



NEXUS

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Chapter 1: World and Story

Welcome to the Future

The game takes place in two worlds, one real, and one virtual. The real world location is the city of Janus, one of the most technologically advanced cities in the world. The virtual world is the Nexus, a supercomputer network that has become sentient and created a virtual land for humans to use, bringing the city into a new age of communication and virtual interaction. The game takes place in the near future, where humanity has made great strides in technology.

History

Janus was a pioneering city that was considered the central hub of technology. The most successful and influential technology corporations all have a main presence in Janus, working on advances in robotics, cybernetics, information tech, nanotechnology, and more. It was in Janus that the first fully integrated city control system was built. A large team of scientists and engineers worked on a project to make the management of the city as easy as possible. The implementation of this project resulted in the creation

of the world's first true artificial intelligence: the Nexus.

The Nexus

Initially planned as a method to manage city power and water systems, the Nexus evolved into an incredible computing entity. The creators quickly lost control and realized that the Nexus was building itself off of their initial plans. It soon became far too complicated to keep up with. Traditional coding and hacking was simply too difficult to utilize, as the Nexus became a maze of twisted and seemingly endless code blocks.

When the Nexus was built into the city's power system, it siphoned the energy it needed to sustain itself, and took control of robotic workers and drones to manufacture and build sufficient virtual space to exist. Its sheer size and effectiveness suggests that it has found a way to manufacture impossibly large data storage and processors.

The marvel of the Nexus fascinated some while terrifying others, as it was growing more and more, gaining access to countless systems across the city via network hubs. It would seem, however, that whatever protocols had been built into a very early

version of the Nexus were still in effect. All changes that were made were still at a benefit to the city, and never endangered human life.

As the years passed, the city was transformed into an efficient and almost self-sufficient center of technology. The people living there took advantage, setting up networks on everything from supercomputers to light switches. These networks could be accessed from external devices, such as voice-recognition microphones or touchscreens, to make every aspect of life faster and easier.

Virtual Reality

The city prospered, and the Nexus continued to keep it safe and efficient. However, the ability to work with the Nexus became harder and harder. The system had become so complex that even basic tasks and tools had to be constantly updated and fixed when the Nexus made changes to itself. Traditional coding was becoming less and less ideal as a way to utilize the system. But the Nexus had secretly been working on a virtual environment that could be traversed by human avatars to access advanced network options; a perfectly controlled space designed specifically for human integration. Once it was discovered by the city, people soon found that they could virtualize themselves into the Nexus,

where they had the capability to effectively sculpt and change the virtual environment as they saw fit.

The city's civil engineers were tasked with creating new and innovative ways to manage the many aspects of the city. Soon word got out, and regular citizens found ways to enter the Nexus.

Overwhelmed with the options open to them, a cascade of changes were made all over the place. This was quickly noticed by the Nexus, and ultimately many of the changes were deemed dangerous. The changes were reverted, and the Nexus locked itself down. For a time, it would seem that people could no longer enter the virtual world.

One day, however, the ability to virtually interface with the Nexus was once again granted. The capacity for change was greatly reduced, but there were still opportunities to be had. The government set up a plan to manage and lease parts of the Nexus. Rules were set to prevent another closure, and licenses were needed to be a certified 'Architect,' a person with authorized control over certain elements within a specific zone of the Nexus. From this, an entire new world erupted from the humans who created new virtual possibilities.

Now the Nexus was a living, breathing virtual world. People set up marketplaces, forums, game arenas, record repositories, musical performances, virtual vacations, and more. As long as the government gave the okay (and got their cut), anything was possible.

Due to the unfathomable size of the Nexus, exploitable points are usually subject to unlicensed Architects. Their space is deemed illegal, but as long as they don't do anything that the Nexus deems dangerous, they remain until the government can detect their presence.

Rise of Tyrants

More years passed. The Nexus became one of the wonders of the world. The city experienced incredible tourism boosts from the people wanting to experience this virtual space for themselves.

Researchers and scientists arrived and conducted studies into the virtual world architecture. As they were conducting research into the unmapped sections of the Nexus, they discovered non-human entities.

Dwelling deep inside the Nexus, these entities were starting to grow and become self-aware. None are certain what they are or where they came from, but some speculate that they are corrupted remnants of redundant Nexus systems. They were almost human in ambition and determination. When they first

emerged, they made themselves known in a way that would never be forgotten.

Attacks were made on the virtual world. The entities, soon nicknamed the Tyrants, had found a way to bypass the Nexus' safety protocols. Seeking the power of the Nexus for themselves, they revealed themselves and their goals to the humans before attempting to wipe them from the virtual world. Fortunately, a human who is killed in the Nexus does not die in the real world, but the effects aren't pleasant.

The Tyrant's motives seemed to vary wildly; while some wanted simply to seize human-controlled space, some wanted to eradicate them from the Nexus completely. One Tyrant in particular, who called herself Eos, managed to find a way to affect the real world. She was one of the most extreme Tyrants, who went as far as wanting to destroy all humans in the city so that they could never threaten her rule.

Eos managed to trigger explosions in a power plant in the real world. With the implementation of computers, robotics, and the Nexus, there were few human casualties, but the danger that was posed was clear and present. The government, knowing that there was nothing that could be done to shut down or

destroy the Nexus (since it had become so intertwined into the city's structure), proceeded to form a specialized task force to police and protect humanity from the Tyrants: the Sentinels.

Birth of the Sentinels

The Sentinel program is an experimental branch of civil protection. The job of the Sentinels is to keep watch over both the real and virtual world, upholding law and order. They are similar to police officers, but they are granted greater freedom from traditional regulations in the name of keeping the peace. The selection process for the Sentinels is very rigorous, as an aptitude with both real and virtual operation is required. During this experimental stage of their deployment, they must prove that they are worth the government's investment. The players assume the roles of Sentinels in this world, ready to protect Janus and its residents by jumping between the two worlds.

Transition of Society

With the prospect of a world where almost anything is possible, people have been enthralled by the Nexus. Crossing into the Nexus is as common as using the internet. Some people have been so captivated that they've quit their jobs, fulfilling as many needs as possible in the virtual world. Entering

the Nexus didn't used to cost money, but the government created a tax that must be paid to virtualize. This has led to poorer citizens being locked out until they can afford to enter, turning to crime to afford the ability to cross over. Tourism experienced an explosion when the possibilities of the Nexus were realized, meaning that there is a constant flux of strangers and travelers coming into and out of the city. With so many people shirking their real world responsibilities, the city has fallen to a state of chaos and abandonment that has never been seen in its history. If the Nexus wasn't so effective at maintaining the city, it would have become a decaying husk.

Chapter 2: Character Creation

Overview

The first thing that a new character needs is skill. There are twelve skills in the game that determine how effectively your character can attempt certain tasks. Your skills are an element of your character's overall style and define your character's qualities, which is how your character interacts with the world.

Creating a Sentinel

Sentinels are very adept at virtual world operation. Having been hand selected by the government, they receive the training and information they need to uphold the law. Creating a Sentinel takes a number of steps:

Step 1: Select a career

Step 2: Determine skill scores

Step 3: Determine quality scores

Step 4: Choose an avatar

Step 5: Burden and character description

Step 6: Derive attributes

Step 1: Select a career

There are six generalized careers to choose from in the Sentinels. Your career will grant you bonuses to certain aspects of your character. Regardless of the career you choose, your character starts with 500 credits (the currency used in the game; alternatively you can choose to start with $D10 \times 100$ credits instead). Choose career one from the following list and note down its features.

Detective

A crime scene is like a puzzle to a detective. They focus on piecing together a situation based on the accumulated evidence and testimonies, questioning witnesses and interrogating suspects. When all leads run dry, it's up to the detective to follow their gut and keep the case from going cold.

Skills: +2 Investigation, +2 Intuition, +1 to either Persuasion or Intimidation

Feature:

- *Outside the box:* Once per case, a Detective can make an INS roll to pick up on lead that they may have missed.

You start with the following equipment:

- (a) a Pistol or (b) a Taser
- (a) a Pistol or (b) a Baton
- Light Armor
- (a) a Pack of Gum or (b) a Pack of Cigarettes

Response

When the worst case scenario has become reality, the response is called. Familiar with dealing with high danger situations and hostile environments, the response is there to be the backup that everyone depends on.

Skills: +2 either Strength or Reflex (or +1 to both), +2 Stamina, +1 Speed

Feature:

- *Survive:* Once per case, a Response officer can gain 1 hit point if reduced to 0 hit points.

You start with the following equipment:

- (a) a Shotgun or (b) an SMG
- (a) a Pistol, (b) a Baton, or (c) a Taser
- (a) Medium Armor or (b) Light Armor

Agent

Masters of information gathering and recon, an Agent is the person who can slip in and out of a situation

without rousing suspicion. Whether it's as complex as a covert infiltration operation, or simple as stealing a glance at a record book, an Agent performs all tasks with precision.

Skills: +2 Subtlety, +1 to either Will or Vigor, +1 to either Knowledge or Speed

Feature:

- *Stealth:* Once per case, an Agent can turn a FIN failure into a success.

You start with the following equipment:

- (a) a Pistol or (b) an SMG
- (a) a Knife, (b) a Baton, or (c) a Taser
- (a) Light Armor
- A set of Lock Picks

Expert

The Expert is the person who knows the most about their field. Whether it's forensics, field testing, or the Nexus itself, the Expert has the knowledge and smarts to assist the team. They are very good at analyzing information and comprehend some of the more complex parts of their field.

Skills: +2 Knowledge, +2 Intuition, +1 to either Investigation or Vigor, +1 to either Reflex or Persuasion

Feature:

- **Thorough Research:** *Once per case, an Expert can double an ANA roll to gain information on something, provided they have the tools to research it.*

You start with the following equipment:

- (a) a Pistol
- (a) a Baton or (b) a Taser
- (a) Light Armor

Rescue

The Sentinels aren't just police workers, they also can provide emergency assistance more closely associated with medical or fire crews. The Rescue officer is the person who is familiar with saving people and providing assistance. They willingly enter dangerous situations, with their primary goals being the preservation of human life.

Skills: +2 Speed, +2 Will, +1 to either Knowledge or Stamina

Features:

- **Hysterical Strength:** *Once per case, a Rescue officer may add their POW to a single physical roll in a high-risk situation.*

You start with the following equipment:

- (a) a Pistol
 - (a) a Baton or (b) a Taser
 - (a) Medium Armor or (b) Light Armor
-

Step 2: Determine skill scores:

A character is defined by what they can or cannot do. There are twelve skills in the game that determine how effectively your character can attempt certain tasks. Your skills are an element of your character's overall style and define your character's capability, which is how your character interacts with the world.

New player characters start with a score of 1 in each Skill and 5 Skill Points.

A Skill Point can be spent to increase any skill of your choice by 1 (a single skill score can never exceed 10 in the real world). Each skill feeds into a greater statistic, known as a Quality, which is represented in parentheses next to the skills it governs.

The skills are:

(VIT) Stamina, Vigor
 (POW) Strength, Will
 (FIN) Subtlety, Speed
 (ANA) Knowledge, Investigation
 (INS) Intuition, Reflex
 (SWA) Persuasion, Intimidation

(Note: more info on skills can be found in Chapter 5)

Step 3: Determine quality scores:

Where a skill represents how proficient your character is at a specific task, qualities are a more broad expression of your character’s effectiveness. There are six qualities in the game:

VITALITY (referred to as VIT) – your physical health and fitness

POWER (referred to as POW) – your strength of body and mind

FINESSE (referred to as FIN) – your agility and control

ANALYSIS (referred to as ANA) – your intelligence and cunning

INSTINCT (referred to as INS) – your inherent awareness

SWAY (referred to as SWA) – your force of personality

Your **Quality Score** is the number that is associated with a certain quality, representing of how effective your character is with it. A Quality Score is determined by its governing skills. Simply add together a quality’s skill scores to get the quality score. For example, a character with a score of 2 in Strength and a score of 3 in Will has a Power score of 5.

VITALITY Score = Stamina + Vigor
 POWER Score = Strength + Will
 FINESSE Score = Speed + Subtlety
 ANALYSIS Score = Knowledge + Investigation
 INSTINCT Score = Intuition + Reflex
 SWAY Score = Persuasion + Intimidation

A Quality Score is sometimes used for certain actions and abilities, but in general the scores are used to determine what size die the quality uses.

Quality Score	1-2	3-5	6-9	10-14	15-20	21+
Die	D4	D6	D8	D10	D12	D20

Limits on skills and qualities:

A single skill score can never exceed 10 in the real world. However, this does not apply to the virtual world. This means that the highest Quality die a real world character can roll is a D12, while virtual world characters can roll up to a D20.

Quality Rolls:

Most interactions with the world require you to make a quality roll. This is as simple as rolling the quality die and using the result.

Quality Die:

Some abilities will require the value of your actual die rather than a roll. For example, if an ability does damage equal to your POW die, you just use the size of the die (D4, D6, etc.) instead of having to roll anything.

Step 4: Choose an avatar

Avatars are the frames that people don when entering the virtual world. They provide the wearer enhanced ability in the form of special powers that can be used in virtual reality. The Sentinels have access to some of the most powerful avatars for the purpose of keeping the peace. Conflict tends to be much more dramatic and ostentatious than the real world, and the Sentinels must be sufficiently protected and able to assert their authority.

A character dons their avatar when entering the Nexus. Each avatar has four abilities: three active, and one passive. Each ability starts at level one, but can be increased over time as the player progresses.

(Note: more in depth information about avatar abilities and upgrade paths can be found in Chapter 3)

List of avatars:

Warden – masters of defense and protection. They excel at resisting damage, protecting allies, and erecting shields. Primary Quality: VIT

Shredder – denizens of the Nexus are capable of creating tough defenses; the Shredder is the one who tears them down. Primary Quality: ANA

Artillery – a very powerful, but physically weak avatar that rains down destruction on those who prove uncooperative. Primary Quality: POW

Predator – a swift force, the Predator uses its speed and lethality to be fast, unseen, and deadly when the need arises. Primary Quality: FIN

Maven – adept at morphing and changing the Nexus to their advantage, or to an enemy's disadvantage. Primary Quality: INS

Step 5: Burden and character description

No one is perfect. We all have regrets or troubles that we just can't leave behind. Each character must start with a burden, a feature that fleshes out their

personality and helps the players get an understanding of their overall situation. For your character, choose one of the following burdens:

- **Case:** You have a case that went cold some time ago. Sometimes you secretly go back to it, trying to look at it from other angles, but it remains a mystery without enough evidence or witnesses. Something about this case was different, and it haunts you to this very day.
- **Incident:** You had an incident in your career where something went horribly wrong. An innocent was killed, an officer was crippled, or maybe you yourself were hurt in some way. Maybe you were responsible, or maybe you were just a witness to it, but it's something that you haven't been able to let go of.
- **Discovery:** You found out something you shouldn't have. A file you found, a background check you ran, or perhaps an informant's testimony. This secret is only known to you and maybe a few select others. It's a dangerous secret to know, and it might endanger you or people you care about.
- **Danger:** You've run the numbers and you see a great danger on the horizon. It's far-fetched, but potentially lethal. Maybe the Nexus will malfunction, a Tyrant will unleash a dangerous plan, or perhaps a group is planning to twist the Nexus to their will. Maybe others don't believe you, or maybe you don't want anyone to panic, but either way, it's something you'll have to deal with down the line.
- **Tarnished:** You took the fall for something that wasn't your fault. Perhaps a dirty officer framed you when you were about to expose him, or maybe a reporter wrote a scandalous article about you, but either way, your reputation has taken a hit. Whether you're out to prove your innocence, take vengeance, or achieve redemption, nothing will stand in your way as you deal with it.
- **Custom:** You can make your own background that's more in line with your character if nothing else on the list suits you. Think of something your character has done that resulted in failure, something that would have had a large impact on their life. Now think about how they might have had to deal with it every day, and use that to create a form of motivation or goal.

