined with mountains of rubble you must navigate.
9	Some predator—perhaps a feral dog or cat—is lurking on this floor.
10	There is a magpie residing on this floor, and it has an eye for shiny Artifacts (and shiny anything, really).
J	Wasps! WAAAAAASPS!
Q	The only obvious route to the next floor is jammed and inoperable.
K	If the Roach is in your party, she will take an injury this floor (if not, draw again).

DIAMONDS	A bit of DEVASTATION
A	A fire is raging on this floor!
2	The flooring has entirely given out, leaving a massive chasm.
3	Whomever approaches the Artifact on this floor will have a beam drop from above them.
4	A section of the flooring has collapsed; this floor's Artifact can be found in the room below, among the rubble.
5	Passage across this floor is only possible by leaping across hanging light fixtures.
6	Heavy winds blowing in through a broken window.
7	As you creep along this floor, something, somewhere nearby, explodes!
8	There is an Artifact perched on the windowsill, about to fall to the ground far below.
9	Live electrical wires dance and weave all over.
10	A burst pipe overhead causes a deluge.
J	The stairs are destroyed. You'll have to climb a few floors.
Q	A wall begins to collapse, causing an indoor avalanche.
K	If the Crow is in your party, she will take an injury this floor (if not, draw again).

CLUBS	The building's internal DEFENSES
A	A small, mobile droid that hunts and kills pests.
2	This floor is lined with motion sensing cameras and alarms which alert... everyone.
3	Between you and the exit is a massive, locked vault door.
4	A laser grid, somehow still active after all these centuries.
5	A very, very bright light is distracting and painful to nocturnal creatures like Rats and Raccoons.
6	On this floor: voice-activated doors. Useful, if you can make yourself pronounce reasonable Human.
7	This floor's Artifact is locked in a case of seemingly impenetrable glass and metal.
8	On this floor: a huge Human machine, still active, taking up most of the floor. What does it even do?
9	One of your party is caught in a trap.
10	A button. A big, red, shiny button. It is OBVIOUSLY a terrible idea to push it... but you never know!
J	A droid or mechanism equipped with a motion sensor, a gun, and a hair trigger.
Q	The building's anti-pest protocols activate, and a poison gas begins to seep from the wainscoting.
K	If the Raccoon is in your party, she will take an injury this floor (if not, draw again).

SPADES	Things which may lead to DISSENT
A	You cannot bear for the species you have a grudge against to have or even touch this Artifact; it's too important.
2	A ceiling panel falls, splitting the explorers into two groups.
3	On this floor: something that suggests the legend you hold to be true isn't.
4	On this floor: something which directly relates to the aspect of Humanity you find mysterious.
5	The Artifact on this floor is something all the Synanthropes know about and find ESPECIALLY valuable.
6	In a thoughtless moment, you say something to remind your neighbor of the grudge he bears against your species.
7	You have made wrong turn, somehow, and find yourself twisted around, lost, and annoyed with one another.
8	It's called "Human Madness" and occasionally affects explorers of old ruins. It should only last for a scene or so.
9	You are 99% sure the character to your right stole the rations you were saving for later.
10	After all this climbing you are, quite simply, exhausted. The others may want to continue, but you want to camp down.
J	Your food rations have been lost or spoiled... you're going to have to hunt or forage.
Q	A burst of homesickness so strong you can't stand it.
K	If the Rat is in your party, she will take an injury this turn (else, draw again).

Optional: More information about the history and language of the Synanthropes

Presented for your entertainment and edification. Entirely optional, but it may enhance your ability to get into a non-human mental space.

The Rat

When Humanity left, the rats fared poorly at first. Even in the newest and cleanest cities, they had outnumbered the Humans, and without exterminators and other population control, their numbers boomed and then, as they quickly overtook and stripped bare the landfills and dumps of the old Human empires, dwindled.

The cycle of boom, bust, and migration might have continued until the rats went extinct; even as conflict and competition drove them to grow more intelligent, their communities weren't long-lived enough to thrive. It was religion that saved them. A clan in the East, whose preoccupation with the Human ruins they lived in led to exploration, worship, and emulation, were the first true Rats. They discovered, in the Human texts the secret of agriculture, from mushroom farming to keeping smaller animals for meat. Though the concept of having food NOW but eating it LATER scrapes unpleasantly against the Rat's DNA, it has kept them alive.

