Synanthropes

Humanity is gone
But we'll be remembered
by the things we've left behind.

by Ed Turner
I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear--
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'

--Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias"
Synanthropes

Syn-an-thrope. Noun. \ˈsin-ən-thrōp\

1. A creature which has evolved to survive in ecological niches created by humans (Ex.: Rats, cockroaches, crows, raccoons, cane toads, house geckos).

2. Any of the various creatures commonly considered to be pests or vermin (Ex.: Rats, cockroaches, crows, raccoons, cane toads, house geckos).

3. An animal which is just a little too human for its own good.
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Inspiration credit where it’s due: Jake Richmond’s Ocean for a lot about Clues, Vincent Baker’s Apocalypse World for a lot about character design and the playbooks.
Feedback is appreciated: EdwardDTurner@gmail.com
Thanks for reading/playing/sharing/not locking your dumpsters!

Synanthropes was originally conceived and written for Game Chef 2013.

Synanthropes v. 3.2, released 11/21/13. Changes made in this edition:
- Danger grid proves to be intensely, DANGEROUSLY sexy, and also kind of a hassle. Return to an oracle, albeit a much-improved, less didactic one.
- Every species has a unique clue-type, relating to their specific relationship with and understanding of Humanity.
- The acquiring of Clues has been made a little easier, because you can stack your Traits.
- Speaking of Clues: there are only seven of them now, in an experimental “one question answered provides a Clue to the next question” sort of way.
- Career dice have been folded elegantly into Hoard points, meaning there’s one less point of fiddliness.

Synanthropes v. 3.1, released 8/27/13. Changes made in this edition:
- Danger oracle has been reworked into the more flexible and much sexier-sounding DANGER GRID. No more need to bring a pack of cards, except as a keen Artifact.
- Narration control has been simplified. Clockwise. That’s all you need.
- A cover, featuring Arthur the Rat. Or possibly Sydney the Rat. It’s hard to tell because they were both hooded, and I can’t see if he has a white spot on his forehead from this angle. Still, pretty sure it’s Arthur.
- For some reason I decided to toss in “Ozymandias” on the title page, because why not?
- Big empty boxes where attractive illustrations would go, serving vague layout purposes.

Synanthropes v. 3, released 8/17/13. Changes made to this edition:

Added:
- The House Geckos, paranoid ninja crackpots, as the final playable race.
- Hoard POINTS, a flexible and useful way to act in the fashion of your species.

Removed:
- Hoard DICE, a contentious and ill-defined means of acting in a bizarrely specific parody of your species.
- Overly complex rules for adjudicating difficulty.

Changed:
- Collection of Clues, again, to make it a little more arbitrary this time.

Synanthropes v. 2, released 6/19/2013. Changes made to this edition:

Added:
- Cane Toads exist now as playable characters. They are vile, awful bastards.
- Opposed rolls and combat rules have been added, in the event that not everyone agrees about everything.
- NPCs now have simple rulesets, to accommodate simple NPCs.
- Player Characters now have Careers outside of anthropology, which benefit the team as a whole.
- I talk about Synanthrope fashion a bit. Because why not?

Changed:
- Collecting Clues has been made less arbitrary; it’s now something you luck across, and Clues may relate to your legends and mysteries and artifacts.
- Basic rolling has been made slightly more intuitive—using a trait is just worth an extra die.
- Passing Narrator privileges has been changed; whomever discovers a Clue is the next Narrator.
- Material which was “Optional” in the Game Chef edition has been rendered “Not Optional”.

Still to come:
- Attractive illustrations.
- More experimental reorganization and fiddling.
About

*Synanthropes* is a story game about representatives of the known sentient races of planet Earth: the Crows, the Rats, the Roaches, the Cane Toads, the Geckos, and the Raccoons. Collectively, they may be referred to as the Synanthropes.

Sometime in the future, somewhere between twenty-five and one hundred years from today, humanity disappeared, for reasons unknown. Some time 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 of these groups, each player from a different species, who are joining together on a scientific expedition. It’s 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 simple: make your way to the top, collecting information and any useful Human Artifacts which have survived these centuries, and maybe, if you’re lucky, an answer to the question which has haunted the Synanthropes for as long as they’ve realized that there was a civilization before them: 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 to five players.
- Several six-sided dice.
- One deck of 52 standard playing cards.
- A number of small tokens (pennies or poker chips work fine) to act as Hoard Points.
- 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. 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?

What were the Humans like?

That is a question for the players to investigate and discover as they run through this ancient building. But it may help if you, the players, have a few ideas in place that you agree upon.

These are some truths about the Humans. Where you go from here is up to you.
The Humans disappeared in the relatively near future. Maybe in the next few decades, but not more than a century from today.

Human technology advanced in some ways. Perhaps the most obvious is the fact that they built structures that would survive for thousands of years without maintenance, and power sources which last much, much longer than anything currently extant. In addition, the creation of robotic drones, semi-autonomous droids, and adaptive computer systems mean that there is still a presence in some old human ruins.

Human technology stayed the same in some ways. With a few exceptions, the room you're sitting in right now would be perfectly comfortable and familiar to the Humans before the disappearance. They never developed a true AI which might remain, and they still relied on paper to communicate, much of which succumbed to rot, fire, or other natural disasters.

Whatever the cause of their disappearance, the Humans never expected to be replaced. There are no guidebooks for the budding sentient, no how-to-be-civilized primer.

Humans were, and will always be, human. They fought amongst themselves, disagreed about anything and everything, suffered corrupt politicians and lowest-bidder construction and petty annoyances of all stripes. And they complained about it, loud and often, because that's humanity for you.

What are the Synanthropes like?

To some degree, that is for you to decide on your own. Your character sheet will give you some general details about your species, its physical traits and the broadest aspects of its culture, but it’s not intended to be all-encompassing. Rats, for instance, idealize Humans, but does that make them religious zealots, militaristic conquerors, or philosophic ponderers? Do they combine aspects of all three at once, or are there internal struggles between Rat clans about just that? That’s for the Rat player to ultimately decide.

One thing that they all have in common is that they are a bit larger than their ancestors; while they are still small by human standards—between the size of a cat and the size of a human toddler, on average—they have had innumerable generations of evolutionary pressure benefitting the ones who could most make use of human-scale objects.

They are also able to speak to one another, vocally, as Humans do (although this is not necessarily the preferred form of communication for all of them). They don’t quite speak the same language, as the construction of their mouths and voiceboxes are too radically different to allow it, but the player characters are trained in the languages of their companions, enough so that all can muddle through speaking a collective pidgin.

