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Machines in the Shadows

In its projection of the technological future, *Shadowrun* incorporates virtual reality, cybertechnology and simsense, among other elements. One would think that this vision of the future would include robots as well. Alas, it does not. This article seeks to fill that hole by providing rules and guidelines for including robots in *Shadowrun*. This is only a framework—it is up to the referee to implement the rules in a manner that fits his particular campaign.

HISTORY

Robots first came into use in the late 20th century in the form of crude industrial robots used in production. It wasn't until the dawn of the 21st century that robots became cost-effective and gained full acceptance in the industrial world.

As breakthroughs were made in computer/cybertechnology, they were soon also applied to the field of robotics. The two industries fed off of one another's innovations, and as a result, many corporations that became involved in matrix technology and cyberware developed robotics divisions.

The VITAS plague in 2010 gave robots the boost they needed to gain corporate acceptance. The lower-class, poverty-stricken and super-exploited workers who had fueled production were decimated by the plague mostly as a result of their poverty. A new, cheaper labor force had to be found to replace them, and many corporations found the answer in robots.

Goblinization and the second wave of the VITAS plague once again fueled the corporate motion toward robotics as a means to solve the labor shortage.

Unfortunately, the push toward robotization that took place in 2010 and 2022 came to a disastrous end in 2029, when the computer crash immobilized most automatic production. Further paranoia was seeded when the corps realized how vulnerable their robot-controlling computer systems were to renegade deckers and rival corps. It was only six years later, when IC became a solid feature of matrix systems, that robotics resumed an important role in corporations and society.

In the early half of the '40s, Aztechnology developed and used many robots in conflicts in Mexico and the Yucatan. Most were scouts, lightly armed and designed for intelligence rather than combat. However, rumors of robot tanks and air drones caused quite a panic in the international community. Fear that high-tech, mechanized armies could lead to wars without casualties for the most advanced nations led to a UN decision in 2045 that made the construction and production of robots for use in military combat a violation of international law. Of course, most countries continued R&D of military robots.

ROBOTS IN 2050

Security: Robots enjoyed widespread use in the security field until the dawn of magic. That brought invisibility, astral sensing and powerful yet undetectable weapons that compromised the effectiveness of security robots.

Two other reasons explain why robots did not replace humans in security work.

First was the threat of a malfunction or programming gap compromising security. It was difficult to prepare robots for every situation, especially how to respond to the illogical and irrational behavior quirks inherent in humans.

Second, the vulnerability of computer systems to the outside influence of deckers presented many problems. The threat of someone gaining outside control of security robots led corporations to guard their security nodes with expensive, high-quality IC. Some robots are built with independent computer systems, but they are extremely expensive and may lack enough computer power to handle all situations adequately.

Regardless of the disadvantages, security robots are used by most major corporations to augment their internal security. They don't sleep, collect a paycheck or possess human flaws like delayed reaction or conscience. Incidentally, these same characteristics make robots prime candidates for dirty work like assassinations and warfare.

When a security robot encounters and identifies an intruder, it automatically triggers an alert through its connection with the matrix. A decker in the system can block the alert signal in the same manner it would block an internal alert.

Industry: Robots are used extensively in the production of goods. Most factories are automated with simple industrial robots designed to perform very specific functions. With more complicated work, robots do the menial or dangerous tasks to free up their human partners for more detailed work.

For example, robots are used extensively in agriculture. They plant, continuously monitor large crops, perform crop maintenance (fertilizing, etc.), and harvest. A flesh-and-blood crew is kept on mainly to solve problems, and to monitor and maintain the robots.

The biggest advantage of robots is that they can work in high-risk situations that are dangerous to humans. They can handle toxic chemicals and radioactive material. They are also used in mining, chemistry and exploration. Robots are an essential part of life in space. Such robots are either solely controlled by humans or hooked up to systems protected with black ice.

