

WINDHAMMER PRIZE
FOR SHORT GAMEBOOK FICTION

Droidchangers: Fight or Die

AN ENTRY IN THE 2015 WINDHAMMER PRIZE FOR
SHORT GAMEBOOK FICTION

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[Datafile: Planet Chromaria]

[Chromaria is the eighth of nine planets in the Zirconian star system. Its surface temperatures, generally beneath 20-Z, are unsuitable for organic lifeforms. The planet circles its star at a rate of 453.7 planetary rotations per solar cycle, with one cycle equal to many years of time on planets closer to their stars. The planet's distance from its star renders incoming energy relatively minimal, although energy also emerges from the biomechanical supercomputer, Omicron Delta, which forms around 56% of the planetary core.]

[According to radiometric dating, Chromaria formed 6 billion cycles ago. Its lifeforms are silicon-based. Simple life emerged after 1 billion cycles, and complex life around 700 million cycles ago. Early lifeforms such as Mechasaur and Cabletrees were later joined by complex, sentient mechanical beings. Many species evolved the ability to form alternate or alt-modes, allowing rapid movement in one mode and manipulation of matter in the other. Depending on the definition used, intelligent mechanical life emerged on Chromaria somewhere between 200 and 100 million cycles ago. Early gatherers were partly displaced by urban mechanoids around 4000 cycles ago. Over hundreds of cycles, the smooth plains and forests were overshadowed by the emergence of hundreds of angular metallic cities.]

[In the Ancient era, city-states were self-contained polities, each rarely harbouring more than 10,000 mechanical beings. Constant inter-city warfare led to the deliberate biomechanical engineering of the first warrior robots. Around 2000 cycles ago, increasingly complex economic exchanges and frustration with inter-city warfare led to social transformations in many of the city-states, and the Syndical period began. Power was held by functionally differentiated guilds, united in the planetary Senate in Astropolis.]

[Around 500 cycles ago, remnants of the military class, frustrated with their political marginalisation and taking advantage of a temporary energy shortage, pushed for a more competitive economic model to raise energy productivity. Many cities withdrew from Senatorial control and resource extraction was increased unsustainably. 200 cycles ago, energy supplies reached crisis levels, with subterranean output seemingly stymied. The military faction proposed galactic colonisation to obtain energy, but this led to a conflict with industrial robots unhappy with exporting the planetary crisis. Tiring of such resistance, the military faction – now known by the name Dominoids – began to take control of cities and plunder their neighbours. Initially taken by surprise, other city-states rapidly organised through the remnants of the guilds to resist this new onslaught, developing a new generation of combat robots based on industrial body-types – the Factronoids. Thus began the global civil war.]

You look up from the data display.

“So, what's all this ancient history to me?”

Your cell commander, the scientist Recognitron, looks at you with barely-concealed disdain, the stare in his glowing red eyepiece as piercing as the silvery-blue protrusion of his alt-mode drillbit, right now pointing at you from the centre of his white-and-blue robotic chest.

“The cosmological and geopolitical context of the current situation indicates the intense strategic significance of our current opportunity”.

“In other words?” You have never understood the scientist's preference to use three words where one

will do.

"In other words, young comrade, this situation has significance beyond the current military situation. Significance, perhaps, to the continuation of the entire conflict."

"Look", you respond. "I was only activated a few cycles ago, but from what I've heard, this war has lasted, what – a couple of hundred cycles?"

"214, to be precise."

"Well, for as long as I've known, this planet has been a metallic wasteland. Most of the cities are in ruins. The war's eating up our energy faster than anyone can scavenge it. The Dominoids rule the skies, and we're left fighting a rearguard war from hidden bases like this one." You wave your arm to indicate the iron-grey interior, fluorescent glow-rods, and steel-plated worktables of the underground room in which you stand. "What makes you think anything's changing soon? If Erudor and his best warriors can't stop this war, what chance do we have? More likely, we'll both be burnt-out shells like so many of our friends – unless the planet itself shuts down first".

"Remember how your friend Wheedle's disappeared?"

How could you forget? The little green microbot – half your size but twice your adrenal fluid – was always getting into messes too big for his two-wheeled frame. He's been your best buddy since your first planetary cycle off the production line, and he hasn't signed in for days. Which, with Wheedle, could mean he'd finally bitten off too big a slice of aluminium – or that he's resting off a hangover at Crankmouth's Old Oilcan.

"Two rotations back, we received a corrupted data transmission over a secure channel. After prolonged restorative work, I have discovered that the message was sent by Wheedle. He was in flight from a trio of Hunter-planes near Octihex. According to his information, he has the Key."

Your expression looks like dull surprise, but inside you're feeling a mixture of excitement and suspicion.

"I thought the Key was a myth! I mean, nobody's been below the third level in my lifetime..."

"It may well be a myth, but the chance of reactivating Omicron Delta and obtaining energy reserves from the planetary core could be enough to win this war – or to end it. If Warlord Azathex has captured Wheedle, he will stop at nothing to extract the Key from his databanks. And if they obtain the Key ahead of us, the consequences could be catastrophic".

"Okay", you say. "So what's my orders?"

"I shall continue to attempt to recover the remainder of the message, in case it contains information on the whereabouts of the Key. At this stage, it is necessary to assume that Wheedle has been captured, and is under interrogation at Octihex. We lack sufficient mechpower to launch a full-scale assault on the city, but a single robot, such as yourself, may be able to penetrate the Dominoid defences and locate Wheedle. My calculations indicate that, of the available Factrobots, you have the highest probability of success – even without factoring in your special connection to your friend. Your mission is to infiltrate

Octihex, and rescue Wheedle. Failing this, you are to obtain the Key, either from Wheedle or by other means. If the situation permits, you are then to enter the arterial duct system beneath Octihex, and use the Key to reactivate Omicron Delta.”

Oh, is that all? Break into the heavily fortified Dominoid headquarters, break your friend out, and then somehow find your way through the underground pipelines criss-crossing the planetary interior, to find one of the access points where the mysterious Key might work – *if*, that is, the whole thing is more than another of Wheedle's tall tales.

Oh well, you think. I never did want to live forever.

Instructions: Your Character

Your character is a heroic Factronoid warrior-robot. Like other Factronoids, and their enemies, the Dominoids, you have the ability to shift between your humanoid robot mode and a vehicle alt-mode (or alternative mode).

Your first choice is which of the four alt-modes you wish your character to be: Truck, Car, Plane or Bike. Each model has its own advantages and disadvantages. The Car is a generalist unit with average speed, dexterity and strength. The Truck is a slow but strong unit with exceptional strength. The Bike is weak but extremely fast.

The Plane is the only base bodytype able to fly. As a Plane, you will often choose to skim close to the surface, or to walk. This is because enemy surveillance is more likely to detect high-flying objects. However, your flight ability will allow you to avoid certain ground-based hazards (e.g. rubble on the road), to fly up out of or down into chasms and pits, and to fight airborne opponents on their own turf.

Read the details on statistics and check the bodytype diagrams before making your choice. If you want to avoid using dice other than plain d6 (regular six-sided dice), choose the Car.

Speed Rating

Your speed rating determines how quickly you can travel (the lower it is, the faster you are). If your alt mode is a Plane or a Bike, your speed rating is 1 – you're light, but fast. If your alt mode is a Car, your speed rating is 2. If it is a Truck, your speed rating is 3 – you're slow, but tough.

When you travel, you will be told to add a multiplier of your speed rating. This means that you should **add to your time score** the number of your rating, multiplied by any multiplier. So if you have a speed rating of 2, and you are told to add 1x your speed rating, add 2 to your time score. If you have a speed rating of 3, and you are told to add 2x your speed rating, add 6 to your time score.

Energy

As a mechanical being, your functioning depends on sustaining a healthy amount of energy. You lose energy by fighting, moving, and certain other actions.

Deduct 1 energy for each round of combat fought, regardless of the outcome. This energy loss does not stem from wounding – it is the cost of the energy bolts you fire at adversaries. You can use additional

energy to make more powerful shots.

Travel also normally consumes energy, and you will be told as the adventure progresses how much energy to deduct for each transition between different areas.

Energy can also be used as a currency, to purchase items or information. Be careful how much of your life-supply you spend!

To determine your initial energy, roll 2d6, multiply by 10 and add 50 for a Truck, 30 for a Car or Plane, and 20 for a Bike (for a score somewhere between 40 and 170). This is your initial Energy score.

If your energy ever reaches zero, your body freezes up and locks in place, and your physical and mental processes come to a halt. Whether you are found by your friends or destroyed by your enemies, this means that your adventure is over.

Skill, Strength, Dexterity, Firepower and Defence

Your FIREPOWER statistic is your attack statistic in ranged battles. To determine this statistic, roll 1d6 and add 10. This is your competency with energy blasters and other ranged weapons.

Your STRENGTH statistic is your attack statistic in close combat. This statistic results from your bodytype, as follows:

Truck	Strength 17
Car	Strength 15
Bike or Plane	Strength 10

Your DEXTERITY statistic is your ability to perform feats of agility and speed. This statistic results from your bodytype, as follows:

Truck	Dexterity 5
Car or Plane	Dexterity 10
Bike	Dexterity 17

Your SKILL covers a range of situations involving problem-solving, spotting threats, manipulating objects and so on. To determine this statistic, roll 3d6 (for a result between 3 and 18).

Your base DEFENCE depends on your bodytype: Truck 21, Car or Plane 19, Bike 17. Your Defence is reduced by 1 every time a body area is reduced to 0 wounds.

Your TIME score starts at 0.

Specialisms

Every Factronoid agent is trained in particular specialist skills. Choose **one** of the following as your specialism:

Warrior: +2 firepower and +2 strength, up to a maximum of 18 each.

Gunner: +5 firepower, up to a maximum of 18.

Demolitions: you start the adventure with **three** Sticks of Dynamite, each of which will cause 5

automatic wounds when used in close combat. When you use this item, you also receive a wound yourself (rolled randomly on the body chart as usual).

Strategist: you may check ahead to view the consequences of **one** choice, **three times** during the adventure, before deciding on your course of action.]

Reconnaissance: you may check the first paragraphs of **any** choices of movement between locations (i.e. when a choice entails Time added and Energy lost).

Scout: +2 dexterity and +2 skill, up to a maximum of 18 each.

Programmer: +5 skill, up to a maximum of 18.

Espionage: +5 dexterity, up to a maximum of 18.

Engineer: double the charges of any special weapons you receive (e.g. if you receive a 2-charge Pulse Gun, it becomes a 4-charge Pulse Gun), and add 5 to your Firepower (up to a maximum of 18) when using special weapons.

Maintenance: if you suffer wounds to your arms, legs, head, wings, or wheels, roll 1d6. On a roll of 5-6, ignore the wound.

Communications: your extra sensory capabilities allow you to reroll any **three** Skill, Dexterity, Strength or Firepower checks of your choice (excluding combat rolls).

Medic: ability to self-repair. Before arrival at Octihex, you may choose at any time to repair wounds at a cost of +1 Time per wound. After arrival, you may repair **one** wound whenever you reach a section marked with a hash (#).

Combat Instructions

There are two kinds of combat in this book: long-range and close. Long-range combat uses the Firepower stat, close combat uses the Strength stat. While it should be obvious from the situation which is in use, a simple rule is: *conduct the combat in line with the stat provided for your opponent* (if they have a Strength stat, it's close; if they have a Firepower stat, it's ranged – either way, you use the same stat they do).

While you have different body areas which can be damaged, opponents only have Wounds. If you reduce their Wounds to 0, they will die or flee.

Combat is conducted as follows.

1. Decide whether to use any extra Energy on this attack (see below), and deduct the energy you use (1 point if you don't boost it).
2. Roll 1d6 and add your Firepower (in ranged combat) or Strength (in close combat). This is your Attack Total.
3. If your Attack Total is **greater than** the opponent's Defence statistic, you have wounded them – deduct 1 Wound from their total (or more if you boosted the attack).
4. Roll 1d6 and add your opponent's Firepower or Strength. This is their Attack Total.
5. If your opponent's Attack Total is **greater than** your Defence, you are wounded. Roll on your Bodytype sheet as to where you're wounded.

In addition, *a roll of 6 always hits and 1 always misses*, regardless of statistics.

If you wish, you may choose **before** making your attack roll to expend 2 or 3 energy instead of 1. If you do this, and the roll is successful, then you do as many wounds' worth of damage as you used energy points – 2 points' damage if you used 2 points, and so on. If you miss, the energy is lost.

Sometimes you may be instructed to roll defence against incoming fire or wounds from non-combat sources (such as colliding with an obstacle). In these cases, an attack stat (Strength or Firepower) will be given, but no Defence. Roll 1d6 and add it to your Defence; if the result is equal or higher than the attack stat, you have evaded the attack.

WOUNDS

Combat damage is determined by hits to different types of your body. If an opponent wins an attack round, roll dice to determine which area of your body is hit. If the body still has wounds (representing your metal skin plating or armour), reduce the number of wounds by 1. (Reroll any hits to areas already reduced to 0). When an area is reduced to 0 it is **damaged** and can no longer be used. Whenever an area becomes damaged, deduct 1 point from your current defence.

Hits to leg, wing and wheel areas impede movement. Wheel areas are those with wheel protrusions on the bodytype model.

For a Car, if **two** wheel areas are damaged, your Speed rating is doubled (from 2 to 4). If **three** wheel areas are damaged, you must switch to robot mode (with Speed rating of 5).

For a Plane, if **two** wing areas are damaged, your Speed rating is doubled (from 1 to 2). If **three** are damaged, you lose your ability to fly and must continue in robot mode (Speed rating 5). This also means that you cannot take advantage of flight options in the text.

For a Truck, damage to **four** of the eight wheel areas forces you to continue in robot mode (speed rating 5). For a Bike, damage to **one** wheel area doubles your speed rating to 2, and damage to both forces you to walk.

If you are in robot mode, and **three** of your leg areas are reduced to zero or **both** areas for a Bike or Plane, you are hobbling along at twice your usual speed (Speed rating 10). Also halve your Dexterity.

