MASCHINE ZEIT

A Machine Age Production

http://www.machineageproductions.com/

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Dedication: To my grandfather, my Opa. You're why I like science. You're why I write horror. Your passing was less than a month before the book's completion. I wished you could have seen this.

Alma Historia

Somewhere over Brazil, 2108 Thursday

If you don't keep running you have time to think.

You don't want to.

Rubber tubes as thick as torsos line the ceiling and hold the

wires and tubes that run through the station. Its veins and capillaries.

They pulse as decaying machines unattended gasp and die.

The wire mesh of the floors and the steel of the walls won't rust,

just enough moisture in the air to stain them, but not fully decay them.

The damage when half the station failed and fell out of orbit was

incredible and makes this ghost station a miracle.

Miracles can be terrible too.

We should never have come here.

Oil and lubricant should overpower the smell of rust, but scents

More terrible to contemplate overcome even the oil's thick coating.

If bloody decay smells terrible, the busted guts of a hundred rotted

Corpses that will not finish their path into oblivion could drop a

Man at twenty paces. The dead just won't leave.

There are things up there, echoes in static and weeping.

The agonies of death transformed into furies, punishing us for living.

A dozen spectral arms reach from holes in the floors it pull us apart.

The veins, the pulse of the station absorbs the spirits of those in

Limbo and the very mechanics of the place try to absorb us too.

If They're screaming through radio white noise and you start running again.

INTRODUCTION

The Machine Age. Let that sink in. The phrase implies many things, a new time, a time when priority is on the steel, the silicon and the plastic. Humans had their time, now it's time for them to step aside.

Maschine Zeit tells the story of the beginning of the Machine Age. Humanity is on its downswing, struggling to find a place in a world moving past it. It has to either advance and adapt, or become obsolete. The Machines of our story are not the traditional machines you are familiar with; they are hybrids of what once were human souls, meshed with the actuators, gears, cables, and pistons of ruined space stations. On one hand, they are a philosophical ideal, the man-machine. On the other, they are humanity's greatest nightmare.

Characters explore derelict space stations, floating at the edge of Earth's atmosphere. They're confronted by the unknown, specters that wander the halls timelessly. In Maschine Zeit, we're telling ghost stories on space stations.

Survival Horror

The game at its very simplest is one of survival horror. The main characters are survivors trying to see the next dawn. For one reason or another, they are in the heart of danger, confronted at all sides by creatures they cannot hope to understand, creatures that can and will slaughter them if left unchecked.

The dramatic value of survival horror comes down to the characters and their interactions, though. It's been said that you never really know your friends until you see them when they're about to die. The characters in Maschine Zeit are at their most raw, their insides spilled out both literally and figuratively.

The Politics of Survival

The world is in turmoil, the world is looking towards a horizon that represents change, and nobody truly knows what role humanity will play after this change. Every decision is important; every choice could be a game changer, a world ender. In a world where nobody tolerates failure, success comes to those most willing to do what it takes to succeed. This willingness often means stepping over the backs of the innocent, or forging alliances with less-than-trustworthy groups. Showing weakness is a guaranteed path to failure, so is excessive hesitation.

If you're not moving forward, you're falling behind. If you're falling behind, you're as good as food for those ready to step ahead.

Futurepulp

Hard science fiction doesn't find a secure home in Maschine Zeit. Maschine Zeit is about the horror, the characters, and the situations, not the physics, chemistry, and other logistical concerns. Science needs to take a back seat any time characters, action and drama serve to benefit. We call this phenomenon "Futurepulp." It's an aesthetic; a default guideline to help when you're making decisions for your game.

Not only this, but the setting is what we like to call "low-tech in a high-tech world." While technology is far past modern understanding, the space stations that make up the default game setting don't allow use of most of that technology. Essentially, this builds a sort of 'retro future.'

Sometimes, ripping open the door to flee from the specter needs to happen. Thinking about the air pressure too much might end the character's story prematurely. Using the air pressure to add tension while the ghost charges until both the monster and the character fall through the abruptly opened door, that's Futurepulp. Seeing someone that fell out into space mouth his last words silently, having the survivors interpret the words coming out of his lips, that's Futurepulp.

An Artifact of the Times

We present the majority of this book "in-character." The goal is to set the stage, to offer you props, and to give you the foundations of a plot, so you the Director, along with your Cast, can tell an amazing story.