Domestic: Domestic use is limited to the households of the wealthy. Those who can afford it usually use security robots and possibly janitorial models. Robots have not yet been developed for other chores, mostly because the enormous cost of designing and producing such robots is not economically feasible. Besides, no corp has yet to design a robot that can successfully cook anything but the most basic meals.

ROBOTICS COMPANIES

That there is a great amount of money to be made in robotics is a fact realized by many companies, each specializing in one or more fields. These are detailed on the following pages.

Article by Dan Snuffin

ATT (U.K.): Industrial robots.

Ares Macrotechnology: Security robots.

Aztechnology: Security and industrial robots. Also covertly constructs counter-security and military robots.

Federated Boeing: Industrial robots. Currently developing robot-controlled aircraft.

Fuchi: Industrial and corporate robots. Also constructs military robots.

Mitsuhama: Although not involved in the actual production of robots, Mitsuhama manufactures many of the delicate electronic parts that go into them.

Robotic Technologies Inc.

In addition to the corporations listed above, this new corp specializes in robotics.

Home Office Location: Seattle, UCAS.

President/CEO: Harlan Carson.

Chief Products/Services: Design, construction, and service of industrial and security robots.

Business Profile: One of the original members of the famous Echo Mirage team, Carson founded RTI in 2032 as a means of applying his extensive knowledge of computer systems and electronics. In less than 20 years, he has brought the corporation through economic turmoil to international success. Industrial espionage has been a real problem for RTI, notably the Aztechnology "information coup" of 2038, but stricter employee screening and better employee benefits have solved these problems adequately. RTI is one of the leading producers of agricultural robots and is responsible for many of the advances made in that market.

TYPES OF ROBOTS

The two main types of robots are system and solo.

System: System robots are linked to a CPU or SPU that regulates their operation and translates their data. Most system robots are immobile, simple machines designed for specific functions, but the category also includes maintenance, agricultural and light security robots.

The major problem with system robots is that they can be controlled by anyone who can break into the computer system. Thus, any robot-controlling node will always be guarded by some form of IC. Any form of security system robot will be slaved only to the CPU.

>>>>>RTI's system is chock full of ice. It is also rumored that Carson himself patrols the system on occasion. Being that he's the "original decker," I would say that he's not one to mess with.<<<<<
KarmaDog
(23:18:08/9/19/51)

Solo: Solo robots are not directly hooked up to computer systems, instead relying on their own computer brain to operate. While some may interact with a larger computer system, they are able to make their own decisions. Solo robots are self-contained, complex and mobile. Household, military and most security robots fit into this category.

Renegade deckers may not be able to control solo robots through the matrix, but they can cut the robots off from the computer system so they cannot relay data or trigger alarms. Solo robots may have limited thinking power or gaps in their programming that makes them unable to react to situations properly. The parameters of these flaws is up to the referee.

Note that both types of robots can be adapted for rigger control.

GAME USE

It is suggested that characters be prohibited from acquiring robots for personal use. Limited availability, and overwhelming purchase and maintenance costs should be stressed, in any case.

Attributes: Robots have the vehicle attributes of Speed (in meters per combat action), Body, Armor and Signature. Reaction is used to determine initiative.

Skills: Robot skills are always very specific (i.e., Build Radio, Wash Windows, AK-97).

Sensors: Different types include video (thermographic, low-light, magnification), audio (high/low frequency, amplification), voice/pattern recognition, motion sensors, and any special sensors integral to the robot's duties.

Weapons: Note that this category includes not only mounted armaments of security robots but also the limbs and equipment mounted on normally benign robots that could be reprogrammed or directed to attack. Because of their complex targeting systems, robot attacks with firearms receive a –2 modifier. Built-in recoil compensators negate the effects of recoil from automatic weapons. Large, on-board ammo hoppers alleviate most reloading problems.

SAMPLE STATISTICS

The robots that follow are examples, and this catalog is by no means complete. It is highly suggested that the referee develop his own robots to fit the needs of his campaign or scenario.

RTI Light Agribot X-34

Body: 4.
Reaction: 3.
Speed: 12.
Armor: 2.
Signature: 1.

