

WELCOME TO SYNTHICIDE

The last great bastion of humanity collapsed trying to quarantine the Prodigravus mutant plague. Centuries later, mankind clings to civilization on the rim of the Milky Way. You are a sharper, a free agent performing criminal missions for gangs and corporations alike. A corrupt and powerful machine cult, the Tharnaxist Church, makes no effort to hinder you. But that changes when you're hired to terminate one of their holy automatons - a crime known as *Syntheticide*...

Sharppers (the Players)

As most planets are mired in violence and squalor, an independent, transient lifestyle is popular among ship owners. However, food and fuel are extremely expensive. Originally called "shippers," these drifters were soon associated with organized crime. Now they are called "sharppers" – a negative epithet for a space smuggler.

Synthetics (Robots)

Synthetics are free entities that do as they please. The Church and powerful corporations commission their construction, but these machines must be paid and are released after fulfilling contracts. Effectively immortal, Synthetics pass through personalities and emotions in season. One may spend 100 years as a manual laborer and suddenly decide it prefers hunting orphans for sport. Some view the humans around them as friendly oddities. But to most Synthetics, man is nothing more than pond scum.

The Church

Tharnaxist Priests are cybernetically enhanced humans obsessed with hoarding newly discovered technology. Driven by their profane devotion to the Synthetic god Ranix, the Church brutally enforces their rule and utterly destroys those they deem a threat. With absolute sovereignty over intergalactic trade and travel, the Priests are deliberately negligent, depriving the Galaxy of food, safety, and a real system of laws. The Church only punishes those who mistreat Synthetics and Priests.

Prodigravus

Prodigravus are mindless, sociopathic super warriors. Only the best informed scholars know the Prodigravus's true origin – that they were once humans transformed by the P-virus plague. Before the Church immunized humanity to the P-virus, the Prodigravus waged a war that nearly ended all life in the Galaxy. Now they are disorganized and broken, scattered among the stars.

Mutants

Mutants suffer an affliction from the Millennial War. They are descended from humans who survived a P-virus infection without transforming into Prodigravus. An unfortunate minority, mutants endure both from unstable biochemistry and discrimination by the Galaxy at large.

Technology

Technological advancement varies in *Syntheticide*. A sharper may round a corner brandishing a gunpowder revolver only to have his insides liquefied by a security guards' beam rifle.

Space Travel

Intragalactic space travel is highly automated and simplistic; anyone can guide a spaceship from one planet to another - though escaping a crew of mutant pirates will certainly demand the talent of a dedicated pilot. Ships of the past powered Jump drives, enabling mankind to leap across space instantaneously. But their legacy has been lost. Now ships can only travel routes supported by active Jump gates.

The Flow of Power

Gangs own people and streets. Corporations own gangs and resources. The Church owns everything, deciding who lives or dies. While everyone has a boss, given the chance, most will bite the hand that feeds them to improve their circumstance.

Prisons

Prisons exist, but none of them are official or state run. When caught, "justice" from the institution is swift and certain. Private prison owners capitalize on forced labor, or extort money from a prisoner's friends.

Security

Out in the streets and alleys, you're on your own. Many worlds have no organized police force, but many important places have private security to keep violence to a minimum. When you start a fight in a dock, a wealthy club, or corporate HQ, expect trained guns to show up.

Docks

All trade and business begins in a spaceship dock, and there are no free rides. Docks are often built underground and include boots for locking down ships whose owners fail to pay the trade and docking fees. Docks maintain exceptionally high security to keep crews from stealing each other's ships and engaging in gunfights.

Dock Masters

Dock masters are your best friend and worst enemy. They provide you a place of relative safety and the ability to meet up with other sharppers. But they aren't here for fun: a percentage of everything you buy or sell in the dock goes to the dock master. Many are Synthetic, further complicating matters.

Lurans (𠄎)

A luran is a tiny crystal that glows in direct sunlight. Following the rise of digital theft, interstellar credit economies destabilized and shifted to physical currency. The Galaxy now exchanges lurans for products and services.