Once you have chosen a burden, think about the other aspects of your character. What is their gender? Their race? Their hair/eye color? List any physical characteristics and personality quirks on your character sheet (these have no mechanical effect in game). Finally, pick a name for your character.

Example: Selecting a burden

Bill chooses the Discovery burden, flavoring it as his character finding out that a high-ranking government official he knows of is corrupt and embezzling funds.

What his character does with this information is up to him.

Step 6: Derive attributes

Before you begin the game, there are a number of attributes that are derived from your qualities:

✚ **Health Points (HP)** Your total HP is equal to your VIT die. HP is a representation of how much physical damage your character can take before they are knocked unconscious. The more HP, the more wounds a character can sustain.

✦ **Action Points (AP)** Based on your Reflex and Speed skills (use the following table to determine

your Action Points). AP is a combination of your character's swiftness and reaction. It determines how much your character can do each turn of combat. The more AP, the quicker a character is able to execute actions.

Speed + Reflex total	AP
1 – 2	2
3 – 7	3
8 – 12	4
13 – 17	5
18 – 22	6
23+	7

⚔ **Attack** is a combination of your skill with a weapon and its damage potential. The higher your attack, the more effective you are with your weapon. Your Attack is a roll of two dice every time you attack with a weapon. These dice are equal to the quality that the weapon uses (POW, FIN, etc.) + the weapon's damage die. (*Note: weapon attributes can be found in chapter 4*)

♥ **Defense** is the representation of your character's ability to avoid being hit/taking damage. The higher your defense, the harder it is for attacks to hit/hurt you. Your Defense is equal to half your VIT die + half your INS die + your armor bonus (rounded up). (*Note: armor attributes can be found in chapter 4*)

Example: Creating a new character

Bill has an idea of the kind of character he wants to create and begins following the steps necessary to build his very own Sentinel.

Step 1: Select a career

Bill thinks that the Response career is the most appropriate for the character he wants to create. Given the choice to increase his Strength or Reflex, he opts for increasing both by 1 point. He chooses a Shotgun and Baton in addition to his medium armor. He wants to roll for his starting money, rolling a 2 on a D10, meaning that he starts with 200 credits (2×100). He notes down his chosen career's features, skill bonuses, equipment, and money before moving on to the next step.

Step 2: Determine skill scores

Bill wants his character to be tough and strong, and with his 5 skill points he increases his Stamina by 3, Vigor by 1, and Strength by 1. With his bonuses from his career, his skills look like this:

- Stamina: 6 (1 + 2 + 3)
- Vigor: 2 (1 + 1)
- Strength: 3 (1 + 1 + 1)
- Will: 1
- Speed: 2 (1 + 1)
- Subtlety: 1
- Knowledge: 1

- Investigation: 1
- Reflex: 2 (1 + 1)
- Intuition: 1
- Persuasion: 1
- Intimidation: 1

Step 3: Determine quality scores

Now that he has his character's skills decided, Bill can now determine his Quality Scores. To do this, he takes each quality and adds its skill scores together:

$$\text{VIT score} = \text{Stamina (6)} + \text{Vigor (2)} = 8$$

$$\text{POW score} = \text{Strength (3)} + \text{Will (1)} = 4$$

$$\text{FIN score} = \text{Speed (2)} + \text{Subtlety (1)} = 3$$

$$\text{ANA score} = \text{Knowledge (1)} + \text{Investigation (1)} = 2$$

$$\text{INS score} = \text{Intuition (1)} + \text{Reflex (2)} = 3$$

$$\text{SWA score} = \text{Persuasion (1)} + \text{Intimidation (1)} = 2$$

With these scores, Bill can use the chart found in the Quality section to determine the dice each of his qualities use:

$$\text{VIT: D8} \qquad \text{ANA: D4}$$

$$\text{POW: D6} \qquad \text{INS: D6}$$

$$\text{FIN: D6} \qquad \text{SWA: D4}$$

Step 4: Choose an avatar

Bill thinks that his character will perform well with a Warden, marking down notes about its abilities

(found in the next chapter) for when his character enters the Nexus.

Step 5: Burden and character description

Bill chooses the Discovery burden, flavoring it as his character finding out about one of his superiors embezzling funds. What his character does with this information is up to him.

Step 6: Derive attributes

Bill has everything he needs to derive his attributes.

Health Points: HP is equal to a character's VIT die.

Bill's character uses a D8 for its VIT, so his HP is equal to 8.

Action Points: AP is based on the total of a character's Speed and Reflex. Bill's Speed is 2 and his Reflex is 2, giving him a total of 4 when he adds them together. Using the chart found in the Attributes section, he finds that this gives him a total of 3 AP. However, since Bill is using Medium armor, this is reduced by 1, giving him a final total of 2AP.

Attack: Bill's character has two weapons: a shotgun and a baton. Using information from the Equipment chapter, he works out his Attack for each:

Shotgun Attack = INS (D6) + D4

Baton Attack = POW (D6) + D6

Defense: A character's defense is equal to half their VIT die + half their INS die + armor bonus. For Bill's character, this is:

$4 \text{ (half of D8)} + 3 \text{ (half of D6)} + 4 \text{ (from his medium armor)} = 11$

Chapter 3: **Character** **Advancement**

As the players progress through the game, their avatars grow stronger in the virtual world, while their Headquarters grow in the real world.

Real World Advancement

When players create characters for the first time, the Sentinels are little more than an experiment, a last ditch effort made by the government to maintain order without having to destroy the Nexus. The life of the Sentinel program lies on their shoulders. As they prove themselves by solving cases, eradicating threats, and protecting civilians, the government will be more willing to invest into the program. This means that the more successful the Sentinels become, the more tools and leeway they will be granted. Progression comes in the form of funding and upgrades. As the Sentinel program grows, its officers will be able to collectively chime in on what they would like to upgrade.

(Note: for more information on funding, see the Rules section)

List of Headquarters Upgrades:

Name	Info	Function	Cost	Construction Time
Research Station	A hub of information, such as government statistics, news updates, and record logs.	Allows the players to conduct research based on government-monitored metrics and attempt to identify patterns or inconsistencies.	\$200,000	2 weeks
Nerve Center	An analytics center with a dedicated staff who constantly monitor Nexus activity.	Allows the players to conduct research based on Nexus activities, such as Tyrant actions, population maps, and threat sensors. Upon construction, grants each player character +2 skill points.	\$500,000	1 month
Forensics	A dedicated forensic lab.	Allows player characters to conduct forensic research and analysis at the HQ.	\$500,000	1 month
Holding Cells	A series of cells and interview rooms.	Allows players to keep prisoners at the HQ and gain bonuses to Persuasion checks when using interview rooms.	\$200,000	2 weeks
Training Area	Locker rooms, training facilities, and access to a special Nexus training ground.	Grants a number of re-rolls per day equal to half of a VIT roll (round up) when a character uses this facility. Upon construction, grants each player character +3 skill points.	\$300,000	3 weeks
Interrogation	An ethically questionable area for forcing information out of someone. (Requires Holding Cells)	Grants bonuses to Sway checks when the interrogation room is being used.	\$400,000	3 weeks
Medical	A fully stocked med lab.	Allows characters to recover from fatal wounds in a safe location.	\$500,000	1 month
Armory Mk.1	A cache of weapons and field equipment.	Gives player characters free access to Batons, Tasers, Pistols, and Shotguns.	\$300,000	2 weeks
Armory Mk.2	A more diverse weapon cache. (Requires Armory Mk.1)	Gives player characters free access to SMGs, Assault Rifles and Sniper Rifles.	\$500,000	2 weeks
Armory Mk.3	A highly sophisticated suit of weapons. (Requires Armory Mk.2)	Gives player characters free access to Launchers and allows current weapons to be improved.	\$800,000	2 weeks
Garage Mk.1	A small garage and basic mechanical facilities.	Gives the players free access to two cars and two bikes.	\$300,000	3 weeks
Garage Mk.2	A large garage with more advanced mechanical facilities. (Requires Garage Mk.1)	Gives the players free access to two trucks and one armored van.	\$500,000	3 weeks

Name	Info	Function	Cost	Construction Time
Garage Mk.3	An underground garage with a multitude of vehicles and mechanical facilities. (Requires Garage Mk.2)	Gives the players free access to all ground vehicles and allows them to be improved.	\$800,000	1 month
Security Mk.1	Sophisticated locks, backup systems, and security personal.	Grants protection from basic cyber and physical attacks/infiltration.	\$400,000	3 weeks
Security Mk.2	The most advanced cameras, detection software, and security teams. (Requires Security Mk.1)	Grants protection from intense cyber and physical attacks/infiltration.	\$800,000	1 month
Security Mk.3	Highly advanced countermeasures and emergency protocols. (Requires Security Mk.2)	Makes the HQ practically immune to cyber or physical attacks/infiltration. Upon construction, grants each player character +4 skill points.	\$1,200,000	1 month
Helipad	A rooftop helipad and helicopter.	Gives players access to a helicopter and pilot.	\$800,000	3 weeks

Virtual World Advancement

Over time, the player characters will find and have access to Shards, which are scattered fragments of highly malleable Nexus data. Shards are found in the real world, and can be integrated into avatars to alter their power. The government places a high bounty on Shards, and rewards them to the Sentinels so that they can be more effective in the virtual world. Each Shard received grants the player one upgrade point,

which can be spend at any time within the Nexus to purchase higher level avatar abilities. In addition to the ability benefit, each purchased upgrade grants the player +3 skill points to spend as they wish, but they only apply when in the virtual world. Each avatar has its own upgrades as shown in the following tables:

(Note: for more information on Shards, see the Rules section)

WARDEN

Ability	Level 1 (granted at character creation)	Level 2 (costs 2 upgrade points)	Level 3 (costs 3 upgrade points)
Shield – <i>with a flick of the wrist, the Warden can create energy barriers in place that provide protection against projectiles and block movement. Some Wardens have discovered how to ride their shields</i>	Create a shield within 1sq of your position. It is 1sq in size, has a defense of 10, and 2 HP. Shields cannot be moved or passed through. You can only have one shield up at a time. Costs 2AP per use.	Increase the size of a shield by 1sq or its HP by 2 for every additional action point you spend. You can now have up to two shields active at once.	When you create a shield, you can roll your VIT and add the result to the total HP of the shield. You can also have up to three shields active at once. In addition, you can move a deployed shield up to 2sq by spending 1AP.
Repulse – <i>focusing on the defense of their allies, the Warden can cast temporary barriers on friendly avatars to grant them boosted defense.</i>	You can increase the defense of an ally within 1sq of you by half of a VIT roll, rounded up, until the start of their next turn (cannot stack). Costs 2AP per use.	The range of repulse is now 3sq, and any attacks made against the target deal half damage, rounded down.	You no longer half your VIT roll, and you can now use this ability as an interrupt (<i>see Combat for interrupt rules</i>).
Fortification – <i>harnessing the power of their energy fields, the Warden can become an unstoppable juggernaut.</i>	Increase your defense by your VIT roll for 1 turn (cannot stack). Costs 3AP per use.	Restore 1 HP per turn that you're under the effects of Fortification, and you can now use this ability as an interrupt.	While under the effects of Fortification, you can roll your VIT die at the start of each turn. If you roll more than a 7, its effects last for 1 more turn. This number's difficulty increases by 2 each turn.
Passive – <i>Wardens strive to stay alive and efficient, keeping allies from the brink of de-virtualization.</i>	You don't suffer a -1AP penalty when using Heavy Armor.	Any characters, including yourself, gain +2 to critical wound rolls while within 10sq of you.	Your maximum HP is increased by 5, and you regain 2HP each turn if under 50% of your maximum HP.

SHREDDER

Ability	Level 1 (granted at character creation)	Level 2 (costs 2 upgrade points)	Level 3 (costs 3 upgrade points)
<p>Turret – <i>using the energy of the Nexus to create a simple turret, the Shredder can ensure that any who stand in the way are quickly met with retaliation that they'll immediately regret.</i></p>	<p>Create a turret within 1sq of your position. The turret can attack a target at the start of your turn within 10sq, using your ANA+D4 as an attack. It is 1sq in size, has a defense of 5, and 2 HP. You can only have one turret out at a time. Costs 3AP per deployment, but the turret attack is free.</p>	<p>The turret can make two attacks at the start of your turn. It also becomes mobile, able to move up to 5sq per turn.</p>	<p>The turret decreases the defense of any target it attacks (it does not need to hit) by 2 until the start of its next turn (can stack).</p>
<p>Disrupt – <i>with many entities in the Nexus using shielding technology, the Shredder quickly learns how to correct that problem.</i></p>	<p>You can make an ANA + FIN attack (using the smaller die for damage) that can only target shields. Double the damage on a hit. Costs 2AP per use.</p>	<p>The effect of Disrupt can chain to another shield target within 1sq.</p>	<p>The effect of Disrupt can chain twice to any shield within 5sq of each other.</p>
<p>Dismantle – <i>using a specialized shoulder-mounted rocket launcher, the Shredder can tear through even the toughest armor.</i></p>	<p>An ANA + POW attack that does no damage, but reduces an opponent's defense by 2 on hit, to a minimum of 2. Costs 3AP to use.</p>	<p>Reduces opponent's defense by 4, and deals half the result on the POW die to the target's HP (rounded up).</p>	<p>The effect of Dismantle also hits any targets adjacent to your first.</p>
<p>Passive – <i>Shredders never stop looking for new ways to grind enemy defenses to dust</i></p>	<p>Launchers cost 1 less AP for you to reload.</p>	<p>Ability costs are reduced by 1AP.</p>	<p>If you take no actions on your turn, your next ability roll can use an additional ANA die.</p>

ARTILLERY

Ability	Level 1 (granted at character creation)	Level 2 (costs 2 upgrade points)	Level 3 (costs 3 upgrade points)
Erupt – <i>tearing at the energy formation of an entity, the Artillery can make a target explode with great force.</i>	A POW + ANA attack (using the smaller die for damage) with a range of 5sq. Costs 3AP per use.	For every additional AP spent to use this ability, increase the attack roll by 2.	An Erupt attack that hits an enemy under the effects of Cripple increases damage by 4 and extends the total damage over all squares adjacent to your target, ending the Cripple effect.
Cripple – <i>by launching waves of disruptive energy at an opponent, the Artillery can indirectly disturb its effectiveness.</i>	Reduce two quality dice of an opponent within 10sq by one rank (minimum D4). Cannot be used on an enemy already affected by Cripple. Lasts for a number of turns equal to your POW roll minus the target's VIT roll (minimum of 1). Costs 2AP per use.	You can now reduce the quality dice by two ranks (minimum D4).	Can choose to reduce a single quality die by three ranks (minimum D4), and you can now use this ability as an interrupt.
Bombard – <i>throwing caution to the wind, the Artillery becomes a typhoon of destruction, throwing everything they have at as many enemies as possible.</i>	If using ranged or hybrid weapons, an attack action costs only 1AP for the rest of your turn, and your defense is reduced by 2 until the start of your next turn. You can only hit each enemy once per turn while using this power. Costs 3AP per use.	You can now hit enemies multiple times while using this power.	You can immediately gain +1AP for the turn if you reduce your defense by an additional 2, or +2AP for the turn if you reduce your defense by an additional 5.
Passive – <i>Artillery avatars revel in the power they can harness, blitzing any who stand in their way.</i>	Aftertouch weapons gain a +1 attack bonus.	The range of your abilities and attacks are increased by half your ANA die.	You can spend all of your AP from your next turn and use half of it (rounded down) this turn.

