

ALTERNATOR



MICROSHOCK: 1

Joshua A.C. Newman's

ALTERNATOR

Inspired by Richard K. Morgan's novel **Altered Carbon** and the video series of the same name, this experimental micro science fiction roleplaying game by **Joshua A.C. Newman**, designer of **Shock:Social Science Fiction** is about bodies and identity, economic inequality, and self-determination.

Alternator is part of the **xenoglyph project**, at patreon.com/joshua! Thanks to the xenophiliacs, this is the first of several developmental experiments leading to the production of **Shock:2.0**. [Join the Patreon](https://patreon.com/joshua) for playable sketches, science fiction art, stories, conlangs, and weird electronic music.

To play, you need:

- » 2 colors of dice, about 9 each.
- » At least one friend, up to maybe 5.
- » An hour or so.



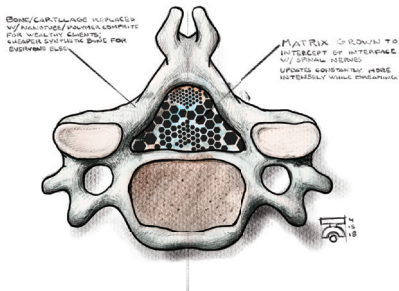
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Shock:

»IDisc

A technology that records all your life experiences, including your internal ones. It's a digital device installed into your first cervical vertebra, right behind your skull. It can be uploaded, downloaded, duplicated, transmitted, and stored like any other digital media. It can't be read, though; to read it, you need to download yourself in a body and remember things. It does not replace the limbic system, brain, or other features of the human body — it casts your own life onto someone else's brain.



Issues:

» **Economic Inequality**

» **Identity**

Who has the resources to achieve bodily autonomy and can afford to choose to give or withhold consensual use of it? What happens to your sense of self — your identity — when it's disaggregated from your body under the pressures of economic inequality? Are you “you” when under the sway of your body's needs — needs designed to the specification of someone who holds your material existence in the palm of their perfectly-manicured hand?

2+players. One of you is the **revenant**. One is the **client**. Anyone else is **support**. If there are only two of you, the client is also support.

Revenant, you want to make the world better than the one you died in.

Client, you want the revenant to accomplish your own objective, whether or not it suits theirs.

Support, you want to portray support characters and the world in ways that make sense and look cool. You say how the **IDisc**, **Economic Inequality**, and **Identity** work in the world, including what is technically possible, legal, expensive, or difficult according to what serves the most powerful members of the society. When the revenant or client say something about them, tell them if you agree. If not, correct them.

Everyone, describe what anyone else can see, hear, feel, taste, smell, **but not what you intend, feel, or think until you make it obvious by your appearance or action.** Answer questions with observable details and **as the characters would answer**, given what they know and want the listener to hear.

Notice when the revenant takes one of the actions listed and point it out so they can roll. If they didn't mean it that way, they can take it back and say what they meant to do.

Revenant, you were a cyberpunk — a member of a minority with no money, no credit, on the wrong side of the law for the right reasons. You recorded your consciousness into an experimental bodymod called a **IDisc** installed at the top of your spine before you died in 2028. Your consciousness has been brought back using now-ubiquitous IDisc technology.

The client obtained the contents of your IDisc (“you”) and brought you back at great expense.

Now you owe them.

Client, why did you, with all your power, want to pay to bring back this dead punk? What’s so special about them? Decide on your objective and keep it secret from the revenant. Write it down if you need to, but don’t show anyone. If asked what you wrote down, lie.

Revenant, ask the client, “What year is it? Where am I?”

Client, tell them in a way that will get them to do what you want them to do.

Client, describe the body. Is it:

- » **Beautiful to you?** Describe it. **Revenant**, tell them how you respond as you discover your appearance.
- » **Strong?**
- » **Agile?**
- » **Specialized?** How is it modified? How are its mods apparent?
- » **Revenant**, does it feel like you see yourself?

Revenant, take one orange die for each spec that is true.

Revenant, ask the client: Why did you embody me? My:

- » **creativity?** If so, tell them what you invented, created, and built.
- » **violence?** If so, tell everyone who you hurt and how.
- » **cause?** If so, tell them what you fought for. Ask them what happened to your cause while you were dead.
- » **perception?** If so, ask them what you notice they're hiding from you.

Take one black die for each true identity.

Revenant, you owed someone else before you died last time, too. They might be how you got dead. Tell everyone who it was. **Ask the client**, "Did they put you up to this?" **Client**, answer them, "Certainly not."

You miss someone. Tell everyone who it is, since they know your history anyway.

Support, confer among yourselves and the client **as you play** to figure out if/how they're connected.

Ask the client and the revenant to describe what they each look like.

Client, tell the revenant what you want them to know about what you want them to do. Tell them in a way that will get them to do what you want. Tell them what you're paying them — are their basic expenses covered, as **normal**? Are you giving them a bonus so they feel like they've **hit it big**? Or are you magnanimously granting them **endless resources**? Whichever it is, you hold the purse strings throughout the game.