If both of your arm areas (all four for a Truck) are damaged, halve your current Firepower and Strength.

A successful hit to the head area, reducing its armour to 0, is a **killing shot** which instantly ends the adventure.

Print out a copy of the bodytype sheet for your character, and use it to record wounds – starting by writing 2 in each area, and deducting points for each injury. Remember to also reduce your Defence when an area is reduced to 0.

You also start with **five Emergency Patch-ups**, which can each be used at any time except during combat to repair 1 wound.

A Note on Datafiles

The encyclopedic chip attached in the ROM compartment of your cranial processing unit will provide detailed information on each of the locations you encounter – a process of literal factual recall which

largely replaces personal memory in the everyday processing of mechanoids.

A lot of effort has been put into worldbuilding using the datafiles, for the benefit of players interested in exploring the world in detail. These sections are included in [square brackets]. For those looking for a quicker, more action-oriented adventure, simply ignore these sections.

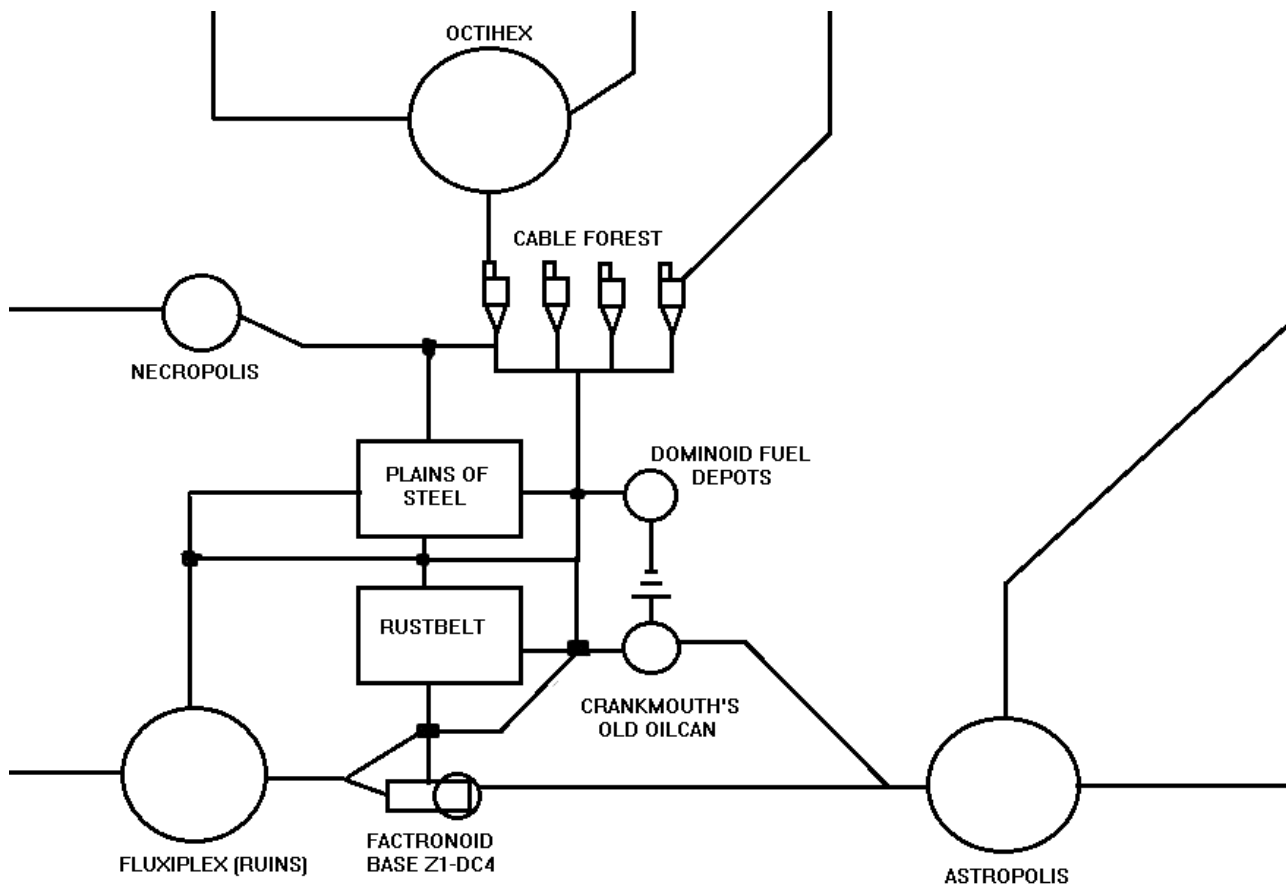


Fig. 10.31 Map of Zeta Epsilon sector and surrounding areas, Chromaria, ZC 4312

Mechanoids: Fight or Die

ACTION SHEET

BODYTYPE (select 1): Truck Car Plane Bike

Speed Rating:

Specialism:



FIREPOWER:

STRENGTH:

DEFENCE:

DEXTERITY:

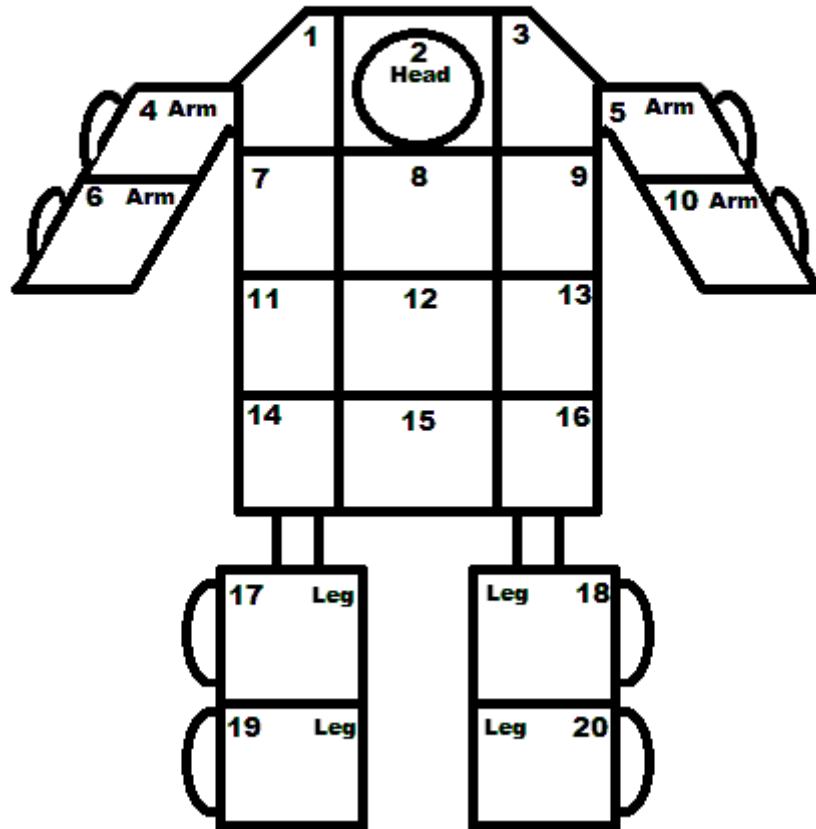
SKILL:

TIME:

Energy: *Original:*
Current:

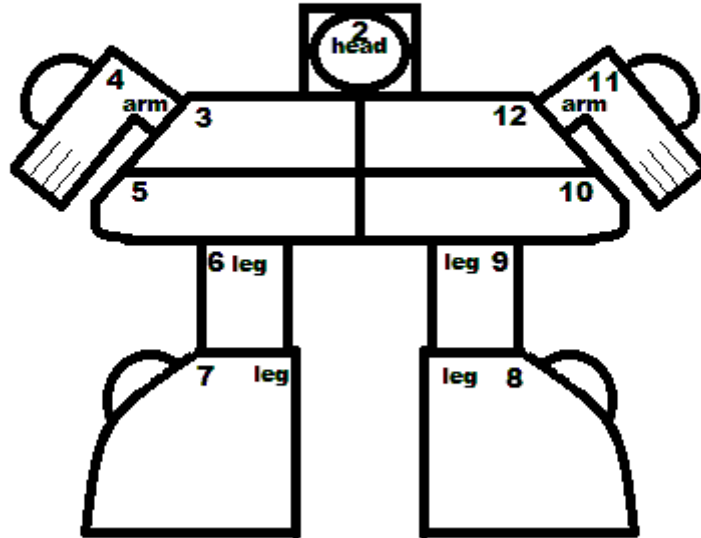
Items:

TRUCK BODYTYPE



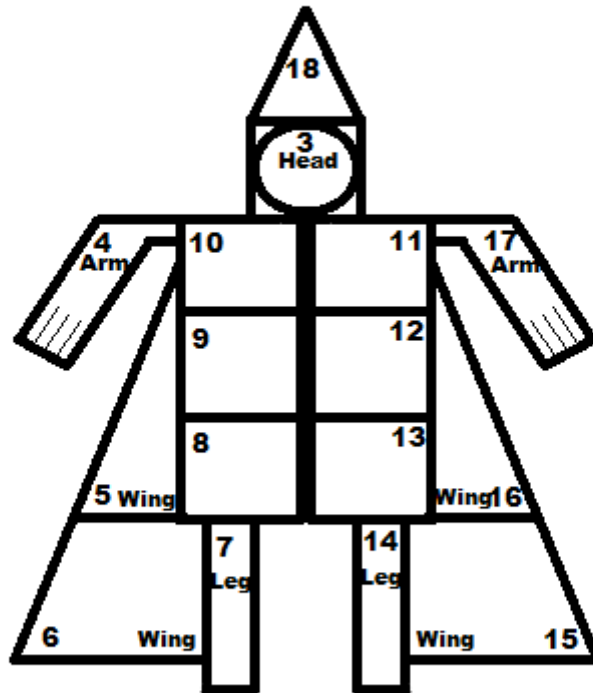
Roll 1d20 to wound. Each area starts with 2 wounds.

CAR BODYTYPE



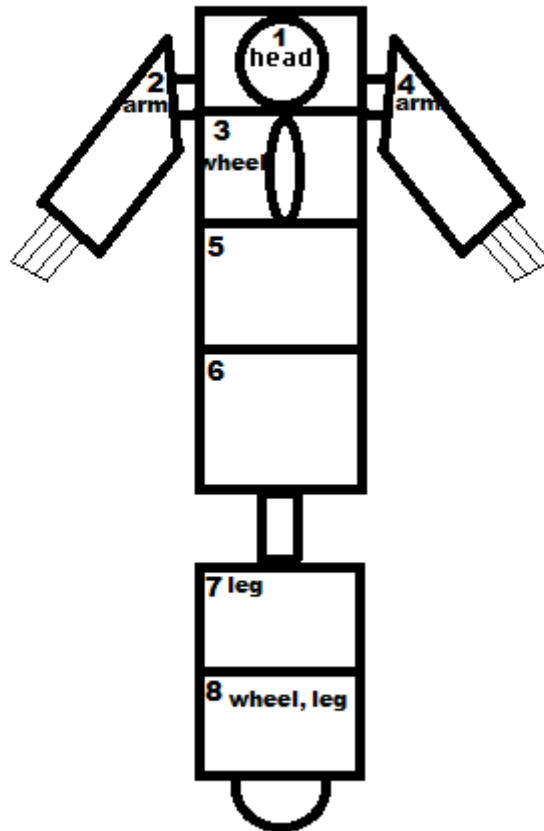
Roll 2d6 for wounds. Each area starts with 2 wounds.

PLANE BODYTYPE



Roll 3d6 for wounds. Each area starts with 2 wounds

BIKE BODYTYPE



1d8 to wound. Begins with 2 wounds in each area.

1

[Datafile: Factronoid base Z1-DC4]

[The superior airpower provided by their fleets of intelligent Hunter-plane units gives the Dominoids functional control on the planetary surface, although they are unable consistently to secure the territories occupied. Factronoid resistance cells have responded by moving underground – literally. The majority of Factronoid bases are small, housing a single fighting cell of between six and twenty operatives. They are concealed in the labyrinthine maze of tunnels below the planet's surface, or excavated beneath concealed openings in strategic positions.]

[Base Z1-DC4 is typical in this regard. Its entrance is concealed beneath the rubbish-heaps of Zeta-Epsilon district, on the outer rim of the ruins of the city of Fluxiplex. Like most underground bases, the small exterior door leads to a nondescript underground chamber, guarding a concealed access panel, undetectable by any of a regular mechanoid's 27 major senses. Transmission of the correct access code causes the panel to open. There are currently sixteen Factronoid operatives assigned to the unit, under the nominal command of the scientist Recognitron.]

In preparing for your mission, you equip yourself with a full supply of energy chips, your regular energy projector gun and energy sword, spare parts for repairs, and field equipment such as a screwdriver and wrench. You bid farewell to several other Factroids present on the base, exchanging morale-boosting words or gallows humour to offset the anxious rush of adrenal booster fluids preparing your mechanical body for action. Finally, you check in again with Recognitron for any further instructions.

“We cannot ascertain what difficulties you must navigate”, says the scientist with unusual candour, “but there are several strategic options available to you. The most direct route is to go as the steamhawk flies, traversing the ruins and the Plains of Steel, and navigating the Cable Forest to Octihex. Dominoid patrols and wild mechabeasts prowl the area, and my calculations provide a 63.7% prediction that this will be the most dangerous route. A second choice is to investigate the intervening area around the base for information or a means of access to the city. This may or may not be safer, and carries the additional hazard of consuming precious time, but it will likely turn up Wheedle if he is not in fact in Octihex. A third proposal is to head outward along the lateral meridian, and seek to reach our capital city of Astropolis. There, you may receive help from the greatest scientists and strategic planners of the Factronoid alliance, again at the cost of delaying your primary mission.”

What will you tell him is your plan?

If you say you intend to travel directly to Octihex, turn to **80**.

If you say you will search the surrounding area, turn to **48**

If you propose to travel to Astropolis, turn to **21**.

2

You wait until two of the stupid-looking guard units come by on patrol. (Roll 1d6 and divide by 2, rolling fractions down; if the number is higher than zero, add this figure to your Time).