Skills: Any agricultural skills appropriate to its specific work; usually a specialization of Botany.

Sensors: Video (thermographic). The robot is also able to analyze plant samples for disease and growth, soil nutrients, and humidity.

Weapons: Stomp/kick (5S4), pesticide spray (3S3).

Description: The X-34 is a five-foot-tall, spider-like robot that walks on six legs. An extendable probe is located under its body.

Notes: This is a system robot. The only time an agricultural robot would come into play is if someone took control of it through the guiding computer system or if the PCs accidentally got in its way.

Ares Watchdog Light Security Robot

Body: 6.
Reaction: 8.
Speed: 16.
Armor: 4.
Signature: 3.

Skills: Perception (7), Ares MP-LMG (6), Grenade Launcher (6).

Sensors: Video (thermographic, magnification), audio, voice/pattern recognition, motion sensors.

Weapons: Ares MP-LMG (5S3), grenade launcher (gas grenades).

Description: This robot looks like a hovercar with no windows. It is in fact a small hovercraft. A large spotlight is mounted in the "grill."

Notes: This is a system robot used to guard the perimeter of large corporate installations. Upon encountering an unidentified person, it will ask for identification in a crisp, electronic voice. If the identification is not valid, the robot will deny the person access and warn him of the consequences

of trespassing. If the person attempts to pass or attacks, the robot will immediately set off an alarm and attack.

Aztechnology Vanguard Light Security Robot

Body: 8.
Reaction: 8.
Speed: 8.
Armor: 5.
Signature: 4.
Skills: Perception (5), Ingram Valiant (6).
Sensors: Video (thermographic), audio, voice/pattern recognition.
Weapons: Ingram Valiant (5S3).
Description: The Vanguard is vaguely humanoid in appearance.
Notes: This robot is either system or solo, depending on the measure of security desired. Although it has arms and legs, the Vanguard cannot execute physical attacks.

RTI Hellion High Security Robot

Body: 12.
Reaction: 8.
Speed: 10.
Armor: 7.
Signature: 6.
Skills: Perception (8), Vindicator (8), Ingram (8).
Sensors: Video (thermographic, magnification), audio (high/low frequency), voice/pattern recognition, motion detectors.
Weapons: GE Vindicator minigun (5S3), Ingram smartgun (5S3).
Description: The Hellion is vaguely humanoid in shape.
Notes: The Hellion is a solo robot. It can punch for 8M2 damage, but may not kick.

Aztechnology Warbot

Body: 14.
Reaction: 7.
Speed: 15.
Armor: 8.
Signature: 6.
Skills: Perception (6), Target Identification (7), Vindicator Minigun (8), Panther Assault Cannon (8).
Sensors: Video (thermographic, magnification), voice/pattern recognition, motion detectors.
Weapons: Vindicator minigun, Panther assault cannon.
Description: The Warbot looks like a streamlined tank about the size of a car.
Notes: Warbots are solo robots, usually programmed for specific missions. Actual armament will vary according to purpose. Obviously, Warbots are highly illegal, and Aztechnology will go to extraordinary lengths to protect its secret. Ω

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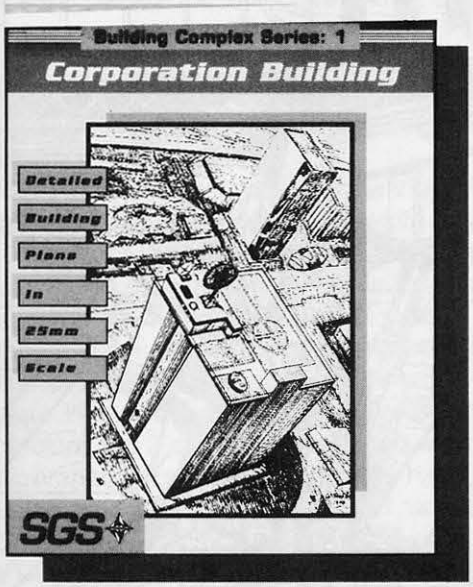

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