BLADE RUNNER

OFF-WORLD

A roleplaying scenario toolkit of secret identities and artificial emotions for Epidiah Ravachol's

Dread

09/07/2013
Aaron M. Sturgill

CONTENTS

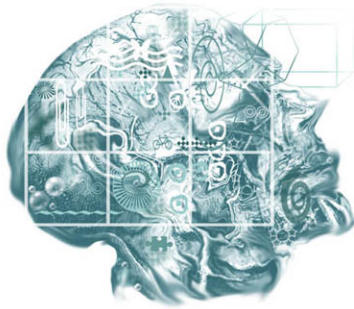# INTRODUCTION

The *Dread* (Jenga®) tower is a mechanism of suspense. In this setting toolkit you will find ideas for building suspense around not only the characters' ultimate fates, but their very identity.

I have not read anything by Philip K. Dick, so the *Blade Runner* film is my only source.

Many thanks to…

SETTING

The Basics
The year is 2031 (or later, if your present day is creeping close enough to that year to break credibility). Replicants (sentient artificial humanoids) developed by firms such as the Tyrell Corporation are used extensively in the fleets and colonies of Earth's growing interstellar expansion. They serve as soldiers, technicians, laborers, and recreational devices, among other things. Due to emotional instability as they age, their lifespans are capped at four years, at which point they shut down automatically and permanently. This is common knowledge.

Identity
Most Replicants are implanted with a false set of memories stretching back to early childhood. Most Replicants do not know that they are Replicants. Some suspect, but have no way of knowing for certain. Some humans have convinced themselves that they must be artificial.
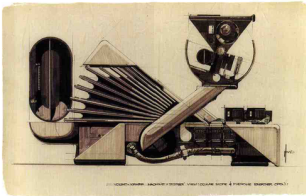
Only Blade Runners and those with access to the infamous and supposedly inerrant Voight-Kampff test can determine a person's identity with any certainty. Many people are subjected to this test at some point in their lifetime. (See the separate questionnaires document for a sample V-K test.)

Emotions
Replicants will develop unique emotional responses as a result of their individual experiences. For instance, a combat model could easily develop a personality that revolves around fear, rage, or power. A pleasure model could end up with serious body image issues and depression.

Because Replicants have been known to become unstable as they age, these emotional responses are considered dangerous aberrations (hence the four-year lifespan). Known Replicants are often isolated from their human peers upon any manifestation of emotion, sometimes well before their expiration date.

Resistance

Some groups have arisen in response to this perceived persecution, calling for equality and fair treatment of artificial humans. They will go to great lengths to protect Replicants, especially those that have manifested emotions. There are even rumors that resistance scientists have developed ways to delay or override the expiration date, but these are just rumors.

Kicker

Our story begins when something dire occurs. For instance:

- The planetary colony is under alien attack.
- Something really important at the mining outpost breaks, and people start turning on each other.
- The flagship of the Corporate Defense Conglomerate (CDC) is about to engage the enemy fleet, and the PCs are ordered to battle stations.

Whatever it is, it should set off the characters' emotional triggers, perhaps for the first time.

Death

Having recently discovered their own emotions, each Replicant is terrifyingly close to his or her inevitable death. This is called their *expiration date*, which is exactly four years from their *incept date*. It's possible that this information could be retrieved from the ship's/colony's main computer by an industrious Replicant or friend. It's just as likely that they won't know the time of their termination until the tower collapses.

Off-world

Throughout Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, references are made to "Off-world" colonies and fleets. The disposition of these Off-world exploits is uncertain: when advertised early in the film by a floating billboard, the colonies seem too good to be true, as the announcer offers a chance for excitement, adventure, and a new beginning on the frontier. However, Sebastian later admits to Pris that the only reason he's still earthbound is due to a degenerative genetic condition, implying that the default public attitude is a desire to leave the overcrowded earth.

Either way, nothing Off-world is directly portrayed in the film, so we'll be making up a lot of this as we go.

Where Do We Start?

Since this is intended as a one-shot scenario, we'll keep the options limited. Groups should choose a setting by consensus.

- Earth-like colony: Cities, parks, farms, centers of commerce, military installations. Thousands of people. Tech level could be anything from agrarian (*Firefly*) to advanced (*Star Trek*).
- Isolated mining outpost: Dark hallways, not much space to move around, everything's always breaking, we're lonely and at each other's throats.
- Deep space vessel: Well-equipped for battle, exploration, and/or colonization. Possibly the center of a larger fleet in search of a habitable world, or part of a war fleet sent to engage an unknown alien menace.

Blade Runners

Though a necessary part of society's infrastructure, Replicants have come to be seen as a dangerous liability among the corporate colonies and fleets. For this reason, highly-skilled Blade Runners operate on any Off-world installation large enough to support a large number of Replicants.