“Hey! Knucklehead!”

Your insult draws the attention of the nearest guard. “Watch your rust-infested mouth, slagbot, or I’ll

come weld it shut – for good!”

“You couldn't hit a microbot with a moonbeam!”

Clearly raging now, the guard stomps over, deactivates the lock from the door panel, and storms into your cell, followed by his companion.

This is just what you wanted. The guards didn't know you still had weapons, and they certainly weren't expecting a fight.

First Dominoid Guard	Strength 15	Defence 19	Wounds 2
Second Dominoid Guard	Strength 16	Defence 20	Wounds 3

Each turn, roll for your own attack against an opponent of your choice. Then roll attacks for *both* of your opponents in turn.

If you manage to deactivate both of the guards, you leave them lying in the cell, and prudently lock it from the far side.

Go to **52**.

3

You sit and watch as the massive tank unit beats the smaller Microbot with his club, ignoring his pleas for mercy. After some time, he kicks away the Microbot's body – which looks alive, but barely – and storms out of the bar. You hear him switch to tank mode, take some pot-shots at the landscape, and drive off towards Octihex.

Not my fight, you remind yourself. Still, you feel a little less deserving of your Factronoid badge right now. *Add the codeword RAW.*

Now, return to **9** and make another choice.

4

Your area effect weapon cuts a swathe through the advancing swarm, leaving dozens of mechanical insects twitching on the desert floor. Shocked at the sudden defeat of their comrades, the rest of the swarm loses morale and panics. Many retreat back underground, pulling back the steel earth so it seems nothing was ever disturbed. Others flee into the plains, shrieking desperately.

Go to **94**.

5 #

You find yourself in the ancient undercity beneath the sewers of Octihex. Nothing lives down here besides mechanical rodents and small reptilian robots which scavenge nutrients from the dripping waste products which accumulate in puddles on the floor.

Just as you begin to relax your guard, an echo and a low moaning reverberates from a narrow side-tunnel up ahead. Slowly, shambling forward at half your own robot-mode speed, comes a horde of mechanical zombies, their sentient will extinguished by some long-gone computer virus. Most have

been reduced by time to a metallic skeleton from which hang plates of metal. They wield crowbars, chunks of metal and even their own severed limbs as handheld weapons.

Mechanical Zombies Strength 5 Defence 10 Wounds 12

The zombies are immune to pulse weapons, but a flamethrower blast will destroy the whole group. For each round of combat, roll 1d6. On a roll of 5-6, another zombie joins the fight – add 1 to the group's wounds and Strength.

If you survive the combat, go to **27**.

6

You peer around the edge of the wall and let off an energy blast towards the seeker. Surprised, it tries to dodge aside too late, and takes a blow to one of its wings. It lets out a screech of pain and anger as it adjusts its flight course to make a run on your position, crying: "Prepare to die screaming, Factronoid scum!" As you adjust yourself to dodge an energy blast from its weapons, it instead fires off a claw-like device attached to its underbelly, and you realise too late that it is carrying a Restraining Claw – a disabling device which prevents its victim from shifting to alt-mode. The claw closes around your shoulders and chest, locking itself in place and blocking the lever-joints necessary to shift form. **You cannot switch to your alt-mode until the claw is removed. Until this time, adjust your speed rating to 5 – walking speed.**

As you take another shot, the jet comes around again, firing its air-to-ground energy cannons at your position. Fight it as the usual way.

Hunter-Plane Firepower 19 Defence 20 Wounds 5

If you win the combat, you are faced with a dilemma.

You anticipate that news of the battle will quickly reach Octihex, and reinforcements are likely to come hunting. **You may not return to the Ruins of Fluxiplex, even if the text gives you an option to do so.**

If you wish to return to base to remove the claw, and to repair any battle wounds you have sustained, add 1x your speed rating (i.e. 5) and go to **62**.

If you wish to ignore the claw and use the Harvester unit to sneak into Octihex, make a 2d6 Skill check. If you are successful, you manage to hotwire the unit to accept your own electronic output as a remote command; go to **66**. If you are unsuccessful, the unit remains still, choose another option.

If you are low on energy, and wish to raid a Dominoid fuel depot, add 2x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **85**.

If you wish to head for the Plains of Steel, and possibly travel to Octihex, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **24**.

If you wish to travel to the Rustbelt, home of the down-and-outs and transit point to the Old Oilcan or Astropolis, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **73**.

7

Boosting your rear engines, you swing around and focus your targeting computer on the Hunters, and let off a burst of bright red energy from your underside cannon. The odds are stacked against you, but you trust your courage to see you through.

Hunter Plane 1	Firepower 17	Defence 20	Wounds 3
Hunter Plane 2	Firepower 18	Defence 20	Wounds 2

Fight this combat as usual, except that, in each turn, both enemies make attacks (to each one of yours).

If you're not destroyed, but lose the use of your wings, continue the battle at **98** (the Hunters do not recover any wounds they have already lost).

If you manage to defeat the Hunters, continue to Astropolis at **70**.

8

The guards drag you, cursing and struggling, into an open-air amphitheatre, slamming the barred door behind you. You are standing on a dented, rubble-strewn metal field. All around you, on raised tiers of seating and terraces, are row after row of Dominoid spectators in robot mode – gigantic tank units, executioner-hooded guards, microbot vassals, Hunter-planes with their batwings spread behind their heads like some monstrous cape, and units of a hundred unknown bodytypes, all bearing the Dominoid badge. Above and ahead of you, in a box by himself, stands the feared tyrant, Warlord Azathex himself!

You have been chosen for the Pit-fights, a cruel form of amusement in mockery of the gladiatorial duelling of the ancient world. In these fights, the Dominoids pit their prisoners against Dominoid warriors, wild beasts, and one another in brutal fights to the death, watching their captives fight and die for the sadistic enjoyment of Azathex and his minions.

Your energy-cuffs are barely deactivated when the first opponent is upon you – a massive Dominoid tankbot swinging a morningstar.

Dominoid Gladiator	Strength 18	Defence 20	Wounds 3
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If you kill the pit fighter, then you are faced with a dilemma as the guards drag out your next opponent – a fellow Factronoid warrior! This brown-plated truck unit sports the tell-tale insignia on his chest which marks him out as a former comrade.

If you fight the fellow Factronoid to save your own life, go to **59**.

If you refuse to fight, go to **97**.

If you wish to stage a daring attack on Warlord Azathex himself, go to **86**.

9

[Datafile: Crankmouth's Old Oilcan]

[Crankmouth's Old Oilcan is an energy bar, trading post and neutral zone run by the curmudgeonly former mechanic Crankmouth. This dark blue mechanoid with a truck bodytype and a permanently grumpy expression was known in the early cycles of the war for providing much-needed repairs to

combatants on both sides, as well as civilians. His reputation for neutrality, not to mention the quality of his oil cocktails, set him in good stead to set up a neutral bar catering to both sides – at the cost of damage from innumerable brawls. Its current location is underground in the literal as well as figurative sense, occupying a former storage complex about 500 mechlenghts outside the former Fluxiplex city limits.]

The dark, dingy interior of Crankmouth's Old Oilcan, sparsely lit by a few neon glowrods, feels as shady and dangerous as it always did. Mechanoids of a dozen types and factions line the bar, the arcade consoles along the walls, and the suitably concealed booths used for drinking, socialising and conducting business of a hundred illicit types. In the corner, a band of harmonoids – musically attuned robots who are few and far between in these warlike times – play a synthjazz number on their own bodyparts. This is the borderzone, the place where the factional boundaries don't apply, where factional insignia are left at the door – at least in principle.

The old man himself is busy serving oil drinks to the robots lining the bar, a finger-thick energy stick protruding from his mouth, slowly leaking gases. It takes awhile for him to even look at you, let alone pay attention to your queries – and of course, you'll have to buy something first. (If this is your first time reading this section, deduct 2 energy points to buy drinks).

Finally he gets round to your questions. “Wheedle, eh? Well, let me tell ya, young bot, I ain't been seeing that young hoodlum for, oh, ten rotations or more. Last he were in here, he were braggin' an' brayin' 'bout some silicon-suckin' project he got. Well, he say he got the hottest goss this side a' the standard longitude line, an' he be endin' the war an more. Well, I puts it down as fine bull talk an' all, but now I dare say he gone stuck those spindly hands o'his where they ain't welcome, an' reaped the worst.”

You speak to a few of the other mechanoids, but those who've even heard of Wheedle tell much the same story. There's no leads for you here.

Before you leave the bar, would you like to:

Listen to the music and relax awhile? Turn to **41**.

Trade with one of the underground dealers hanging out in the shadier corners of the room? Turn to **77**.

Play an arcade game? Turn to **96**.

If you are ready to leave, then would you like to:

Pay a visit to the Rustbelt, home of the down-and-outs? Add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy, and turn to **73**.

Head directly to the Plains of Steel? Add 2x your speed rating, deduct 4 energy, and turn to **24**.

Skirt the Plains of Steel and head directly for the Cable Forest? Add 3x your speed rating, deduct 6 energy, and turn to **83**.

Return to base to repair any wounds or other impairments? Add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy, and go to **62**.

Seek help from the Factronoid leadership at Astropolis? Add 2x your speed rating, deduct 4 energy, and go to **39**.

10

If you possess a Restraining Claw and wish to use it, the claw will short-circuit the bars, allowing you to escape. However, you cannot retrieve the claw; delete it from your Action Sheet if you use it here.

If you possess a vial of Acid, you can throw it through the bars, aiming for the control panel. If you wish to do this, roll 3d6. If you roll less than or equal to your Dexterity, you damage the panel and it short-circuits, causing several of the bars to raise to the ceiling. If you fail, the acid is wasted. Either way, delete it from your Action Sheet.

If you possess a Pulse Gun, you can use one of its shots to disable the bars.

If you have – and wish to use – any of these items, go to **52**.
Otherwise, return to **71** and choose another option.

11

You climb warily down the deserted staircase leading to the abandoned metro station. The route maps, staff booths, tube repair stations and even a few of the glowrods are still in working order. Descending manually down an escalator ramp which has long run out of power, you reach one of the platforms. The tubshafts are still in order, and one of the capsule-like, translucent tube canisters, used to convey mechanoids individually through the metro system, is parked conveniently at the entrance.

Before you can inspect the keypad, and access a destination, you hear a creaking behind you as several of the plating covers of the platform floor are ripped up. As you stare at the creatures advancing towards you, a flow of chemical excitants produce a feeling of rising fear in your chest cavity. These skeletal beings are the remains of mechanoids lost in the city, still controlled by whatever programming virus killed their minds many cycles ago. Most have been reduced by time to little more than a steel endoskeleton with hydraulic limbs and a leering metal skull, though many have trailing fragments of outer plating and alt-mode attachments – wings, wheels, hinged plates. On the torn fragments of a battered chestplate which once belonged to a car bodytype, you can make out clearly a Factronoid insignia – and the bodyshape of an old comrade.

“No!” you scream. “You're dead!”

The zombies are immune to pulse weapons and other disruptors. However, a flamethrower will suffice to wipe out the entire group.

Mechanical Zombies Strength 5 Defence 10 Wounds 20

After each round of combat, roll 1d6. On a roll of 5-6, another zombie joins the fight – add 1 to the group's Wounds.

The zombies aren't strong, but they're tough and numerous – the greatest risk in this fight is running out of energy.

You may evade combat at any time by jumping off the platform into the abyss below; go to **15**.

If you fight off the zombies, go to **57**.

12

At last you stand alone at the rim of the pit. Looking over the edge, you see a steep drop to a lake of blood-red molten metal, in which living and dead mechanoids, as well as heaps of rubble and debris, slowly melt. If the Dominoids tired of your friend Wheedle, it is possible he was thrown into this pit –

but if so, will he still be alive down there?

If you have a functioning Plane alt-mode, a Jetpack, or a Hydraulic Rope, you can climb down into the pit without risking immersing yourself. If you do this, go to **43**.

Otherwise, the only way into the pit is simply to jump in yourself. If you choose to take this risk, go to **74**.

Alternatively, if you have not already done so, you can visit the prison area and search for your friend there; go to **52**.

Or you can follow the signs to the Dominoid headquarters, and seek revenge on their ruler, Warlord Azathex – go to **37**.

If you feel ready to head underground and search for the supercomputer, Omicron Delta, go to **63**.

13

The tube capsule speeds along for some time (add 1 Time), following a route which goes downward and downward, past the sewage ducts and undercity foundations, into the bowels of the planet. Finally it stops, tipping you unceremoniously into a wide underground pipeway. The pipeway stretches on downwards into the darkness, and you have to switch your headlights to full to see anything ahead. You consider returning to Necropolis, but the tube capsule has already sped off behind you, and there are no control panels down here. In fact, you are surprised this location is even a stop on the tubelift system at all. With little choice left to you, you continue down the passageway into the planet's heart.

Go to **27**.

14

You pick your way through the undergrowth, avoiding the sounds of large predators and venomous creatures. As you push your way through a vine forest, however, you make a potentially fatal mistake. Pushing past what you take to be a cablevine, your oil runs cold as you feel it wrap itself around your wrist, and you find yourself face to face with a constrictor, its body as thick as your arm. You must fight.

Cablesnake	Strength 13	Defence 18	Wounds 2
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For each round you fail to defeat the snake, its grip tightens – add 1 to its Strength at the start of each round after the first.

If you manage to throw off the jungle predator, go to **44**.

15

Down and down you fall, crashing through cables and wiring, slender steel pipes and flimsy floorboards. Finally you collide with the floor – making a soft landing on a bed of shredded metal fibres. Roll defence 3 times against Strength 18 for wounds received during the fall.

Groggily, you funnel your processing power to your CPU, turn on your headlights, and sit up. You are in a dark underground cavern lit by a distant lightbeam from above. You have landed in a fabricated nest, and around you are splinters from metallic eggs. Across the room is the den's owner – a white-steel metallic dinosaur with glowing green eyes. You have inadvertently destroyed the creature's brood, and must prepare to defend yourself – or at least give it the worst case of indigestion it's ever

had!