A very brief summary of the different synanthropic species of the Earth:

- Crows: Tool-using birds, native to the crumbling remains of Human skyscrapers. Most are trappers and explorers, ever on the prowl for something shiny and interesting.
- Rats: Social mammals, native to the sewers and basements of Human cities. They know agriculture, and they know storytelling, and they revere the Humans most of all.
- Raccoons: Clever mammals, native to the old Human suburbs. They have mastered the appropriation of Human technology, and will sell their expertise for a high price.
- Cane Toads: Toxic amphibians, native to the ditches and culverts between Human settlements. Violent and destructive, they will destroy anything in their way.
- Geckos: Paranoid reptiles, native to dark and abandoned Human shops. They prefer to be hidden from view, and find that safety only comes from stealth.
- Roaches: Hive-minded insect swarms, native to the radioactive wastes of destroyed Human lands. They are true scavengers, itinerant adventurers, and giant piles of bugs.
How to Play

This is a game about telling one specific sort of story: the journey of one group of very alien (but still very human) creatures through a dangerous landscape, in the hopes of understanding something about their past, and maybe preserving their future.
Creating your Character

First, distribute one character sheet per player, and fill it out, following the directions. These sheets cover the basics of Character creation in more depth. In brief, you will select:

- A **Name**. Each Synanthrope has its own naming conventions.
- Three **Traits**, based on the physical attributes of your species.
- A **Grudge**, a reason that you hate the species being portrayed by the person to your left.
- A **Career**, which reflects your skills and expertise outside of anthropology.
- A cultural **Legend** which you believe deeply, that will inform your worldview.
- A **Mystery** you do not believe about Humans, which may affect how you see discoveries.
- A **Human Artifact** you are bringing with you.

Choosing a **name** is straightforward; you may pick any of the suggested names, or one of your own devising that reflects your species’s naming conventions (or, if you wish, breaks from it, marking you as something of an outsider from your own people).

Your **Traits** are based on the three most defining physical attributes of your species; each attribute has two possible Traits attached to it, and you will select one of those two to favor. The Traits you don’t pick may still reflect areas that you excel at compared to the other species and suggest instinctive reactions to danger, but they aren’t as reliable for you, personally, as the Traits you favor. There are advantages both to selecting traits that work together well (running and hiding, for instance) and for getting a broad base (running and operating technology, for instance).

While your true vocation is as an anthropologist, a scientist-cum-historian who seeks to better understand Humanity and your place in their world, you do have an outside **Career** which reflects, for want of a better way to put it, your day job. Your Career is an advantage that you share with the group; everybody can benefit from your area of expertise. There are nine Careers, drawn in very broad outlines, so when you select one, think about how it would make sense for you, specifically, and as a member of your species.

- **Soldier**—The Resource Wars are not long over, and even in times of peace society needs its fighters, from city guards to internal police, travelling protection and cheap, gutter mercenaries. If you’re a soldier, you know how to fight, work hard, and be tough.
- **Academic**—Anthropology is the golden science, but there is an entire world of information out there, gleaned from Human textbooks, practical experimentation, and the few burgeoning universities. If you’re an academic, you excel at dredging up esoteric knowledge.
- **Politician**—The difference between true Synanthropes and lesser animal species is their ability to band together; it may be under a king, a warlord, or a cadre of clerks, but there’s still enough to make a society. If you’re a politician, you can effectively lead, plan, and influence people.
- **Artisan**—Scavenging can only take a people so far. Weapons, houses, tools, clothes, even art; it all has to be created by someone who knows how to turn one thing into another. There are many sorts of artisans, but all of them know how to do fine work with their hands (or beaks, or multifold feelers, or what have you).
- **Healer**—People get hurt. Healers make them better. Good healers can help all body types, from Crow to Rat to Roach, even, whether it’s through advanced medical technology to classic herbal remedies. The best healers go a step beyond, and can make others feel better before they even get hurt.
- **Courier**—The wastes are wide, far-reaching, dangerous places. But they still need traversing by those willing to deal with other cultures. Whether your cargo are goods, services, or information, if you are a courier you know how to get where you’re going and do so quickly.
Your **Legends** and **Mysteries** are both cultural ideas that you grew up with, or without, as the case may be. Two legends about Humans are provided, and two mysteries that you can’t understand about them or refuse to believe about them. You can create a third of each, to help define your culture and yourself. For each, you’ll pick one as the most important… the legend you really believe or the mystery you really can’t imagine. You can select either the pre-generated ones or your own, whichever seems the most interesting.

Your **Hoard** abilities and **Clue** table are also included on your character sheet, and will be discussed in further detail below.

As you’re answering these questions, take some time to work into the mentality of your species. Read through the description at the beginning, and consider the implications of your Traits, Legends, Mysteries, and Hoard abilities. Remember: you aren’t human. How do you move? How do you speak? What matters to you?

At the same time, remember that you are a *representative* of your species, not a personification of it. You may have interpretations of legends and Human matters that others of your clan or family find odd. Like all intelligent creatures, any individual Synanthrope is a variation on an abstract and impossible cultural norm.

When everyone has finished their character sheets and has some understanding of who they are, you may begin the first scene. 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. Every player will have an opportunity to narrate over the course of the game.
Anatomy of a Floor

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 single story of the building; most floors pass by uneventfully as you trek up the stairs, but when you stop 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.

The Narrator is the Game Master for each scene, and it is her job to determine the essential elements of this floor: the Artifact and the Obstacle.

An Artifact is one of the Human Artifacts that the players brought along, and, like the Artifacts all the characters begin with, it represents itself: a thing which is somewhere on this floor, waiting to be discovered, and which the exploration party will likely find interesting. Depending on the Obstacle on this floor and your own tastes as Narrator, the Artifact might be obvious right off, or it might be discovered at some point later, but it is always somewhere, ready to be found. The Narrator may pick whatever Artifact seems most interesting in the moment.

An Obstacle is something on this floor which will, for some reason, delay your approach to the next floor. Obstacles are supplied by the table at the end of this document: the Narrator should, at the beginning of the scene, draw a card which will determine what Obstacle will be found on this floor.

Obstacles come in four general styles, based on the suit drawn:

- Creatures, represented by Hearts, are those living inhabitants of the building. While the Synanthrope civilizations haven’t visited the tower before, the world teems with other forms of life, some of whom make the tower their home. Often they are not pleased to encounter intruders.
- Scale, represented by Diamonds, describe those elements of a building which are easily overcome by Humans, but present unique challenges to creatures who are much smaller, and not necessarily blessed with voiceboxes or opposable thumbs. Doors, for instance.
- Decay, represented by Spades, describes the degradation of the building over time, creating unstable or dangerous terrain. While the next floor is always accessible, you will sometimes need to forge your own path.
- Technology, represented by Clubs, describes those elements of Human tech which have somehow remained active throughout the years, and still defend the building from trespassers or vermin (of which you are both).

