

Technolust

A Compact RPG by

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It's a dark future where the boundaries between human and machine have blurred...or fused. Today, cyborgs are real...and they're everyone. But no one started questioning what happens when your body becomes more machine than flesh. Until now. We call it technolust: The more you "mod," the more you want to mod. And the more you mod, the more the mod is you.

And technolust can drive cyberdaddies and moddie mamas to disturbing, even gruesome extremes. The body puritans--we call them "meatheads"--use words like "perverse" and "blasphemous" to describe the new cyborg culture. The buzzing heads and the crawling newfeeds in the media spout statistics about rising crime rates and disintegrating families; the edutainment blogs tell sensationalistic stories about modmad tweens selling their organs for upgrades and steel-knuckle 24/7 cage-matches between cyborg fighters on cognitive autopilot. Some radical New Age geeks have even started to preach that it's all a sign that the Singularity is near, and soon humanity will move to a new level of machine-enabled consciousness. But the meatheads mock the cyber-Rapture as just another symptom of the hallucinatory delirium that is known to be a side effect of too-extensive body modification.

In *Technolust*, you play a citizen of this slowly disintegrating world. You are caught up in the throes of technolust, and it may be pushing you to do things that would make you blush--or maybe turn white as a sheet--if you were thinking straight. Can you hold on to your humanity when all around you everyone else is surrendering theirs?

Setting Up

One player is the "Dealer" (GM). He or she should have two or three decks of cards (shuffled together) and a bunch of poker chips to serve as "social capital" markers. There should be at least two other players, and preferably more, up to about six.

First, the group establishes the setting for the game, settling upon a few sentences that describe the basic situation. All of them will be members of a futuristic social circle that is characterized by intense status competition: high school students; hovercar sales reps; ambitious megacorporate executives; holovision porn stars; asteroid miners--whatever the players think is cool. The underlying metric that drives the status competition needs to be established as well, e.g., "popularity" for high school students, "sales" for hovercar reps; "profit" for executives; "sexual performance" for porn stars; "ore strikes" for miners--whatever seems appropriate for the kind of people the characters will be.

Second, each player creates his character. The Dealer gives each

player two cards, one face up (the Dream card) and the other face down (the Nightmare card). Interpret the dream card using the motifs charts at right. For example, if the characters are used hovercar salesmen, and a player receives the Ten of Diamonds as his character's Dream, the player could read it as, "This character wants to sell the Big Lemon on the lot to show that he can sell anything," or even as, "This character just wants to make it to his retirement." Do the same thing with

Suit Motifs



Spades represent the body and physical action. As dreams and nightmares, they suggest physical achievement or failure. Played as base, define them as related to "normal" appearance and ability (e.g., "a great smile"). Played as mods, define them as performance-enhancing, functional prosthetics (e.g., "diamond-sharp teeth"). Technolust fever in spades is violence, physical competitiveness and belligerence. A spades Singularity is a robot uprising.



Hearts represent the emotions and personal relationships. As dreams and nightmares, they represent intimate, domestic or family situations. Played as base, define them as relationships with other characters (PC or NPC). Played as mods, define them as appearance-altering cosmetic enhancement (e.g., "mirror eyes"). Technolust fever in hearts is hedonistic self-indulgence. A hearts Singularity is a nanotechnological nightmare.



Diamonds represent personality and social identity and rank. As dreams and nightmares, they suggest social achievement or failure. Played as base, define them as "normal" personality traits (e.g., "ambitious") or social roles ("nerdy guy in back of classroom"). Played as mods, define them as behavior-modifying implants or personality chips (e.g., "an Elvis karaoke chip"). Technolust fever in diamonds is extreme emotional outbursts or personality fugues. A diamonds Singularity is a bizarre hivemind that wants to assimilate those which suit it.



Clubs represent the mind and intellectual efforts. As dreams and nightmares, they suggest intellectual or cognitive achievement or failure. Played as base, define them as property: places or things the character cares about (e.g., "my old H.S. varsity fusionball jacket"). As mods, they are computational or cybernetic enhancements (e.g., "satellite survey uplink"). Technolust fever in clubs is single-minded paranoid obsession. A clubs Singularity is an omnipotent AI with its own agenda.

Card Motifs

Ace (1 or 11)	primacy, mastery
Two (2)	a partner, a complement
Three (3)	a successor, a student
Four (4)	stability, order
Five (5)	centrality, membership
Six (6)	change, novelty
Seven (7)	wonder, strangeness
Eight (8)	recognition
Nine (9)	progress, movement
Ten (10)	completeness, fulfillment
Jack (10)	submission, learning
Queen (10)	nurturing, fostering
King (10)	ownership, dominance

the Nightmare card, inverting the meaning appropriately to show what it is the character is afraid of. If the same character draws the Five of Clubs, it suggests that, "This character is afraid of being left out of the loop, of not knowing things that other people know."

Next the dealer gives each player a hand of five cards that he or she should play right away as "base" (human-normal abilities and characteristics) or "mods" (cybernetic, prosthetic, and other enhancements). Use a big sheet of paper in the center of the table to record all of the choices being made, producing a big social network that includes characters and their relations to each other and the things and places they care about.

Everybody makes up a name for his or her character and takes a number of chips equal to the value of the cards assigned as mods (with J, Q, K = 10 and A = 1 or 11 at player's option) and the number of cards assigned as base (i.e., base cards have a value of 1 here). This pool is the character's "social capital" (SC) and represents all manner of resources, from cash on hand to favors receivable.

The Dealer lays out cards equal to twice the number of players in the game, including himself, face up in the middle of the table, receiving SC equal to the sum of the card values there. This is the "Mods Market."

You are now ready to play.