Revenant, say what you say and do. If you want the other players to know how you feel or what you want, do something to show them.

If you ever have no black dice left, you lose. You're not yourself, or anyone. You're just an employee.

If your IDisc gets destroyed, you die foreal. If you run out of black dice, your body dies and your IDisc is vulnerable to whoever can get their hands on it. If you die, you better make it over something good.

What's going on?

Support, whenever you want to know (like right now), ask the revenant:

- » Where are you?
- » What are you doing?
- » Who else is there?

Client, when you want to take an action that affects the revenant with your vast resources, ask support what you need to know and tell them what you want your agents to do.

Support, have those agents act according to what they want and the resources they have at their disposal.

Take Action

Revenant, when you **take action**, support tells you which they saw you do (see the list of actions at the end). Roll all the dice, then count every (6+) as a **hit**. Count every (1-) as a **reveal**.

If your body or identity is **perfect** for the action you're taking, reduce the hit target by 1, making it 5+.

When you roll, count the hits:

- » **0 hits:** Support, tell the revenant which spec would have helped them. Revenant, if you accept it, tell everyone which identity stopped mattering to you just now, then put all dice from that identity onto that spec (up to maximum), then get 1 hit. **If you refuse**, support or the client can hurt you.
- » **1 hit:** Pick one » consequence from the list for the action you took.
- » **2 hits:** Pick two consequences.
- » **3+hits:** flash back to any experience you've had before now. Support, tell them which one identity it demonstrates. Revenant, add a black die for that identity.

Your body and your self

When orange hits outnumber black hits, you are alienated from this body. **If you reject it**, lose all dice from one spec, which is no longer effective. **If you accept it**, tell everyone which identity no longer matters to you and take away its dice.

Being hurt

When you're hurt, it's serious: compound fractures, gouged eyes, lost fingers. **Support** will tell you which spec you've lost. You can heal from those things, or replace your whole body with the technologies of the day. Then you'll get the spec back.

If you have no spec left, you're dead. **Client & support**, tell everyone what happened after.

Instead of hurting your body, client and support can hurt you by harming anything or anyone you care for.

Force the revenant's hand

If you threaten the revenant with harm and they take no action in immediate response, the harm just happens according to what support says makes sense.

Actions

Buy something

If it is on the black market and you've hit it big or have unlimited resources, tell support the spec of the thing you want, and they'll tell you what's available.

If you've hit it big and reveals outnumber hits, support can tell you if your resources are now normal if you buy it.

If your resources are normal and reveals outnumber hits support can tell you who and what you'd owe.

Look closely.

If you have time, reduce the hit target by 1.

For each reveal, the client or support can hide truth in another possibility.

- » Ask, "Who controls this situation?" Client or support: tell them.
- » Ask, "What weakness do I see?" Client or support, tell them.
- » Ask, "What did they think I'd miss?" Client or support, tell them.

Have sex with someone, give or accept a gift, or feed someone

If you're having sex, increase the reveal target by 1.

If you roll more reveals than hits, what they like is about your current body spec, not your identity. Turn one black die orange.

- » You don't reveal any more about yourself than you wanted to.
- » They devote themselves to you.
- » No one is jealous of your intimacy.

Do violence

If you roll more reveals than hits, support will tell you if they die or escape before telling you anything.

If you roll 0 hits, support will tell you what it cost to keep from losing your IDisc when your body died. You may accept those consequences to prevent your death.

If you have a weapon that's perfect for this situation, reduce your hit target by 1.

Strong and **Agile** specs each reduce the hit target by 1 when you're fighting hand-to-hand.

If support thinks your weapon is overkill, increase the reveal target by 1 or 2.

- » They give or tell you what you want, or you hurt them.
- » They don't succeed in making contact with their allies until later.
- » You don't get hurt.

Build or hack something

If you roll more reveals than hits:

and **your resources are normal**, ask support if the materials are more expensive than you can afford, and what you have to do first to get what you need.

or **you've hit it big**, ask if this will exhaust your resources, making your resources **normal**.

or **your resources are unlimited**, you have the resources for it, but the client will definitely notice.

» You finish it quickly.

» It works reliably. Otherwise, using it increases the reveal target by 1.

» It works great, reducing the hit target by 1.

Backup or embody your consciousness

Don't roll. It can be done from anywhere, and takes about 30 seconds of unconscious trance.

If you have normal resources, pay to lease a body as though you're buying.

If you've hit it big, you can lease a body with 2 specs of your choosing. You can also illegally dub your identity to another body. If you're caught, all dub IDiscs will be erased and the bodies leased or sold. You are imprisoned in VR

If your resources are unlimited, you can buy a body to your specification, and you can contract a backup your IDisc at will or on schedule, which will remember everything up to the moment the backup started. And maybe money can buy you out of the consequences of illegal dubs.

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