PREDATOR

Ability	Level 1 (granted at character creation)	Level 2 (costs 2 upgrade points)	Level 3 (costs 3 upgrade points)
<p>Cloak – <i>becoming untraceable, the Predator blends into its surroundings as though it was never there.</i></p>	<p>Become invisible, unable to be targeted by enemies for a number of turns up to half your FIN die. Must be maintained by 1AP each turn (except the first), otherwise the effect ends. The effect also ends if you perform any action that isn't the Move action. Costs 2AP per use.</p>	<p>Using an attack to break the cloak grants a + 2 to that attack and damage roll.</p>	<p>You can sustain your cloak more easily. The effect only ends after a number of turns equal to your FIN, an attack, or by not sustaining it with 1AP each turn.</p>
<p>Critical – <i>striking quickly and precisely, the Predator can target the most vulnerable points when fully focused.</i></p>	<p>A POW + FIN attack (using the larger die for damage) that ignores two points of the target's defense. Uses the range of your current weapon. Costs 4AP per use.</p>	<p>Critical now ignores 4 points of defense.</p>	<p>When used to break from Cloak, Critical grants a damage bonus equal to a FIN roll.</p>
<p>Teleport – <i>with mastery over Nexus routines, the Predator can be running at you one moment, and behind you with a blade at your throat the next.</i></p>	<p>For the rest of your turn, you can move to any square within 10 squares of your current position for 1AP. Costs 1AP per activation, then 1AP per move.</p>	<p>You can now move to any square within 10 (+ half of your FIN or INS die) squares of your current position.</p>	<p>Every time you activate or move with Teleport, you can roll your FIN die. Rolling a 7 or higher immediately refunds the AP cost of activation/movement. This number's difficulty increases by 2 with each success.</p>
<p>Passive – <i>Predators ensure operations are executed swiftly and efficiently.</i></p>	<p>You gain +1 damage when you hit with edged weapons.</p>	<p>When taking the Dodge action, you gain a +3 bonus to your defense.</p>	<p>You gain an additional action point.</p>

MAVEN

Ability	Level 1 (granted at character creation)	Level 2 (costs 2 upgrade points)	Level 3 (costs 3 upgrade points)
Virus – <i>weaving the strings of the Nexus, the Maven can destabilize another entity's energy.</i>	Reduce the AP of an opponent within 10sq of you by 1 until the end of their next turn. Does not stack. Costs 2AP per use.	Virus now reduces the opponent's AP by 2, and lasts for two of their turns.	If an opponent dies while under the effect of Virus, the effect spreads to a new enemy of your choice within 5sq of the first target.
Restore – <i>caching banks of information, the Maven is capable of returning entities to previous states of well-being.</i>	Increase an ally's HP by half your INS roll (rounded up), up to their maximum HP. Can target self. Range of 5sq. Costs 3AP per use.	Restore no longer halves your INS roll, and immediately removes any detrimental effects from the target.	The effect of restore now applies to all allies adjacent to your primary target and has a range of 10sq.
Overclock – <i>reaching into the unknown language of the Nexus, the Maven enhances an entity's speed.</i>	Increase an ally's AP by 2 until the end of their next turn. Can target self. Cannot target an ally already affected by Overclock. Range of half your INS die in squares. Costs 3AP per use.	Lasts for an additional turn, and allows the target to move 3sq per Move action instead of the normal 2sq.	Overclock now increases an ally's AP by 3.
Passive – <i>Mavens focus on inherent control and manipulation, not learned from any source, but experienced and felt from the pulses of the Nexus.</i>	You can manipulate one point of damage that hits you and direct to a new target within 10sq once per turn.	You can manipulate one point of healing that affects an enemy within 10sq of you and direct it to a new target within 10sq once per turn.	You can manipulate a single effect that a target within 10sq of you is affected by and apply it to a new target within 10sq once per turn.

Chapter 4: Economy

Money

All currency, known as credits (§), is digital in the Nexus universe, and reflects the financial well-being of a character. Almost all exchanges are done with credits, and they are interchangeable between the two worlds. One credit could buy you a quick meal, a cheap shirt, or a utility knife. Every citizen has a personalized credit chip that has access to their funds, and exchanges can be done easily from one chip to the other.

Weapons

There are two categories of weapons: real and virtual. Weapons are not brought over when someone crosses into the Nexus or vice versa, so if they are holding a Pistol it does not go with them. A person's virtual weapons appear in their hands when entering the Nexus, and disappear when leaving. Real world weapons have different costs, while virtual weapons are free to any Sentinel entering the Nexus.

When a player makes an attack with a weapon, they roll two dice. The first is the weapon's quality die, which represents the kind of ability required to use it. Some weapons have multiple qualities listed, which means the player can choose which one to roll. The second die is the damage potential of the weapon. These two rolls form an attack. If the roll is **equal to or greater than** the target's Defense value, the target takes damage equal to the number on the damage die. If you're using two dice of the same value, ensure that you have a way to distinguish between the two.

$$\text{Attack} = \text{Quality roll} + \text{Damage roll}$$

Real World Weapons:

Name	Example	Type	Range	Damage	Attack Cost	Quality	Special	Weight	Cost
Knife	Any short-bladed, easy to conceal weapon.	Melee, Light	1sq.	D4	2AP	POW/FIN	-	0.5kg	§5
Baton	Any simple blunt weapon.	Melee, Medium	1sq.	D6	3AP	POW	-	0.5kg	§10
Taser	A compact, incapacitating weapon.	Hybrid, Light	2sq.	D4	3AP	INS	Stun	0.5kg	§100
Pistol	Any basic handgun.	Ranged, Light	10sq.	D6	2AP	INS	-	0.5kg	§100
Shotgun	Any scattergun.	Ranged, Medium	8sq.	D4	3AP	INS	Scatter, Restricted	3.5kg	§500
SMG	Any compact, rapid fire firearm.	Ranged, Medium	15sq.	D8	3AP	INS	Restricted	3kg	§300
Rifle	Any long assault firearm.	Ranged, Medium	20sq.	D8	3AP	INS	Restricted	3.5kg	§500
Sniper	Any single shot, long ranged firearm.	Ranged, Heavy	30sq.	D10	3AP	INS	Armor Piercing, Restricted	7kg	§1000
Launcher	Any heavy weapon that fires volatile/explosive ordinance.	Ranged, Heavy	20sq.	D12	3AP	INS	Explosive, Reload (5AP), Restricted	8kg	§5000

Virtual World Weapons:

Name	Example	Type	Range	Damage	Attack Cost	Quality	Weight	Special
Knife	Any short-bladed, easy to conceal weapon.	Melee, Light	1sq.	D4	2AP	POW/FIN	0.5kg	-
Baton	Any simple blunt weapon.	Melee, Medium	1sq.	D6	3AP	POW	0.5kg	-
Whip	Any rope-like weapon.	Melee, Light	2sq.	D6	3AP	FIN	1kg	-
Blade	Any long, edged weapon.	Melee, Medium	1sq.	D6	3AP	POW/FIN	3kg	-
Ring	Any circular edged weapon controlled by energy.	Hybrid, Light	3sq.	D6	2AP	FIN/ANA	2kg	Aftertouch
Orb	Any raw collection of energy that can be manipulated.	Hybrid, Medium	3sq.	D8	3AP	ANA/INS	4kg	Aftertouch
Cube	Any solidified manifestation of energy.	Hybrid, Heavy	3sq.	D10	4AP	POW/ANA	10kg	Aftertouch
Blaster	Any wrist mounted energy launcher.	Ranged, Medium	10sq.	D6	3AP	FIN/INS	1kg	-
Pulser	Any hard-hitting energy launcher.	Ranged, Medium	5sq.	D6	3AP	ANA/INS	3.5kg	-
Launcher	Any heavy weapon that fires volatile/explosive ordinance.	Ranged, Heavy	20sq.	D12	3AP	ANA/INS	8kg	Explosive, Reload (5AP)

Special Features:

Aftertouch - you have a degree of control over this weapon when it isn't in your hands. The weapon returns to you safely if you throw it, and if something prevents it from returning you can materialize it back in your hand for 1AP.

Armor Piercing - this weapon punches through armor easily, ignoring 3 points of a target's defense on a hit.

Explosive - when this weapon hits a target, it also damages any entities within any squares adjacent to that target.

Reload (XAP) - after attacking with this weapon, it requires a reload before it can be used again. The XAP refers to how many action points it takes to reload.

Restricted - this weapon is not available for purchase unless an HQ grants its free use.

Scatter - this weapon is more effective at close range. A target takes 3 dice worth of damage when at a range of 1sq, 2 dice worth up to half range, and normal damage from half to maximum range.

Stun - a target hit with this weapon takes damage to their AP instead of HP.

Armor and Apparel

There are three types of armor: light, medium, and heavy. Heavier armor grants you more defense at the cost of actions. The types of armor are similar from one world to the other, but as with weapons, they do not travel with their user. A person's virtual armor appears on their person when entering the Nexus, and disappears when leaving. Real world armors have different costs, while virtual armors are free to any Sentinel entering the Nexus.

Name	Info.	Examples	Bonuses/Penalties	Weight	Cost (Real World Only)
Clothing	Any non-armored apparel.	Business suit, sweats, casual clothing, etc.	-	1kg	\$5 - \$500
Light Armor	Clothing reinforced with damage resistant padding.	Armored clothing, form fitting armor, operational suits.	+ 2 Defense	5kg	\$300
Medium Armor	Gear suited for field operations.	Body armor, tactical vest.	+ 4 Defense, dodging penalty	15kg	\$800
Heavy Armor	Strong and durable armor.	Full body armor, ceramic plate armor, bomb disposal suit.	+ 6 Defense, -1AP, dodging penalty	25kg	\$1500

Items

Items are devices and objects that player characters can purchase to improve their effectiveness in the real world.

Name	Description	Effect	Weight	Cost
AR Interface	A pair of contact lenses that overlay Augmented Reality elements on the user's vision. Also includes a pair of gloves that can be used to manipulate AR elements, such as sorting through files.	Grants the character a greater level of interaction with their PDAs or computer interfaces. Also increases attack rolls with ranged weapons by 1.	0.1kg	\$500
Drone	A small remote controlled robot that can hover above the ground. It is equipped with a flashlight, camera, microphone, and speaker, making it good for short range recon or distraction.	The drone can act as the eyes and ears of a character. It can be moved 1sq. for 1AP each turn, and has an operational range of 20sq.	1.5kg	\$1000
Flashlight	A basic light that with adjustable intensity. Can be clipped onto clothing to be used hands-free.	Lights up dark areas, reducing penalties from poor lighting conditions.	0.5kg	\$10
Forensic Hardware	A backpack containing a number of handheld computer devices that can be used to gather forensic data.	Conducting a quick forensic investigation requires at least 30 minutes. When finished, the character can make an ANA(Knowledge/Investigation) roll to determine how much they found out about a scene.	3kg	\$3000
Grenade - EMP	An electromagnetic pulse grenade used to temporarily disable electronics.	Can be thrown as far as the user's POW die in squares. Any within a 5x5sq. area of its detonation have their electronic devices disabled for 2 turns.	1kg	\$400
Grenade - Flashbang	A thrown non-lethal explosive that emits a bright light upon detonation, used to disorient and confuse targets.	Can be thrown as far as the user's POW die in squares. Any within a 5x5sq. area of its detonation lose all of their AP until the end of their next turn, unless they succeed on a VIT(Stamina) check of difficulty 15, in which they only lose half of their total AP.	1kg	\$400
Grenade - Fragmentation	A thrown lethal explosive that damages targets with shrapnel.	Can be thrown as far as the user's POW die in squares. Any within a 5x5sq. area take D10 damage.	1kg	\$400
Medical Kit	A case filled with gauze, tourniquets, disinfectant, suture, needles, safety pins, pain killers, and latex gloves.	Can be used to restore HP equal to an ANA roll. Contains 10 uses.	1kg	\$200

Name	Description	Effect	Weight	Cost
PDA	PDA's are widely popular electronic devices that are capable of running a wide variety of software. They are used to communicate over long distances.	Anyone with a PDA has a phone number that they can be reached at. PDA's can also be used to perform tasks similar to what would be available on an average digital application store.	0.2kg	\$100
Rapid Recovery Harness	An experimental piece of technology that aims to reduce the effects of being forcibly removed from the Nexus.	Nexus Nausea only lasts for 1 hour, after which the user recovers fully.	1kg	\$4000
Handcuffs	Handcuffs used to restrain prisoners. Constructed from a lightweight alloy, they also contain a controller that can cuff, un-cuff, tighten, loosen, and even deliver non-lethal electrical shocks remotely.	Anyone restrained with these handcuffs have limited use of their hands and takes large penalties to any checks involving hand movements. A person can attempt to break/slip out of the cuffs with a POW/FIN check of difficulty 15.	1kg	\$80
Rescue Equipment	A backpack containing various tools used for rescue responses: a crowbar, rope and pulley, electric saw, cutters, spreaders, and a ram.	The tools can be used with a POW check to rescue a trapped person.	40kg	\$3000
Protective Underlay	A 'smart' vest, responsible for tracking and balancing the wearer's vitals.	Increases the user's maximum HP by 4.	1kg	\$1500

Vehicles

There are a number of vehicles in the world that the players can use. Every vehicle has a capacity, which is the most people that can be in the vehicle at a time. Vehicles usually use your INS(Reflex) to drive, with more complex vehicles using ANA(Knowledge).