"Blade Runner" is a blanket term for specialists in tracking and identifying artificial intelligence. They are trained and employed by a variety of organizations:

- Military: Most corporate agencies will train their own force of Blade Runners, specifically trained to identify artificial threats to corporate expansion. They will usually hold officer ranks.
- Law enforcement: Blade Runners are often detectives or special agents in an urban or regional police force.
- Civilian: Many Blade Runners make their living as private investigators —although they may spend more time chasing unfaithful spouses than Replicants.

A Sample Situation
Expand

Themes
Here are some quotes from the film that you can use as titles for your games to indicate possible themes to explore.

- "They don't advertise for killers in the newspaper."
- "Skin jobs, cops, and little people."
- "Have you ever retired a human by mistake?"
- "Painful to live in fear, isn't it?"
- "Wake up! Time to die!"
- "I've done… *questionable* things."
- "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe…"
- "Lost in time, like tears in rain…"
- "The light that burns twice as bright burns half as long."

SYSTEM

Setup
Players fill out the questionnaires; this is character creation. When the GM reviews each questionnaire, he decides whether that character's true identity is human or Replicant. The GM makes note of this, as it will come up later.

Identity in the Course of Play
The players may or may not have an idea of whether their characters are Replicants. They are certainly free to roleplay whatever decision they have made. However, they are not necessarily in control of this determination, as you will see.

Collapse and Revelation
When the tower falls, we learn the truth about the character in question.

- If the tower falls accidentally (as part of a player's attempted pull), the GM immediately reveals their initial decision regarding the PC's identity.
- If a player intentionally collapses the tower (as a 'noble sacrifice'), that player immediately declares the character's true identity.

Interpretation
Fictional events, both past and future, are colored by the revelations. Both the GM and players must work together to create compelling explanations for resolutions that are outside of an individual's choices.

- Example: The player determined at the outset that her PC was a Replicant. In the course of play, the tower falls accidentally, forcing the GM to reveal the truth: the PC is actually a human. In response to this, the player declares that the character is actually mentally unstable, and only believes herself to be artificial. Perhaps believing that her past was manufactured/implanted was the only way she could deal with a childhood trauma.

Ultimate Fate

When the tower collapses, it indicates that the character will perish or disappear in the course of play. However, unlike the original *Dread* rules, this fate need not be met immediately—it can wait until a dramatically appropriate time in the fiction. In this way, the tower is both a determining mechanism and an oracle of events to come, not an immediate death sentence.

- Example: The player decides to collapse the tower while his character is scouring the records of the Tyrell Corporation, thereby allowing him to declare the truth that he discovers. He states that the character is indeed a Replicant, but decides that he will not die until he confronts the Blade Runner that is hunting him.

Attributes

Each PC shares three common attributes: Physical, Mental, and Social. These are pulled directly from the film, and also have mechanical impact.

Players must select letter grades (A, B, or C) for Physical and Mental; Social always starts at C. (That's just the type of characters we're dealing with; see the next section for more information.) You can choose any combination you want, but the higher your ratings, the fewer chips you have at the start of play (see following section, **Chips**). In addition, attribute ratings have the following impact on pulling from the tower.

In the film, attribute ratings are only used for Replicants. In our setting, they are used for humans as well, to assess their usefulness to Off-world colonization efforts.

Physical A	Physical C	Mental A	Mental C
Pulls related to physical strength, dexterity, stamina, attractiveness, etc. are made at **-1 block** (a 3-block pull is only 2; a 1-block pull is nullified).	Pulls related to physical strength, dexterity, stamina, or attractiveness are made at **+1 block** (a 2-block pull is now 3).	Pulls related to intelligence, logic, memory, strategy, etc. are made at **-1 block** (a 3-block pull is only 2; a 1-block pull is nullified).	Pulls related to intelligence, logic, memory, strategy, etc. are made at **+1 block** (a 2-block pull is now 3).

B-level attributes are not subject to bonuses or penalties.

The Social Attribute

While rated on the same scale as Physical and Mental, the Social attribute functions very differently from the others.

- The Social attribute always starts at C.
- Players can "take the pull" for another player character, putting themselves in harm's way, when the situation is related to their answers in the Basic Test.
- When this happens, the PC making the sacrifice goes up a level in Social, or knocks down the tower, as per usual the usual *Dread* noble sacrifice.

Attaining an A rating doesn't prove that the character is a human, but if you end up being a Replicant, you must be at least a Nexus 7: almost indistinguishable from human, possibly possessing an unlimited lifespan, and certainly more humane than most humans.

More Human Than Human

Some have posited that the selfless act of Roy Batty saving the life of Rick Deckard on a Los Angeles rooftop indicated an almost human level of empathy or compassion.

- Example: The setting is a failed human colony overrun by spider-like aliens. A PC is attacked by one. Another PC with a fear of spiders (written on her Basic Test) wants to jump in to kill it or otherwise save the victim (this is "taking the pull"). Because the intervening PC is testing her Social attribute, the combat result is secondary to testing whether or not the character gains a Social level.

Chips

Chips are exchanged during play as part of the fiction and the mechanics. How many chips you start with depends on how you select your attribute ratings.