In the event that your draw creates an Obstacle which is for some reason incredibly unsuitable, either because the narrative so far has made it illogical, or you have had a run of too-similar dangers, or just because you’ve had a long run of one sort of element and want to mix it up, feel free to creatively interpret the prompt, or even re-draw entirely! The purpose of the oracle is to encourage the unexpected and ensure that the state of the building is consistent in its unpredictability, but tweaking the rules to ensure an entertaining story is always okay.

Once you know what the Obstacle is and what Artifact you want to be discovered, think about how they fit together with each other and with what you already know about the building, and use that to decide what is on this floor. It’s okay to be loose in the connections; after all, your characters wouldn’t truly understand the purpose of the floor or its contacts. Likewise, it’s okay to be very specific about the connections, but it’s important to remember that just because the players know that they are moving through, say, a server farm and encountering an old wifi antenna, that doesn’t mean the characters understand what’s going on.

Running a Scene

The Narrator will begin every scene by describing the Synanthropes’ arrival on this floor, and creating a picture of what they see. As characters move through the floor, it’s the Narrator’s task to describe what they see (or feel, hear, and smell for those Synanthropes who don’t rely overmuch on sight), and how the world reacts to their actions (from lights turning on when they enter a room, to feral cats leaping from behind a desk as someone passes). The players are responsible for their own characters, describing what they say and do as they move through this floor; this means that the Narrator is also controlling her own character. It is generally good form (and easier on the Narrator’s creative muscles) if that character takes a slightly more passive role in this floor, commenting and helping everyone else, but not stealing the spotlight. It’s the Narrator’s primary job to create interesting situation for the other characters to interact with, not to make sure her own character looks good.

The Narrator will introduce both the Obstacle and the Artifact on this floor; sometimes it will make sense to show these right away, and other times it will be more sense to hold off on one or both until they get
discovered, but both must be dealt with. The Obstacle stands between the players and either the next floor of the building or the Artifact on this floor (or both!); it must, therefore, be surpassed or somehow evaded. The Artifact must be interacted with by at least one character, preferably sparking a big discussion of what the heck it is and, more importantly, who gets to keep it.

Once the Obstacle has been dealt with and the Artifact discussed, the Narrator is also responsible for ending the scene. This may take place right away, but if there are some lingering issues being dealt with, the Narrator should let the scene continue until they resolve themselves. Still, if a scene is dragging, the Narrator has the power (and responsibility) to start wrapping it up.

Finally, the Narrator may issue Challenges; these are occasions when characters must roll the dice to see if they get what they want. Challenges are points of major success and failure, the building blocks for conflict and combat, and the only way characters can hope to stumble across Clues, all of which will be dealt with in more detail below.

The player to the left of the Narrator will become the Narrator of the next scene; this continues clockwise until the end of the game.

**Interacting with Artifacts**

Artifacts are meant to be super fun and the real meat of the game. Yes, it’s about finding Clues and being animals and figuring out what happened to Humanity, but really, it’s about Artifacts. **Interact with Artifacts by picking them up, moving them around, and guessing about their use.** This cannot be stressed enough: Human Artifacts are meant to be sources of discussion, but they’re also intended to be physically present, handed around the table. Look at them as if you’ve never seen something quite like this before, and look at them as if you’re a giant bird, or a pile of insects, or a paranoid lizard, or whatever your species is, but most importantly look at them and talk about them with everyone else in the exploration party. Pass them around; if your character is holding an Artifact, then you as a player should be holding it as well.

And then, fight over who gets to take it, because Artifacts are incredibly valuable, and you’re probably willing to swear up and down that you saw it first.

**Setting up Challenges**

When any character (including her own) 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 for him.
- The character is directly confronting the floor’s Obstacle.
- There is someone or something obstructing this character’s action (however the obstruction isn’t active enough to justify an Opposed Roll).
- Failure would cause the character to get significantly hurt.

…AND if there will be an interesting result for failure; “getting injured” is considered to be an interesting result, for this purpose, but only just interesting enough to pass muster. If there’s no interesting effect of failure, the task should just succeed or fail on its own.

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 does have the power to veto an attempted action outright if she feels it is too outlandish to be possible… if the Rat wants to solve a situation by breathing fire on it, he is out of luck.

The Narrator determines the difficulty of the action (covered in more detail below) and the price of failure. Regardless of the precise nature of the Challenge, **the effect of a failed roll should never be “nothing happens.”** At the very least, something must occur which slightly changes the situation. The easy example is tripping and falling in an attempt to move quickly; the character is now in a slightly different position, anyone else on the floor now has a few extra moments before the fallen character can react, and narratively it gives everyone more to work with than “you simply weren’t fast enough.”
Resolving Challenges

Characters will roll a pool of six-sided dice; there are five elements which affect this pool.

- **Effort**—All challenges start with a one die, just for making the effort.
- **Artifact**—Add 1 die if the use of a Human Artifact (either the one you brought with you or another you have picked up along the way) is a fundamental part of this action.
- **Traits**—If you are making use of one of your circled traits in a major way, gain an additional die for each trait you are using.
- **Career**—When taking an action which falls under the penumbra of your career (fighting for soldiers, assembling things for artisans, exploring for couriers, etcetera), add an extra die to your pool.
- **Help**—If you are receiving significant assistance from another character, roll an extra die.

Every die that rolls a 5 or 6 is considered a success; for a normal difficulty Challenge, a single success allows the character to reach his goal. For situations which the Narrator feels are especially unlikely, in which a character must push his abilities to the limit, she may set the difficulty to “high,” in which case the character must roll two successes. This makes the action nearly impossible for a character who doesn’t have their training, companions, equipment, or natural inclinations helping them along.

If absolutely necessary, a Narrator may decide that a Challenge is of “incredibly high” difficulty, which requires three successes, indicating actions which are so far outside the realm of plausibility that the odds of success are almost negligible; a three-success challenge is meant to account for moments when the player and Narrator are in disagreement over whether a character can accomplish as task at all.

Opposed Rolls and Combat situations

In the event that two or more characters are actively competing with one another, either symmetrically (e.g.: both are racing to be the first to reach an Artifact) or asymmetrically (e.g.: one player is racing to the Artifact and the other is trying to knock the first out), they will both be rolling. Combat between two player characters is a common example of an opposed roll; each character is attempting to injure or incapacitate the other.