CHAPTER 1:

CORE RULES



A GAME OF THREE SYSTEMS

Syntheticide is a classic pen-and-paper role-playing game requiring a Game Master (GM), 2 to 5 players, and several 10-sided dice (d10s). It employs a new rules system called the ACTIONS RULE CODEX (ARC). ARC uses attributes to describe the strengths and weaknesses of a character and is composed of 3 main systems: Roleplay Actions, Battle Actions, and Resolve & Cynicism.

THE ATTRIBUTES

ARC relies on attributes, which determine a character's talents and weaknesses. During character creation, players assign values to the following:



Awareness (A)

Awareness denotes a character's senses and attention to detail. Detecting ambushes, discovering concealed weapons and intuiting suspicious body language, all rely on the Awareness attribute. Awareness also affects when you act in battle.



Combat (C)

Your character's skill at physically harming opponents is reflected by their Combat attribute. A character strong in Combat is equally effective at brute force, gun fighting and assassination. Combat also decides the success of non-violent battle actions, like tossing objects to nearby allies.



Toughness (T)

Toughness constitutes your character's resilience and athletic prowess. Use Toughness to resist damage from physical attacks, as well as perform feats such as jumping and climbing. Toughness also measures the effects of disease or poison.



Influence (I)

Deception, impersonation and negotiation are delineated by the Influence attribute. A character with high Influence is skilled at navigating treacherous social situations and getting what they want using the force of their

personality. If your character has access to psychic powers, the Influence attribute determines how effective they are.



Operation (O)

Operation represents technical aptitude. This is used when hacking a computer terminal, piloting an uncommon vehicle, repairing broken equipment, or when applying subject matter expertise of any sort. Unless specially trained, characters cannot accomplish more than a routine action and do not roll Operation checks.



Nerve (N)

Nerve represents your character's capacity to shrug off trauma and psychological duress. This applies when resisting social pressure, intimidation, or unusual mental stressors. When targeted by a psychic attack, your character's Nerve determines whether they withstand the effects.



Speed (S)

Speed affects who acts first and how many actions a player can take during battle. Speed is also used for stealth, concealment of weapons, and pick-pocketing. Stunts demanding uncanny agility or acrobatics are usually decided by the Speed attribute.

Where are the skills?

ARC doesn't use a classic RPG skill system. Most checks are resolved using character's attributes and situational bonuses from equipment and powers.

Since there's no skill system, it's assumed your character doesn't know how to perform complex and technical actions until they gain a power explicitly saying they do.

However, if your game is more open-ended and encourages players to "attempt the impossible," consider raising the Operation difficulty for a task by +5 or more.

ROLEPLAY ACTIONS

Roleplay actions happen whenever characters interact with the game world. Not every action necessitates arbitration; GMs are encouraged to prioritize a high narrative pace. If there are any questions about what a character can or can't do, use the following as a guide:

- 1. Describe the action the character takes.** This could be as simple as telling a lie or as complex as bypassing a high-security alarm system.
- 2. Choose an effect.** The GM makes the final call on what happens:
 - a. Remove an obstacle:** An obstacle is anything that stands between a character and what he or she wants to accomplish.
 - b. Create an obstacle:** Creating obstacles can slow opponents down or ruin their plans.
 - c. Reveal information:** Revealing information alerts characters to something important in the game world, such as hidden enemies or secret plans.
 - d. Hide information:** Hiding information keeps characters safe from prodding eyes or enemy pursuit.
 - e. Alter NPC attitudes:** NPCs may themselves become social or even physical obstacles. Getting them to agree with plans or stand aside can be vital.
- 3. Roll 1d10 and add the relevant attribute and any other bonuses.** Players are encouraged to discuss which attribute best applies to the situation, but the GM delivers the final arbitration.
- 4. The GM compares the result to the Action Difficulty (AD) value.** The GM sets this number based on how risky or difficult the desired action sounds. However, if 2 characters are acting in direct opposition, both characters should roll and compare results.
- 5. Rolling equal to or above the AD grants the desired effect.** AD may result in better effects than desired (see Success Levels below). Rolling below the AD results in failure.
- 6. Failure may result in penalties.** The GM may decide your character suffers severely, given the danger in the scene and the degree of failure.

