

**SYNTHETICA**

*We all live in a golden age.*

*Everyone tells us so.*

*This is the best of all possible worlds.*

*Everyone tells us so.*

*"I believe in overkill," whispers the silver ship.*

—inscription on the Golden Disc of Safranj

# **MEC HAN ICA**

You. This confusing word. Who does the author address? Reader? Referee? Player? Character? Hero?

No, truly, there are no heroes here. Only humans who could not try but do or die.

So it is the player character, the PC, that is addressed by the second person pronoun. They are the human in the world of the synthetic dream. Those other humans, out there, the author and the reader, the referee and the player, they are but shadows beyond the veil.

## A. ROLL

When you try something risky, roll d20 + ability + skill and try to beat a target number.

3	Trivial
7	Easy
11	Mediocre
15	Hard
19	Very hard

If you roll on target, sacrifice something to succeed.

## MAGIC NUMBERS

Some numbers on the icosahedron are special.

1	Fail and equipment notched. Mark. Mark again, it is broken.
13	1 ammo or power left. Mark. Can only be used one more time.
20	Always succeed. Double effect or additional stunt (trip, trick, trap), then roll a second time.

Also, the d20 always explodes.

## BONUS & PENALTY

The Referee assigns a bonus [+] or penalty [-] when circumstances favor or hinder you.

+1/-1	a tiny bonus or penalty
+6/-6	a rather large bonus or penalty
+1d6/-1d6	a pretty random bonus or penalty
roll 2 dice	... and take the better or worse

Traits, items, events, burdens and more also give [+] or [-].  
Common sense is a dictator sometimes ignored.

## GROUP ROLL

When a group endeavors together, a random one rolls.

—Ederacts d4:d20

“I rolled last time, now it's your turn,” mutters the player and passes the fateful die to another. For the first shall be last, and the last shall be first, and none shall know who is coming and going.

## ORACLE ROLL

When you ask truths of the dice, roll d20 + ability.

3 or less	Nay and woe!
4 to 7	Nay
8 to 13	Perhaps, for a price
14 to 19	Yea
20+	Yea and more!

Your Referee shall season to taste with [+] and [-].

# B. LEVEL & LIFE & HERO DICE

## LEVEL

An abstract measure of power.

You start at level 1 and go to level 9. Monsters and the unplayables (the NPCs) stretch from level 0 to level 17.

## LIFE

Hylospheric persistence, hit points, embodiment, ha. Your narrative resilience. At 0 life, you are in trouble.

## HERO DICE

Dice six-sided to adjust your rolls and regain life. You gain 1 per session and another every couple of hours. Here, in your heart, there is a space to store as many HD as you have levels.

What's a session? Is life not a running stream, unbottled?

# C. ABILITY

The function of your form is measured for the pleasure and understanding of the gentle daemon there beyond.

## ACTIVE ABILITIES: DOING THINGS

Charisma: drive, fortune, will to dominate mind.

Strength: vigor, energy, force to dominate matter.

## DYNAMIC ABILITIES: CHANGING THINGS

Thought: intellect, speed, wit to adapt mind.

Agility: dexterity, speed, flexibility to adapt matter.

## STATIC ABILITIES: RESISTING THINGS

Aura: spirit, courage, resolve to bear mind.

Endurance: grit, pep, stamina to bear matter.

## HUMAN ABILITY RANGE

Those who are inhuman may diverge, you are not, do not.

- 0 Unremarkable
- +1 Promising
- +2 Talented
- +3 Gifted
- +4 Excellent
- +5 Incredible

## D. SKILL

Your learning, training, and downloaded skill packages let you exceed the function of your form. Now, it is your trait. Wait ... how do you remember that?

Skilled	+3 bonus to rolls
Expert	+6 bonus to rolls
Master	+9 bonus to rolls

What is a skill? Any trait can be a skill. A job, profession, hobby, background, sport, practice, or upbringing. That which is known. That which requires practice. That which makes sense.

A mutant doghead with gills may be skilled at breathing and moving and being under water. One raised among the slow-fishers of the Cyan Sea may be skilled in those tides and fish and customs. A warrior raised on the steppe would know lance and jezail, bola and bolo. A soldier from the city would know partisan and poignard, grenade and garotte.

A skill applies when it makes sense.

### ONE WOULD LEARN

Skill becomes expertise, expertise becomes mastery. One hopes to progress, but hopes are not promises.

You gain a level and so choose.

*or*

Find a source or mentor or install a skill-pak. Roll to learn therefrom. Repeat thrice, to become skilled.

Repeat more to become an expert, a master.

## E. SAVE

When nothing but blind luck will save you, roll d20 + ability over 13 to save.

Under 13	Doom. What was, will be. No save.
13	Sacrifice. Lose a precious to save.
Over 13	Save. Disaster averted, fortune appeased.

Endurance may save your body in the poison desert of disease, aura may save your psychic integrity in the wormway under the void.

