

# Talking Transhumanism at the Table: Designing Games for Non-Transhumanist Audiences

The Making of



# Eclipse Phase Vitals

- Pen and Paper tabletop RPG of post-apocalyptic transhuman conspiracy and horror
  - Fully supported game line licensed to Catalyst Game Labs
  - Explicitly transhuman and many central plot elements deal with ethical issues of transhumanity
- Premiered at Gencon this summer Aug 13-16
  - Creative Commons PDF went on sale/torrent mid-September
  - Hard Cover released mid-October

# Brief History

- ◉ Latest in a line of transhuman themed games
- ◉ Was originally a partial re imagining of Shadowrun
- ◉ Rob and I liked the idea so much we kept working on it
- ◉ Both of us identify as transhumanists and wanted to make sure the game engaged with those themes

# The Dilemma

- ⦿ Unlike some forms of media games are inherently interactive and meant to be shared
  - This means in addition to a genre (fantasy, sci-fi, post-apocalyptic) they also have a type (video, card, tabletop)
- ⦿ How do we make transhumanist themes and ideas appeal to an audience which is largely unfamiliar with them?
  - Or possible hostile towards them

# Rapture of the Nerds and Fiddly Bits

- ⦿ Early on when we'd talk to people we'd hear
  - 'Transhumanism isn't real scifi'
  - 'That's just intellectual masturbation'
  - 'Ugh it's too technical for me'
  - 'Sounds neat but what can you do with it?'

# The Transhumanist Imagination

- So the goal for us became to access the core of what got us interested and excited in Transhumanism
  - C. Wright Mills – Sociological Imagination
  - But with Clones! Robots! AI's! Nanotech!

# Our Mission

- ⦿ Take ideas from transhumanism that have broader popular appeal
  - Anything where you can give them one sentence and get the ‘wow that’s cool’ response.
  - This allows players to grok transhumanist ideas as game ideas first
  - But through play and in discussion in and out of the game a wider understanding is created



# Physical and Cognitive Enhancement

- ⦿ “What would you do if science could make you superhuman?”
- ⦿ In game
  - Talk about issues of what you’d like to do to yourself
  - Players are part of a group that embraces responsible use
  - What are the social/political/economic repercussions of these sorts of enhancements
- ⦿ Around the table
  - Would the players like these sorts of enhancements
  - Is this something they would support
  - Responsible use outside of fictional worlds

# Morphological Freedom

- ⦿ “Who (or what) do you want to be today?”
- ⦿ In game
  - Experiment with uplifted or artificial life
  - Play with boundaries of physical gender and humanity
  - As you create you character you have wide array of choices
- ⦿ Around the table
  - What does it mean to be human?
  - How much would social roles change if we could alter our bodies?
  - How does this challenge existing beliefs?



# Digitized Consciousness

- ⦿ “It’s like a save point for your character”
- ⦿ In game
  - What happens when you are immortal?
  - If you are data, and you’re copied, who’s the real you?
- ⦿ Around the table
  - What is the meaning of consciousness and the self
  - How would a responsible society use this technology?
  - How does this affect social relations if not universally accessible?

# Post-Scarcity and Reputation Economies

- ⦿ “Being nice to people has its own rewards”
- ⦿ In game
  - Actions have repercussions
  - Choice to ally with old market or new reputation economic blocs
  - Data and information are worth more than any currency
- ⦿ Around the table
  - How might a society without money work
  - What happens to economies when nanofabrication becomes rampant?

# Reactions

- ⦿ Mind/body/soul debates
- ⦿ Accusations of anti-religious bias
- ⦿ Discussion of the political content
  - Yet ignores most sci-fi has political content
  - A lot of military sci-fi games are fairly fascistic by design
  - People love them Octomorphs and Space Whales!

# Conclusions

- ⦿ This is really our stealth attack to turn gamers into transhumanists!
- ⦿ Seriously though we wanted to make something that was fun, and accessible first
- ⦿ But which also attempted to engage the players in some of the debates regarding emerging technologies and responsible use.



Brian Cross

[kylleran@yahoo.com](mailto:kylleran@yahoo.com)

[www.eclipsephase.com](http://www.eclipsephase.com)

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# Questions or Comments?