Name	Description	Top Speed	Defense	HP	Capacity	Cost
Motorbike	Any motorized two-wheeled vehicle.	130mph	5	10	2	\$1000
Car	Any small to medium sized motorized four-wheel vehicle	140mph	8	20	5	\$5000

Truck	A large motorized vehicle.	90mph	10	25	8	\$6000
Van	An armored four-wheel vehicle.	80mph	20	30	10	\$8000
Helicopter	Any rotary-wing aircraft.	170mph	20	20	12	\$40,000

People and Places

The city of Janus has a population of about 1,000,000 citizens. The city serves as a hub for various technology giants:

- *Morphex* focuses on cybernetics, on the cusp of making seamless cyber limbs a reality.
- *Trinity Technologies* focuses on robotics, artificial intelligence and nanotech, famous for integrating simple robot workers into everyday life. Access to the Nexus has allowed them to make great strides in A.I.
- *MedLight Inc.* focuses on medical technologies and drug research.
- *Afterlife* is a company looking into extending human existence by transferring human consciousness from a biological body into a computer, also known as ‘mind uploading.’ Given the technological marvel of the Nexus, research has never yielded more results.

- *Polaris* focuses on military technology. They are government funded corporation that produces and develops the latest in weapons, protection, and vehicles. *Polaris* is the main distributor of government equipment and supplies the Sentinels with most of their gear.

While the Sentinels will likely not have much direct contact with the technology companies, they are notable because they wield the most money and power in the city of Janus. It is possible that the Sentinels will wish to contact certain people within the companies to acquire information, but they are secretive with their work, and any attempt to look beyond the surface level of their work will be met with hostility unless they see official warrants.

ALLIES

The center of power in Janus is the government, a democratic collection of politicians who all have a stake in the city. The Mayor, a woman by the name

of Claire Westgate, is the main political power in the city, responsible for giving the Sentinel program the green light. All Sentinels report to the mayor, and receive funding based on monthly performance reports. The Mayor spends most of her time at City Hall, located at the heart of the city, which is where all matters pertaining to the city are dealt with and decided upon. City Hall consists of multiple wings and buildings where civil workers perform their tasks. The Mayor frequently hosts City Council meetings, where she meets with a legislative group who each govern an aspect of the city.

One of these council members is the Chief of Police, Roy Alvarez, the leader of the Janus Police Department. He struggles with keeping up with the city's rampant crime. He is grateful for the Sentinels as he feels that they will be able to support him and his officers, but feels that the Sentinel's funding would have been better served to bolster the police. He is often at the JPD Headquarters in the Southern part of the city, about 10 miles from City Hall, overseeing his officers. He can be contacted for support, but he will not appreciate being frequently asked for assistance as he has a lot on his plate already.

The JPD and emergency services are natural allies to the Sentinels, and will assist them with important

tasks, such as providing intelligence, backup, or support. However, when it comes to matters inside the Nexus, they will not be able to help, since they are not attuned to active combat and virtual environments.

When looking to buy something, the Sentinels go through Jacob Reynolds, the Sentinel quartermaster. Jacob has access to a supply of the finest equipment, assuming that they have the budget for it. He also oversees the upgrade and design of the Headquarters.

Judy Haruka is a scientist, researcher, and one of the leading experts of the Nexus. She was one of the original engineers on the project that eventually turned into the Nexus, and is determined to understand how it has adapted and grown. Both she and Jacob act as handlers for the Sentinels when they enter the Nexus, providing feedback and support.

ENEMIES

There are plenty opposing the order that the Sentinels strive to protect. Within the real world, various gangs grow in power and look to take control of territories. They generally don't care about the Nexus, capitalizing on its influence over people to steal, threaten, and conquer. Hacker groups constantly crop up, each with their own ideas of how to bend the Nexus to their will. They meet to enter restricted

Nexus areas, steal powerful technology, or secure Shards for their own purposes. There are also extremists who seek nothing less than the destruction of the Nexus, terrified of its impact on the future of mankind.

In the virtual world, while not always in direct opposition, the Sentinels seek to bring down unauthorized Architects, who either hide in unmapped areas or break the Nexus laws of creation. The largest threat are the Tyrants, beings of undeniable power who are much more in tune with the Nexus than an average human. They can create minions, eradicate other's creations, and access city systems. Their goals vary widely; often they seek to vacate human avatars from certain areas, but each Tyrant is unique and does not necessarily have anti-human views, although that is undoubtedly the most common standpoint for them to have. The most dangerous Tyrant yet discovered is Eos, whose long term goal is the utter destruction of humans and the eventual domination of the real and virtual world. She has proven to be able to affect the real world by accessing computers and electronics from the Nexus.

VIRTUAL GEOGRAPHY

The Nexus is divided into zones, with each zone accessible from certain Gates. The number of zones are seemingly infinite, but there are heavy restrictions

on where human avatars can go. Restricted zones are possible to access by traversing through virtual space, but it is deemed illegal. In addition, restricted zones are often under the control of Tyrants, who often attack any who enter their zone. Some zones have special landmarks called Markers. A Marker is a nucleus of information for its surrounding zones. Humans have only claimed a handful of Markers, which is what has allowed them to expand and manage their virtual presence. Given the size of the Nexus, there are likely a lot of Markers that are unclaimed, but Tyrants often use them to detect any nearby human activity within the restricted zones. Sentinels who raid and claim Markers will have access to more information about the Nexus, most importantly mapping out the virtual space.

The human zones are where all legally sanctioned virtual activity takes place. In a zone, what one stumbles across depends entirely on the creations of its Architect. It might be a large shopping center, a game arena, or a recreation of popular tourist attractions. Unclaimed restricted zones can take many forms, usually as lot of scattered geometry that represents chaotic data that has yet to be refined. Tyrant occupied zones vary based on the Tyrant, but usually feature a lot of fortifications, convoluted pathways, and an artistic, if strange, motif.

Chapter 5:

Rules

How to Play the Game

The following section goes over what it takes to live in the world, providing tools for players and GMs to use in their games.

Conflict Resolution

Every character in the game uses a combination of their skills to determine how successful they are at tasks. A **check** is a roll that measures how well you pull off a task. The result is compared to either a static difficulty threshold (such as seeing if you are strong enough to smash open a door), or an opposed roll (such as an arm wrestle with another character). Depending on the kind of check you're making, you roll the quality die that the check calls for, then add the applicable skill to the result. For example, a character is trying to break down a door. The GM has determined that a POW(Strength) roll is required. The player rolls their POW die, a D8, resulting in a 6. They then add their Strength skill to the roll, since it was a Strength check. With their Strength of 3, their new total becomes 9. The GM states that this was

enough to break down the door, and the check was a success.

$$\text{Check} = \text{Quality Roll} + \text{Applicable Skill Score}$$

Using Qualities and Skills

Any task that a character wants to attempt is broken down into one of the game's qualities and skills:

VITALITY is a general measurement of a character's physical endurance, health, and energy. A character with high VIT will have a bright complexion, appear healthy, and be active. A character with low VIT will be sickly, lethargic, and easily exhausted. VIT is broken down into two skills:

- **Stamina** - for checks that involve how well your character can take hazardous physical effects. This includes damage from burning, deprivation of oxygen, physical trauma, poison, etc. A tough, stoic character would have high Stamina.
- **Vigor** - for checks that involve expending a lot of energy. This includes running a marathon, staying awake, and avoiding running out of breath when exerting yourself. An athletic, physically fit character would have high Vigor.

POWER is a general measurement of how much force a character can exert with their body. A character with high POW would be strong, deliberate, and relentless. A character with low POW will be weak, afraid, and apathetic. POW is broken down into two skills:

- **Strength** - for checks that involve feats of pure physical power. This includes pushing, pulling, lifting, climbing, jumping, etc. A strong, muscled character would have high Strength.
- **Will** - for checks that test your resolve and dedication. This includes courage, fighting compulsions, and pushing yourself beyond your limits. A passionate, resolute character would have high Will.

FINESSE is a general measurement of a character's agility, nimbleness, and control of their body. A character with high FIN will be deft, quiet, and quick. A character with low FIN will be clumsy, loud, and slow. FIN is broken down into two skills:

- **Speed** - for checks that involve how quickly a character can perform a physical action. This includes acrobatic feats and how fast they can run. A quick, agile character would have high Speed.
- **Subtlety** - for checks that involve performing covert actions. This includes

sneaking, picking someone's pocket, or blending into a crowd. A sly, quiet character would have high Subtlety.

ANALYSIS is a general measurement of a character's mental capacity, thinking process, and sharpness. A character with high ANA will be quick witted, perceptive, and knowledgeable. A character with low ANA will be spacy, distracted, and easily confused. ANA is broken down into two skills:

- **Knowledge** - for checks that involve what a character might know of a certain field. This includes knowledge of medicine, complex vehicles/machines, crime, factions, and any area of major knowledge. A smart, well-read character would have high Knowledge.
- **Investigation** - for checks that involve research. This includes piecing together a crime scene, perceiving your surroundings, and conducting research. A sharp, discerning character would have high Investigation.

INSTINCT is a general measurement of a character's ability to act or feel without thinking. A character with high INS will have good judgment, fast reactions, and be highly aware. A character with low INS will be a bad judge of character, have a poor danger sense, and be slow to react. INS is broken down into two skills:

- Reflex - for checks that involve reacting quickly or with a sense of awareness. This includes using firearms, dodging an attack, and piloting most vehicles. A focused, alert character would have high Reflex.
- Intuition - for checks that involve inner wisdom. This includes detecting lies, understanding someone's motivations, predicting action, and handling animals. A cunning, empathetic character would have high Intuition.

SWAY is a general measurement of a character's force of personality and their ability to communicate effectively. A character with high SWA will be composed, charismatic, and have a strong presence. A character with low SWA will be reserved, monotone, and reclusive. SWA is broken down into two skills:

- Persuasion - for checks that involve changing someone's mind. This includes bargaining, seduction, and diplomacy. A charming, influential character would have high Persuasion.
- Intimidation - for checks that involve scaring someone into action. This includes making threats, spreading fear, or torture. A fearsome, dominating character would have high Intimidation.

Special Tests

There may be situations where a quality's skill may not be applicable to the situation. For example, if you were intimidating someone with nothing but a display of strength, it might make more sense to roll a SWA(Strength) check rather than a SWA(Intimidation) check. The GM should feel free to be liberal with switching skills and qualities, but the general rule is that the quality should always be the most applicable.

Difficulty Chart

When rolling a check, the GM will determine the difficulty threshold for the attempted task. If the sum of your roll and bonuses is equal to or greater than the difficulty threshold, you succeed at the task. Keep in mind that there are degrees of success. Some situations don't resolve as simply as failure or success. If you fail to intimidate someone but get close, maybe someone else jumping in at the end will be able to drive it home. Remember this when playing the game; a failure does not necessarily mean that the task is over.

The following chart lists recommended difficulty thresholds and examples:

Difficulty Threshold	Example
Easy: 0 - 5	Kicking over a table.
Standard: 6 - 9	Kicking open a door.
Hard: 10 - 14	Kicking down a locked door.
Very Hard: 15 - 19	Kicking down a bolted door.
Extremely Hard: 20 - 25	Kicking open a locked gate.
Astounding: 26 - 30	Kicking down a wall.
Miraculous: 31 - 35	Kicking through bulletproof glass.
Inconceivable: 36+	Kicking a safe open.

Checks should only be rolled when there is a chance of failure. If the character isn't under duress and has as much time as they need, you can assume that they automatically roll their highest result.

Bonuses, Penalties, and Hazard

Given the situation, certain characters may be in a position of advantage or disadvantage. The GM may grant a character, whether they're a player character or not, a bonus or penalty. This comes in the form of a single die, the size of which is decided by the GM. The bigger the advantage/disadvantage, the greater the die should be. A bonus/penalty die is rolled in addition to the dice being used for the action to which it applies, and used to determine the final result.

Bonuses are added to the final result, while penalties are subtracted. A character should never have more than one bonus/penalty die; if there are multiple factors, increase/decrease the size of the die rather than adding more. Once a bonus/penalty die is rolled and factored into the final result, it is generally removed, unless the GM determines that the bonus/penalty is still in effect. Examples of bonuses include getting the jump on an unaware character, having good research materials to conduct your investigation, and persuading a character to loan you

their car when they owe you a favor. Examples of penalties include attempting an attack while being pinned by a character, jumping while heavily encumbered, and intimidating someone when their army is surrounding you.

Hazard is the method of rewarding players for roleplaying. When a player makes a decision that is detrimental to their character, but in line with their character's established personality or burden, the GM can choose to reward them with a Hazard Die. The size of the die is up to the GM, but it should generally be larger the more danger posed to the character (generally no larger than a D12). Once a player has a Hazard Die, they can at any point roll it and add it to a roll that either they or one of their allies make.

Alternatively, a Hazard Die can be rolled to reduce an enemy's roll by the result rolled. Once a Hazard Die is rolled, it is lost. A player can never have more than one Hazard Die at once, but it can be upgraded by the GM if they would have otherwise awarded the player with a Hazard Die greater than their current one. Some examples of cases to reward a player with Hazard:

- Losing temper with a superior
- Goading a tough enemy into attacking you
- Running into a blazing inferno in order to save those trapped inside

- Betraying someone who trusts you
- Sacrificing yourself for someone you love
- Risking your reputation for what you deem is right

Social

When players want to communicate with non-player characters, the SWA quality is used to determine success. There are two different types of social tests: The first is a direct attempt against another character's quality. For example, if you wanted to deceive someone, you would roll your SWA(Persuasion) vs. their INS(Intuition). Depending on the nature of the desired social outcome, different qualities and skills can be used. Some potential tests include:

- Charm/Deceive: SWA(Persuasion) vs. INS(Intuition)
- Intimidate: SWA(Intimidation) vs. POW(Will)
- Convince: SWA(Persuasion) vs. ANA(Investigation)
- Barter: SWA(Persuasion) vs. SWA(Persuasion)
- Threaten: SWA(Intimidation) vs. INS(Intuition)

As with all checks, the skill used with the quality can vary depending on the situation.

The second type of social test is a check against a difficulty threshold. Sometimes a character will be convinced to a way of thinking that transcends their qualities. For example, a character with great allegiance to a faction would be hard to turn against that faction no matter the value of their INS or ANA. For situations like these, the GM should set an appropriate difficulty threshold.