Each player sets the terms for their own success, while the Narrator for this scene will be responsible for defining a mutual failure (whether a mutual failure in combat means that both players fail to injure the other or that both are injured equally is for the Narrator to determine based on the setup of the scene).

All players set up and resolve their dice pools normally, counting all their successes. Whichever character gets more successes is the victor, and accomplishes their goal.

If two opposed characters roll the same number of successes, however, or if in a conflict of three or more there is a tie for the most successes rolled, then the conflict ends in a mutual failure.

If nobody in the conflict rolls any successes, then the opponents are currently tied, neck and neck, or at some other sort of impasse. They have two choices: back down or escalate. Backing down is easy: they stop competing, and nobody gets what they want but nobody loses, either. Escalating is also easy: the players may re-define the terms for success (changing “I’m trying to beat you to the staircase” to “I’m trying to push you over so you can’t reach the stairs,” for instance), and in so doing change the makeup of their dice pool. Then, all players add an extra escalation die, and re-roll the lot. If nobody rolls a success on the escalation, players may escalate again, and so on until someone succeeds or everyone fails.
Hoard Points

Each Synanthrope possesses a unique Hoard; a Hoard is an abstract representation of the skills and knowledge which is known only to that particular individual. The thing to remember about all of these creatures is that they have, written right into their DNA, a need to hold on to things. Even to those species which exist in clans and large families, sharing is something that is done by necessity and with a full awareness of the enlightened self-interest of it, rather than because it is the Right thing to do. In this way, most Synanthropes are very like Humans indeed.

You character's hoard is represented by Hoard Points, which can be marked with any convenient token, such as a penny or glass bead. You will start with two Hoard Points; every time you Narrate, you gain an additional Hoard Point. In addition, each species has a unique mechanism for acquiring additional points, which are detailed on their character sheets.

You may spend a Hoard Point at any time, whether you are narrating or not; there are five ways to spend a point:
1. Extra Effort. Spend one hoard point to add an extra die to any roll; you MAY do this after the roll, if you wish. This bonus die will be re-rolled as normal if you escalate or use a career die.
2. Special Effort. Each Synanthrope has a special skill, for which spending a hoard point allows them to roll two extra dice. Again, you may do this after the fact, and will re-roll them with the rest of your pool if needed.
3. Give Advice: When any player, besides yourself, fails a roll which has something to do with your profession, you may spend a hoard point to allow that player a chance to re-roll. Describe the advice you gave them in the moment, or an experience you shared together in the past, which should have made them more effective at whatever task they were attempting; the player may then re-roll, including an extra escalation die.
4. Species Power: You have abilities which your companions simply do NOT, because of your very species. You may spend a Hoard Point in order to invoke one of these effects instantly, with no roll needed.

Injuries

When you are injured, mark one of the “Injury” boxes next to a set of Traits, and describe how you've hurt yourself. You get no benefit from the circled Trait in that set until the injury clears. Injuries last two scenes before you can attempt to heal them.

To heal an injury, simply describe yourself finding something within the ruins you can use to recover. Using it is a Challenge (usually of normal difficulty, unless the Narrator thinks that the healing item is a complete stretch); if you succeed, the injury goes away, and if you fail it becomes permanent, and you cannot attempt to heal it again.

If at any point you take three injuries, your character is mortally wounded. You are not dead, and can continue following the rest of the party, but your die pool is now capped at ONE, regardless of what you are doing; Career and Escalation dice can still allow you to re-roll, but you will only be rolling the one die.
NPCs

The Humans are gone, and the ruins have yet to be explored by any of the Synanthropic species, but that doesn't mean that there's nothing to encounter there. From robotic remnants of Humanity to less-Human species of animal to entirely feral beasts, sometimes you may have to deal with characters beyond your own explorers. Generally, small groups of animals can be treated as a single NPC as well, if they are acting in concert. More abstractly, if it makes more sense to present a trap or a room or the ravages of nature as an active participant in a conflict, it can be an NPC as well.

NPCs are played by the Narrator, and in the event that an NPC follows the explorers for a way up the tower, ownership with transfer over to the next Narrator; that said, you aren’t really meant to be acquiring a posse to explore with. Mechanically, NPCs operate much like the player characters, in that whomever is controlling them describes what they say and do, until such a point as there is disagreement over whether they should be able to accomplish a task, at which point, the Narrator will have to roll for the NPC.

NPCs generally do not have any Hoard Points, Traits, or other attributes like player characters. Instead, they roll 2 dice for all Challenges (plus any earned for using a Human Artifact or being assisted). If an NPC is going to be especially important, they can also get a single skill (something like “Fighting,” or “Running”). In that case, they roll an extra die when using that skill. NPCs can generally take two Injuries, after which they are incapacitated, flee, or otherwise remove themselves from the scene, though most will flee at the first Injury, and some (especially tough and dangerous ones) might take three.

How Human-like are NPCs? That’s a question for the group to consider as a whole; as a useful rule of thumb, think of other small, urban animals as being akin to the "monster races" in a fantasy RPG... kobolds, orcs, and trolls are roughly equivalent to starlings, moles, and opossum in this world. Whether that makes them gruff and clannish but still viable companions and trading partners, or mindless brutes, or some measure in between will depend on the Narrator and the group. One thing is sure though: they are never as Human-like or aware of Humans as the Synanthropes are.

As for robotic drones and other remnants of the Humans, remember that there are no true artificial intelligences. The robots might be marvelous, incredible to the eyes to the explorers, but they are still confined to doing a single task, without any measure of creativity. Even those capable of imparting information are only able to do so in very specific ways and must be coaxed into doing what the explorers want them to do.

Discovering Clues

While you journey through this building, you will happen across lots of interesting bits of human detritus hidden away; every bit of surviving text or old machinery will expand in some way on what is known about Humanity and paint a fuller picture of who they were and what they were like, but not all of it is a Clue.

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.

At the beginning of the game, write these three questions down on index cards, one on each card. Mix up those cards and set them face-down in a pile on the table.

Whenever a character besides the Narrator participates in a Challenge, there is a chance that he or she will stumble across a Clue; mechanically, this occurs whenever you roll doubles. In-universe, this represents a moment of chance observation... something catches your eye, whether you are successful or not at whatever you were trying to do, and makes your character take notice. Doubles count no matter how many dice you are rolling.