Raptonoid Strength 20 Defence 10 Wounds 3

If you defeat the creature, you leave the cavern through the only exit passage. Go to 5.

16

You flee back down the passageway, the lumbering hulks creaking along behind you. Darting up a side passage, you wait to make sure the creatures are still following, and lead them on a merry chase around a maze of side tunnels and aqueducts.

Roll 3d6. If the number is less than or equal to your Skill, you manage to lose the guardians and double back to the antechamber. Go to 84.

If the number is greater than your Skill, you fail to lose the guardians. Go to 78, but proceed to close combat immediately (you may still use the fighting retreat technique).

17

At last, you have reached the inner sanctum of the Factronoid leadership. The aged, grey-plated mechanoid Erudor, his cable beard scraping against the spaceship alt-mode prow which forms his chest, listens intently to your story.

“So, a Key to reactivate Omicron Delta.” He rubs his beard with his fingers. “I can see why Recognitron sent you to me. This could mean power beyond measure – for us, or for Azathex. I remember many cycles ago, we discovered information placing the Key in the Fluxiplex area – though we never found it. But can this Wheedle be trusted? Still, if he’s telling the truth and there *is* a way...”

Erudor paces for awhile, and considers the situation. “If Wheedle is in Octihex, the Dominoids will be using their force decryptors to access his memories and obtain the Key. Chances are, they have already broken through. You should waste no more time! But I can give you some help now. Should you reach the supercomputer, it is likely you will have to face Warlord Azathex himself. He seems all-powerful – but he can be hurt. For cycles now, we have been studying his weaknesses, and we have learnt that he has a fatal dependence. His superior power comes from his ability to destabilise and absorb the energy of surrounding molecules. This is dangerous to the substance of the planet itself – but it is easily disrupted. Here, take this.” He hands you a rod, small enough to store inside your chest cavity. “It’s a superior version of the atomic regulators which are sometimes used to stabilise atomic volcanoes. This one can be worn inside you, and should prevent Azathex from using his powers.”

Mark the **Superior Atomic Regulator** on your action sheet.

“You will need to enter Octihex to obtain the Key – if Wheedle is still alive. Intelligence files reveal that the easiest way to enter the city is to smuggle yourself in as cargo on one of the Harvester units used for mining and salvage operations. Be careful, as the Harvester will attempt to deposit you in the Slagpit – the pit of molten metal used to break down rocks, metals, and the bodies of mechanoids. Harvesters can be found at energy depots and mining sites. Alternatively, Octihex can be accessed through the underground tubelift system. Should you find access to the system, the nearest station is at location Gamma three seven five.” Note this code on your action sheet.

You are repaired and refuelled. Restore all wounds and restore your Energy to its original level.

"To save any further time, we are prepared to take the risk of deploying our experimental Projectile Travel System. You will travel coated inside a metal cocoon, in a rocket fired directly to your location. Our range does not reach as far as Octihex, but we can send you as far as the Plains of Steel if you wish."

This travel method will not cost further Time points when used.

If you ask to be sent to the Plains of Steel, go to **24**.

If you ask to be sent back to base, go to **62**.

If you ask to be sent to Crankmouth's Old Oil Can, go to **9**.

18

Treat the guards as a single enemy. If you wish to draw your energy blaster and exchange fire with the guards, their scores are:

Fuel Depot Guards Firepower 15 Defence 18 Wounds 4

If you wish to charge the guards, it will take two rounds to get into close combat (during which they may roll against you but not you against them; do not deduct energy). Their statistics then become:

Fuel Depot Guards Strength 8 Defence 12 Wounds 4

You may choose to surrender at any time. If you are fully damaged in more than half your body zones, you are captured. If you surrender or are captured, go to **56**.

If you manage to defeat the guards, go to **90**.

19

You come up with a cunning plan. Taking a piece of debris from the ground, you perch it on the electronic bars of an unoccupied cell. Then you let off a blaster shot, and quickly position yourself behind the door.

The piece of metal crashes to the ground, grabbing the attention of the two guards. With curses and shouts, they grab their rifles and pace down the corridor, looking for the source of the sound. While their backs are turned, you slip round the door and through the control room.

Roll 3d6.

If the number is greater than your Dexterity, the guards hear you, and call for reinforcements. You are hopelessly outnumbered, and soon recaptured. Roll 1d6. On a roll of 1-2, you are returned to your cell; turn to **71**. On a roll of 3-4, go to **8**. On a roll of 5-6, go to **55**.

Otherwise, you manage to leave the prison block.

If you wish to head for the overall control room and confront Azathex in person, go to **37**.

If you wish to head to the Slagpit, go to **34**.

If you wish to head underground, into the passage network leading to Omicron Delta, go to **63**.

20

The mystery city is not large, but, unlike most of the planet's architecture, it looks as if it is in perfect condition. It is built as a single giant block, with various towers rising from the single foundation. A nagging thought on the edge of your mind asks why someone has built a city like this, in the middle of nowhere, when the old cities still need so many repairs. But your curiosity overcomes your doubts, and you cross the plains towards the city.

You are exposed in the open when hidden gunports on the side of the city slide open, and missiles come streaking out towards you. You are blown off your feet, and stare up from a crater as an amazing process occurs. The giant city itself shifts form, the buildings sliding into place as arms and legs, cogs and gears shifting as it switches to its alt mode – a gigantic mechasaur, a hundred times your height. You are frozen in awe as the gigantic city-mechanoid opens fire once more, and your adventure is at an end.

21

"I can understand your hesitancy", says the scientist, "but the route to Astropolis is itself a long and dangerous one. If you make it to the city, you may find information on how to enter Octihex, or even on how to defeat Warlord Azathex himself. But take care, for what you will gain in information, you may lose in expended time. In this time of hostilities, you will need a pass code to enter the subterranean parts of the city in which the Factronoid leadership is based. I am the only member of this unit authorised to know the code, but extraordinary circumstances require extraordinary measures. The code is Modus Alpha Three Zero."

Mark this code on your action sheet.

If you continue with the plan to travel to Astropolis, add 3x your speed rating, deduct 6 energy and go to **58**.

If you change your mind about the journey, and instead head for the nearby ruins of Fluxiplex, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy, and go to **68**.

If you change your mind and head for the derelict district known as the Rustbelt, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy go to **73**.

If you prefer to stop off at Crankmouth's Old Oilcan, which is en route to Astropolis, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **9**.

22

The tube capsule speeds through the pipes, images of other crisscrossing tubes blurring before your eyes. Occasionally the capsule stops and the pipes readjust around it, creaking into diagonal or even vertical positions for different stages of the journey. At last, you arrive at a small station – only a platform and doorway, really – with a sign marked MINE STATION. Following the tunnel which leads from the doorway, you find a large, hollowed-out cavern. At the far side, behind a gridded forcefield, several enslaved mechanoids, their hands and feet bound by purple energy shackles, swing picks at the wall, alongside huge mechanical digging apparatuses which take out sections of wall with a single swipe. The entire operation is commanded by a single Dominoid overseer unit, his light purple and white colour scheme standing out against the drab, ferric surrounds. He surveys the scene while checking a flat datapad attached to his right arm. On one of the walls is a small side-tunnel with a railed mineshaft leading upwards, on which there stands a minecart.

If you wish to sneak onto the minecart and hitch a lift to Octihex, go to **75**.

If you wish to attack the lone overseer, go to **91**.

23

You drive back some distance from the edge, and accelerate to your maximum speed. At full velocity, you launch from the edge of the gap, your optic sensors and willpower trained on the far platform. With rising panic, you realise almost right away that the jump is too far. Your front end is angling downwards, falling short of the target. With a deafening clang and a jolt of numbness, you collide head-on with the support post, leaving a dent in the post and a larger one in your frame. Your body involuntarily switches to robot mode as you plummet towards the ground below.

Your adventure ends here.

24

[Datafile: Plains of Steel]

[The Plains of Steel are one of many natural areas of Chromaria which have not succumbed to urbanisation or extractive industry. Somewhat off the main tracks of the freeway network and devoid of scarce mineral resources, the Plains remained in a state untouched by sentient mechanoids for thousands of cycles. Over the last 300 cycles, however, the Plains have suffered from pollution arising from fuel processing activities on the perimeter, and their previous mechanodiversity has declined. Processes of respeciation have generated new, mutant species of mechanical insects better able to survive in the damaged environment.]

Hundreds of mechlenghts to each side, the Plains of Steel stretch to the horizon, the flat plane of palely gleaming metal interrupted only by small naturally-formed mounds and mechanical vegetation. As you race across the surface, you reflect on the fact that these plains have been around long before Factronoids or Dominoids. You also keep your sensors alert for any sign of an ambush or a Hunter patrol.

Your detectors are pointed mainly upward and outward, and you are taken by surprise as the ground around you begins to rock and cave in. A steel beam juts out into your path, and as you swerve and shift form to avoid it, a mechanical pincer grabs onto your leg. Crawling from newly-formed holes in the ground are a swarm of giant mechanical insects of a hundred forms, their black and red bodies cruelly mutated by pollution. Some of them have grafted on limbs, talons and shielding from other mechanoids, and as you watch, a large mechanisect turns and rips apart a small one beside it, swallowing its shell but implanting the victim's forked claw onto its own forehead.

There must be hundreds of them, and they clearly see you as an energy snack!

If you are a Plane, you can simply lift off and avoid this danger. Continue to **94**.

Otherwise, if you have a Flamethrower or a Pulse Gun, and you wish to use it here, go to **4**.

If you wish to fight the swarm, go to **29**.

If you attempt to flee, go to **60**.

25

Whatever you try, the door to Omicron Delta will not open. You try hotwiring the control plate, smashing down the door with your fists, but nothing works. Finally, you collapse to the floor, defeated.

Despondently, you retrace your steps to the surface. You dread reporting your failure to Recognitron, especially as it probably means that the Dominoids now control Omicron Delta.

You have failed in your mission, and your adventure ends here.

26

You can see from here that the bars are electrically charged. As a warrior mechanoid, you are sure you could bend them, but you would risk damage to your hands.

Otherwise, the only way out is to bend the bars and risk an electric shock. You may attempt this as many times as you like (before, after or instead of using items), until/unless both your hands are damaged. For each attempt, roll as if being attacked at Strength 12 (i.e. roll 2d6 and add 12). If you fail to defend the roll, one of your hands (your choice) loses a wound. If you succeed, then make an attack roll using your Strength, against a defence of 20. If you succeed, you have bent the bars wide enough to squeeze through.

If you manage to escape by any of these means, go to 52.

If you do not wish to use any of these methods, give up trying, or are unable to continue, then you may either wait for the guards (go to 2), or wait and see what happens (go to 33).

27 #

The passageway continues downwards, and is joined by several more leading from above. You are entering the bowels of Chromaria, drawing closer and closer to the supercomputer at its core. As you travel downwards, the sewer-like architecture of the higher levels is replaced by more ancient metallic forms, many reflecting the careful design patterns of planetary antiquity. Computerised panels are replaced by levers and pulleys as the technological level imitates a descent into the planet's distant past.

Your many senses are alert for danger, but you are unaccustomed to antique defence techniques. Depressing an invisible weight-pad, you accidentally activate an age-old intruder device, and a gigantic axe-blade comes swinging towards you on an iron chain.

Roll 2d6 and add 6. If the result is greater than your Dexterity, suffer three randomised wounds.

If you survive, you continue downwards; go to 45.

28

As you continue through the winding, intermittently covered metallic streets, you get an eerie sense you are being watched. Nothing's picking up on any of your senses, but you continue warily. Your caution is well-placed, for a few moments later, a shape drops from above and attempts to impale you with its forked harpoon teeth. This winged, black-and-purple monstrosity is a Dominoid Arachanoid, which attacks with its cable-launched mandibles.

If you have the codeword BUG, you were anticipating an attack of this kind, and evade the first attack.

Otherwise, roll 3d6 against your Dexterity stat. If you fail, the Arachanoid pins you to the ground with its talons. Make attack rolls against both shoulderpoints (top and middle body points for Bike), and in addition, you cannot use special weapons (Flamethrower, Restraining Claw, etc) in this battle. In each combat round, in addition to the usual 1 energy expended, deduct another 1 energy for the vampiric draining effect of the creature's fangs.

Then roll your first attack on the Arachanoid. After your first attack, unless you have prevented it from doing so, it will shift to robot mode. If you possess a Restraining Claw and use it, you may retrieve it after this combat.

Arachanoid (winged spider mode)	Strength 9	Defence 12	Wounds 4
Arachanoid (robot mode)	Strength 15	Defence 15	Wounds 6 (minus any already taken)

If the Arachanoid manages to reduce at least half your armour areas to 0 (without scoring a killing shot), or if all your leg areas are reduced to 0 armour, you have been captured, and the Arachanoid knocks you unconscious and carries you back to Octihex. Add 2 time and then roll 1d6; on a roll of 1-2, turn to **55**; on a roll of 3, turn to **8**, on a roll of 4-6, turn to **71**.

If you defeat the metallic monstrosity, you realise there may be more of them around, and quickly leave the area.

You may not return to the Rustbelt, even if the text gives you an option to do so.

If you have been damaged, and wish to return to base for repairs, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **62**.

If you are low on energy, and wish to raid a Dominoid energy depot, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **85**.

If you wish to head for the Plains of Steel, and eventually Octihex, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **24**.

If you wish to explore deeper into the Ruins of Fluxiplex, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **68**.

If you wish to head for Crankmouth's Old Oil Can, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **9**.

29

You stand and face the horde of writhing, gibbering things which reach for you with claws, hooks, pincers, and antennae. Lashing out with your energy sword, you sever a limb here, a hydraulic mandible there, keeping the swarm back, stopping it from getting too close.

Mutant Mechanisect Swarm Strength 12 Defence 20 Wounds 10

The longer the combat lasts, the more insects come to join the fray. At the end of each round of combat, roll 1d6. On a roll of 5-6, another mutant joins the swarm – add 1 to the swarm's Strength and Wounds.

On a roll of 1, roll 3d6. If the number is greater than both your Strength and Dexterity, you slip and fall, plunging for an eternity before crashing into the floor below. Go to **15**.