*"Or not,"* whispers an echoing Omino.

### WARD

Artifacts that recall the oldtech of the Long Ago or the corrupted fantascience of to-day may offer their bonus when you save.

## F. DEFENSE

When you are a target, defend lest you are ... destroyed.

7 + ability (agility) + bonus (if skill applies) + armor

Could there be other defenses? Spiritual, perhaps, when your soul travels like a butterfly between the dreams of the divers cosmic lords?

*"A fair wizard's skull as ward, a mind fortified as ability,"* mutters the daemon. Again the daemon.

### ARMOR

Modern equipment that softens blows or ancient war machines that replace the body. Armor takes many forms.

# G. CONFLICT

Then words had had their day.

## REACTION

Roll 2d6 + cha to see how they, the others, behave.

- Under 2 They come at you, like raving agents of cosmic corruption.
- 2 Aggressive, hostile. They attack, given half a chance.
- 3–5 Thanks, they hate you.
- 6–8 Unsure, waffling, complicated, suspicious. Mediocre.
- 9–11 Polite, understanding, sympathetic.
- 12 Friendly, interested. They'll help, given half a chance.
- Over 12 They insist on helping, even if you don't need help. Rude to say no, but they will waste your ... Oh, dear. Cup of tea?

## INITIATIVE

Talk was ended and lances sang electric harmonies.

d6 + agility

Each side rolls initiative every round. A random character every round. High roll goes first. When there's a tie, chaos reigns and everything happens at once.

## ROUND

Cinematic time enough to take an action.

## ACTION

You move and do. Be reasonable. Use common sense.

# H. ATTACK

Your mode of destruction defines your approach. Overcome your target's defense to succeed. Your skill, if applicable, provides a bonus also.

Melee

d20 + ability (strength) + bonus (if applicable)

Ranged

d20 + ability (agility) + bonus (if applicable)

Oldtech

d20 + ability (thought) + bonus (if applicable)

Fantascience

d20 + ability (charisma) + bonus (if applicable)

## SPACE

Space is relative.

Here Melee.

The thick of things. Free attack if an enemy disengages carelessly.

There Short range.

Win initiative to run over and melee or keep opponents at range for the round.

O'er there Long range.

Takes two rounds to reach.

Off stage Extreme range.

Three+ rounds. More chase than conflict.

# I. DAMAGE

Victory makes untenable your foe's existence. But ... why would I have foes? What hell is this?

## DAMAGE REDUCES LIFE

Though the dagger missed your flesh, it tore your plot armor and life's thread attenuates.

dXX (item) + ability (if applicable) + bonus (if appl.)

When you are reduced to 0 life, roll for your defeat (gaze left, overleaf).

Other targets become ex-targets at 0 life. Most sentient targets do not want to be ex-targets and flee before.

## DAMAGE REDUCES ABILITIES

Some obnoxious attacks reduce your ability scores: strength, endurance, agility, charisma, aura, or thought.

When you cannot reduce your ability score, roll for your defeat overleaf as above (so below).

Of foes without abilities, what of them? Let the Ref's brow furrow with worry as they reduce their levels and bonuses, and weaken them in many ways.

## DAMAGE IMPOSES BURDENS

Burdensome effects and modifiers occupy inventory slots, reducing your options. Much may be a burden: broken leg, toothache, phobia, blindness, crippling anxiety, mad delusion, divine hubris.

# J. DEFEAT

By its fruits, you shall know its roots.

Damage broke through armor:  
At 0 life roll 2d6 + endurance

Damage broke through wards:  
At 0 life roll 2d6 + aura

## DEFEAT TABLE

Woe!

1 or less	Destroyed utterly.
2–6	Dead.
7	KO. Burden (-1 thought).
8	Winded or weakened. Burden (-1 strength). Miss 1 round, regain 1 life.
9	Strained or nauseated. Burden (-1 agility). Miss 1 round, regain 1 life.
10	Scarred or corrupted. Burden (-1 charisma). Miss 1 round, regain 1 life.
11	Stunned. Miss 1 round, regain 1 life.
12+	All ok! Regain 1 life.

A burden takes up 1 inventory slot.

## K. MORALE

Defeat, like all disasters, comes first slow, then all at once.

### WHAT HAPPENED?

A leader was defeated, a horror from beyond the void appeared, the angels were mowed down like sheaves of wheat, the levy's spear beams glanced off the monster's shimmery form like grains of millet.

To some, victory seemed impossible.

### YOUR MORALE

You have no morale score. The daemon Player from beyond the veil of the cosmos rides your mortal shell. Though you feel terror, they care not.

"My hero is fearless!" cackles the daemon Player.

You know better. Bitterly, better.

### NPC MORALE

It goes to 11, no higher (yet, is it not more than 10?). The brave have more, the cowardly less; the Ref adjusts.

NPC morale = 3 + half their level

When morale is tested, 2d6 roll. The tumble of the dice decides: if the score it exceeds, the NPC does flee.