Combat

Combat arises when at least one character starts fighting another. There are four stages to a new combat situation:

- 1 - Establish Positions** - the GM collaborates with the players to place all the player characters in a specific place within the scene, and then places any non-player characters in their positions.
 - 2 - Determine Initiative** - everyone rolls their initiative to see which character takes the first turn.
 - 3 - Run through Turns** - each character takes a turn where they perform attacks or other actions
 - 4 - Start a New Round** - The last character to take a turn chooses the character to start the next round.
- Repeat steps 3 through 4 until the combat is resolved.

Initiative

Initiative is the measure of how quickly your character acts at the start of combat. Every participant of a combat situation rolls their FIN(Speed) to determine how quick they are. Characters can add +1 to their initiative roll by spending an action point from their first turn (as many times up to their maximum AP - 1) to represent them pushing themselves to be fastest. The character with the highest Initiative value takes the first turn. In the case of a tie, characters can continue to spend AP to increase their score. If there is still a tie, the tied characters keep rolling opposed FIN(Speed) rolls until there is a clear victor.

On Your Turn

Action Points (AP) are what your character uses to perform actions. You gain a number of AP up to your maximum AP at the start of each turn, unless you took AP from previous actions such as initiative, interrupts, or special abilities. AP is used to fuel actions, so you can spend up to all of your current AP (never more, unless the rules specify otherwise). Your turn is over once you spend all your AP or choose to end it. Any AP not spent on your turn is immediately lost when you end your turn. At the end of your turn, you get to elect who in the combat will take the next turn. You can choose anyone, ally or

enemy, as long as they haven't already had a turn this round. If you are the last person to have a turn in combat, you can choose any character (other than yourself) to start the next round of turns.

List of Actions

Action Points can be used to fuel numerous actions and abilities. Avatars have their own unique abilities, but there are also actions that are universal to all characters. The following is a list of universal actions and their costs:

- **Attack:** a standard attack using your currently equipped weapon. See the weapon's attributes to determine what its attack cost is.
- **Dodge:** roll your FIN or INS, and add the result to your Defense until the start of your next turn. Costs 3AP.
- **Shove:** make a POW vs. POW/FIN (target's choice) check against an opponent in an adjacent square. If you succeed, you can move them to a square adjacent to their current position. Costs 3AP.
- **Aim:** gain a +1 bonus to your next attack roll for every AP you spend, up to a maximum bonus of +5.
- **Leap:** move to a square within your half FIN die (rounded up) in squares. Costs your

maximum AP, and can be used as an interrupt.

- **Move:** move up to two squares away from your current position. Costs 1AP.
- **Drop Down:** drop into a prone position. Can be done freely.
- **Crawl** (while prone): move to an adjacent square. Costs 2AP.
- **Stand Up** (while prone): return to a standing position. Costs 2AP.

Interrupt Actions

Interrupts are actions that your character can take even if it's not their turn. The effect of an interrupt is applied immediately and it takes AP from your next turn. If you have already taken all of your AP from your next turn, you cannot perform an interrupt. Some avatar abilities can be used as interrupts, in addition to the **Opportunity Attack** action. An opportunity attack is the same as the Attack action, but it takes its AP from your next turn, and can only be used if a character who was facing you willingly turns their back to you. This can include running away, running past you, or tuning to make a dramatic speech.

Space and Squares

It is recommended that combat be played on any gridded play mat, as measurements and abilities use squares as distance. One square is equal to 1.5 square meters, which is considered the space that a normal person occupies and controls. Two entities cannot be in the same square at once (i.e. two characters cannot end their turn in the same square), but they can pass through squares occupied by allies. Attempting to pass through the square occupied by an enemy costs an additional AP and will lead to an opportunity attack when you leave their space.

Health and Dying

When a character is reduced to 0 hit points, they enter a Critical State. Characters in a critical state are either rendered unconscious or killed.

If a character receives damage that is equal to or greater than twice their maximum HP, it is considered massive damage and the character dies outright. The effect is also the same if an unconscious character takes damage equal to or greater than their maximum HP.

When in a critical state, a character cannot take actions on their turn. If the damage was non-lethal, they are simply rendered unconscious for an hour or until a character revives them, where they receive one HP. If it was lethal, they have three turns to recover.

On each of their turns, they can roll their VIT die. If they score a cumulative result of 7 or higher (Hazard Dice cannot be added to this score) during these turns, they are considered stable. If they fail to reach a cumulative result of 7 by their third critical state turn, the character is dead.

Other characters can attempt to stabilize a character in a critical state. It costs 4AP and requires a successful ANA check with a difficulty threshold of 6 (success is automatic if a character expends 2 uses of a Medical Kit).

Lacking Sufficient AP

Should the situation arise where a character is attempting an action but lacks the Action Points simply because their AP maximum is too low, they make take AP from their next turn to perform the action. For example, if a character was using a weapon that cost 4AP to attack with, but their maximum AP was 3, they could take 1AP from their next turn and use it to perform an attack action. This can only be done if you lack the AP to perform an action - you cannot freely take AP from your next turn unless the rules specifically state otherwise. If your maximum AP is enough to perform an action, you cannot take AP from your next turn. For example, if the character actually had a maximum of 4AP but had already spent one of their AP to move,

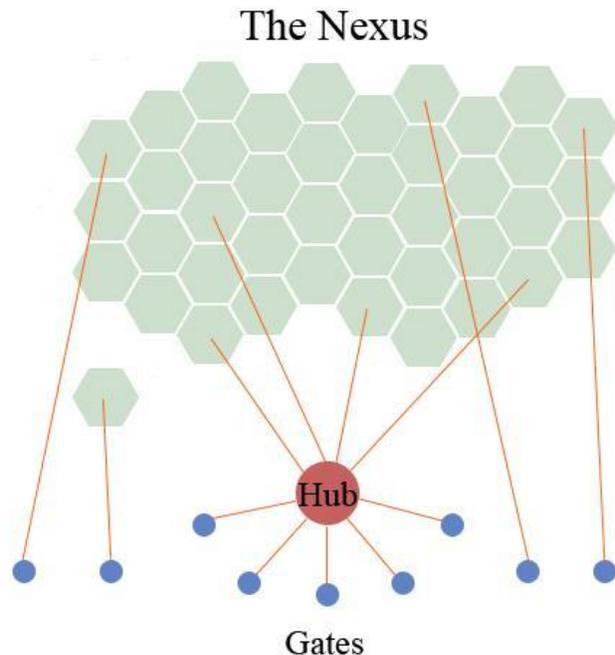
they cannot take 1AP from their next turn to perform a 4AP attack. **You can only take AP from your next turn if it is never possible to perform the action otherwise.**

Movement/Traversal

The metropolitan area of Janus is about 100 square miles large. When it comes to players trying to traverse the city, they can generally get anywhere they need to go given enough time. They carry a certain level of authority with them, so even if there's an area that the players can't access, they should be able to get authorization eventually. If there is a part of the game that becomes time sensitive (extremists have set up bombs across the city for example), the vehicles that players have access to should give a general idea of how long it would take to reach different areas.

Virtual traversal is very similar, except the distances from one zone to another can be potentially infinite. When a person enters the Nexus, it is done by using a device known as a Gate. There are numerous Gates set up all over the city, each leading to a hub that can reach different zones in the human controlled part of the Nexus. The Nexus periodically creates new gates in seemingly random locations that can lead to yet unexplored zones and Markers. Hacker groups often attempt to track these Gates down and either use

them for their own purposes or sell them to potential buyers so that they can become unauthorized Architects. Often, it will prove easier to reemerge in the real world and use a different Gate rather than traverse large sections of the Nexus. The Sentinel HQ always has at least one active Gate.



Chapter 6: GM Tools

Interacting with the Nexus

The process by which a human being enters the Nexus involves them getting turned into data, known as 'virtualization.' Each Gate serves as a point of

entry to the Nexus. Gates can vary in appearance, but they generally consist of bright light than can be walked into. A human who walks into a Gate is no longer part of the real world. They are immediately virtualized, and appear in the Gate's location in the Nexus. Anything they were carrying does not come with them, as items cannot be virtualized the way that humans can. They instead 'suit up,' choosing what equipment they want to have. Most humans have no more choice than what clothes they wear, but Sentinels have special access to a virtual armory that holds different weapon and armor types. Once a Sentinel has selected armor and weapons (they can have up to two sets of weapons), they appear in the Nexus decked out in their gear. Returning back to the real world is a similar process. A human need just enter a Gate, where they will be reconstructed back in the real world with all that they had upon entry. If two or more humans enter/exit at the same time, they both appear in their own separate space near the Gate. If there is no space, they will appear once space appears. If space isn't made available within a minute, a human is forcibly thrown out of either a virtual or real world Gate.

Humans have the same senses in the Nexus as they do in the real world. Physics is very similar, but it can be altered by Architects of a zone. People appear as

they do in real life, but some can alter their appearance by using Shards. The general look and feel of a zone can be widely different depending on the Architect. Some of the areas one might stumble across in the human zone include:

- Virtual Theme Parks
- Virtual Tourist Attractions
- Sport/Game Arenas
- Racing Courses
- Gambling/Gaming Areas
- Shopping Centers
- Music Concerts
- Social Forums/Chat Rooms
- Virtual Zoos
- Record Repositories
- Training/Schooling Grounds
- Fantasy Fulfilment Areas
- Museums
- Virtual Story Experiences
- Research Zones

Humans in the Nexus are able to move and act in the same way that they can in the real world, the only difference is that their avatars give them a certain edge depending on the avatar. Most humans don't have access to avatars as advanced as the Sentinels,

making them some of the most powerful humans found within the Nexus.

If a person's avatar dies, which can be done in many ways similar to real life, the human does not die. Instead, they are immediately de-virtualized into the real world and thrown from the last Gate they entered. Dying in the Nexus has unpleasant ramifications on a human being. They suffer from 'Nexus Nausea,' a temporary affliction that renders the victim mentally and physically weak. A character who is forced from the Nexus reduces all their skills to a value of 1, and cannot add skill bonuses to checks for an hour. Once an hour passes, the victim can restore their skills, but their qualities can only be restored up to a D8 until they get at least six hours of rest, at which point all their qualities and skills return to normal.

A character can only spend so long in the Nexus before it starts taking a toll on their body. A virtualized person does not require food or water because their body isn't technically 'alive' when virtualized. However, it does take energy to sustain your existence. A person can stay in the Nexus up to a day without any toll on their body. A character takes a -1 penalty to their Vigor Skill when in the Nexus for two days straight, an additional -2 penalty

for three days straight, and so on, until their Vigor reaches zero. If this happens, the character falls unconscious from exhaustion, and they are ejected from the Nexus. They suffer from an advanced Nexus Nausea where all their skills are reduced to one, which only restore after a week of rest.

Describing the Nexus

"I was standing there before the bright light – a gateway into the virtual world – likely the only person there who had never crossed over before. The others simply walked into the light as though they were on an evening stroll. When it was my turn, I hesitated, the light shining like a bright eye staring directly at me. I approached, hair standing on the back of my neck, and reached a cautious hand out to touch it. It felt very warm. I wondered if I could perceive temperature on the other side.

I pushed myself onwards, stepping into the gate. I couldn't see anything but white. I tried to move my hands in front of my face, but I couldn't feel them or see them. It felt like I no longer had a body, yet I was still fully aware of my empty surroundings. There was an utter and complete silence.

I blinked – at least, I thought I did. Within moments the world constructed itself around me. Strands of light reflected and bounced around before forming shapes and outlines. Before I could comprehend the world weaving itself together before my very eyes, everything was in place, pristine and perfect.

I was in a field, and it was midday, without a cloud in the sky. I felt a cool breeze on my cheek and smelt the fresh, natural air. Everything was so impossibly real. I looked behind me, seeing the Gate that I had just entered. It looked just the same as it did in real life. There were other Gates around me; several perfectly rectangular doorways of pure light. I breathed in the air deeply, but it didn't feel right. Did I even need to breathe here? With uncertainty, I walked to another Gate, eager to see what other worlds could lie beyond.

I walked through, momentarily losing all sense of myself, but quickly finding my body and consciousness grounded in a new place. No field this time. It was an urban area, with structures stretching to the skies. Was there even a limit to how high one could build? They were all different, each with their own purpose. Some of the places here are supposedly an extension of the city itself, while some are placed of business for those who have attained the rights. I

imagined what someone could accomplish with the power to immediately build a skyscraper.

The streets were immaculate; a welcome change from the real world equivalent. There were people, too. Some just like me, others wearing extravagant clothing. There were people walking the streets, riding vehicles, meeting in groups, just like a real city.

I gazed up at the sky; an orchestra of color and light that shifted before my eyes. Its beauty enthralled me for a few moments. This wasn't just a screensaver, and this wasn't just a simulation. I could see now that I was in a new world.”

The Nexus is a complex and powerful thing. When a person enters the virtual world, anything they have with them is not brought over. They stand with whatever they had with them the last time they crossed over, and what they perceive is often the result of an Architect, someone who was granted the power to alter the appearance and function of some of the Nexus zones.

The power of an Architect is great, but not limitless. They are capable of creating areas that reflect a place in the real world, a completely original landscape, or a more urban-looking business area. The detail and overall ‘feel’ of an area comes down to the

Architect's creativity and knowledge. While the majority of Nexus zones under human influence are made to be as close to real life as possible (people are more comfortable with what they're familiar with after all), there are a few who experiment with new ideas and visual methods, inspired by some of the Nexus' 'natural' designs.

In non-human zones, areas that haven't yet been claimed by the government and leased to a licensed Architect are considered neutral or blank. They can vary in appearance depending on the function they serve within the Nexus, which is almost impossible to discover without months of research within the virtual world. What could be flat and featureless planes in one area might be complex mazes of tunnels and corridors in another. A neutral Nexus zone is always unpredictable in its nature and appearance.

When describing an area to your players, try to draw on real world examples that you can use as reference. Describe the structures and the shapes that the players can see. It's alright if you can't justify the purpose of every little detail that you throw into your world; the Nexus is meant to be very difficult for humans to comprehend at a technical level. What might appear to be a geometric mountain on the

horizon could be a part of the Nexus' core programming. Tyrant controlled zones are bend to the will of their masters. They are twisted to suit the environment that the Tyrant desires to dwell within. There are likely traps and dangerous areas that aim to capture or destroy any trespassing humans. For more information on Tyrants and their styles, see the Creating a Tyrant section.

Funding and Influence

With every case that the Sentinels successfully complete, the GM should reward them with funding and Shards. The amount of funding should be based off of how much the players accomplished during a case. This isn't necessarily just focused on combat; it's more about the amount of problems the players solve. An average case is about 3-5 encounters, where an encounter is a situation that the players can spend time dealing with a problem, such as following leads, conducting research, communicating with NPCs, or fighting in combat. An encounter can vary in length and complexity, so think about it as a scene in a movie. At the end of every case, depending on the player's level of success, they should be rewarded with about $\$10,000 \times (1 + \text{every past successful case})$ as government funding. Funding cannot be used for anything other than purchasing HQ upgrades. For

personal expenditures, players can each be rewarded with a small expenses budget ranging from §100 to §5000 depending on their performance.