If you manage to defeat the Swarm, go to **94**.

30

Quickly, you use your energy sword to rip apart one of the pipelines which carry molten metal and extracted chemicals from the pit. A gushing torrent of slag pours out, and you ignite it with your Flamethrower.

Screaming, "Reap the whirlwind!", you direct the flaming slag at the advancing guards, instantly melting their upper bodies. Then you turn the flood of death on other guards, the Harvester units, the surveillance towers, the Hunters circling overhead. More than a dozen Dominoids fall, some reduced

to burning heaps of metal, others crashing with holes in their wings or torsos. The survivors panic and run, leaving the Slagpit chamber entirely to you. Only the automated carts continue to operate, ignorant of your rage.

Not only have you defeated the guards, but you may now *ignore any further combats* in the Slagpit area, and *ignore any instructions regarding incoming fire*.

Go to **12**.

31

As you continue down the passage, you slip and fall in a small pool, several handlengths deep. Your internal regulation circuitry registers a sharp pain as a protruding object carves a gash in the metal plating of your leg.

Hauling yourself out of the pool, you inspect the wound and realise with horror that it has become infected. Tiny organisms resembling nuts and bolts have clamped themselves on the inside of the wound and are multiplying rapidly. Your memory banks quickly identify this as the onset of Mechanitis, a potentially fatal parasitic disease of the robotic nervous system, which will eventually spread to your brain and spine. Add the codeword NUT.

If you have the specialism Medic, or you possess a vial of Acid, go to **50**.
Otherwise, you have no choice but to continue down the passage. Go to **5**.

32

"Pick on someone your own size, slag-for-brains!"

OK, it's a cliché, and not quite true, but it gets the Dominoid's attention. He ignores the Microbot and charges at you with his club raised.

Armourcruncher (Dominoid bully) Strength 16 Defence 20 Wounds 3 (see below)

This enemy is strong, but worse for wear, and not interested in a serious fight. After you wound him three times, he will push you over and walk out.

If you win the battle, the watching mechanoids quickly lose interest and go back to their drinks. The Microbot expresses his gratitude, and rewards you with **5 energy chips**. You can use these to recharge your energy, or to buy something later.

Return to **9** and make another choice.

33

It is a long wait, and you amuse yourself by viewing holomovies stored in your flash memory. Roll 1d6 and all this number to your Time.

Finally, the guards come back for you. Grabbing you by the arms, they lead you away.

Roll 1d6. On a roll of 1-3, go to **55**. On a roll of 4-6, go to **8**.

34

You walk straight in the front door of the Slagpit – the facility where the Dominoids dispose of rubbish, melt down ore, and kill their enemies as painfully as possible. The centrepiece is a twenty-mechlength titanium pit, with a vertical drop into a lake of molten metal. A handful of guards patrol the perimeter, and occasionally, a batlike Hunter plane passes by overhead. Surveillance towers twice your height, each with an eye affixed to its front, swivel occasionally looking for interlopers like yourself. Pipelines all along the floor exude heat as they carry away the molten metal and other components. A constant flow of mining trucks and Harvester units drive to and fro, tipping their loads over the edge. Occasionally you hear a scream as a still-living mechanoid is deposited. More screams can be heard from the pit below, as living robots suffer a whole world of pain as they slowly dissolve into their component parts.

The security here is poor; after all, people are more likely to break out of the pit than into it. Still, you need a way past the surveillance towers if you're going to get to the pit.

If you have a Pulse Gun with at least 1 charge, go to **47**.

Otherwise, roll 2d6 and add 6. If the total is less than or equal to your Dexterity, you sneak close enough to get in range of the pit before you're spotted. Go to **95**.

If the total is greater than your dexterity, you are overwhelmed by guards. Go to **55**.

35

Wheedle has risked his life for the other Factronoids. *Can I do less*, you think.

With your friend's body held by the arm over one shoulder, you attempt to climb out of the Slagpit. In this position, you cannot use a Jetpack or switch to Plane alt-mode, and will have to climb out.

A successful climb requires a series of 5 successful Strength or Dexterity checks (your choice which), in successive order. If you have already attached a Hydraulic Rope, roll 3d6 each time, and add 2; if you have not used a rope, but have one in your possession, roll 2d6 and add 8; if you do not have a rope, you use your bare hands: roll 1d6 and add 14. If you fail any of these rolls, you slip back down into the pit. Roll defence against a single attack at 18 Strength each time you fall.

Unless you have been told otherwise, you also face incoming fire from the pit's guards. For each Dexterity or Strength roll, also roll defence against an incoming attack at Firepower 16.

If you reach the top of the pit, your initial elation at rescuing your friend is silenced by the realisation that his lifeforce has slipped away during the climb. The light has faded from his remaining eye, and with a sad heart, you leave his body at the rim of the pit. Robots cannot cry, but your grief for your friend is real enough nonetheless. You vow to avenge Wheedle, and make sure his death was not in vain by completing his mission and using the Key he gave you.

Turn to **89**.

36

Using your internal circuitry, you transfer the Key to Omicron Delta onto the antiquated portable media required by the ancient door. You insert the flimsy disk into the lock, and wait to see if it will open.

Now we find out if this code is worth the price we paid, you think, as the lock processes the data.

If you have the codeword NUT, go to **40**

If you do not have this, but you have any (or all) of the codewords BOT, BUD, GUT, or RAW, go to **76**.

If you have none of these codewords, but you have the codeword RIP, go to **69**.

If you have none of these codewords, turn to **53**.

37 #

The arrogance of the Dominoid leadership is such that there is little security along the route to the leader's headquarters. Anyone foolish enough to confront the mighty Azathex will be dealt with by the warlord himself. The closer you get to the warlord's quarters, the more the military-grey utilitarianism of the outer fortifications is replaced by opulent decoration inlaid with rare metals and gems. Finally you come to the leader's office, which is not even locked. As you approach, a terrified scribe leaves the room carrying a datapad, evidently relieved to have escaped with his life.

Readying your weapons, you enter the room and confront the leader of the Dominoids – either the bravest or the stupidest action of your adventure so far!

Azathex is head-and-shoulders taller than the largest Factronoid truck unit, his black, purple and red body bearing chest lasers, the tank treads on his arms and legs revealing his alt-mode as a gigantic tank. His horned head resembles the executioner-hood design of the Dominoid guards, with a glowing red eyeslit across the steel face, but the lower face is adorned with a helmet-mouthguard. His body flickers occasionally with sparks of energy being drawn in from some invisible source.

“You dare challenge Azathex?” he curses. I get stronger with every day. “You won't believe the things I can do now!”

Warlord Azathex (Robot Mode)	Firepower 20	Strength 20	Defence 24	Wounds 5
Warlord Azathex (Tank Mode)	Firepower 26	Strength 26	Defence 24	Wounds 5

The battle starts at range, but you can move to close combat if you wish in the second or any subsequent round. Azathex starts in robot mode, but will switch to tank mode in the third combat round unless you have a way to prevent him from doing so.

If you have an Atomic Regulator, deduct 2 from Azathex's Firepower, Strength and Defence in both modes. If you have a Superior Atomic Regulator, deduct 4 from his Firepower, Strength and Defence (these bonuses do not stack). Owing to his superior defence, a blast from a Flamethrower or Dynamite will only injure Azathex for 2 wounds. Attacks from an ordinary weapon will never do more than 1 wound (so energy boosting is pointless).

If you manage to destroy the evil warlord, well done – you have rid Chromaria of its greatest scourge, and scored a major victory in the global civil war. Add the codeword RIP to your action sheet.

If you have not done so already, you may search the prison complex for your friend Wheedle by turning to **52**.

Alternatively, you can look for him in the Slagpit by turning to **34**.

Or you can go underground and look for the supercomputer Omicron Delta. Turn to **63**.

38

From your position of cover, you aim the Pulse Gun at the Hunter. It doesn't even notice, its optic sensors focused on the Microbot. Your blast hits the Dominoid square in its underbelly, and electrical sparks dance across its surface. An explosion in its cockpit area indicates that its control circuits have blown out. Almost at once, it begins to drop to the ground, crashing into the body-thick girders of a once-mighty building. You've brought the Hunter down to earth – literally.

Go to **82**.

39

You speed onwards towards Astropolis. As you reach the last leg of your journey, you see a dark shadow against the sky, and something sinks in your chest. Hunter-planes! The Dominoid seek-and-destroy units must be targeting traffic along the freeway in the hopes of stopping Factronoid movements to and from Astropolis. This far from base, they must be low on energy, but they are still a formidable threat. There are two of them – one purple, one black – their switchback wings casting a bat-like shadow in the pale light, with energy cannons protruding beneath their maws. At two against one, this will not be an easy fight.

If you are a Plane, and you wish to dogfight the Dominoids, go to **7**.

If you wish to switch to robot mode and fight them from the ground, go to **79**.

If you are a Car, Bike or Truck, and attempt to outrun them, go to **98**.

If you wish to get off the road and hide, go to **88**.

40

As the doorway processes your access request, you feel a sharp stabbing pain at the top of your spine. Initially assuming a surprise attack, you try to spin around – but find that your legs and body have jammed up. Looking down, you realise that the Mechanitis infection has spread all the way up your body, and is even eating its way out through your armour plating. The door clicks open, but you lack the ability to move forward. After a few agonising moments of paralysis, the tiny metallic parasites eat through to your brain, and there is only oblivion.

Your adventure ends here.

41

You're just getting into this synthjazz set. A spindly, almost skeletal microbot vigorously pounds the keys of a harmonoid colleague in piano mode. Another bot, its forearm converted into a trumpet, exhales forcefully through her own arm. Still another, shifted into a violin from the waist down, merrily plays along with a silver bow held in his robotic left hand. The performance is almost hypnotic, and, try as you might, your mission begins to lose out in the battle for processing power inside your CPU.

“SLAG-MUNCHING RUST-GUZZLER!”

You're jarred back to your senses by the outcry as a large Dominoid tank unit throws a Microbot a third of his size to the ground, chair and all.

“I’LL TEACH YOU TO SHOW YOUR CABLE-SUCKING FACE TOO CLOSE TO ME!”

Even off-duty, many Dominoids are sadistic bullies. The Microbot's only crime is to have sat too close to this particular bully.

"No guns! No guns!" shouts Crankmouth as the tankbot pulls out a spiked club.

You eye up the Dominoid. He's big, a forearm taller than you, but he looks slow and stupid. His green-and-black colouring, for display rather than camouflage on this metallic planet, is specked here and there with rust. He doesn't have space in here to use his tank mode to good effect. His club is for beating defenceless victims, not for serious combat. You think you could take him on.

Are you going to try?

If you intervene, turn to **32**.

If you ignore the fight, turn to **3**.

42

There is no sign of mechanoids, alive or dead, inside the relay station. The computer terminals used for instant communication are dead, their cables ripped apart, though the machines themselves are intact. You pick up a few of the handheld communicators, but they are also dead.

You are about to give up your search when you notice a message cube lying on the ground. It is many hundreds of cycles since these objects, on which holographic messages are individually recorded and carried, have been in widespread use. They were rendered largely obsolete by the instantaneous communications developed in the late Syndical era. So what's this one doing here?

You pick it up and switch it on. It demands a passcode, but the obsolete encryption is easy to crack. As it fires up, it displays an image of a much younger version of the Factronoid strategist Erudor, without his distinctive cable beard.

"Greetings, Kryonix", he begins. "I apologise for the roundabout means of delivery, but I have reason to believe that Dominoid agents are bugging our telelinks. I have continued my studies of the Omicron Delta supercomputer as we discussed, and some remarkable information has come to light. As we suspected, the computer has control over energy emissions from the planetary core. Its recent inaccessibility is directly connected to the conflict in which we are caught. We were right in our guess that the supercomputer controlled the energy fluctuations from the core, but we have found evidence that the creature is sentient, and **** anger at our slippage towards warfare. According to ancient datafiles held in the museum here in Astropolis, only the pure of heart... *****" The image shakes and the message dissolves into white noise. After a few moments, it continues: "***** have hidden a codekey somewhere beneath Fluxiplex. I cannot exaggerate the importance of keeping this Key out of Dominoid hands. Please dispatch agents immediately to... *****"

No more of the message can be deciphered. Clearly the message cube was sent to a fellow scientist or collaborator, in the cycles before the outbreak of civil war. It never reached its destination, held up in Necroplex due to the city's implosion. It provides the first piece of decisive evidence that Wheedle may, indeed, have stumbled upon a Key to Omicron Delta.

Buoyed by your discovery, return to **99** and make another choice.

43

You hover or abseil down to the bottom of the pit, being sure to keep yourself well away from the deadly molten metal. The scene inside the pit is like a scene from hell. Everywhere, hunks of metal – some of them the remains of deceased mechanoids – are slowly melting into their component parts. Amongst the dead and the never-alive echo the screams of the dying – living mechanoids who have been thrown alive into the pit. As you watch, the head of a microbot sinks below the surface for the last time, leaving its arm trailing lifelessly like a seaborne buoy. A few survivors cling desperately to the side of the pit, keeping what little remains of their bodies out of contact with the molten smelt for the short time their strength holds. Their screams echo inside the vat like a vast, demonic echo chamber. Harvesters and mining carts regularly deposit fresh debris and bodies into the pit, causing lethal splashes of molten metal.

If your Time rating is more than 11 but less than 16, turn immediately to **61**.
Otherwise, turn to **81**.

44

Pushing through a clump of vines, at last you come face to face with your destination – the Dominoid walled city of Octihex. Across from you, across a killzone barely three meclengths wide, towers the iron wall of the fortress, topped with battlements manned by Dominoid guards. The executioner-hood faces of the guards stare impassively at the distant horizon as they clasp their energy rifles to their chests and shoulders.

You are close to one of the city's entrances, a vast mouthlike portal leading to the notorious Slagpit, where ores, detritus and living mechanoids are melted down for energy and components. Dozens of mechanoids, and convoys of mining carts and Harvester units, pass backwards and forwards through the gates, barely noticed by two guards on either side. After all, nobody just walks into the Slagpit; it's the last place anyone would *usually* want to be.