Combined Rolls (Assists)

Usually, characters roll independently for actions, succeeding and failing on their own. When multiple characters want to cooperate in a single action (such as two doctors performing surgery), everyone involved rolls. So long as 1 character overcomes the AD, the action succeeds. The GM makes the final call on when combined rolls may be used. A good example where they cannot be used is rolling for stealth or making attacks.

SUGGESTED ACTION DIFFICULTIES

The chart below lists typical action difficulties. The GM may establish thresholds between these values. For more information on AD scaling, refer to the Chapter 7: Game Mastering.

| Easy | Standard | Difficult | Challenging | Fantastic | Epic | Legendary |
|------|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|------|-----------|
| 3 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 15 | 21 | 27+ |

SUCCESS LEVELS

Rolling significantly higher than the action difficulty results in more impressive roleplay actions, beyond mere success. High rolls indicate particularly fortunate happenstance. Use this chart for typical thresholds:

| Standard | Excellent | Superb |
|----------|-----------|--------|
| +0 | +5 | +10 |

Example: Your character is forced to con his way out of a poorly executed heist by deceiving an armed guard. The GM sets an Influence action difficulty of 6. Using a roleplay action, you roll 1d10 and add your character's Influence attribute.

- On a result of 6 to 10, the guard is suspicious of your character, but believes them nonetheless.
- On a result of 11 (+5 over the AD), the guard accepts your lie without questioning.
- Rolling over 16 (+10 over the AD), the guard is so profoundly convinced of the truth of your character's words that he accepts risks to his livelihood on their behalf.

BATTLE ACTIONS

Battles take place on a gaming grid, with each square or hexagonal unit representing 5 feet. The general rules of battle are explained below, followed by a table of common Battle Actions.

- **All participants roll battle reflex [1d10 + Speed + Awareness] at the beginning of every fight.** Turn order descends from high to low and the player with the highest battle reflex acts first. Until the end of battle, participants act in the same turn order.
- **For every turn, players are distributed a number of Action points (AP) equal to ½ their character's Speed + 3 (rounded down).** Action points determine how many actions a character can take on their turn. A player turn ends when they run out of AP or decide they are done.
- **Certain actions are limited by the number of times you can use them in a turn.** For example: you may only *gain advantage* once per turn.
- **Once all participants take a turn, the round ends.** A new round begins and everyone takes another turn in the same order. Battle continues until all immediate threats have been overcome.
- **For chase scenes and ambulant fights, use the rules for vehicle battles on page 120.** Substitute an on-foot character's Speed attribute for driver velocity. On each turn, a player can take 1 driver action and 1 passenger action.
- **If you ever need to convert battle time to real time, a round of battle lasts roughly 10 seconds.**

Grids

Dry erase grids are recommended for play for quick mapping and improvisation. If you want to make your own, laminating grid paper is a fast and easy solution.

| Action | AP Cost | Uses Limit? | Description |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------------|--|
| Move | 1 | No limit | Move 4 squares |
| Attack | 1 | Once per turn | Make a viable attack against an target |
| Second Attack | 2 | Once per turn | Make a second attack action on the same turn |
| Third Attack | 3 | Once per turn | Make a third attack action on the same turn |
| Guard/Counter Attack | See description | Once per round | Reflexively attack an exposed target |
| Use Power | Varies | No limit | Activate an ability such as a Tactical Power or Psychic Power |
| Defend | 1 | Once per turn | Gain +1 bonus to any cover (max +4) |
| Gain Advantage | 2 | Once per turn | Get the upper hand in combat |
| Keep Watch | Varies | Once per turn | Save an action to trigger under specific circumstances |
| Stealth | 1 | Once per turn | Hide from enemies |
| Other | Varies | No limit | Common, simple actions. Examples: 0 AP: Talking, intimidating 1 AP: Switching weapons, opening doors 2 AP: Carefully moving through hazards |

Battle Variant: Theater of the Mind

If your group prefers to play without a gaming grid, GM's are encouraged to keep the same rules and rely on imagination to play out the battle. Positioning still plays an important role in the mechanics: keep in mind that 1 square equals 5 feet. For example, a thrown weapon with a range of 3 squares has a range of 15 feet.