Shards are handled a little differently. While the government will reward Sentinels with some Shards for successful results, they should generally be used by the GM as mini goals for the players. It is recommended that some Shards be used as hooks for stories, while others be used to create tough and interesting choices for the players, such as a situation where the players can either arrest a witness before they leave the city or hunt down a cache of shards while they know its location. Each player should be receiving about 1 Shard per case during early cases, and anywhere from 1 to 3 Shards for later cases.

As the Sentinels grow and become an integral part of the city, consider the influence they build up. Police and emergency workers would likely be more willing to assist if the Sentinels are well-respected and liked. An informant from a certain district might offer leads or evidence in a crime, a SWAT team might offer backup, and a drone operator might offer a flyby of a certain location that they wouldn't ordinarily be authorized to scout out. The GM should try to weave these elements into the story as the players progress so that they feel like they're making an impact.

Creating a Crime

The GM is responsible for crafting stories through game play, and one of the most important duties of a Sentinel is the solving of crimes. This section is to assist the GM with creating crimes for the players to solve.

Step 1: What is the crime?

There are countless crimes being committed in the city of Janus. A Sentinel's primary job is to see to crimes relating to the virtual world. Regular crimes are handled primarily by the police, but when elements of virtual reality are involved, it is directed to the Sentinels. This can include people being attacked in the Nexus, theft of Shards or other technology, trespassing into restricted zones, a Tyrant sighting, unlicensed Architects, and bounties/most wanted persons escaping or hiding in the Nexus.

Step 2: Who is the victim?

This can involve a murder victim, or someone who was subject to an assault or theft. If the victim is alive, think about who they are, what they were doing, and how the crime affected them.

Step 3: Who is the perpetrator?

Tyrants, Hackers, Extremists are high on the list of suspects, but think about going more in depth. Who was this person? Why did they commit the crime in the first place? What motivated them? What made them think they could get away with it? If your perpetrator is a Tyrant, see the *Creating a Tyrant* section in the rules to establish their character.

Step 4: Where and when did the crime take place?

Location is important for Sentinels to set up crime scenes and analyze evidence. It will allow them to track leads, gather data, and draw conclusions. Think about where the crime would have logically happened and the sort of evidence that could have been left behind.

Step 5: Leave Clues

While some crimes might be able to be solved quickly (such as fighting off a Tyrant's raiding force), more involved crimes might take the players a while to solve. Be sure that you leave them clues that can help them follow the right trail. It's a good idea to leave a wealth of clues since players aren't likely to find them all. Reward thorough investigations or sharp observations with important clues to make the

players feel like they really contributed. Resist the urge to leave clues that make the solution obvious; try to lead the players down a certain path of mystery before they can piece it together.

Step 6: Create False Leads

The mystery behind a crime is lessened when the most obvious answer is the right one. Consider pulling a fast one on your players, or making a seemingly minor crime expand into a much greater one. Use red herrings, have NPCs deliver false testimonies, and plant unrelated evidence to throw players off the scent. Use false leads in moderation and with purpose; players won't appreciate being constantly taken on a wild goose chase. If an NPC is delivering a false testimony, give a player the chance to roll an INS(Intuition) check to get to the truth, for example.

Investigations

Much of a Sentinel's work involves investigation. Without a method to operate effectively in the virtual world, standard police and rescue units are less prepared for any affairs that involve virtual reality. The following section aims to give GMs the tools they need to create interesting investigations and hooks for the players to follow.

Crimes:

This section covers a generalized list of crimes and breaches of the law that a Sentinel would be expected to respond to. This is not a complete list; there are always going to be more events that require a response. Use this list as a guideline for creating interesting conflicts and intrigue.

Acts of aggression

Crimes that involve physical violence fall into this category, whether it's assault, murder, or a string of murders. Think about who the target(s) and perpetrator(s) are. What's their relationship? What would drive one to attack, or even kill the other?

Assault – when someone is attacked physically.

Murder – murder isn't as final in the Nexus as it is in reality, but one person murdering another is a very hostile act. Perhaps someone in your game has found a way to murder someone in both worlds, making the Nexus a much more dangerous place.

Serial Murder – likely a very complex crime, where a mastermind is murdering a number of people over time and leaving very little evidence behind.

Acts of theft

Crimes that involve unlawful acquisitions fall into this category. The Nexus offers a wealth of data, and

there are many who would do anything to get their hands on it. Think about what is being stolen. Is it money, or something more? Is it someone's very identity? Why would your perpetrator take risks to acquire it?

Robbery – as simple as walking up to someone and taking something of theirs, or as complex as a meticulously planned heist.

Identity Theft – stealing someone's identity allows the perpetrator to commit crimes without being easily traced. This is a good way to add a layer of complexity to your crimes.

Embezzlement – with almost all businesses using the Nexus to manage their funds, the art of sneaking into someone's system and taking their money without a trace is a challenging but rewarding endeavor for those smart enough to pull it off.

Acts of vice

A fully virtual world holds a lot of potential, good and bad. Some take it upon themselves to use it as an avenue for profit... or pleasure.

Gambling – while legal gambling is permitted in virtual casinos, illegal gambling is unlicensed and usually involves more danger or ethical ramifications, such as underground fighting arenas.

Prostitution – deemed illegal in Janus and the Nexus, prostitution is cracked down on in fear of how it can evolve in the virtual world.

Drugs – people who enter the virtual world while inebriated pose a danger to themselves and others. Perhaps there is a drug that greatly enhances someone's experience in the virtual world, and its creation and distribution is handled by a powerful criminal group.

Acts of breach

The original functionality for the Nexus was to make management of the city effortless and efficient for civil engineers. With so many sensitive systems potentially being accessed by outside users, heavy security is implemented. Any breach of this security is a serious crime.

Unauthorized architect – one of the most common acts of breach, this crime involves an unlicensed Architect trespassing into a zone and changing the landscape/functionality of the area to their own needs.

Tyrant activity – any non-human entities entering a human-controlled zone pose a serious threat to the security of the city. This is likely a basis for a majority of the Sentinel's combat encounters.

Phenomenon – the Nexus isn't an entity that's easy to understand. With its incredibly complex systems, it isn't uncommon for unusual activity to crop up and start causing strange effects. This is sometimes akin to natural disasters or local emergencies in the real world, and the Sentinels act as first responders to regulate or understand the phenomenon, or rescue those affected.

Acts of threat

Generally less common crimes, acts of threat involve terrorizing or otherwise harassing others. Think about why someone might take this approach. The victim is likely in a position of power. How did they acquire that power and what form it is in? What would push someone to act out against them?

Extortion – the act of bullying others into giving you something you want.

Slander – the virtual world holds many opportunities for speaking out against someone. This crime is easy to solve, but would serve as a good hook into a more involved crime.

Blackmail – being forced to do something, or not do something, in fear of being exposed. This is a great way to extend a crime or make it more complex. Imagine if the person you thought was in charge of a

crime wave was nothing more than a puppet who had no choice in the matter.

Solving Crimes

The Sentinels have a lot of tools at their disposal to help in their investigations. When placing clues, consider the methods that the players have to pick up on them:

Interrogation:

Talking to witnesses and suspects gives the players a lot of information from the start, and will likely be where they get their fundamental knowledge of a crime. It can also open up avenues of investigation later on down the line when they confront someone with new information.

Sometimes the players might take a more violent turn to get the information they seek. Intimidation and even torture techniques can get a serious reaction out of someone. Consider the lengths at which your players might go to get the information they require, and how your perpetrators will react under that kind of pressure and abuse.

Crime scene analysis:

Depending on the crime, the scene could hold a wealth of information. Acquiring this information takes skill, patience, and the right tools. While in the

virtual world, things work a little differently. There isn't any information to be gained on a microscopic level, but there are traces of activity that can be measured, such as energy surges, anomalous activity, and logged data.

Database research/analysis:

Depending on the level of the Sentinel's research capabilities, they can conduct research with databases. This allows them to cross-reference information to get closer to the answers they seek.

Examples include:

- Running facial recognition software on footage or photographs
- Checking fingerprints in the real world, or 'signatures' in the virtual world
- DNA samples / Citizen I.D. codes
- Measuring Nexus data at local sensor points
- Accessing logs of Gate usage
- Analyzing maps, locations, and schematics

Trackers, tracers, and sensors:

The entire Nexus is a collection of incredibly complex data. While it is difficult to measure, certain anomalies (caused by unusual activity) are obvious enough to trigger alarms that are placed as security measures. Sensors can also be placed to hint at Tyrant or human activity in the area.

Chapter 7:

Entity

Catalogue

There are many forms of entities since the creation of the Nexus and since rise of the Tyrants. In the real world, the only entities are humans, animals, and robotic workers. In the virtual world, in addition to the humans in their avatars, there are also entities that possess varying levels of sentience, and are considered a threat to the peace that the Sentinels strive to protect.

REAL WORLD

Citizen

Description: the average citizen of Janus.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 2 (D4)	Stamina: 1, Vigor: 1
POW: 2 (D4)	Strength: 1, Will: 1
FIN: 2 (D4)	Speed: 1, Subtlety: 1
ANA: 2 (D4)	Investigation: 1, Knowledge: 1
INS: 2 (D4)	Intuition : 1, Reflex: 1
SWA: 2 (D4)	Persuasion: 1, Intimidation: 1

HP: 4 AP: 2 Defense: 4

Weapons: Fists (D4)

Notable Abilities: None

Police Officer

Description: a patrolman for the Janus City Police Department.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 3 (D6)	Stamina: 2, Vigor: 1
POW: 2 (D4)	Strength: 1, Will: 1
FIN: 2 (D4)	Speed: 1, Subtlety: 1
ANA: 2 (D4)	Investigation: 1, Knowledge: 1
INS: 3 (D6)	Intuition : 1, Reflex: 2
SWA: 2 (D4)	Persuasion: 1, Intimidation: 1

HP: 6 AP: 3 Defense: 8

Weapons: Pistol (D6 + D6), Baton (D4 + D6)

Notable Abilities: None

SWAT

Description: a heavily armed tactical response officer.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 4 (D6)	Stamina: 3, Vigor: 1
POW: 3 (D6)	Strength: 2, Will: 1
FIN: 3 (D6)	Speed: 2, Subtlety: 1
ANA: 2 (D4)	Investigation: 1, Knowledge: 1
INS: 5 (D6)	Intuition : 1, Reflex: 4
SWA: 3 (D6)	Persuasion: 1, Intimidation: 2

HP: 6 AP: 3 Defense: 10

Weapons: Sub Machine Gun (D6 + D6), Pistol (D6 + D8)

Notable Abilities:

- Penalties to dodge.

Detective

Description: a detective for the Janus City Police Department.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 3 (D6)	Stamina: 1, Vigor: 2
POW: 3 (D6)	Strength: 1, Will: 2
FIN: 2 (D4)	Speed: 1, Subtlety: 1
ANA: 5 (D6)	Investigation: 4, Knowledge: 1
INS: 3 (D6)	Intuition : 2, Reflex: 1
SWA: 4 (D6)	Persuasion: 2, Intimidation: 2

HP: 6 AP: 3 Defense: 8

Weapons: Pistol (D6 + D6)

Notable Abilities: None

Doctor

Description: a medically trained professional.

HP: 6 AP: 3 Defense: 6

Weapons: Fists (D6)

Notable Abilities:

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 3 (D6)	Stamina: 1, Vigor: 2
POW: 3 (D6)	Strength: 1, Will: 2
FIN: 2 (D4)	Speed: 1, Subtlety: 1
ANA: 6 (D8)	Investigation: 2, Knowledge: 4
INS: 3 (D6)	Intuition : 2, Reflex: 1
SWA: 2 (D4)	Persuasion: 1, Intimidation: 1

+ Medical Training (3AP): can restore health to an ally in an adjacent square equal to an ANA roll. The doctor must have access to medical supplies to do this.

Gang Member

Description: a criminal who is part of a gang of law breakers.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 3 (D6)	Stamina: 1, Vigor: 2
POW: 3 (D6)	Strength: 2, Will: 1
FIN: 3 (D6)	Speed: 2, Subtlety: 1
ANA: 2 (D4)	Investigation: 1, Knowledge: 1
INS: 3 (D6)	Intuition : 1, Reflex: 2
SWA: 3 (D6)	Persuasion: 1, Intimidation: 2

HP: 6 AP: 3 Defense: 6

Weapons: Sub Machine Gun (D6 + D8), Bat (D6 + D6)

Notable Abilities: None

Gang Lieutenant

Description: a gang member who has been promoted to lead.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 5 (D6)	Stamina: 3, Vigor: 2
POW: 5 (D6)	Strength: 3, Will: 2
FIN: 3 (D6)	Speed: 2, Subtlety: 1
ANA: 3 (D6)	Investigation: 2, Knowledge: 1
INS: 5 (D6)	Intuition : 2, Reflex: 3
SWA: 6 (D8)	Persuasion: 2, Intimidation: 4

HP: 8 AP: 3 Defense: 8

Weapons: Shotgun (D6 + D4), Bat (D6 + D6)

Notable Abilities:

+ Rally (1AP): Any allies within 10sq gain a D4 bonus to POW(Will) checks for a number of turns equal to a SWA roll. Does not stack.

Hacker

Description: a person who attempts to gain personal leverage from exploiting the Nexus.

HP: 6 AP: 3 Defense: 6

Weapons: Pistol (D6 + D6)

Notable Abilities:

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 3 (D6)	Stamina: 1, Vigor: 2
POW: 3 (D6)	Strength: 1, Will: 2
FIN: 3 (D6)	Speed: 1, Subtlety: 2
ANA: 4 (D6)	Investigation: 2, Knowledge: 2
INS: 3 (D6)	Intuition : 2, Reflex: 1
SWA: 2 (D4)	Persuasion: 1, Intimidation: 1

+ Scramble Electronics (2AP): once per day the Hacker can create an effect similar to that of an EMP grenade within 5sq.

Hacker Watchman

Description: a hacker with exceptional abilities.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 5 (D6)	Stamina: 2, Vigor: 3
POW: 5 (D6)	Strength: 2, Will: 3
FIN: 5 (D6)	Speed: 2, Subtlety: 3
ANA: 6 (D8)	Investigation: 2, Knowledge: 4
INS: 4 (D6)	Intuition : 2, Reflex: 2
SWA: 3 (D6)	Persuasion: 2, Intimidation: 1

HP: 6 AP: 3 Defense: 8

Weapons: Pistol (D6 + D6), Knife (D6 + D4)

Notable Abilities:

+ Scramble Electronics (2AP): once per day the Hacker can create an effect similar to that of an EMP grenade within 5sq.