The Narrator's character, unfortunately, cannot discover a Clue. Though her character is involved on this floor, participating in the
interactions with Dangers and Artifacts, her job is to create interesting situations for other characters to find Clues, not to get them herself. Additionally, once a Clue has been discovered on a given floor, no more will be discovered until the next scene begins... this is a pacing mechanism that keeps you from fishing for all the Clues you need in the lobby of this building. You have to keep moving, higher and further into the Human ruins.

The number you doubled will define, in part, the nature of the Clue and how it relates to your worldview. Each player has on their character sheet a "Clue Chart" with six options detailing, in broad terms, what the Clue relates to. Clue Chart to see what the nature of the Clue is; if you rolled multiple sets of doubles, then you may select either option.

Once you discover a clue, cross out its line on the chart! Your character will no longer find Clues of that type, even if you roll doubles of that number again.

(Note that finding a Clue is separate from winning at an endeavor; rolling two ones will find a Clue but fail at an action, rolling two threes and a six will succeed and find a Clue, and rolling four sixes will succeed AND find a Clue, for a very successful moment).

In the event that two or more players both roll doubles at the same time in a conflict, whomever is clockwise from the Narrator takes precedence.

Take a moment to consider the Clue; you may talk (out of character) with the other players if you're looking for suggestions as to how you might incorporate an element. If you honestly can't figure something out, or you have another reason you’d rather not be the one who found the Clue, you can say something along the lines of, "No, never mind, it wasn't as interesting as I thought," and discard this Clue entirely.

When you figured out what the Clue might be, explain it to everyone else; you are allowed to jump into the Narrator's seat for a moment to explain how you stumble across it and what it looks like, whether it's an object, or some writing, or just a curious bullet hole on the wall, or whatever.

Once you have decided on your Clue, select the top question card, and jot the Clue down on it. Do not look at the question yet! You’re writing on the back of the card, and should not know what these clues are going to point to yet. This will prevent you from trying to force your clues to fit a particular mold.

When a question has its third Clue, the Narrator can flip it over and read what the question is. Then, you can take a moment to discuss what the answer to the question might be, based on the Clues you have acquired. 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 most agreed-upon answer you come up with on the bottom of the card for reference. In addition, write this answer down on the next card; whatever the next question is, this answer will be its first Clue. If this was the last card, then you will instead segue into the final scene.

The Final Scene

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

- Your characters have answered all three questions, in which case the mission will be deemed a success.
- Your characters are all unable or unwilling to gather additional Clues, in which case the mission is a failure; the obvious point when you are unable to gather additional Clues is if everyone is mortally wounded, or if the only characters who are not so have found six Clues and cannot find any more. Alternately, if your characters devolve into bickering, or a player has to leave or you run out of time to play, you can end the mission in failure.

If the mission ends in failure, each player, in turn, starting with the current Narrator and moving clockwise, 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. Start with whomever Narrated the last floor, and proceed clockwise.

These 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. Again, each should only take a minute or two. Remember that the purpose isn’t to overwrite what the other players are creating, but to bring the joy of discovery back to your own people… focus on their reactions to your tale and, of course, yourself, who is a returning hero after all.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEARTS</th>
<th>Creatures occupying these ruins.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A feral dog lumbers through the hall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A feral cat stalks from behind desks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A squirrel warband leaps from the power line outdoors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A lone opossum loudly defends its territory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A tribe of spiders see you as gods or demons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Wasps! Waaaaaasps!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Someone, another Synanthrope, has been following you since before the lobby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Magpies, snatching up anything of value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A chattering of starlings considers this their territory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Evidence of long-deceased intelligent occupants (and the traps they left behind).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>A feral barn owl, shrieking and diving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIAMONDS</th>
<th>Issues created by your non-Human scale.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A maze of twisty passages, all alike. And you're lost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>An impenetrable case of glass and metal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A voice-activated doorway; the password should be somewhere around here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A security AI, barring passage to anyone without a badge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>There SHOULD be a door here, but it's been hidden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The only door around is an emergency exit that won't open until there's an emergency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The keys are hanging on a hook, well out of reach. They're huge and awkward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Some shifting rubble traps you all in a box, cage, or similar enclosure of detritus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The floor is sticky. REAL sticky.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPADES</th>
<th>Problems created by the decay of the building.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Hanging electrical wires, still sparking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The flooring is destroyed, leaving a huge chasm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The entire ceiling has collapsed; there's no obvious path through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Leaking water has rendered this floor a swamp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Horrible, toxic liquid, seeping out of poorly-stored barrels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The stairs up are, quite simply, nonexistent. Time to climb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Somehow, the climate control on this floor has become set to an unbearable extreme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Potted plants, overgrown, creating a jungle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The path ahead is up a mountain of steep, treacherous rubble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>A broken window lets in dangerous weather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Fire has broken out on this floor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLUBS</th>
<th>Dangerously active technology.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>&quot;Vermin detected. Releasing toxin.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A laser grid suddenly clicks on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A massive, locked vault door.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A cleaning droid, still mobile and obsessive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Endless conveyer belts and mashing machinery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A contraption belching thick, impenetrable smoke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A computer controlling the doors, active enough to communicate with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Motion-activated alarms that create unbearable noise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A ponderous repair droid, blocking the way as it works endlessly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The way up is an elevator, if you can get it working.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Horribly bright, unbearable lights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Crow (*Corvus sapiens*)

To hear the Crows tell it, the departure of Humanity was only a brief hiccup for 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, like Humans, 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.

Crows have no hands, but they manipulate objects with their talons and beaks with surprising deftness. Crows wear little over their black feathers, but strap utility belts to their lower legs. Often they accent themselves with anklets and necklaces that appeal to their in-built love of shiny things.

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

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

CAREER: Pick your Career. Soldier, Politician, Artisan, Healer, Courier. Academics are rare among the practically-minded Crow.

GRUDGE: 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?

LEGEND: Create a Legend. These are stories all Crows have heard, which define their worldview. Two are provided, create one of your own. Pick one of the three as something you find truly meaningful.

MYSTERY: Create a Mystery. These reflect aspects Crow culture just doesn’t have, which make Humans baffling. Two are provided, create one of your own. Pick one of the three as something you find especially strange or impossible to believe of Humans.