Move

Characters travel up to 4 squares (20 feet) per move action. Diagonal movement is permitted. Note:

- **Characters may not move through enemy targets or obstructions.** You may only move through allies and empty squares.
- **You must end your action on an empty square.**
- **The GM may require checks when moving on precarious surfaces.** One example would be ice.
- **When you are *overpowered*, you cannot move unless forced.** Removing the status takes 1 AP.

Attack

Attacks are resolved with the following method:

1. **Roll 1d10 a single time.** The same result is used to determine if your attack successfully strikes your opponent and the amount of harm inflicted.
2. **Calculate the following to determine if your character struck their target:**
 $d10 \text{ result} + \text{Combat} + \text{Attack Bonuses (ATT)}$
3. **If the total Attack equals or surpasses the target's armor defense, your character successfully hits.** If your target's armor defense is higher than your attack, your character misses.
4. **If the attack is successful, calculate damage.** Negative weapon damage bonuses lower the damage dealt. Add the following:
 $\text{Original } d10 \text{ result} + \text{Combat} + \text{Damage Bonuses (DMG)}$
5. **Targets instantly lose Hit Points (HP) equal to any damage taken.**

The following affect attacks:

- **You must be adjacent to the target of your striking weapons.** Striking weapons have a limited range of 1.
- **Ranged weapons can attack at a distance, but may take penalties.** These weapons have a *range increment*, which represents a distance in squares. You may attack targets within 1 range increment at no penalty. Each additional range increment needed has a cumulative -1 on your attack roll.
- **Ganging up:** Gain +1 to attack rolls when allies are adjacent to your target.
- **Overpowered status:** A character who is *overpowered* suffers a -2 penalty to all rolls. An overpowered target grants +1 to all rolls against them.
- **Cover:** If your target is behind cover, it increases his armor defenses by an additional +1 to +4. The GM sets the value relative to the quality of the cover.
- **Invisible Targets:** Generally, if you cannot see your target you cannot attack it. However, if they attacked or made a commotion during their turn, you have a chance to spot them. Roll Awareness vs. Speed. If your Awareness check is higher, treat them as temporarily visible but with +1 cover on top of any cover they already have.

Relationship between Attack and Armor

Attacks deal damage proportional to the attack roll. Armor defense represents a character's capacity to evade or shake off physical harm, therefore armor defense directly scales the damage value a character can ignore. A character in casual wear may be damaged by forces both weak and strong, while a character wearing impressive armor is only damaged by equally potent assaults.

Second and Third Attacks

It takes incredible focus to compensate for gun recoil, follow moving targets, or assail a foe with slashing blows. Therefore, the second attack action in each turn costs 2 AP and the third attack action costs 3 AP. You cannot take more than 3 attack actions in a turn without special exceptions.

Guard/Counter Attack

Guard/counter attacks are granted for free when certain conditions are met. Your character must be wielding a *guard* or *counter* weapon to do the following:

- **Guard Attack:** Once per round, make a free attack against an target that enters a square adjacent to your character.
- **Counter Attack:** Once per round, when your character is hit by an adjacent attack, he or she may take a free attack in retaliation.

Keep Watch

You can delay actions for later by doing the following:

1. **Choose an action or series of actions to hold.**
2. **Spend the AP needed to perform the actions this turn.** For example, if you wanted to *keep watch* with 2 attacks, it costs 3 AP.
3. **Declare a trigger that allows you to take the saved actions.** This may be as simple as "an enemy walks through the door." The GM must agree that the trigger is realistic and reasonably specific.
4. **End your turn.** *Keep watch* always ends your turn.