If you wish to walk nonchalantly through the gates, go to **34**.
If you hitch a ride in one of the vehicles, go to **66**.
If you surrender to the guards, hoping to find your friend in the prison area, go to **71**.

45

Finally, you reach an anteroom to the supercomputer Omicron Delta itself. The room is a vast ceilinged chamber, its tungsten walls unmarked by the passage of time. Cold statues of ancient heroes line the walls of the room. At the far side of the room, an access door with an antique floppy-disk key system marks the point of access to the computer. Between you and the door, there is only a long, smooth floor.

The room is not as unguarded as it looks, however. As you step over the threshold, the statues' eyes light up and the statues slowly crank into life. These ancient creatures look weaker than today's mechanoids, but appearances can be deceiving – they are basically lumps of metal, controlled by a tiny, instinctive processing unit to attack intruders.

If you wish to fight the guardians, turn to **78**.
If you try to lose the statues in the maze of underground passages, go to **16**.
If you wish to hide from the advancing robots under a manhole cover, turn to **72**.

46

You remain concealed behind the wall as the Microbot seeks cover in an abandoned warehouse. The Hunter is in close pursuit, blowing a hole in the warehouse wall with its energy cannons. The panicked Microbot doubles back, straight into the line of the Hunter's cannons. A blaze of purple light flares through its chest, followed by an explosion, and the Microbot collapses to the floor, a hole bigger than both your hands blown clean through its chest. The Harvester is on it in faster than a data request, extending its hydraulic claw to grasp the body and lift it into its mouthpit. This luckless mechanoid will feed the Dominoid war-machine with its metals and energy.

As the Harvester lumbers away, you try to convince yourself that you did the right thing by putting your mission first. **Add the codeword BOT.** You also become increasingly nervous around the looming, irregular architecture of the city. Observing such a killing first-hand must have corrupted your memory-files somehow. **You may not return to the Ruins of Fluxiplex, even if the text gives you an option to do so.**

Now, if you are low on energy, and wish to raid a Dominoid fuel depot, add 2x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **85**.

If you wish to head for the Plains of Steel, and possibly travel to Octihex, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **24**.

If you wish to travel to the Rustbelt, home of the down-and-outs and transit point to the Old Oilcan or Astropolis, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **73**.

47

You take steady aim at the surveillance tower which is monitoring the nearest approach route to the pit, and hit it with a blast of energy from the pulse gun. White sparks dance across its surface as it stops its periodic rotations.

It will not be long before guards respond to the deactivation of the tower. You act quickly, advancing in the shadow of a mining cart to the edge of the pit. You are almost to the brink before the guards spot you.

Go to **95**.

48

"A wise choice", the scientist responds, "though be sure not to procrastinate too long, and underestimate the urgency of your assignment. I would advise that you initiate your investigation at the Old Oilcan, lest your friend has been waylaid by his inner cyberdemons instead of the enemy. In the chaotic lands surrounding the ruined city of Fluxiplex, energy is generally used as a currency. To ensure that you do not expend your personal energy supply before you reach your goal, I shall provide you with specially prepared Energy Trading Chips."

Mark the **Energy Trading Chips** on your action sheet. They are worth a total of **30 energy**, which can be used to recharge yourself or to purchase goods and services. These are in addition to your personal maximum energy.

Finally, you raise the metal panel covering the entrance to the base antechamber, and step out onto the planetary surface. Heaps of metal plates and assorted garbage – including the barely-recognisable remains of mechanoids – stretch as far as the eye can see.

If you take Recognitron's advice and head for Crankmouth's Old Oldcan, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **9**.

If you instead prefer to search the Ruins of Fluxiplex, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy, and go to **68**.

If you head for the down-and-out district known as the Rustbelt, perhaps intending to buy information from the derelict mechanoids there, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy, and go to **73**.

If you change your mind and start the long trip to Astropolis, add 3x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **58**.

49

The guards look up from their game as you bust open the door. Their hood-like faceplates portray no emotion, but their body language speaks of surprise. They jump for their energy rifles as you open fire.

Dominoid Guards Firepower 15 Strength 14 Defence 21 Wounds 6

Treat the two guards as a single opponent. The first round is fought at long-range. At any time after this, you may switch to close combat if you wish. If the guards are still alive on the third round, and on every third round afterwards (6th, 9th, etc), there is a chance the sleeping guards will wake up. This will only happen once, and will lead to the addition of 2 points to each of the guards' statistics (Firepower, Strength, Defence and Wounds).

If you manage to defeat the guards, you leave the control room and find the whole base ahead of you! Tunnels lead off in all directions, but only a few are relevant to your interests.

If you wish to head for the Dominoid headquarters and confront Azathex in person, go to **37**.

If you wish to head to the Slagpit, go to **34**.

If you wish to head underground, into the passage network leading to Omicron Delta, go to **63**.

50

Quickly, you pull out some acid from your supplies, and pour it over the wound. You cringe with pain as the acid eats into the surrounding flesh. Reduce one of your Leg armour areas to 0 wounds.

You examine the wound, and see the dead remains of several of the tiny parasites. There is no sign that the infection has spread to surrounding areas, and you consider yourself healed – albeit in a painful and costly way.

Delete the codeword NUT and go to **5**.

51

After a few moments without an adequate answer, the creature's faceplate glows red.

Threat detected, drones the stupid machine. *Countermeasures activated*. It swings at you with its clawed fist.

Why, you wonder, does anyone still give autonomy to these blasted things? You're facing combat with an agent of your own side.

Guardian Unit Strength 25 Defence 23 Wounds 10

After two rounds, a Factronoid trooper, alerted by the sounds of battle, comes from a side passage and commands the Guardian to stop. The trooper, a red car-type mechanoid, listens to your story and agrees to escort you under guard to the Factronoid leadership. Go to **17**.

52

Now is your chance to look for Wheedle. Sharply aware of the eye-bobble minicams watching the corridors, you check each of the cells for your friend.

If your Time score is 11 or less, go to **64**.

If your Time score is greater than 11, go to **87**.

53

As the computer processes the keycode, you also sense a spiritual force probing your mind. You relive all your choices, the brave defence of your comrades, the mercy shown to enemies, the nights lost to enhanced oil and other intoxicants. To your delight, the lock clicks open as a whole series of tumblers retract into the wall. You pull at the door – a mechlenght-thick monstrosity designed to withstand forced entry – and it finally swings aside.

You enter the chamber – and are greeted with a scene of horror. At the centre of the room stands a golden neuronal meshwork which is clearly an access-point to the supercomputer itself. Strewn around the still-intact entity are chunks of debris from the collapsed ceiling and the bodies of Dominoid warriors. The panels around the walls have mostly been blown-out or smashed. Standing before you, an expression of fury on his red-horned face, is the Dominoid leader himself, Warlord Azathex, and one of his lieutenants, the black-and-white drilltank mechanoid Impaler. Despite the difference in colouring, Impaler's bodytype is a dead ringer for your own commander, Recognitron.

You brace yourself for an attack, but it doesn't come, as the gigantic tank-bot Azathex shrugs his tank-treaded shoulders. "It's no use, Factronoid", he bemoans. "The Key is useless. The computer is dead – it will not respond".

"Not to a Dominoid", you reply, the adrenal circuits of your anger spiked by the damage done here.

"Puny fool", curses Azathex. "I may not have Omicron Sigma, but I can still kill YOU!"

Warlord Azathex (Robot Mode)	Firepower 20	Strength 20	Defence 24	Wounds 5
Warlord Azathex (Tank Mode)	Firepower 26	Strength 26	Defence 24	Wounds 5
Impaler	Firepower 20	Strength 14	Defence 15	Wounds 3

The fight starts at range, but you may move to close combat if you wish for the third or subsequent rounds. Azathex starts in robot mode, but will switch to tank mode at the start of the third combat round unless you can prevent him from doing so.

If you have an Atomic Regulator, deduct 2 from Azathex's Firepower, Strength and Defence in both modes. If you have a Superior Atomic Regulator, deduct 4 from his Firepower, Strength and Defence (these bonuses do not stack). You may not use Dynamite so close to the supercomputer, but a blast from the Flamethrower will do both adversaries 2 wounds damage (not the usual 3-18). Attacks on Azathex with ordinary weapons only ever do 1 wound; energy boosting is ineffective here.

In each combat round against Azathex, roll defence against incoming fire from Impaler, who cleverly stays out of range. You may not attack Impaler until Azathex is reduced to 0 wounds; at this point you may immediately enter close combat with Impaler if you wish.

If you manage to defeat these formidable adversaries, go to **100**.

54

"We has good goss on yer friend Wheedle", croaks the lead mechanoid. "Arachanoid got 'im poleward of 'ere, out on the Plains. Must've 'ad sommit good, they 'ad whole mobs down 'ere, givin' good volts fer goss. Bought so much hustle so dear, but summun sold 'im out, I reckons."

It's bad news, but pretty much what you'd expected. You make a mental note to stay alert for the creepy Arachanoids, which use their aerial spider alt-modes to ambush the unwary. *Add the codeword BUG.*

"If yer 'eddin to Octi", said another, "yer might need some goss on the big boss too. I eard" - he continues despite dirty looks from the others - "I eard 'e got some kinda atom magic goin' on. Now, I canna tell ya 'ow it works, but I 'eard iffen yer jam it, well, 'e just a reglar bot, right?"

You make another mental note to keep your optic sensors open for anything which might disrupt any special powers Warlord Azathex might have over subatomic matter.

It's an open question whether the information was worth the price you paid, but at least you're a little wiser than you were before.

Go to **28**.

55

The guards march you unceremoniously to the Slagpit – the disposal point where the Dominoids kill their enemies, and innocent mechanoids, as cruelly as they can. You are shackled in energy cuffs which prevent you from shifting to your alt-mode, and which hold your hands in place behind your back. The guards drag you past surveillance towers, patrols of guards and moving minercarts and Harvester units, towards the pit at the centre of the room. For a moment, they dangle you over the edge – giving you time to take in the titanium cauldron, the crimson smelt of the pool itself, the dozen-mechlength drop, the screams of the dying mechanoids clinging to the sides of the pit, the melting bodies of the dead, and the sheer hopelessness of your situation. Then, they fling you over the side – your energy cuffs dissolving as they get out of range of the guards' controls.

One of the guards shouts down, "Die screaming, Factronoid scum!" before they wander off.

Go to **74**.

56

You are trussed with cable wire and dumped unceremoniously onto a fuel transport. "Give our greetings to Azathex!" sneers one of the guards as the automated transport carries you away across the Plains of Steel, to be picked up by more guards at the other end.

Add 2 to your Time, and roll 1d6. If you roll a 1, go to **8**. If you roll 2-3, go to **55**. If you roll 4-6, go to **71**.

57

Shaken by your encounter with the zombies, you proceed to examine the controls for the tube. To your disappointment, the panel showing the physical destinations has been torn off. All that remains is the underlying switchboard with the codes for destinations.

If you know a code for the tubelift system, now is the time to use it. Convert any letters in the code to numbers (A=1, B=2, etc), add these to any numbers in the code, and turn to that number. If the entry begins "The tube capsule" then you're at the right section.

Otherwise, you can try selecting locations at random – there are only thirty or so. Roll 2d6 and turn to the location which is the same as the two numbers (e.g. if the numbers rolled are 3 and 5, turn to 35). If the passage starts "The tube capsule", you've arrived somewhere interesting. If not, you've arrived at an abandoned or nondescript station or the tube has run up against a broken pipeline. Stop reading immediately, return to this section (57) and add 1 to your Time. You may try again as many times as you like.

If you have no code and don't want to press random numbers, or if you're fed up of trying to randomly find the right route, go back to 99 and choose a different option.

58

[The Great Highway System of Chromaria was initiated around 2500 cycles ago, though some sections did not reach completion until 1500 cycles ago. The system consisted of a planetary gridwork of raised metal runways connecting all the major cities and production hubs of the planet. Maintained by the Freeway Guild throughout the Syndical era, and later by private investors, the highways suffer from sabotage and neglect in the war era. It is a testament to ancient engineering that so many of them are still standing. Ground-based units of all allegiances or none continue to use the surviving freeways for inter-sectoral travel.]

If you are unable to switch to vehicle mode, you cannot attempt this route. Go back to 62 for repairs.

You feel something akin to exhilaration as you race along (or just above) the vast planetary freeway. You feel the wind against your sides, and see the cities and plains rushing by, all around and below you. While enjoying the moment, you keep your senses activated for ambushes and other hazards.

After travelling for some time, you encounter the first difficulty. One of the supporting columns has been blown out, leaving a hole in the freeway several mechlenghts wide.

If you are a Plane, or if you possess a Jetpack, you can easily cross the intervening distance; turn to 39. Otherwise, if you wish to give up and turn back, add 2x your speed rating and go to either 62 (base) or 9 (Crankmouth's Old Oil Can).

If you wish to attempt to jump the gap in Car, Truck or Bike mode, roll 3d6.

If the total is lower than or equal to your Dexterity, you barely make the jump and land on the other side, your tyres scraping a handslenght from the edge of the precipice. Relieved, you can continue your adventure at 39.

If the total is greater than your Dexterity, turn to 23.

59

The bulky truck unit lumbers towards you swinging the iron pole he has been given by his guards. He looks the worse for wear after prolonged Dominoid imprisonment, and you feel bad about slaying a fellow Factronoid. Still, your mission comes first.

Gatesmasher (Factronoid prisoner) Strength 18 Defence 18 Wounds 8

If you defeat your fellow prisoner, the crowd cheers ecstatically, and the guards lead you away. You can't help feeling that your honour as a Factronoid was harmed by killing one of your own, and you will not look at yourself the same way from now on. Add the codeword GUT to your action sheet, and go to 71.

60

You run – and after awhile, drive – as fast as you can, away from the monstrous swarm. Every time you accelerate, they match your speed. Every time you think you have lost them, there they are – advancing in your rear mirror. You race for the edge of the Plains, hoping the creatures will not follow you. But all around, insects dart ahead and grab for you with talons, stings, mandibles. The swarm are calling for more of their number, calling out the horrors from beneath the shimmering plains.