Also, you'll find that we lean away from 'canon.' We aren't building a full and complete world for your digestion. We offer hints, bits and pieces. It's your job to fill in the blanks,
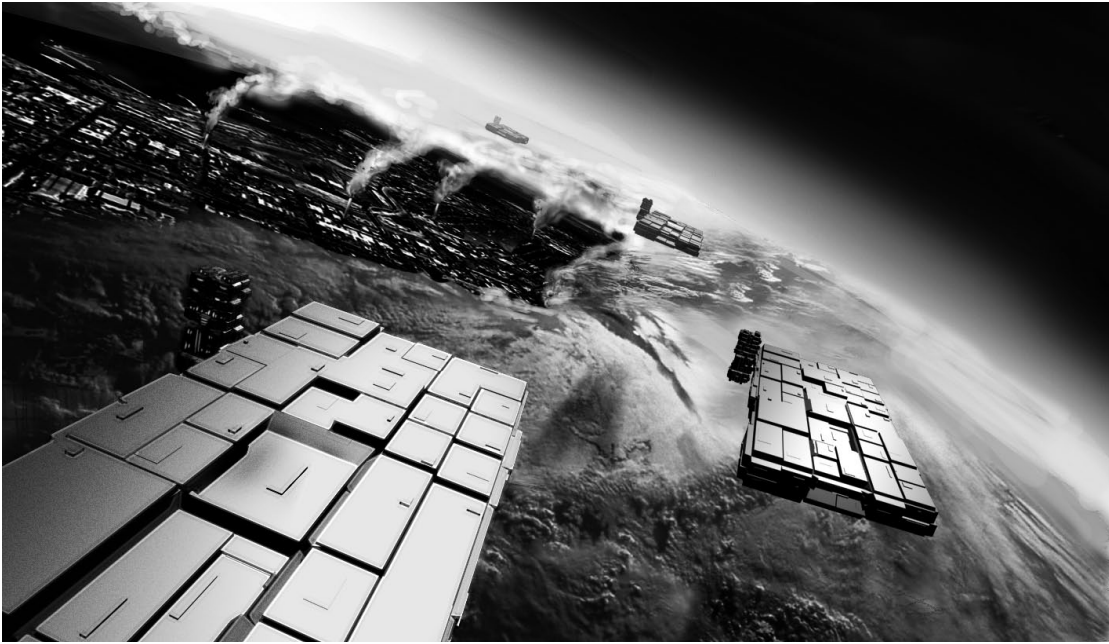
to personalize the game world to accommodate the game you want to play. There are no right answers. There's no truth besides the truth you bring to your game. The goal is to inspire you, to offer motivations for stories. You're telling the stories, we're not.

In order to facilitate this, we'll get some basic game terms out of the way first.

Glossary of Game Terms

Dice: Maschine Zeit uses dice, particularly ten-sided dice. The Cast and Director use dice to resolve situations where random chance and skill come in to play. Almost every situation calling for dice call for two ten-sided dice, ideally of different color or markings, used to generate a number between one and one-hundred. The first die determines the 'tens' digit. The second determines the 'ones' digit. A result of 0 and 0 (or 10 and 10, depending on the dice you use,) represents one hundred, not zero.

Director: The Director is a player who brings to the table the seeds for the story, and portrays any characters not portrayed by Players. The Director describes settings, and gives the Players a world with which to interact. In some games, a Director is unnecessary. That's described during Chapter Four.

Player: Everyone around the table that isn't a Director. Each Player has a single character that she portrays through the majority of the narrative.

Roleplaying Game: We'll leave this short. Either this is not your first roleplaying game, and we don't need to explain, or you're being introduced to Maschine Zeit by someone who has roleplayed before. They can give you a better description than any book can hope to. If that's insufficient, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roleplaying_game is a nice source of information on the topic. But it bears noting, Maschine Zeit leans more toward "story" than "rules," and is designed to be a primarily dramatic endeavor, as opposed to an exercise in strategy.

Scene: A scene is the basic unit of time in a game of Maschine Zeit. It's somewhat abstract, but frames an event of action. For example, it might be a chase scene, or a debate scene. As a rule of thumb, moving to another physical location changes scene. A new primary conflict often denotes another scene.

What You'll Find Within

Maschine Zeit is broken into four easy chapters.

Chapter One: Time and Turmoil

This chapter presents the world of Maschine Zeit, the world in 2110. Instead of offering a long series of facts, we present a timeline and a number of in-character pieces that build mood.

Chapter Two: Body and Breath

In this chapter, we discuss how to make a character to play in Maschine Zeit. It's a simple, step-by-step process.

Chapter Three: Gears and Guts

Here are the rules of play. This chapter comprises the lot of the system for resolving challenges and driving the game's drama.

Chapter Four: Fuel and Fear

Lastly, we address how to make Maschine Zeit yours. Much of this chapter is advice for a would-be Director, but can help anyone better build a game. It gives ideas for developing a story, as well as ideas for taking Maschine Zeit in other directions, ones not suggested by the basic material.

Inspirations

Maschine Zeit unapologetically draws inspiration from a number of sources. The game aims to emulate some of them, it draws a bit of sentiment and aesthetic from others. While we could go on all day, we'll instead focus on some primary inspirations.