HOARD: Start with two Hoard Points.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAITS</th>
<th>Injured?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your Binocular Vision lets you…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spot objects at a distance</td>
<td>Throw accurately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Short, Functional Wings let you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glide short distances</td>
<td>Quickly evade danger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Straight, Strong Beak lets you…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stab with a spearing motion.</td>
<td>Break objects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAREER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRUDGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLUE TABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 This Clue relates to one of your Mysteries, and you will need help understanding it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 This Clue relates to one of your Legends in a manner that casts doubt on it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 This Clue causes you to reconsider the species you have a grudge against, for better or worse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 This Clue forces you to reconsider one of the Artifacts in your possession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 This Clue relates to one of your Legends in a manner that confirms or justifies it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 This Clue suggests Humans can be clumsy, inelegant bumbling.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On a challenge:
- 1 die for your effort.
- +1 if you're using a Human Artifact
- +1 if another character is aiding you
- +1 for each relevant circled Trait
- +1 if your Career is relevant.
- +1 or 2 by spending Hoard points.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CROW LEGENDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CROW MYSTERIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your own:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOUR HOARD POINTS:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because you are a master of traps and small gadgets, you are inspired by mechanisms of all sorts, but especially Human Artifacts. Whenever you get your talons on an Artifact, and you must physically hold on to it for a few minutes at least, you may describe what sort of useful contraption it could be made into, and how you could use it or rebuild it to better your society. If you do so, gain one hoard point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend Hoard Points on:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1 die to any effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+2 dice when navigating dangerous terrain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow another player to add a die and reroll any failed roll relating to your Career.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crows are naturally inclined to spot shiny things, which they suspect to be intrinsically valuable. Spend a hoard point to see something shiny hidden in the wreckage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While Crows have grown too large to fly comfortably indefinitely, they can still flap with gusto when needed. Spend a hoard point to fly for about five minutes, carrying something the size of one of your companions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- On a challenge:
The Rat (*Rattus sapiens*)

When Humanity left, the rats fared poorly at first. Even in the newest and cleanest cities, they had outnumbered the Humans; without exterminators as 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, strangely, Humanity 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, the knowledge 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 morphemes like /th/ and /f/ are quite impossible. To a modern human, they would be speaking an incomprehensible pidgin; 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.

Rats can see ultraviolet light and are especially sensitive to direct light. They often wear simple cloaks, attached at the neck by a decorative or clan brooch, with a hood they can raise as needed and a few deep internal pockets. Additionally, all rats carry an instrument of some sort, often a sturdy, two-stringed guitar or drum.


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

CAREER: Pick your Career. Soldier, Academic, Politician, Healer, Courier. Artisans are rare among the Human-emulating Rats.

GRUDGE: 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?

LEGEND: Create a legend. These are stories all Rats have heard, which define their worldview. Two are provided; create one of your own. Pick one of the three as something you find truly meaningful.

MYSTERY: Create a mystery. These reflect aspects Rat culture just doesn’t have, which make Humans baffling. Two are provided; create one of your own. Pick one of the three as something you find especially strange or impossible to believe of Humans.


HOARD Start with two Hoard Points.
A RAT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAIT</th>
<th>Injured?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your Sharp Nose lets you…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track someone</td>
<td>Sniff out food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Strong Hind Legs let you…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climb vertically</td>
<td>Quickly evade danger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Sharp, Chiseling Teeth let you…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gnaw through barriers</td>
<td>Bite hard and hold fast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CAREER

GRUDGE

CLUE TABLE

1. This Clue relates to one of your Mysteries, and you will need help understanding it.
2. This Clue relates to one of your Legends in a manner that casts doubt on it.
3. This Clue causes you to reconsider the species you have a grudge against, for better or worse.
4. This Clue forces you to reconsider one of the Artifacts in your possession.
5. This Clue relates to one of your Legends in a manner that confirms or justifies it.
6. This Clue suggests that Humans can be violent, evil bastards.

On a challenge:
- 1 die for your effort.
- +1 if you’re using a Human Artifact
- +1 if another character is aiding you
- +1 for each relevant circled Trait
- +1 if your Career is relevant.
- +1 or 2 by spending Hoard points.

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 Fromethius who gave Humans the freedom to run the world.

Your own:

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.

Your own:

YOUR HOARD POINTS:

Because you grew up with the stories of Humans and Humanity dominating your culture, those stories move you, and you long to share them... and you long to be recognized for having shared them. Whenever a Clue is discovered by a companion, and you are there to witness it, you may relate a Human legend you know of which may shed some light on the situation. If someone listens to your tale, you gain one hoard point.

Spend Hoard Points on:
- +1 die to any effort.
- +2 dice when translating or interpreting text.
- Allow another player to add a die and reroll any failed roll relating to your Career.
- Rats can't see very well, and tend to stay near walls, advancing into the open only cautiously. Spend one hoard point to find an opening in the wall you're hugging.
- Rats have advanced the arts further than any other Synanthrope, and are the only ones with instruments and epic sung narratives. If you spend a hoard point, you may play a song to inspire your companions, giving everyone in your party (including yourself) one additional die to their next roll, whatever it is.
The Roach (Blattella sapiens)

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 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 it is believed to be 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.

A Roach needs no clothing, but they recognize the value in recognizability, so many elect to have several dozen workers painted in vibrant and eye-catching hues. The remaining members of the Roach tend to stay relatively clustered, as the queen’s reach is only a few feet; it’s common for roaches at the periphery of the mass to wander away, and for wild roaches to be pulled into the fold.
### A ROACH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Injured?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your thousands of Sensitive Antennae let you…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hear extremely well</td>
<td>Analyze chemicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Sturdy Carapaces let you…</td>
<td>Survive impacts and falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resist environmental effects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Seething Mass of Bodies let you…</td>
<td>Stretch yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flank someone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CAREER

### GRUDGE

### CLUE TABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>This Clue relates to one of your Mysteries, and you will need help understanding it.</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>This Clue causes you to reconsider the species you have a grudge against, for better or worse.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>This Clue forces you to reconsider one of the Artifacts in your possession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>This Clue relates to one of your Legends in a manner that confirms or justifies it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>This Clue suggests that Humans have made a fundamental change in the world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On a challenge:
- 1 die for your effort.
- +1 if you’re using a Human Artifact
- +1 if another character is aiding you
- +1 for each relevant circled Trait
- +1 if your Career is relevant
- +1 or 2 by spending Hoard points

### ROACH LEGENDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>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’litr’n.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Your own:**

### ROACH MYSTERIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>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.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Your own:**

### YOUR HOARD POINTS:

Because you are, to be frank, a pile of roaches, what you hoard is yourself. You pull in roaches from anywhere nearby, and let them go whenever you need to, sending wave after wave into danger, as long as your queen is safe. And wild roaches thrive on death and decay; whenever one of your companions spills blood (read: takes an Injury) you can be sure the wild roaches in the building will come into your area of influence, and you gain a Hoard Point.