Multiply your Speed rating by 5 – this is the number of attacks you take before you are able to lose the swarm. For each attack, roll 2d6 and add 10 – this is the Strength of the mechanisects attacking you. Then roll for the attack and wounding as usual. If you lose enough wheel parts to be prevented from fleeing, you are overwhelmed and consumed by the swarm, and your limbs become part of their mutated cannibal bodies.

If you manage to outrun the swarm, go to 94.

61

A sudden sight jars you from your rising panic. There, dangling by his hands from a bar a few mechlenghts away, is your friend Wheedle. He is almost unrecognisable from last time you saw him. His legs and the bottom half of his torso are burnt away, and the cavity beneath his chest is trailing hydraulic cables and wiring. One of his arms is also burnt down to its cabling, his green plating is blackened in many places, and his face is a mess of leaked lubricant and broken wiring. Still, it is definitely Wheedle, and he is still alive – though barely.

As you shimmy across the intervening wall, carefully avoiding the sprays of molten metal from below, he turns his remaining eye to you.

“I never thought I'd see you again, old buddy!” he coughs.

“Easy, old pal. I'll get you out of here.”

“It's too late for me. But the Key... Azathex has the Key. The torture rooms... brute force attacks... memory...”

“Quiet”, you say. “We'll talk later – when we're out of here.”

“No”, he says. “The Key... you must take it...”

He slides a datachip from his battered head. Humouring him, you plug it into your own circuits. This is the data you were seeking. A detailed code of thousands of random symbols and numbers, beginning Alpha-Five-Seven-Delta-One.

“Now leave me”, he says. “Let the pool finish its work.”

If you do as he says, leave him here and climb out yourself, add the codeword BUD and turn to **81**.
If you wish to attempt to climb out, carrying your friend on your back, go to **35**.

62

Recognitron is surprised to see you back so soon. “Your reappearance is unexpected. Have you located Wheedle so promptly?”

No, you reply. You have suffered wounds which need repair, and did not dare go on without further support. Recognitron retrieves various surgical implements and a magnifier, and looks you over.

Restore your energy to its maximum level, and remove any wounds you have received so far from your action sheet.

If you have a **Restraining Claw** attached, Recognitron will remove it. Restore your speed rating to normal. The claw is still in working order, and if you wish, you may keep it for future use. Using the Restraining Claw is successful on a regular attack roll, and counts as a single combat move. It does no damage, but prevents the adversary from changing form for the duration of the combat.

Your mission is now more urgent than ever, and further delays risk failure. Once you are back in fighting shape, you waste no time in setting out once more.

If you wish to head for the Plains of Steel by way of the Ruins of Fluxiplex, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy, and go to **68**.

If you would prefer to pass through the Rustbelt, a district known for its down-and-outs, on the way to the Plains, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **73**.

If you head for the Plains via the Old Oilcan bar, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **9**.

63

#

There is only one way downwards from Octihex – and that’s through the sewers. Finding a maintenance shaft leading into the city’s support infrastructure, you pass bedraggled-looking Dominoid clean-up teams and carefully channelled rivers of liquid metal and used lubricant as you proceed downwards. The inrush of unsavoury chemicals is such that you temporarily deactivate your olfactory sensors to protect yourself from processing errors.

Why do I get all the dirty jobs?, you think to yourself.

As you continue downwards, the well-maintained upper infrastructure is replaced by the remnants of older systems. Waste products drip from the ceiling into rivulets and pools along the passage floor, and your footing becomes increasingly precarious.

Roll 1d6 and add 12. If the result is greater than your Dexterity, go to **31**.
If it is less or equal, then turn to **5**.

64

You're in luck. In a cell at the end of the corridor, battered but not broken, you find your friend Wheedle. He's in a worse condition than you've ever seen him – worse, even, than when he drank those twelve spiked oilcans in one sitting. One of his wheels is dislocated; his left arm is barely in its socket. But the worst damage is around his head. There are burn marks on and around his face, and one eye seems welded shut by leaked internal fluids. But he's cycling air, and still alive.

Hastily, you use the door panel to open the cell door. Wheedle looks up, and says your name. The beginnings of a smile appear in his lips.

“What a time to see you! My old bot, I think my reboot cycles are done this time. But, I have to tell...”

His exuberance is cut off by a racking cough, and black internal fluid spatters from his mouth down his chest.

“Easy, old pal. I'll get you out of here.”

“It's too late for me. Listen – Azathex has the Key. Three planetary rotations in the torture cells, running his brute force attacks on my memory files, and he finally got it. You need to get there first, beat him to the computer. Here, plug into my memory files.” A panel in his head-armour shoots over, revealing a plug-in data transfer point.

Reluctantly, you lift the end of a finger and insert the memory input plug into his transfer point. Memories rush into your mind – a chase through the undertunnels, a hasty encrypted message, ambush by a winged Arachanoid near the Rustbelt, painful aeons of mental probing at the hands of Azathex himself, with randomly generated symbols pounding at breakneck speed through your mind. There's no coherent pattern, just images and dataflows.

Finally, it's with you – the Key. A detailed code of thousands of random symbols and numbers, beginning Alpha-Five-Seven-Delta-One.

“Come on, old buddy”, you say, “I cannot – will not – leave you here. We have to get out of here, before they find us”.

You lead your hobbling friend out of the cell – just in time to see four guard units emerging from the far end of the corridor. One of them shouts a command, and they both open fire. Before you can react, Wheedle falls, a smoking hole in his chest. He tumbles to the ground, smoke pouring from his mouth.

Robots cannot cry. But there is no time to mourn, as the guards advance on you.

Dominoid Guards Firepower 15 Defence 21 Wounds 8

If you manage to defeat the guards, you leave the body of your friend, swearing to avenge him, and set off out of the detention area, determined to find a way down to Omicron Delta. Go to **92**.

65

As you trudge through a swampy patch, your senses distracted by the squawking of avians, you fail to notice a rustling in the zinc-bushes around you – until it's too late. A bulky mechanical creature, the weight of a truck-model mechanoid, comes crashing out of the undergrowth and throws you to the floor. Its red and black striped coloration disguises it amongst the flora of the forest, but its knife-sharp fangs are visible now! Let battle commence.

Metallitiger Strength 19 Defence 20 Wounds 3

If you wound the tiger three times, it will flee into the forest with a growl, disappearing out of sight.

You daren't use a Flamethrower in the dense forest, but if you have a Pulse Gun and wish to use it, it will paralyse the tiger for long enough for you to escape.

If you win the combat, go to **44**.

66

#

The cumbersome vehicle clanks along the debris-strewn terrain, all the way to Octihex. It passes under a vast, mouthlike entrance which leads through a huge tunnel, and comes out right into the place most mechanoids would least want to be.

This is the Slagpit, a multi-purpose melting pot in which the Dominoids melt down ore, debris, and their foes. You can see little from your hiding-place, but hear the clattering of other minecarts and Harvester units which are in constant traffic to and from the pit, and see the occasional shadow of a Hunter unit overhead.

As you get closer, the screams of the dying can be heard rising up from the pit below. Eventually, you venture a peek over the top of your hiding-place. This place is as terrifying and awe-inspiring as you expected. Occasional patrols of guards, their purple torsos topped by executioner-hood faceplates, pass by, looking more for escapees than break-ins. Surveillance turrets swivel periodically, taking in the scene. In the centre of the open-air chamber lies the pit itself – a titanium monstrosity descending to a lake of molten metal many meclengths down. And the vehicle in which you are travelling is programmed to deposit its contents right here!

If you wish to jump ship, go to **95**.

If you would prefer to wait to be dumped in the pit, perhaps hoping to find your friend there, go to **74**.

67

You walk into a former warehouse-supermarket. The shelves are empty, having been long ago stripped of their content by persons unknown. You try the fuel pipes, but they're as empty as a black hole. You are about to leave when a severed robotic hand catches your attention, lying on the floor near the payment processing units. As you are wondering whether to investigate further, it flips upright and jumps for your face!

Make a defence throw against the attack, at Strength 15. If the attack succeeds, you have received a direct head wound.

Shouting some binary gibberish, you rip the hand from your face and fling it away.

Return to **99** and make another choice.

68

[Datafile: Ruins of Fluxiplex]

[The city of Fluxiplex was once the main conduit for wireless electrical and fluid energy transmissions for the upper radial quadrant of Chromaria. At the time of its destruction, two cycles after the outbreak of civil war, the city had a population of 532,000 mechanoids, making it the largest city in the Zeta-Epsilon district and the fifth-largest in the upper radial quadrant. Two cycles into the war, Dominoid forces overran the city with overwhelming force, destroying most of its infrastructure. Today, the Ruins of Fluxiplex are a 50,000 square meclength wasteland with no significant economic, political or cultural features. An estimated 5,000 Microbots and other scavengers are believed to inhabit the underground and semi-ruined portions of the city, surviving through energy bunkering and gathering activities.]

The ruins of Fluxiplex are an urban wasteland, but for the last four cycles, they have been the closest you have to a home. You pick your way through iron rubble, torn-up metallic paving-stones and the steel mainframes of long-abandoned buildings. Zircorats dart for cover as you disturb their snacking on the remains of industrial equipment. Copper wiring still protrudes from the more inaccessible of the collapsed towers, too risky even for the desperate scavengers who inhabit the ruins. Here and there, torn posters and binary-code graffiti show signs of life in this wasteland. *Melt all Dominoids*, says one; *Stick your war in your exhaust pipe*, another. *Factroids = Dominoids = Slagfaces*, declares a glassy freestanding wall which may once have been a storefront. Sometimes you wonder if they're right – if in fighting your enemy for so long, you've become just like them.

Your reverie is interrupted by explosions to your right. Concealed by the electromagnetic disruption in the area, your sonar, radar, and radiowave senses had failed to pick up the approach of possible danger. Cursing your carelessness, you dive behind the long-rusted remains of an industrial elevator.

You soon realise that the danger is not to yourself. A small, battered Microbot, his blackened golden arm hanging from wires and his face a mess of electronics and lubricant, stumbles out of a ruined warehouse. Close behind him is a Dominoid Hunter-plane, its sleek shape, wings swept forward, looming darkly against the pale sky like some predatory bird, as its purple energy blasts scorch the ground. A few dozen meclengths behind lumbers a Harvester unit – the dreaded disposal units used by the Dominoids to gather the burnt-out husks of formerly living mechanoids to smelt down into components, its cuboid body fronted by a mouth-like pit and two extendable claws. You can tell from its movements that this unit is under the remote control of the Hunter.

You think twice about risking your mission by getting involved. After all, Hunter-planes are powerful adversaries, and their cruel persecution of the planet's unfortunates is a common enough occurrence. But your oath as a Factronoid requires you to protect the innocent, and this Harvester unit may be your ticket into Octihex.

If you wish to intervene, and you have a Plane alt-mode, go to **93**.

If you have a Pulse Gun, and wish to use it against the Hunter-plane, go to **38**.

If you have neither a Plane alt-mode nor a Pulse Gun, but still wish to attack the Hunter, go to **6**.

If you prefer to remain hidden and wait for the danger to pass, go to **46**.

69

As the computer processes the keycode, you also sense a spiritual force probing your mind. You relive all your choices, the brave defence of your comrades, the mercy shown to enemies, the nights lost to enhanced oil and other intoxicants. To your delight, the lock clicks open as a whole series of tumblers retract into the wall. You pull at the door – a mechlenth-thick monstrosity designed to withstand forced entry – and it finally swings aside.

You enter the most beautiful chamber you have ever seen. The walls of the chamber are a light metallic purple, with slender columns rising to the ceiling. Panels and control boards decorate the walls, their keys and monitors lighting up occasionally in shades of red and green. At the centre of the chamber is one of the interface points for the vast supercomputer Omicron Delta. It is a roughly orb-like meshwork of neuronal clusters, with energy constantly sparking along its connecting wires. The meshwork is suspended on a pipeline into the floor, which connects it to the vast underbelly and databanks of the planet-sized computer.

Go to **100**.

70

[Datafile: Astropolis]

[Astropolis is one of the oldest and most prestigious cities on the planet Chromaria. Located in the Epsilon-Centauri district of which it was formerly the capital, the city lies at the intersection of eleven major freeways. Founded by copper miners around 3,500 cycles ago, the city was one of the five largest polities of the Ancient era, with an estimated population of 15,000 mechanoids. During the Syndical era, Astropolis was chosen by popular vote as the location for the planetary Senate. The historic city's dome, a transparent gridwork ascending from the city limits to a high-point of 900 mechlenghts, was constructed around 1500 cycles ago. At its industrial height, the city had a population of over 4 million mechanoids, making it the largest city on the planet. Its geographical proximity to the Dominoid stronghold of Octihex put it in the firing line in the early cycles of the global civil war. However, the strategic, symbolic and economic importance of the city made it a focal point of early Factronoid resistance. Astropolis was able to hold out in open defiance of the Dominoids for 39 cycles. Today, the upper sections of the city are largely ruined, and the great dome is pocked with open holes. However, the city remains a focal site of Factronoid resistance. With a population of over 300,000 mechanoids inhabiting its undercity, Astropolis is the largest conurbation outside Dominoid control. The Factronoid strategic leadership live in a secret complex somewhere in or under the city.]

Still awed at the long-distance sight of the remnants of the giant dome, you walk along one of the entry routes leading to the undercity of Astropolis. This part of the underground is a maze of interconnecting passageways, some doubtless concealing hidden sensors to detect any Dominoid approach. You quickly find yourself in inhabited areas of the undercity, and turn off your headlights to conserve energy. The pipelike architecture, with clamped-down panels, intermittent glowrods and a ceiling an entire mechlenth above your head, reminds you of holograms you have seen of the lost cities of old. Further locked panels indicate entrances to residential areas, although few mechanoids are about on the streets, and none speak to you in passing. The most eventful moment of your journey is when you are nearly knocked down by a courier-robot, its car-like alt-mode hovering several handspans above the ground. Eventually, you find a talkative old mechanoid who points the way to the Factronoid headquarters.