Attribute Ratings (Physical and Mental)	Starting Chips
A/A	1
A/B	2
A/C	3
B/B	3
B/C	4
C/C	5

*Following the so-called "Roy Batty Debacle," in which a Replicant with dual A-rated attributes killed the head of the Tyrell Corporation and nearly killed a Blade Runner, most Replicant manufacturers adhere to a strict policy of imposed ineptitude: **no Replicant can have A/A attribute ratings.***

Of course, pockets can be lined to get pretty much anything done. Exceptions have been known to occur.

Here's how you use chips.

- Award (gaining chips): the GM and the players can award chips for any in-game activity they think deserves an in-game reward. Common examples include:
  - An entertaining comment (from the player).
  - A useful idea, plan, or action (from the character).
  - A selfless act (from the player or character), such as taking the fall for someone, or bringing something like snacks to the table.
- Spend (losing chips): players can spend chips to accomplish the following:
  - One chip reduces the cost of a pull by one brick (e.g., a 3-brick pull is only 2; a 1-brick pull is nullified).
  - Chips can be saved and used at the end of the game to nullify the GM's identity declaration (see following page).

Survival and Identity

So, you've survived the game, and you want to know whether you're a human or a Replicant.

The GM has made a determination as to each player's identity. He has also marked an X for each answer on the questionnaire that he found suspect.

At the end, he will tell you how many X marks you got. Even a single X mark means you "failed" the test, and are a Replicant. However, If you have any remaining chips (see p. XX), you may spend them now to negate the X marks, and declare that your character is human.

Thus, you can save your chips during play in order to have a say as to your final identity:

- "I want to save these three chips and prove I'm human."
- "I'd rather use them up and survive even if it means I'm a Replicant."
- "I have chips left over but I won't spend them because I *want* to be a Replicant/believe I am a Replicant (although if I didn't get any X marks on my answers, then I'm human no matter what)."

If you survive the game with a Social attribute of less than A, it says nothing about whether you're human or Replicant... just that you're selfish/unwilling to help another character.

At its heart, *Blade Runner* asks, "What does it mean to be human?" Answer: to be humane.

Having a low Social attribute means that your character is, in fact, Less Human Than Human, regardless of biology. Imagine realizing *that* just after a Replicant sacrificed herself to save you from a spider-alien!

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

"Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?"

"No... they dream of Unicorns."

QUESTIONNAIRES

Basic Test Questions

What is your...

- *Name*
- *Occupation*
- *Greatest hope/dream*
- *Greatest fear/phobia*
- *Greatest hatred/enemy*
- *Greatest love/joy*
- *Fondest memory*

The questionnaires themselves are found in a separate document. Here's something by way of explanation.

We begin with seven basic questions that will serve to define your character. We call this the **Basic Test**.

The Basic Test side of the exam also contains your attribute ratings. Be sure to circle your choices (always start with C for Social, whether you plan on being a human or a Replicant).

On the reverse side, you will find the **Abstract Test**. These are the questions we see the Blade Runners administering in the film as part of the Voight-Kampff test. They are intentionally specific and off-putting, intended to provoke an emotional response.

Abstract Test Questions

- *A tortoise lays on its back, its belly baking in the hot sun beating its legs trying to turn itself over but it can't, not without your help, but you're not helping. Why is that?*
- *Describe in single words, only the good things that come in to your mind about: your mother.*
- *It's your birthday. Someone gives you a calfskin wallet.*
- *You've got a little boy. He shows you his butterfly collection plus the killing jar.*
- *You're watching television. Suddenly you realize there's a wasp crawling on your arm.*
- *You're reading a magazine. You come across a full-page nude photo of a girl. You show it to your husband. He likes it so much he hangs it on your bedroom wall.*
- *One more question. You're watching a stage play. A banquet is in progress. The guests are enjoying an appetizer of raw oysters. The entree consists of boiled dog.*

Using the Questionnaires: for the GM

The GM should use these questions (primarily the Abstract Test) to make a determination about the PCs' identity. Don't sweat this too much; for instance, if a player writes an amusing answer, maybe that means the character's sense of humor is authentically human. On the other hand, it could mean they're trying too hard to cover up their identity. Who knows? Only the tower will tell.

Replicants don't have the life-experience to react according to social norms. Example: Rachael fails the VK test when her reactions indicate that she feels more empathy for the raw oysters than the boiled dog.

When you read a questionnaire, decide the following for each PC:

- Human or Replicant?
- If Replicant, how many questions were suspect? Mark an X for each "wrong" question.

Don't mark up the questionnaires themselves, of course—the players get those back. Note your decisions for your eyes only.

- Example: Andrew (player) has finished his questionnaire, and handed it to Sarah, the GM. Sarah decides that two of Andrew's answers were too glib and off-the-cuff, and marks two Xs on a card marked "Andrew".

As GM, your decisions may be subverted in one of two ways:

- The player knocks down the tower and declares their own identity.
- The player has enough chips at the end of the game to "buy off" all of the Xs you marked (all of their incorrect answers on the Voight-Kampff).

.