**Spend Hoard Points on:**
- +1 die to any effort.
- +2 dice when acting in defense of a companion.
- Allow another player to add a die and reroll any failed roll relating to your Career.
- Roaches feed on decay, and their sensitive antennae can sense even the early stages of rot. Spend a hoard point to advance the natural decay of the building.
- Roaches are, as a mass, fairly invulnerable, since they can just get rid of their members when they get hurt. Spend a hoard point to completely remove an injury from yourself, at any point, even a permanent one.
The Raccoon (*Procyon sapiens*)

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.

Almost all Raccoons carry with them a set of tools used to open up and use Human technologies; no two Raccoons use the exact same set of tools. Backpacks are especially fashionable among the Raccoons, usually stuffed to bursting with old batteries, lengths of wire, spare wrenches, and anything else the Raccoon thought would be useful or fun to have on hand.

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.

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

CAREER: Pick your Career Soldier, Academic, Politician, Artisan, Healer. Couriers are rare among the self-centered Raccoons.

GRUDGE: 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?

LEGEND: Create a legend. These are tales all Raccoons have heard, which define their worldview. Two are provided; create one of your own. Pick one of the three as something you find truly meaningful.

MYSTERY: Create a mystery. These reflect aspects Raccoon culture just doesn’t have, which make Humans baffling. Two are provided; create one of your own. Pick one of the three as something you find especially strange or impossible to believe of Humans.


HOARD: Start with two Hoard Points
A RACCOON

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAIT</th>
<th>Injured?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your Tactile Paws let you...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operate technology</td>
<td>Forage without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>looking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Nimble Body lets you...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep your balance</td>
<td>Run quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Dark Stripes let you...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hide in shadows</td>
<td>Cause a distraction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CAREER

GRUDGE

CLUE TABLE

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>This Clue suggests that Humans regret or resest the technology they created.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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!

Your own:

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."

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.

Your own:

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.

YOUR HOARD POINTS:

Because you are a Raccoon, you think you are the best. No, really. You think you are the bee's knees, you clever little bandit you. As a result, you are... disinclined to admit any sort of failure. It's upsetting, and that frustration is something you can hold on to and pull from when it's time to show off. Whenever you attempt a task that you're reasonably competent at (rolling 3 or more dice) and fail, take a moment to describe how completely foolish you look. If you do, gain one hoard point.

Spend Hoard Points on:

- +1 die to any effort.
- +2 dice when operating Human technology.
- Allow another player to add a die and reroll any failed roll relating to your Career.
- Raccoons have an eye for machinery, and hold most of the secrets as to its operation. You can spend a Hoard point to describe the layout of a machine in more precise detail.
- Raccoons have one talent that seems almost supernatural to the other Synanthropes, but is so inherent they need never really think about it. Spend a hoard point to open any closed cabinet, or drawer instantly.
The Cane Toad (Bufo sapiens)

The Cane Toads maintain that their ancestors were pleased when the Humans disappeared. Indeed, there's a large contingent that suggests that they were somehow responsible for the disappearance. The ancient cane toads dwelled between Human settlements rather than within them, preferring the isolation and comfort of drainage ditches, gardens, and farmlands away from direct human contact. When Humanity disappeared, and the gardens expanded to cover the towns and cities, the Toads followed, cutting down anyone who got in their way.

The Toads are large, brash, and toxic. They are, quite literally, poisonous; their skin secretes a bofutoxen which is pleasantly hallucinogenic in small quantities and unpleasantly deadly in sufficient doses. They are not afraid of using this toxicity as an offensive weapon, and it was common during the Resource Wars for front-line troops to coat blades and arrows with their own secretions prior to a charge. This has given them a reputation as deadly warriors, something which is only enhanced by their wanton destructiveness, merciless battle tactics, and cannibalism.

The Toad language is loud and simple: a language of few nouns, fewer adjectives, and many, many imperative verbs. They make use of lots of loanwords from Human languages, though the placement of their tongue (attached at the front of the mouth, ready to be flicked out at prey) prevents them from correctly intoning human vowel sounds, which all end up as a flat /ə/. The design of the Toad's eyes prevent them from reading a written language, though they have a system of basic colored shapes based on Human road signs, which can preserve simple information.

Though the Toads remain quadrupeds who move by hopping, they have developed a capacity to swagger forward on their hind legs briefly, freeing up their arms for a few minutes before they tire out and return to all fours. Most toads wear clothing that covers their arms, shoulders, and bellies, but leaves their back (and the poison-secreting glands on it) exposed for ease of access.

NAME: Toads have two names; the first is a simple monosyllable which is given the them as soon as they are grown, and the second is a Human word of their own choice, selected to strike fear into others and shouted as a battle cry of sorts: Ker Vectory. Mer Blede. Pek Deadly. Bem Destreyer.

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

CAREER: Pick your Career. Soldier, Academic, Politician, Artisan, Courier. Healers are rare among the boorish Cane Toads.

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

LEGEND: Create a legend. These are tales all Toads have heard, which define their worldview. Two are provided; create one of your own. Pick one of the three as something you find truly meaningful.

MYSTERY: Create a mystery. These reflect aspects Toad culture just doesn’t have, which make Humans baffling. Two are provided; create one of your own. Pick one of the three as something you find especially strange or impossible to believe of Humans.


HOARD: Start with two Hoard Points
## A Cane Toad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your Wide, Motionless Eyes let you…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track moving objects</td>
<td>See far to your periphery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Long, Sticky Tongue lets you…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quickly grab an object</td>
<td>Pull something toward you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Slick, Toxic Skin lets you…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evade anything’s grasp</td>
<td>Intoxicate others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Career

### Grudge

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<td>This Clue causes you to reconsider the species you have a grudge against, for better or worse.</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>This Clue relates to one of your Legends in a manner that confirms or justifies it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>This Clue suggests that Humans value a loving, nurturing environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On a challenge:
- 1 die for your effort.
- +1 if you’re using a Human Artifact
- +1 if another character is aiding you
- +1 for each relevant circled Trait
- +1 if your Career is relevant
- +1 or 2 by spending Hoard points.

## Toad Legends

Not all humans are truly Humans; the real Humans were few and far between, surrounded as they were by pale imitations which might have been cousins or larval forms. While mere humans are forgotten, the names of True Humans have passed down through the ages: Check Nerris, Ven Demme, Stev Segel, Jeck Chen, and more.

Your own:

This world is a temporary place, a kind of canvas stretched over the real world, or the “Dremming.” The Humans understood their role as members of the Dremming dropped onto the world and tasked with painting it to their satisfaction.