Use Power

Activating a psychic power or tactical power varies in its AP cost.

Defend

Defending yourself raises any cover you have by +1, to a max of +4. If you have no cover, you still gain 1 cover if you took a move action this turn.

Gain Advantage

As a catchall for gritty combat and dirty tactics, *gaining advantage* always costs 2 AP. Perform the following:

- 1. Choose a target.** Unless the GM says otherwise, you can only *gain advantage* against 1 target.
- 2. Describe your advantage.** This could include having higher ground relative to your target, or the element of surprise. It could also be a quick series of actions you take to get the upper hand, such as sand in the eyes followed by a kick to the knee.
- 3. Choose an effect.** Below are your options:
 - a. Forced Movement:** Move the target 1 square, or up to 4 if you take a move action and move directly with them.
 - b. Overpower:** The target gains the *overpowered* status. Overpowered characters take -2 on all rolls, and all rolls against them gain +1. They cannot move unless forced.
 - c. Attack Bonus:** You receive +2 to your next attack against the target this round.
 - d. Melee Takedown:** Your turn ends. You and your target are *overpowered* and lose your next turns. However, you may renew this effect during your lost turn with another successful roll.
 - e. Ranged Takedown:** When you lay down suppressing fire as part of a *ranged takedown*, your target does not completely lose their turn. Instead, they may take a single 4 square move away from you, though they remain *overpowered* after that move.
- 4. The GM may require a roll to *gain advantage*.** Trying to outsmart a target would require an Influence vs. Awareness check, while knocking over a target would be a contest of Toughness. Getting an Attack Bonus does not usually require a roll, however.
- 5. Failure has consequences.** The GM may further penalize characters for failing their check by 5 or more. Consequences include:
 - a. Forced Movement:** You lose 1 AP as your character recovers from botched positioning.
 - b. Overpower:** Your character gains the *overpowered* status instead.
 - c. Attack Bonus:** There are no consequences for failing in this action – the wasted attempt is enough of a penalty.
 - d. Takedown:** Your turn doesn't end, but you immediately lose 1 AP and become *overpowered*.

ENDING BATTLES

Death

Sharpers who drop below 1 HP are incapacitated. They may take no actions and are executed by any additional damage. Incapacitated characters also die if left unattended after a battle. Conscious allies may stabilize their fallen fellows. Stabilized sharpers awaken an hour later at 1 HP.

Killing Blows

Occasionally, a single attack may be so devastating that it kills a foe outright, regardless of HP. Unconscious or paralyzed targets are particularly susceptible to killing blows - as are those held down by multiple opponents. However, when a target is well armored or defended, the GM may instead allow an auto-hitting attack at double maximum damage.

Flee or Surrender

If you gain the upper hand on a foe, they may attempt to flee or surrender. During your turn in battle, you may make Influence checks to cow your adversary. The GM sets the Influence AD based upon how intimidating you are, how convicted your opponent is to their mission, and whether they are at a disadvantage. Captured enemies may be freely knocked unconscious and tied up. (See below)

Capturing Enemies

Oftentimes it is more advantageous to keep a foe alive than to slay them and move on. You may easily stabilize and tie up any unconscious enemy using ropes or strips of cloth. They may attempt to escape later with Toughness or Speed attribute checks. The AD is equal to the captor's Operation + 10. Bound foes are helpless and may be automatically killed or knocked unconscious at your discretion. Unconscious enemies awake an hour later.

Resuscitation

A trained doctor may resuscitate or reconstitute a dead character so long as some portion of their remains are intact. You must sacrifice 1 Resolve point and then spend ₱60 per character level. If your character passed away more than a number of days ago equal to your character level, they may not be resuscitated. If none of these requirements are met, the character dies permanently.

Regaining HP from medicine

Characters with the field surgery power can make Operation checks to restore HP. Sharpers may also visit hospitals, which restore half a character's HP for ₱15 per character level.