In a group, a random character is tested. Routs start with a single panicked flight.

## L. REST & RECOVERY

To rest again, to be free of the daemon.

To enjoy a comfortable bed, a day of ease, soothing circumstance, an end to toil.

Ah, you dream, to have a satisfied mind again.

### RECOVERY

Each week, one insult to your existential integrity is removed. This may be:

All missing life is restored  
or one missing ability score is restored  
or one burden is removed.  
*(Terms and conditions apply.)*

Options for faster recovery exist if you can find them.

### RELIFE

Death is not the end of your service to the daemon.

Body available: use an aspera casket to spin a new soul into your body. Time of death affects memories and modifies personality. Top up the aspera casket with fresh soul-source as required.

Head available: please use a suitable clone or golem body to restore mobility. An aspera jar may keep just the head alive, though psychological adjustment may be difficult.

Jewel available: error. Jewel not available. Please contact your canopic jewel service point to install a new synthetic personality backup matrix.

# M. INVENTORY

Your capacities limit how much you can bear.

Items: 7 + ability (strength)

Traits: 7 + ability (thought)

Every item or trait beyond your limit is a burden and imposes -1 to all rolls. Curses, disease, and other afflictions also occupy inventory slots. Pets and sidekicks serving the same daemon Player as yourself also occupy inventory slots. You are the daemion's anchor in this existence. Non-humans may bear more or less.

## UNITS OF MATTER

Items, things. You can carry a packed sack, even if your strength implies otherwise. One cash is what a median laborer earns in a day. How do you know this? Why?

1 sack (sk) = 10 stones (st) = 100 soaps (sp) = 2,500 cash (€)

## UNITS OF MIND

Ideas, background, mutations, spells, things that could be used as skills. Thankfully, even as your skill grows, it occupies no more space in your soul's palace.

## HALLMARK

An item, trait, or other property (such as a steed) can be your hallmark. It is always with you and your daemon may invest xp to make it more powerful. You can bear a number of hallmarks equal to your level.

# N. POWERS: OLDTECH & FANTASCIENCE

There are secret sciences, indistinguishable from magic, that offer mastery over the worlds of matter and mind.

*"All these spells, these powerful magics, my hero shall master!"* gloats the daemon. Why must it threaten you with such corruption? Truly, knows it no mercy?

## LIFE FUELS POWERS

You pay for power with your life. 'Ware! The alien fires of the incomprehensible may consume your body (ha), spirit (ka), and memories (ba).

1 power costs 1 life

All spells are of the first power, unless otherwise noted.

## POWERS & SPELL LEVELS

What the Further-Fallen call spells and spell-levels are but technologies too arcane for their minds to grasp.

1 power	0th level spell or cantrip or metacanticle.
2 power	1st level spell, such as <i>Tragic Missile</i> .
4 power	2nd level spell, such as <i>Hlod Person [sic]</i> .
6 power	3rd level spell, such as <i>Pyreball</i> .
2n power	nth level spell, such as <i>Nihil Est!</i>

## P. R. T. D.

Power. Range. Target. Duration.

## IMBUE

Your life is locked in the spell until it ends.

## OVERCHARGE

Doubling a spell's power may modify effects. Multiple overcharges on one spell cast multiply multiple times: ×2, ×4, ×8, ×16 and so on. Basic mathemagic.

# O. EXPERIENCE

The daemon experiences the world vicariously. Through you. Stealing time and dreams and hopes.

## THE DAEMON PLAYER EARNS EXPERIENCE (XP)

When they ...

- Send you exploring, braving danger to see something new: 1d6 × 10 xp.
- Drive you flailing, blithering on some terrible quest: 1d6 × 100 xp per session of progress.
- Please the Referee, as is tradition.
- Attend a session: 500 xp for being a good egg.

## LEVEL UP: CHARACTER EXPERIENCE (CXP)

You grow when the daemon Player invests in your growth. Earned xp becomes invested cxp. The daemon Player may also invest in your sidekicks, pets and items (turning them into hallmarks). Only thus may you, your sidekicks and your hallmarks level up.

*"I am generous!"* boasts the daemon. It is a lie, you know.

XP	LEVEL	LIFE
0	0	4
300	1	8
750	2	12
1,500	3	16
3,000	4	20
6,000	5	24
12,500	6	28
25,000	7	32
50,000	8	36
99,999	9	40

Every level, you, your sidekick, or pet ...

- Gain a new trait (be it skill, power, or mutation)
- or improve a trait (skilled → expert → master)
- or increase an ability score by 1.

Your item gains no life. Instead, every level it gains +1 to saves vs destruction and ...

- +1 bonus to every damage die rolled
- or +1 defense bonus
- or a new trait, power or complication.

You wonder, must you track this currency "experience" for yourself and all your items and beasts of burdens e'en? Or will this daemon Player comfort thee? You wish that you were homeward bound?

*"Nixi spettatei,"* sighs the gentle machine.