Film

Alien: This is the first real "ghost story in space" film. Its existence is directly responsible for Maschine Zeit. From the Geiger art direction to the brutal character deaths at the hands of an unknown monster, this is exactly the feel we like to evoke.

Event Horizon: This one similarly shows very graphic and frightening events, in a place where the characters have nowhere else to go.

Evil Dead: This series can serve as a strong mood inspiration for a slightly less serious game. While it takes place in a cabin, the same feel remains. A bunch of people are somewhere they shouldn't be, being assaulted by things they really have no hope against. Also, Bruce Campbell.

Hellraiser: Things beyond understanding, but just at the edge of what we can relate to drive this story into very disturbing territory. There's a lot to be learned from Clive Barker's messed up little brain.

Pandorum: As far as we're concerned, this film tweaks the Alien model in the direction of Maschine Zeit. The monsters were once human. The action gets a bit over-the-top at times. Madness plays into what's occurring. It takes minimal set dressing and turns it into something to make a grown man quiver. Also, it shows what happens to people after a long period (often generations) of being removed from the world as we know it.

Video Games

Bioshock: This has a feel of immediacy and intensity we love for a good game of Maschine Zeit. Evoking panic is challenging, it does well.

Dead Space: This is a shoe-in. Space. Horror.

Silent Hill: Maschine Zeit's stations offer a bit of symbolism if you're interested. They can be a hell, they can be a purgatory. Silent Hill exemplifies symbolic horror.

Music

Chemlab – Oxidizer: A strong album from an amazing artist. This particular disc was the initial inspiration for many of the game's themes.

Scanalyzer – On the One and Zero: Instrumental, experimental, glitchy industrial music from the brains behind Sister Machine Gun and Christ Analog. It makes for outstanding background music, with plenty of machinery clanging and other odd noises in a particularly melodic fashion. Also, it's released under a Creative Commons license. So check it out. If you dig it, support the musicians.

That aside, we move in to Maschine Zeit. Enjoy.

Jason stood on the underside of the station. Tilting his head upwards, he gazed down toward earth as his radiation detector scanned the area ahead. He had seen pictures of earth as a child but much of what his memories said was blue and green was now brown. His moment of nostalgia was shattered by the sound of mic feedback shrieking.

"Jason, comeback, comeback Jason."

Jason cringed and gritted his teeth. "Jesus Christ Hank, turn down your mic!"

"Sorry Jason, how's this?"

"I don't know, I can't tell if my ears are bleeding in this suit."

"We're making our way through the interior of the crew quarters now, anything interesting on the surface?"
"The scan hasn't picked anything up yet but I think- Whoa, hold on a second."

The monitor lit up and displayed signs of radiation thirteen yards ahead of his location. Jason smiled and switched his magnetic boots to walk. "I've got a reading and I'm heading to the location now. Looks like we have some irradiated aluminum."

"Sounds like money in the bank Jason, keep me posted."

Jason moved across the hull, securing his safety line with a cam rivet and carabiner every five yards. He had always thought the safety precaution was cumbersome and unnecessary during training. That was of course until they took him out on his first walk-about. That was when the realization sunk in that magnets were the only things keeping him from flying off into space or combusting in earth's atmosphere. The detector's indication light lit up when he reached his destination, and after a series of beeps the scanner confirmed his suspicions. He spotted a large patch of irradiated aluminum. Jason secured another cam a yard away from the site and began the extraction protocol.

Using the index finger of his utility glove, he marked the two by two yard square with a green A. Detaching a tow line from his suit, Jason secured it to the metal square. Jason switched his magnetic boots back to stationary and removed his cutting torch from its holster. Turning on the gas, Jason snapped his fingers together to ignite the lighter in the thumb of the utility glove. Lighting the torch, Jason began an L shaped cut. Jason reached the corner of his cut when Hanks voice roared along with the cries and shrieks of a thousand voices.

"Jason! For the love of God answer me!"

"Hank what the hell is-"

"Jason, this thing, this thing has got us held up in one of the cabins! This thing is huge it's-" A tremendous crash cut him off, followed by the unmistakable whine of rent metal.

"Oh dear god! It's here it's-"

Instinctively, he brought his hands up to his ears, only to clasp his hands around his helmet. The noise dissolved into static, then vanished. Jason stood frozen, then suddenly a giant cluster of wires ripped through the slit. The cluster arched, like a human arm grasping for him. Screaming, Jason deactivated his magnetic boots leaped from the station. His safety line let him free fall several feet before snagging. He laughed nervously as the thing grasped at nothing and then disappeared into the station. His laughter turned to screams as the thing took hold of the safety line, hauling him back toward the station's jagged maw.