Regaining HP naturally

It's very difficult to heal battle wounds naturally in *Syntheticide*. Food is low in nutrition and space wreaks havoc on the body. Only once per week, you regain HP equal to your Toughness + level. If this number is negative, you regain no HP. Also, if you skipped eating on any day in that week, you regain no HP.

RESOLVE & CYNICISM

Resolve and Cynicism (R&C) are central to character world view in *Syntheticide*. Combined, they reflect a character's connection to the universe and their commitment to something more than survival. Here's a quick summary:

Players acquire Resolve by completing significant tasks or behaving benevolently. Resolve points can be exchanged for several boons. Cynicism, on the other hand, is accumulated through capricious violence and cruelty. Cynicism makes it harder for you to earn Resolve, though not impossible.

STARTING RESOLVE & CYNICISM SCORES

Every character begins with 2 points of Resolve and 0 Cynicism. Once the game begins, players may never pool more than 5 Resolve nor accumulate more than 10 Cynicism. Neither Resolve nor Cynicism may drop below 0.

SPENDING RESOLVE

Players may spend a point of Resolve to benefit from 1 of the following:

- **Treat a die roll as 10.** You must choose to do this before making the roll.
- **Automatically hit and massively damage a target.** If you spend a Resolve point before an attack, it automatically hits and deals a minimum amount of damage. Deal $10 + (2 \times \text{your level})$ damage, or your normal damage total resulting from rolling a 10 – whichever is higher.
- **Return from the brink of death.** Whenever a doctor attempts to resuscitate a dead character, the dead character must have an unspent Resolve point. This point is consumed upon resuscitation.
- **Reduce Cynicism.** If you have gained Cynicism from antisocial behavior, you may consume Resolve to reduce it. Each Resolve point reduces your Cynicism score by 1.

| Behavior | Effect |
|------------------------------|--|
| Sacrifice | +1 or +2 Resolve (must roll above your Cynicism) |
| Harming innocents for profit | +1 Cynicism |
| Wanton destruction | +3 Cynicism |
| Catastrophic evil | +7 Cynicism |
| Pursue motivation | +1 Resolve (not affected by Cynicism) |

GAINING RESOLVE & CYNICISM

At the end of each game session, the GM will open a discussion on the significant themes of each character. Players determine who made significant sacrifices and whether anyone was deliberately cruel. Gain Resolve or Cynicism according to the values below. Players gain additional Resolve if their character moved any closer to their driving motivation.

Sacrifice: Whenever your character gives up wealth or exposes themselves to danger for the sake of others, they have made a sacrifice. This positive behavior improves their outlook and self esteem. The GM decides to grant you +1 or +2 Resolve assessed by the significance of their sacrifice. Yet Cynicism saps even the most virtuous of their righteous rewards. Roll 1d10: players who roll equal to or lower than their Cynicism score do not gain any Resolve. Examples:

- Fighting a gang to protect locals – not just for money
- Donating medicine to a sick colony
- Standing up to unjust authority
- Taking the hard path to avoid casualties

Harming innocents for profit: When your character harms an innocent person to improve their station, they are wracked with guilt. Gain +1 Cynicism.

Examples:

- Accepting contracts to murder innocent people
- Randomly robbing unlucky travelers
- Betraying the trust of employers and partners

Wanton destruction: Sadistic behavior performed for its own reward takes a deep toll on the psyche. Gain +3 Cynicism. Examples:

- Murdering for thrill
- Torture and mutilation
- Creating excessive and unnecessary casualties in pursuit of a goal

Catastrophic Evil: The horrors of slaughter harden all hearts, no matter how "necessary." Gain +7 Cynicism. Examples:

- Destroying an entire settlement, just for fun
- "Scorched Earth" tactics to achieve your goals
- Genocidal behavior

Motivations: Every player chooses their character's motivation during character creation. If the GM agrees your character successfully pursued their motivation during the game, she may award Resolve.

Sociopathy

Sharppers are social beings guided by their conscience. But if your character is so callous that wicked behavior recharges them, consider the "Cynical Bastard" on page 66 to convert Cynicism into Resolve.