Playing the Game

At the beginning of the game-round, the Dealer adds new cards to the Mods Market to bring the total up to the original total. Any cards that have been “tapped” during the previous turn are now untapped.

Play proceeds in order of SC from highest to lowest as of the beginning of the turn. Each player gets one free action, and may take additional actions by spending SC equal to the square of the number of additional actions desired (so 1 SC for the first additional action, +3 more for the second (=4), +5 more for the third (=9)).

Turn Actions

- ✦ **Sacrifice a base card** to gain SC equal to the value of that card. Describe how the character makes the sacrifice or suffers the loss.
- ✦ **“Buy off” a Nightmare** by spending SC equal to its value plus any SC on it and drawing a new card to replace it. Describe the character confronting or otherwise overcoming the fear...and gaining the new one.
- ✦ **“Cash in” a Dream** that has SC on it exceeding the value of the card, taking 1½ times the value of the card into the character’s pool. Depending on how the Dream has been defined, either keep it or draw a new one. Describe the character’s accomplishment and/or transformation.
- ✦ **Purchase a mod** from the Mods Market by spending SC equal to the card’s value. Define the mod and put it on the character sheet.
- ✦ **Start a scene** by indicating where his or her character is, who else is there, and what is going on as the scene begins. He or she will also define the scene as involving either pursuing or avoiding some character’s Dream or Nightmare. Characters not included by the scene-starter may be introduced by spending 1 SC and interjecting the appropriate narration.

At the end of each player-turn, any player may untap tapped cards by spending 1 SC per card (Remember that cards untap automatically at the beginning of each new game-round).

At the end of the game-round (once each player has had a turn), if the total value of a player’s mods in a suit are of higher value than his or her base in that suit, the player will lose SC equal to the square of the difference between the total mod value and the base. This loss can be prevented if the character participated in a scene during the turn in which the player role-played “technolust fever” appropriate to the suit. Dealer will judge.

Hint: “Technolust fever” is not a good thing! Think hallucinations or weird behavior related to the mods the character has. The fever is about uncontrollable urges that must be satisfied. The more mods a character has, the more wacked-out he will become.

A player who has any mods and did not buy at least one mod during the round loses SC equal to the number of mods he or she has. A player who has SC on his or her Nightmare card exceeding the value of the card loses SC from his or her pool equal to the difference between the value of the card and the accumulated total. A player who can’t pay his SC losses loses a base card; if he or she has no base cards to lose, the player loses. He or she should narrate an appropriately gruesome and grisly end for his or her character during any scene of the next game-turn.

Before proceeding to the next game-round, the Dealer draws the top card of the deck. If its value is less than the number game-rounds that have already been played, the Singularity occurs and the game ends.

Running a Scene

Starting with whomever the scene-starter designates, each player describes his or her character’s relevant actions in turn, “narrating in” mods and base and “tapping” (i.e., turning them sideways) them in order to do so (Other players can call b.s. to veto; the Dealer gets to be the final arbiter), and explaining how the action contributes to advancing or frustrating the Dream or Nightmare at issue. The scene-starter can assign NPCs to the Dealer or to other players as desired and as seems logical. The Dealer can spend 1 SC to tap any cards in the Mods Market as mods to reflect NPC actions or reactions, even if other players are playing them. During any given player-turn, he can’t spend more SC than there are players to do this.

Once every player has had a chance to participate, determine the winning side, the narrator, and the winner.

The winning side is the side that has the highest value, calculated as the value of tapped mods of the relevant suit plus the number of tapped base cards (i.e., base cards have a value of 1 for the purposes of this calculation). It will be oriented toward advancing or frustrating a specific character’s Dream or Nightmare.

The narrator is the player who has tapped the single highest-value card of any suit, whether a base or a mod. Suits are ranked in order from Spades to Clubs, but the suit of the Dream/Nightmare card at issue “trumps” other suits in cases of ties. He or she narrates the success of the winning side, changing the in-game situation as seems appropriate. The narrator does not have to belong to the winning side.

The winner is the player who has tapped the single highest-value card of the relevant suit, whether a base or a mod. He or she receives SC equal to the value of that card and may distribute this SC as desired: to his or her own pool or to the pools of others. At least one SC must be allocated to the Dream or Nightmare at issue, in the appropriate direction (i.e., adding or removing SC tokens appropriately).

The Singularity (Ending the Game)

The game ends when only one player is left; that player is the “winner” of the game. Otherwise, play continues until the Singularity occurs. The player with the most SC gets to narrate how the Singularity comes about, in accordance with the suit of the Singularity card. Each player then narrates what happens to his or her character in the Singularity, happily if there is more SC on his or her Dream than on his or her Nightmare and unhappily otherwise. In such circumstances, there is no winner.

Notes and Inspirations

Background for the Technolust world and character types has been left purposefully ambiguous to allow the players to construct a world together through their play. If you need to fill in blanks, drawing on almost any dystopian vision of the future, keeping in mind that technology rules...and not in a good way.

Let’s face it, the characters in Technolust aren’t likely to come to a happy ending. But part of the fun is seeing how they survive their struggles against “technolust fever”...if they survive at all.

As we created this game, we had a few sources of inspiration. While we didn’t model Technolust on any of these directly, the following resources might help to add some flavor to your game.

Movies and TV

- ✦ Hardware
- ✦ Saturn 3
- ✦ Virus
- ✦ The Six-Million Dollar Man
- ✦ Johnny Mnemonic
- ✦ Blade Runner
- ✦ Alien
- ✦ Universal Soldier

Books, Art, Etc.

- ✦ Any William Gibson novels... but particularly *Neuromancer*
- ✦ Geiger paintings/drawings
- ✦ X-men comics...particularly Wolverine
- ✦ Cyberpunk (the game)
- ✦ Resident Evil (games and movies)