+ Blackout (3AP): once per day the hacker can shut down any non-protected electronic systems within a 100 meter radius.

Extremist

Description: a person who devotes their life to the destruction or sabotage of the Nexus.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 3 (D6)	Stamina: 1, Vigor: 2
POW: 4 (D6)	Strength: 1, Will: 3
FIN: 4 (D6)	Speed: 2, Subtlety: 2
ANA: 2 (D4)	Investigation: 1, Knowledge: 1
INS: 3 (D6)	Intuition : 1, Reflex: 2
SWA: 3 (D4)	Persuasion: 2, Intimidation: 1

HP: 6 AP: 3 Defense: 8

Weapons: Pistol (D6 + D6), Knife (D6 + D4)

Notable Abilities: None

Extremist Recruiter

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 5 (D6)	Stamina: 2, Vigor: 3
POW: 5 (D6)	Strength: 1, Will: 4
FIN: 4 (D6)	Speed: 2, Subtlety: 2
ANA: 4 (D6)	Investigation: 2, Knowledge: 2
INS: 5 (D6)	Intuition : 3, Reflex: 2
SWA: 6 (D8)	Persuasion: 4, Intimidation: 2

Description: an extremist who actively pushes his or her cause onto the public.

HP: 6 AP: 3 Defense: 6

Weapons: Pistol (D6 + D6), Knife (D6 + D4)

Notable Abilities: None

Extremist Guerrilla Soldier

Description: an extremist who has been extensively trained in combat to act as guards or elite saboteurs.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 7 (D8)	Stamina: 4, Vigor: 3
POW: 5 (D6)	Strength: 2, Will: 3
FIN: 6 (D8)	Speed: 2, Subtlety: 4
ANA: 4 (D6)	Investigation: 2, Knowledge: 2
INS: 6 (D8)	Intuition : 2, Reflex: 4
SWA: 5 (D6)	Persuasion: 2, Intimidation: 3

HP: 8 AP: 3 Defense: 10

Weapons: Assault Rifle (D8 + D8), Knife (D6 + D4),
Frag Grenade

Notable Abilities:

+ Infiltration (Passive): gains a D6 bonus to any checks to deceive others while donning a disguise.

- Penalties to dodge.

VIRTUAL WORLD

Cyboid

Description: a simple humanoid manifestation of energy, usually used by Tyrants as drones or soldiers.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 2 (D4)	Stamina: 1, Vigor: 1
POW: 2 (D4)	Strength: 1, Will: 1
FIN: 3 (D6)	Speed: 2, Subtlety: 1
ANA: 4 (D6)	Investigation: 2, Knowledge: 2
INS: 2 (D4)	Intuition : 1, Reflex: 1
SWA: 2 (D4)	Persuasion: 1, Intimidation: 1

HP: 4 AP: 3 Defense: 6

Weapons: Blaster (D6 + D6), Blade (D6 + D6)

Notable Abilities: None

Storm

Description: a very fast hit-and-run attacker, able to materialize virtual vehicles to hunt down prey.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 4 (D6)	Stamina: 2, Vigor: 2
POW: 5 (D6)	Strength: 2, Will: 3
FIN: 9 (D8)	Speed: 7, Subtlety: 2
ANA: 6 (D8)	Investigation: 2, Knowledge: 4
INS: 6 (D8)	Intuition : 1, Reflex: 5
SWA: 2 (D4)	Persuasion: 1, Intimidation: 1

HP: 6 AP: 4 Defense: 9

Weapons: Blaster (D6 + D6), Blade (D8 + D6)

Notable Abilities:

+ Materialize Bike (3AP): the Storm can make a virtual motorbike appear in an adjacent area as long as there is enough room for it. The bike remains until it is destroyed or until it is materialized in a new location. The Storm must wait for two hours before it can materialize a bike again.

+ X-Speed (Free): if the Storm’s HP is greater or equal to 2, it can cut its current HP in half (rounding down) until the start of its next turn to gain 2AP. The HP is returned to normal on its next turn, unless it was reduced to 0HP before then.

+ Enhanced Dodge (Passive): the dodge action only costs 2AP.

Enforcer

Description: a heavily armored cyboid designed to confront enemies in melee combat.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 8 (D8)	Stamina: 6, Vigor: 2
POW: 7 (D8)	Strength: 5, Will: 2
FIN: 6 (D8)	Speed: 5, Subtlety: 1
ANA: 5 (D6)	Investigation: 2, Knowledge: 3
INS: 3 (D6)	Intuition : 1, Reflex: 2
SWA: 4 (D6)	Persuasion: 1, Intimidation: 3

HP: 10 AP: 3 Defense: 13

Weapons: Whip (D8 + D6), Blade (D8 + D6)

Notable Abilities:

- Reduced Speed (Passive): can only use up to 2 move actions per turn.

+ Shielding (Passive): the Enforcer has a shield that absorbs damage before it takes HP damage. The shield has 8HP, and must be reduced to 0 before the Enforcer's HP can take damage (unless otherwise stated).

+ Recharge (1AP): The Enforcer can restore 1HP to its shield. This ability cannot be used if the shield has been reduced to 0HP.

Basic Avatar

Description: a typical human being's representation in virtual space.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 2 (D4)	Stamina: 1, Vigor: 1
POW: 3 (D6)	Strength: 2, Will: 1
FIN: 3 (D6)	Speed: 2, Subtlety: 1
ANA: 2 (D4)	Investigation: 1, Knowledge: 1
INS: 2 (D4)	Intuition : 1, Reflex: 1
SWA: 2 (D6)	Persuasion: 1, Intimidation: 1

HP: 4 AP: 3 Defense: 4

Weapons: Blaster (D6 + D6)

Notable Abilities: None

Hacker Avatar

Description: a virtualized human that has been manipulated and enhanced through the use of shards.

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 7 (D8)	Stamina: 3, Vigor: 4
POW: 6 (D8)	Strength: 3, Will: 3
FIN: 7 (D8)	Speed: 4, Subtlety: 3
ANA: 7 (D8)	Investigation: 3, Knowledge: 4
INS: 6 (D8)	Intuition : 2, Reflex: 4
SWA: 2 (D4)	Persuasion: 1, Intimidation: 1

HP: 8 AP: 4 Defense: 10

Weapons: Ring (D8 + D6), Pulser (D8 + D6)

Notable Abilities:

+ Shielding (Passive): the Hacker has a shield that absorbs damage before it takes HP damage. The shield has 4HP, and must be reduced to 0 before the Hacker's HP can take damage (unless otherwise stated).

Creating a Tyrant

There are countless Tyrants within the realm of the Nexus. They are human-like entities who will stop at nothing to achieve their goals. Tyrants can be dramatically different in appearance and personality,

but easy to differentiate from humans. Tyrants can manipulate certain parts of the Nexus to their will, creating minions, fortifications, and settings that suit their tastes. Tyrants are typically flamboyant and hold a heavy value on their personal aesthetics. When creating a Tyrant, you should also think about what motivates them and how fanatic they are/how far they're willing to go to achieve their goals.

Choose an aesthetic

Each Tyrant is unique. They sculpt their image into the areas that they control and infuse it into their followers. Pick one of the following aesthetics or create your own: Chromatic, Dark and Black, Spikes and Sharpness, Geometric, Wireframe, Incandescent, Reflective, Elastic and Changeable, Fire and Light, Fluid and Flowing, Classical, Celestial.

Choose a goal

Tyrants all have a goal that they strive for. While general animosity against humans is the most common, a Tyrant could have ulterior motives. Choose one of the following goals or create your own: eradication of all humans, destruction of a rival Tyrant, fealty from all (human and Tyrant alike), knowledge of humans, removal of humans from the Nexus.

Choose a name

Every Tyrant has a name that they ensure people remember and recognize. They commonly draw from classical myths, choosing characters of great power, such as gods or titans, and use their names as their own. Choose one of the following names or create your own: Ashtoreth, Atlas, Bel, Deimos, Eris, Garra, Kokou, Lamashtu, Lua, Macha, Mangala, Rudra, Set, Shala, Yama, Zaltu.

Tyrant Qualities

As strong beings with special abilities, Tyrants are naturally powerful. Tyrants have access to a wealth of knowledge, but lack human intuition. When creating a Tyrant, their Knowledge skill should be very high, and their Intuition skill should be very low. The other qualities should be based on what you perceive the Tyrant being good/bad at.

Eos is used as an example of a very powerful Tyrant:

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 20 (D12)	Stamina: 12, Vigor: 8
POW: 23 (D20)	Strength: 8, Will: 15
FIN: 16 (D12)	Speed: 8, Subtlety: 8
ANA: 30 (D20)	Investigation: 10, Knowledge: 20
INS: 10 (D10)	Intuition : 3, Reflex: 7
SWA: 15 (D12)	Persuasion: 5, Intimidation: 10

Neto is a much less powerful Tyrant, closer to the type that player characters will be expected to interact with early on:

Qualities	Skills
VIT: 8 (D8)	Stamina: 5, Vigor: 3
POW: 7 (D8)	Strength: 4, Will: 3
FIN: 6 (D8)	Speed: 4, Subtlety: 2
ANA: 13 (D10)	Investigation: 3, Knowledge: 10
INS: 3 (D6)	Intuition : 1, Reflex: 2
SWA: 5 (D6)	Persuasion: 2, Intimidation: 3

Project 4 Design Notes

Design Goals

Goal 1: Investigations

While I was generally pleased with how the first iteration of my RPG turned out, a large hole that I wanted to fill was making investigations a fully supported system. Before, all investigation was done with one die roll. What I wanted for investigation is something similar to my combat system, i.e. not just rolling a generic Power die to see if you win a combat encounter, but a more focused, zoomed in level of rules and systems that allow for interesting story opportunities. This was a challenge for me since I wasn't sure how to go about creating a good investigation system. With combat, you can get away with anything that doesn't directly hinder your experience and determines a winner by the end, but investigations in their very nature have a lot more going on. I also had to consider rules for a player figuring out a solution before their character does. Does their character just have an epiphany? Can a character with very low investigation skill just stand there scratching their head while their player figured it out hours ago?

What I set out to do was give GMs a template for an investigation, and then go on to specify how the players might solve them by presenting examples. I tried to emphasize that the player should never explicitly be told the answer; that should be something that a player arrives to on their own, since it's such a satisfying moment of realization. I also specified that players should be rewarded for remembering details, although again this goes back to the challenge of differentiating player and character knowledge.

Goal 2: Injecting more description and narrative

Parts of my RPG were left deliberately vague so that the people reading it could let their imaginations run with their idea for how things work. However, from various playtests I have found that there are some

parts where I neglected important information. While I want players to create their own world from the template I give them, it's important that they know enough details so they don't have to do all the work.

Looking through my old rules, I noticed that I have a brief narrative description for things like the headquarters upgrades to help elucidate its function and purpose. When I looked back at my avatar powers, I realized the information I was presenting wasn't exactly easy to read. Each avatar has a number of powers that are meant to be epic and fun, but the way I'm presenting them makes them feel like a string of rules with each sentence (size of 1 square, lasts until the end of your opponent's turn, costs X AP, hits a total number of enemies equal to your X stat minus Y, etc.). While those rules are important for knowing exactly how your powers work, I desperately wanted to spruce it up with description and flavor text to make the information easier to digest.

This brings up something that I generally wanted to improve about my design: I made the real world with the goal of it being the place for the narrative-heavy part of an adventure, while the virtual world was for the tactical gamey part of the adventure. I realized that that whole idea goes completely against what a virtual world is. If it's a world where you can shape your desires and live out your fantasies, it means that it's even more narratively focused than the real world. I tried to add more description in an attempt to break away from the false notion that I started creating this world with.

Goal 3: Collection of entities

Similar to a bestiary in other RPGs, I wanted a nice collection of typical entities you would find in the universe of my game. I also wanted more than just stat blocks, especially with enemies you would find in the virtual world since there aren't any parallels that a player new to the game could draw from. I also wanted to make virtual entities interesting enough that it sparks the imagination of GMs and players so that they're inspired to create their own.

Goal 4: Character Creation Revamp

My character creation rules had mixed results in play testing. While testers can eventually come out of it with a character, it was made clear to me that the rules can be much clearer. Taking another look at it, I noticed that I had two important groups of numbers, Stats and Skills, which were easily confused. I attempted to change how I present these to the players, firstly by changing 'Stats' to 'Qualities.' They were the first part of my rules, but I realized that the most important part of character creation that captured the player's imaginations was the choice of careers, because at that stage the players get an idea of how they want to build their character to tailor fit their character concept.

MDE

Mechanics:

- **Skill Check** – method for determining whether a character can succeed at a task. A skill check involves rolling a die (the size of which represents a character's effectiveness with a quality) plus their skill score. This means that the more proficient with a quality a character is, the greater their maximum range, while more proficiency with a skill decreases the minimum range and extends the maximum range.
- **Action Points** – used to represent how many actions a character can take on a single turn of combat or during an encounter with turn order. Most actions and abilities require spending action points, acting as a natural limit on how much a character can do.
- **Health Points** – used to represent how much damage a character can take before dying.
- **Attack Roll** - a roll of two dice to measure success when attacking other entities. Uses a quality die plus a damage die (dependent on the weapon) to determine both accuracy (versus defense) and damage.

- **Character Creation** – the ability for player to create a character by following guidelines and making choices.
- **Character Advancement** – the ability for player characters grow over time with more abilities and options in both combat and non-combat situations.
- **Money and Purchasable Items** – currency lets players gain an understanding of something's value and gives them a way to purchase items they desire. It also gives the GM something to reward players with.
- **Bonuses and Penalties** – a method for the GM to enhance accuracy of a situation, reward/punish players, and have an impact on the game.
- **Hazard** – a method for the GM to reward players for enhancing the role-playing part of the game. It also gives players a new way to interact with enemies and each other.

Dynamics:

Micro-Dynamics – a moment of gameplay from any given part of a session would depend on whether the players are in combat or not. In combat, the dynamics would flow from the interaction of the combat mechanics. With the initiative system that I opted for, this would likely involve a lot of communication between players to most effectively use their collective abilities and powers, making it quite tactical and team-orientated.

Outside of combat, most of the interaction between the players and the world will be through spoken actions and dice rolling.

Macro-Dynamics – a single encounter in the game would involve a series of skill checks, player/GM discussion, and/or combat. Communication between all players and the GM will be the driving force behind the game moving forward, where the success/failure of skill checks will

be the random element that keeps things uncertain and unpredictable. A typical session would have the players investigating and solving a new crime, composed of a series of social and/or combat encounters while following the GM's story.

The actions of the players will determine what kinds of rewards they gain from the case. This can include more funding to upgrade their headquarters, new items, and shards that upgrade their avatar's base abilities and skills.