Rats have a language of their own, a private tongue of whispers and gestures that is unique to each clan and rarely shared. Publicly, Rats speak the language of the Humans as best they can, based on their understanding of old recordings, though their large front teeth mean that dental and interdental morphemes like /th/ and /f/ are quite impossible. To a modern human, they would be incomprehensible... the Rats don't seem to recognize different Human languages, and have added every word they come across to

their lexicon. Rats have no written language, but can identify human writings.

The Raccoon

It's said that when Humanity left, the raccoons were the last to notice. Even when the garbage cans and dog bowls stopped being filled, early raccoons still knew how to catch fish and pick berries, and survived the first long winter. Some were lucky enough to find unhindered entry through old cat-flaps, and lived in some comfort.

While the other Synanthropes gravitated toward old Human cities, the Raccoons evolved on the outskirts, in the single-family homes and suburban tracks. Because no door remains locked and no box unopened where a Raccoon dwells, they were the ones who truly explored Human technology. Sure, a clever squirrel can turn on the lights and operate the boiler, but human high-technology... matter replicators, plasma weaponry, holographic communication rigs... only the Raccoons know how to activate them, and they charge highly for their expertise.

Raccoons developed a written language but not a spoken one. Their writings are tactile, resembling braille, albeit with patterns imprinted on tablets of clay or other soft materials. Raccoons are most comfortable communicating in this way, passing lumps of clay to one another. They have adopted a spoken language based on the Rats', consisting of Human words and terminologies, when they must communicate with others. They are also capable of reading human writing.

The Roach

When the Humans left, cockroaches had been operating under the same basic body plan for three hundred million years. They haven't changed

much since then. They continue to swarm, and wander, and eat the detritus that even the other synanthropes consider waste, and get stomped on for their pains.

But sometimes, rarely, a mutated genome expresses itself in an externally invisible manner, and creates a roach, called the queen by other species, which can think, and project its thoughts upon the worker cockroaches. The queen is the nexus of a hive-mind, a thousand or more roaches acting as its neurons and limbs and bodyguards at once, moving with a single thought. This entity, the queen and her entourage, is the Roach. And though Roaches can communicate, the queens sharing news and goods and even worker cockroaches happily, a Roach is generally a loner, wandering the most decrepit and irradiated Human settlements, consuming everything it can and by and large ignoring the rest.

The means by which the queens communicate with both their workers and each other has never been understood by the other species, though the Raccoons are confident that it's not psychic, but merely a complex manipulation of pheromones. A full Roach can "speak" by rubbing its bodies together in specific ways. It is a language of hard consonants and clicks with very few vowel sounds, which other species can, with difficulty, learn to understand. Roaches cannot read, but a worker can be imprinted to store information in a specific spot for as long as it lives, to be accessed by every Roach that passes.

The Crow

To hear the Crows tell it, the departure of Humanity was but a blip on the radar to their ancestors. They were masters of the skies, and in the West, where they dominated, they had already driven away countless competitor species. Certainly, without a Human presence, some of their hunting grounds would have been lost, but crows learn and adapt at an incredible rate.

Crows are planners, builders, and teachers. The great skyscrapers where they live are filled with countless intricate traps, as are the forests on street-level. While Crows tend to live in small, close families, every year there's a grand meeting, where Crows of note share their new traps and other creations for the benefit of the species as a whole (and the honor and respect that comes with it). Though Crows have grown much larger than their ancestors, and the adults have lost the capacity for true flight, they still glide from building to building, looking down upon the rest of the world.

Crow communication is very tonal, heavily dominated by the rhythm and length of its notes, though to most representatives of the other species it is considered discordant, grating, and overloud. Crowsong can be heard up to a mile away, if conditions are right. They can speak Human words and phrases, though their beak prevents them from making any labial consonants like /b/ or /m/, and they traditionally have difficulty constructing entire thoughts in this language. They have a written language of their own, and have a facility for reading Human texts as well.