## Toad Mysteries

Toad tadpoles have a mortality rate of about 99%, due to their small size and insufficient toxicity, as well as the fact that Toads have few qualms about eating their own progeny. After all, they aren’t really Toads yet until they can defend themselves, right? The concept of child rearing in any capacity is unsettling and strange.

Your own:

While all Synanthropes have a… complex relationship with the natural environment, the Toads are far more dismissive of nature than the rest. They live to spread their influence, drowning out native fauna with gusto. Eco-friendliness is simply not sensible.

## Your Hoard Points

Because you are a vile motherfucker, you thrive on violence. That’s what gets you going in the morning, the knowledge that you are the most toxic creature on the planet, and that nothing the crosses your path can survive if you don’t want it to. Of course, it takes some advanced violence to really get your blood flowing... whenever you escalate in a conflict, you may shout out a vile insult directed at your opponent, reminding them of your complete superiority. If you do so, gain one hoard point.

Spend Hoard Points on:
- +1 die to any effort.
- +2 dice when attempting to cause an Injury.
- Allow another player to add a die and reroll any failed roll relating to your Career.
- Toad eyes don’t track consciously, but alight onto motion by their own accord, allowing you to pull flies out of the air without really thinking about it. This can come in handy: spend a hoard point to discover a living creature attempting to hide nearby.
- Toads are poisonous. Straight up toxic and a danger to everything that comes near them because of the toxin that seeps from their skin. If you are in physical contact with someone who has an injury, even one you just caused, you may spend a hoard point to make that injury permanent.
The Gecko (*Hemidactylus sapiens*)

When the Humans disappeared, the Geckos didn't just thrive in their absence, they celebrated their freedom. Ancient geckos embraced the night, travelling in a darkness undisturbed by Humans and their infernal light switches and lumbering presence. While all the Synanthropes have a complex relationship with Humanity, the Geckos' opinions are tinged with fear and the desperate hope that wherever Humanity went, they won't be coming back any time soon.

Geckos are notoriously shy and evasive, prone to hiding in the shadows even in places of nominal safety. During the Resource Wars, Geckos were the least-seen field combatants, far preferring to send individuals to the back lines, investing in assassination and theft as weapons, rather than warriors; in part, this was because their numbers are small, well below those of the other Synanthropes, and in part because they are cowards at a deeply instinctual level. Faced with danger, a Gecko will run to safety before realizing what he's doing, in the same way that one might drop a hot coal before even registering how hot it is. Geckos are almost completely asocial, and their societies are loosely-banded individuals in broad territories who communicate maybe once or twice a year about matters of civic importance.

The Geckos' language is a system of staccato chirps, which combine three different tones and three different lengths of chirp into nine basic words, which are themselves combined and patterned into a more complex language which can be heard from miles away for those rare instances when communication trumps stealth. There is also the silent language: the same basic words, expressed entirely through motions of the front legs. Geckos can approximate human words in their chirps, but their mouths are only capable of plosive consonants such as /b/, /g/, and /t/. Geckos have no written language of their own, but can read Human writing provided it is dark enough for them to see it effectively.

Because Geckos routinely find themselves walking upside down, they find most clothing unnecessary and disruptive, but they do see the use in a tight band around their belly with a few pouches on it, and large, dark goggles to make daylight bearable.

NAME: All Gecko names consist of one or two syllables of hard consonant-vowel-optional consonant chirps. Curiously, most emulate Human names, in the belief this will encourage Humans to keep away: Jak! Mar-Ta! Teh-Dee! Beh-Tee!

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

CAREER: Pick your Career. Academic, Politician, Artisan, Healer, Courier. Soldiers are rare among the cowardly Geckos.

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

LEGEND: Create a legend. These are tales all Geckos have heard, which define their worldview. Two are provided; create one of your own. Pick one of the three as something you find truly meaningful.

MYSTERY: Create a mystery. These reflect aspects Gecko culture just doesn’t have, which make Humans baffling. Two are provided; create one of your own. Pick one of the three as something you find especially strange or impossible to believe of Humans.


HOARD: Start with two Hoard Points
A GECKO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAIT</th>
<th>Injured?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your Large, Unblinking Eyes let you…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigate in near-complete darkness.</td>
<td>See clearly through fog, dust, and other distractions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Adhesive Toe Pads let you…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cling to walls.</td>
<td>Hold objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Ectothermic Metabolism lets you…</td>
<td>Identify temperature gradients easily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CAREER

GRUDGE

CLUE TABLE

1. This Clue relates to one of your Mysteries, and you will need help understanding it.
2. This Clue relates to one of your Legends in a manner that casts doubt on it.
3. This Clue causes you to reconsider the species you have a grudge against, for better or worse.
4. This Clue forces you to reconsider one of the Artifacts in your possession.
5. This Clue relates to one of your Legends in a manner that confirms or justifies it.
6. This Clue suggests that Humans themselves live lives of quiet panic.

YOUR HOARD POINTS:

Because Geckos are terrified of... everything, they have come to value fear and, in a strange way, rely on it. It rouses them, even when the weather is cold, and it stirs the hormones which lets their tails regrow, which is pretty essential since they're dropping off all the dang time. Whenever you COULD be injured in an attack or action but AREN'T, you may gain a hoard point.

Spend Hoard Points on:

+1 die to any effort.
+2 dice when trying to remain unnoticed.
Allow another player to add a die and reroll any failed roll relating to your Career.
Geckos' eyes are constantly twisting, turning, and flitting around the room as they subconsciously record safe spots and exits. Spend a hoard point to find a place where whatever danger is on this floor can't harm you (although you might still need to pass through the danger to hit the exit).
Geckos can drop their tails and run, confusing everyone around. If you are out of view for even a second, you can spend a hoard point to disappear, leaving a wriggling tail in your place, and suddenly be anywhere you could reasonably reach.

GECKO LEGENDS

It was a rare talent indeed, but some Humans had mastered the ability to disappear entirely—simply be gone, without need to run or hide. The greatest of them, Dabed Copapeild, could cause others to vanish, even massive constructions and statues.

Your own:

There are beings called Kabis... invisible, dangerous creatures which the Humans once knew how to chain down in kabidatas, but which now roam free, watching, collecting information for uncertain purposes. There are eight million, and they could be anywhere.

GECKO MYSTERIES

Geckos have so little contact with one another that they have developed very few diseases, and as a result have very little comprehension of germ theory; the idea of “being sick” is very much beyond them.

Your own:

A Gecko’s instinctive response to danger is, quite rightly, to flee, with fighting as a last, desperate resort. Bravery is a sort of madness, on e otherwise the Humans would not have suffered..