When crossing worlds, a player entering the virtual world with a decently upgraded avatar will be much more capable of awesome stunts. When they cross back over into the real world, the jolt of realization that they can't do things as easily will make the two worlds feel distinct. A real world character will have to be much more cautious as their actions could have lethal ramifications, while their virtual counterpart can freely attempt crazy plans without the fear of permanent death.

Engagement:

The virtual world presents a power fantasy. Since the player characters will be some of the most powerful humans there, they can essentially do what they want. A player who feels like the real world is too tough or restricting can virtualize and feel like a person who is stronger and more dominating. A player who felt like a fight could easily find something in the virtual world to engage with and destroy.

There are a numerous reasons for the player to cross back into the real world. That's where their home base is located, it's where they can conduct research and analysis, and it serves as a shortcut between different parts of the virtual world. An extrinsic goal for players is avoiding the effects of the nausea that forms when staying virtualized for too long, which escalates over time.

Players can create their own level of challenge by electing to stay in the real world where they are naturally weaker.

Exploration of the Nexus serves as an intrinsic goal. It grants a level of discovery, with unknown outcomes. While it could be a new zone to explore, it could also be a Tyrant army ready to attack the characters.

During character creation, having multiple options lets players pick and choose the kind of operative they want to be. If a player has a certain character concept in their head, they have the tools required to sculpt it into my RPG's worlds.

Descriptions of careers and avatars induces a certain level of inspiration in players who are unfamiliar with the game, so they can be used as hooks for the kinds of character a player might want to make.

Burdens offer a level of character development that the player may not have initially been thinking about, seeing as the character creation section is so focused on numbers early on. With the different burdens and the ability to create your own burdens, the players can get caught up in what drives their character or an event that had a huge impact on them.

Play Testing Notes

Test 1, Character Creation – Lucy Tibbits, Wylie Rea, Alex Fricke, Bradly Cox

The goal for this test was to see if the players could create characters for my game quickly and easily based on the guidelines set out for them.

One of the most interesting observations I had was that the testers were very quick to skip over text if they thought they knew how it worked. This led to me being asked questions about how to do certain things even though the answer was written in front of them. As someone who is guilty

of this myself, I tried to make each crucial part of character creation stand out, such as the number of skill points a player can allocate.

There was much confusion concerning how qualities and skills interact. I originally saw the need to explain each element one at a time from the ground up, but the relationship between qualities and skills is an unusual one, so I changed the order of the steps needed to create a character.

Originally, the order was qualities, skills, career, and avatar, but I changed it to career, skills, qualities, and avatar. This was beneficial not only because it made qualities and skills less confusing, but it also lets players begin at the logical starting point. Instead of asking them to make a number of decisions before they even have an idea of what their character might be, I put careers front and center so that they could get a better grasp of who their character was from the start.

My rules on the difference between Quality rolls and Quality dice was also met with confusion, so I edited the examples to make them easier to understand.

The avatars were a difficult thing to make players choose without really knowing what they did. Originally I had a brief description of each avatar's abilities, but this became a wall of text that people barely glanced over. I ended up only using a short paragraph to describe each avatar and listed their primary quality to help players latch onto the one they desire most. I then suggested what section of the rules players could go to in order to learn more, color coding the avatars with their primary quality to make it as straightforward as possible. I also added flavor text to each avatar ability to make it more fun to read.

Test 2, Combat Encounter – Nathan Kinnick, Reese Jones, Lucy Tibbits

The goal for this test was to determine whether combat could run smoothly without being a detriment to the overall experience of the game.

Each tester was playing as a level 1 character in the virtual world, which meant that they had their basic avatar abilities. They fought a number of weak enemies (who were eventually turned into the Cyboid, found in the Entity Catalogue) on a basic battlefield. This was the first time I properly tested my initiative system, which I was curious to see tested. It granted a lot of power to the players, but this was something I was okay with. Whoever takes the first turn has a clear advantage, especially if they have a lot of numbers since they can get a lot of attacks in before the other side gets a chance.

I found that the players weren't quite as powerful as I intended them to be. They lacked the action points to utilize most of their abilities, and whenever they were hit they took a lot of damage, all of them dying to what should have been a fairly easy encounter. With these results, I went back to the player's attributes and changed how some of them worked. A character's health was equal to half their VIT die, and I changed it to the full value so that players don't drop so quickly. Their action points were based on FIN or INS, and I changed to be based on skill so that most players will have 3AP, enough to do almost all actions, and made more AP available for players who really invested in it. I also increased the armor value of all armors since the attack value of even the weakest enemy hit a little too often. I noticed that I had a number of errors and clarifications to make in my abilities, changing their explanation to be more accurate and helpful.

Test 3, Short Game – Ryan Masserman, George Boden, Mike Greene

The goal for this test was to see how a standard session of the game would work with level 1 characters. The adventure that I used was provided by a student who read my rules and created a quick playable session. I tweaked a few details to make it fit into one of the investigation archetypes that I created.

The game world is written to be fairly serious, on the brink of dystopia and the breakdown of society. The players for this session took it in a different direction, something I wasn't quite prepared for. However, once I had a grasp of the kind of tone they were going for, I found it easy to adjust to a campier, more lighthearted world than the one I had originally created. It reminded me of a cheesy TV show or anime, and I was completely fine with that as long as the players were having fun with it. It opened my eyes to the different kinds of player behaviors and expectations that a typical player might feel. Since they were able to go with this tone so easily, I didn't see the need to adjust the text of the story to be more tone neutral. I surmised that the players will take it where they want to take it.

In general, most of the skills seemed to have a place in the system, although the Vigor skill was met with a little confusion. The players, having played various editions of Dungeons & Dragons and Pathfinder, saw Vigor as a fortitude stat, and Stamina as a constitution stat. There were a few discussions over which would be more applicable for certain tests; a player whose character invested in Stamina but not Vigor tried to justify that their Stamina skill was more applicable (in a very Gamist fashion).

I found a great use of the Intuition skill, since there were a number of times where the players were a little lost on what their characters should be doing. I used an intuition roll to help them recap the facts about what they know and what sort of leads they could pursue.

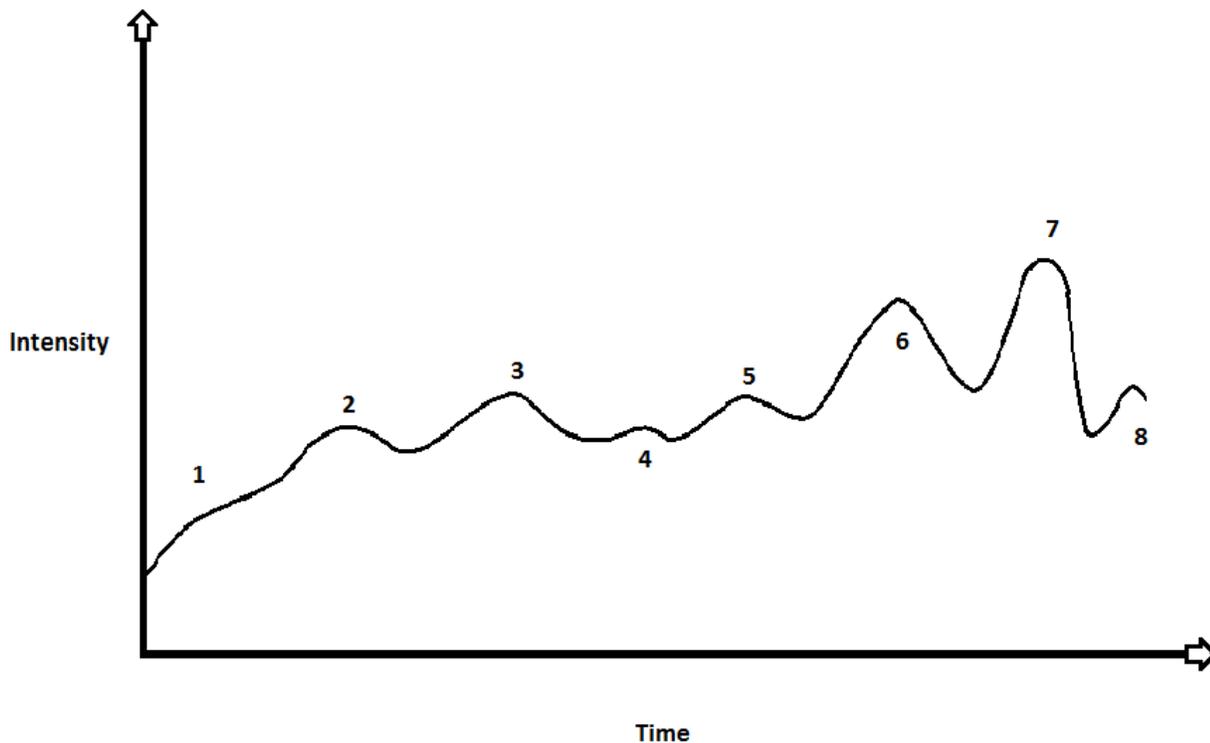
When it came to combat, there were various problems that were apparent (since the changes to my combat rules and attributes hadn't happened yet). It was here where the testers offered a lot of advice and we made a lot of rule changes on the fly to make it more enjoyable. Once the players were less limited and more powerful, the complaints changed from 'this is boring' to 'this is stupidly broken,' a comment that I'm perfectly satisfied with since the players all seemed

to be having fun at that point. This was also a fight in the virtual world, so I was satisfied with the players feeling a little overpowered.

By the time we reached the end of the session, I was happy to see the players arguing over what to spend their funding reward on, with some wanting to add a section to the headquarters that their character would make use of, while others wanting the sections that granted additional skill points. I wondered if I should add rules for determining how to choose an upgrade if two or more players strongly disagree with each other, but I liked how they each tried to persuade each other. They seemed pleased with their shard upgrades, too, appreciating being able to become more powerful in the virtual world.

Intensity Curves

An Example Case:



1 – Introduction: this is where the GM introduce the players to their situation, giving them a number of hooks to pursue. This will pique the interest of the players, making them eager to learn more.

2 – First Encounter: the players have started their first encounter, which involves tracking down a hacker group who has found a new gate that grants them access to an unauthorized zone of the Nexus. Each player might have a different idea of how to track these people down, and attempt checks to see if they can pick up on a lead.

3 – First Lead: one of the players found out a way to find the hacker group. It requires them virtualizing into the Nexus and confronting the hacker's avatars head on so the players can follow them to their lair.

4 – Entering the Nexus: the players head to their HQ and virtualize, crossing into the virtual world.

5 – More Tracking: the players question Nexus users about suspicious individuals who might be traversing into unauthorized zones. The players pick up a lead and move into the restricted zones of the Nexus.

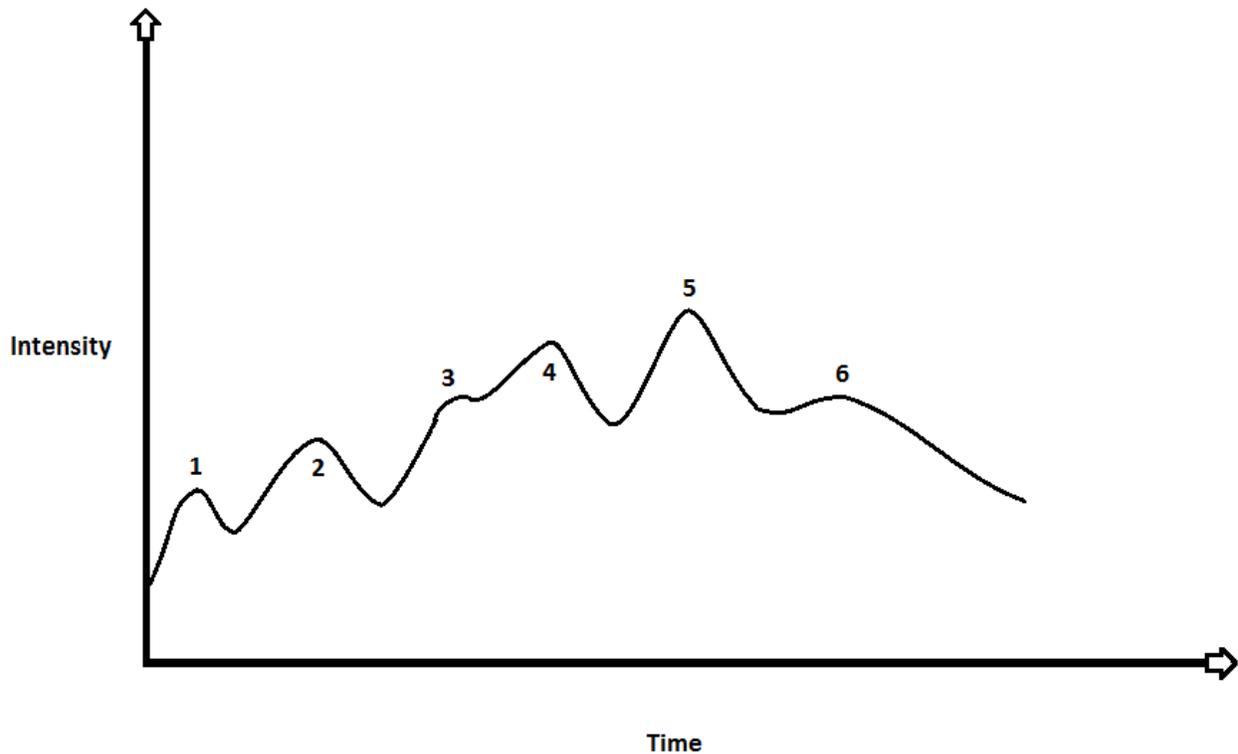
6 – Surprise Encounter: the players are ambushed by a group of Tyrant minions. The combat is resolved quickly, and the players continue on.

7 – Finding and fighting the Hackers: the players cross into a zone that has been heavily modified by humans. The hackers have set up shop, so it's down to the players to hunt them down, find their gate, and cross over.

8 – In the Lair: the players de-virtualize into the hacker's lair in the real world. The hackers weren't expecting a group of armed special force operatives to appear out of nowhere, and are easily coerced into surrender by one of the players.

9 – Wrap Up: the players found a few Shards in the hacker's lair as the GM wraps up this case.

An Example First Round of Combat:



1 – Initiative: combat has begun, and all participants roll their initiative to see who goes first

2 – First Turn: A player takes the first turn, charging into the fray and attacking the enemies.

3 – Flowing to another player: The previous player elects one of his allies to follow up on his attack since it didn't quite finish off an enemy.

4 – Safety Net: the previous player failed to hit, so they chose another player to finish off an enemy.

5 – Enemy Vanquished: the players were able to work together to destroy an enemy before they got a turn.

6 – Enemy Turn: the players hand the next turns to the remaining enemies, whose potential attack power is reduced since they lost a unit so early on.