After several reboot-cycles of walking, you finally locate a doorway marked with the Factronoid emblem. Nowhere else would this symbol be displayed on a building so prominently. You knock on the door and it shoots into the ceiling, leaving you face to face with a Guardian Unit – a semi-sentient drone used for basic security tasks. You've never previously encountered one of these massive, two-mechlengths-tall creatures, whose hydraulic claw-like hands and blank faceplates signify their purpose and simplicity. Golden in colour, they were most widely used during the brief competitive era before the start of the civil war, but this one has been refunctioned to guard an entrance to the undercity.

Password? it growls.

If you have a passcode, then take the *first letters* of any words in the title, convert these to numbers (A=1, B=2, etc), add any numbers in the code, and turn to this entry.

Otherwise, go to **51**.

71 #

Held in electric bindings of pure energy, and bent forward with your head to the ground, your frogmarch to the detention area feels like an eternity. Finally, you are thrown in a ramshackle cell. The guards – intimidating mechanoids with muscular purple torsos and executioner-hood faceplates – deposit you unceremoniously on the floor, before activating the lock to the side of the bars. They march off, leaving you unobserved.

The cell you are in is a small holding area, roughly two mechlengths in each direction. The walls are solid metal. There are no windows, and the only light comes through the row of glowing bars to the front of the cell. There is nobody in the cell opposite, and you can find no evidence of your friend Wheedle. The remnants of former inhabitants – a gear here, a bodily cable there – litter the floor, suggesting that some mechanoids have met their end here.

The guards do not obtain any items contained in your chest cavity, but if you possessed a Flamethrower and/or a Jetpack, they find and confiscate this; delete it from your Action Sheet.

Time I wasn't here, you think. To continue your quest, you need to get out of this cell.

If you have an item you wish to use to escape, go to **10**.

If you wish to attempt to break the bars, go to **26**.

If you wish to wait for the guards to return, and attack them in an attempt to escape, go to **2**.

If you would rather wait and see what happens, go to **33**.

72

You run down the corridor, dart into an alcove, rip aside an ancient manhole cover, and stuff yourself into the hole. You pull the cover over your head just as the guardians round the corner of the passageway, and activate all the sensor cloaking you have. You hear the guardians' heavy boots echo past you down the corridor – and away into the distance. You have lost them!

Go to **84**.

73

[Datafile: The Rustbelt]

[Originally a lightly-populated outer suburb of Fluxiplex, the area known today as the Rustbelt was one of the least damaged when the Dominoids destroyed the city in the early cycles of the civil war. A maze of underground tunnels and half-ruined multi-storey buildings provides an ideal environment for noncombatants seeking to evade the deprivations of Dominoid hunting squads. The Rustbelt initially attracted refugees from the remainder of Fluxiplex. The population of the area is difficult to calculate, but has been estimated as being at least 10,000, or twice the population of the main city. Most of its residents subsist through begging, illicit trade, or energy bunkering.]

The decayed environment of the Rustbelt, a maze of half-collapsed arcades and former residential complexes, at least has the advantage over much of Chromaria of being inhabited. While the area may be a danger to a casual visitor, none of its derelict residents are likely to risk tangling with a warrior mechanoid – and the area's sentiments are generally sympathetic to the Factronoid cause.

Whenever you attempt to navigate obstacles in robot mode, you are instantly beset by one or more derelicts, begging for energy. The word quickly gets out that you are looking to buy information on Wheedle and Octihex, and as you approach the city limits and the collapsed archway marking the exit to the Plain of Steel, you are accosted by a small group of down-and-outs, all of them the worse for wear from rust.

“Hey guvnor”, says one of them, “wanna buy goss? Only 10 chips for all.”

If you're prepared to pay for the information, and risk falling for a scam, deduct 10 energy and turn to **54**.

If you politely decline, continue on your way to **28**.

74

Down, down, down you fall for what feels like an eternity, but in reality is only a few short time-units. With a splash, you collide with the blood-red smelt, a searing pain running through your body. Despite your combat training, you let out a shriek as your armour begins to dissolve.

For each area on your body which is not already at 0 armour, roll an attack roll at Strength 18. If you lose the attack round, deduct one wound from this area. Repeat this for every part of your body.

If you survive your immersion in molten slag, you find yourself in a hellish scene. Around you is a vast pool of churning molten metal, with floating mounds of debris and ore slowly dissolving. Some of these mounds are the bodies of living or dead mechanoids. You notice a hand raised above the waterline, the last remains of an unfortunate microbot. The immense vat functions as an echochamber, and your sonic and radio receptors are overwhelmed by the echoing cries of the dying. Here and there, survivors, most missing limbs, faces or most of their bodies, cling to the sides of the vat for dear life. Splashes of searing liquid spray across the pool as Harvesters and minercarts deposit their loads. Occasionally the laughter of Dominoid guards or notaries, come to watch the torment, float down from the rim of the pit.

If this is your first visit to the Slagpit, and your Time rating is more than 10 but less than 15, turn immediately to **61**.

Otherwise, turn to **81**.

75

Waiting for the overseer to look the other way, you stealthily creep around the wall towards the cart.

Roll 3d6.

If the number rolled is less than or equal to your Dexterity, you manage to secrete yourself among the ore in the cart, which seems to be a mixture of ironrock and cobalt. Covering yourself with ore, you wait for the mining to finish (add 1 Time unit) and the cart to creak its way up the tunnel. Go to 66.

If the number is greater than your Dexterity, the overseer notices you and sounds an alarm. You are subdued by several guards and led away. Go to 71.

76

As the machine processes your entry code, you feel as if a spirit-force is penetrating into your mind, reading your memories, testing your convictions. You feel past experiences rush through your mind – times you have saved your comrades in battle, nights lost to enhanced oil and other intoxicants, choices to kill or spare your enemies. You find yourself questioning your loyalty to the Factronoid cause, and questioning the depths of your character-programming.

Finally, the lock spits out the disk, but the door does not open. You double-check the code several times, and even print out a second copy, but everything seems to be in order. You sense that it was the mental probe that doomed your attempt. You do not know if the machine has judged you and found you wanting, or if your own uncertainties about your convictions were the reason for the failure. Go to 25.

77

You approach a brown, boxlike mechanoid loitering in an alcove near the back of the room, a closed briefcase by his side. This is Hustle, one of dozens of black and grey market dealers who frequent the Oilcan and similar establishments, in return for small bribes to the management. Hustle turns his head your way, though it is hard to tell if he is looking at you through his reflective black eyeplate. His lower-helmet mouthpiece moves up and down as he talks.

“Whatcha lookin' for, bro?”

He eases open his silver briefcase, displaying various wares.

You may buy any of the following, either using any Energy Chips you have, or from your personal Energy supply. Be careful how much you spend – you'll need your energy for battles and travel later, although you may be able to steal more from the Dominoids. With the exception of Emergency Patch-ups, you may only buy **one** of each item in total (including over multiple visits).

Jetpack – allows you to fly for short distances. This does not allow effective aerial combat, but could save a long climb out of pits and ravines. **10 energy**

Emergency Booster – can be used during combat (in place of a regular move) to restore 10 energy. Cost: **15 energy**

Emergency Patch-up – can be used to repair 1 wound at any time, except during combat. **5 energy**

Pulse Gun – a small, concealable weapon which fires inbuilt electromagnetic energy in a wide wave at a target. Contains **2 uses**. Can be used in place of a regular attack to reduce enemy Firepower or Strength by 1, at no energy cost. Also has special uses. Cost: **20 energy**

Flamethrower – a large, shoulder-mounted weapon which fires lit propulsants at an enemy, causing 3-18 damage (3d6) to one or more ground-bound enemies. Also has special uses. This weapon has 1 charge. Cost: **20 energy**

Vial of Acid – can be used to burn through a small area of metal. **5 energy**.

Atomic Regulator – stabilises atomic matter in the event of instability. **5 energy**.

Hydraulic Rope – can be attached to handholds (manually or by lassoing), allowing an easier climb up or down steep gradients. Not lost on use. **5 energy**.

Targeting Scope: raises Firepower by 1. **20 energy**.

Plate Shielding: raises Defence by 1. **20 energy**.

When you are done trading, return to **9** and make another choice.

78

The statue guardians advance on you, seeking to punch you with their solid metal fists.

Animated Statues Strength 20 Defence 20 Wounds 4

For the first two rounds, roll using your Firepower as the creatures advance (they cannot retaliate). They will get into close combat range at the start of the second round. In this and subsequent rounds, you may choose to beat a fighting retreat. Instead of your attack roll, roll 2d6 and add 6; if the result is less than or equal to your Dexterity, you jump backwards. You may follow up with an attack using Firepower before the statues get back in range. If the number is greater than your Dexterity, roll for defence as usual. You may retreat like this as many times as you like. Otherwise, you may conduct the combat as usual using your Strength stat.

If you destroy the guardians, go to **84**.

79

Your gears crank into place as you shift to robot form and pull out your energy blaster. Your enemy has the advantage here: they can manoeuvre rapidly, while you're in the open, a sitting target.

Hunter Plane 1 Firepower 15 Defence 22 Wounds 3
Hunter Plane 2 Firepower 16 Defence 22 Wounds 2

The Hunters' defence is increased by their manoeuvrability.

During this fight, halve your Defence (rounding the number up) to reflect your exposed position. Fight this combat as usual, except that, in each turn, both enemies make attacks (to each one of yours).

If you win the combat, turn to **70**.

80

You declare that you plan to travel directly to Octihex. "Wheedle's life could depend on speed. And anyway, what's life without a bit of excitement?"

"I expected no less", replies the scientist. "Your impetuosity has always been a match for your acumen. In this circumstance, however, the direct approach may prove to be the most apt. You will, however, need additional assistance".

He quickly leads you to the armoury, and hands you an impressive-looking weapon – a red-hued cannon longer than your arm, with a storage tank, flayed at the business end, and welded to a power tank at the other. "It's the best weapon we have – an Iridium Flamethrower. This is the most important mission within living memory, so it is hardly logical to hold it back. Use it wisely – it has limited energy capability, and requires carbonised liquid fuel which is difficult to obtain."

Mark the **Flamethrower** on your action sheet, and also record that it has **three uses**. One use of the flamethrower can deal 3-18 damage (3d6) to a ground-bound opponent, and 3-18 damage to each opponent when fighting against a group. This counts as a combat turn (instead of a regular attack), and the Flamethrower may be used several times in the same combat. It may have other uses which will be revealed later in the adventure.

Finally, you raise the metal panel covering the entrance to the base antechamber, and step out onto the planetary surface. Heaps of metal plates and assorted garbage – including the barely-recognisable remains of mechanoids – stretch as far as the eye can see.

If you wish to head for the Plains of Steel by way of the Ruins of Fluxiplex, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy, and go to **68**.

If you would prefer to pass through the Rustbelt, a district known for its down-and-outs, on the way to the Plains, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy, and go to **73**.

If you change your mind, and stop off at Crankmouth's Old Oil Can for information, refreshments, black-market trade or a chance of finding Wheedle, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **9**.

If you change your mind and set off for Astropolis, even though this is a long detour, add 3x your time rating, deduct 6 energy and go to **58**.

81

I'm well and truly in it now, you think. You crawl as far as you can up the titanium rim of the pit, clinging to one of its support beams and shimmying up until your feet are out of range of the molten slag. Then you focus on formulating a plan to escape.

If you have a functioning Plane alt-mode (with at least two surviving wing spots) or a Jetpack, you can easily fly up to the surface.

Otherwise, you will have to climb out. A successful escape requires a sequence of 5 successful Dexterity or Strength checks (your choice which). If you are climbing with your bare hands, roll 1d6 and add 12. If you have a Hydraulic Rope in your possession, roll 2d6 and add 6. If you have already used a Hydraulic Rope to descend into the pit, you can use it to ascend again. In this case, roll 3d6 for each roll.

If you fail a roll at any point, you slip and fall back into the pit. Roll defence against a single attack at 18 Strength for damage done on impact.

Unless you have previously been told otherwise, your escape is also marred by incoming fire from guards around the rim of the pit. For each Dexterity or Strength check, also roll defence for an attack from above at Firepower 16.

If you successfully escape, go to **89**.

82

The microbot looks at you with astonishment – and then, without so much as a word, darts into a nearby doorway.

Searching the Hunter's remains, you discover a **Restraining Claw**, a powerful weapon which blocks an affected mechanoid's ability to shift into its alt-mode. Using the Restraining Claw is successful on a regular attack roll and counts as a single combat move. It does no damage, but prevents the adversary from changing form for the duration of the combat. The microbot you saved has wisely secreted himself among the ruins.

If you wish to use the Harvester unit to sneak into Octihex, roll 3d6. If the number rolled is less than or equal to your Skill, you manage to hotwire the unit to accept your own electronic output as a remote command; go to **66**. If you are unsuccessful, the unit remains still, choose another option.

You anticipate that news of the battle will quickly reach Octihex, and reinforcements are likely to come hunting. **You may not return to the Ruins of Fluxiplex, even if the text gives you an option to do so.**

If you were wounded in this or a previous fight, and wish to return to base for repairs, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 1 energy and go to **62**.

If you are low on energy, and wish to raid a Dominoid fuel depot, add 2x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **85**.

If you wish to head for the Plains of Steel, and possibly travel to Octihex, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **24**.

If you wish to travel to the Rustbelt, home of the down-and-outs and transit point to the Old Oilcan or Astropolis, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **73**.

83

[Datafile: The Cable Forest]

[Primeval forests have covered the poleward portions of Chromaria for roughly 2 billion cycles. These forests were the site of the emergence of many of the planet's surface-bound lifeforms. Harvesting of cabletrees for energy and metals led to deforestation beginning around 3000 cycles ago, escalating during the Syndical and especially the competitive eras. In the wartime era, forests have been utilised by both sides as complex terrain, covering troop movements and hidden facilities. This has led to occasional episodes of saturation bombing, which have defoliated large areas of militarily significant forest. However, the Cable Forest of Zeta-Epsilon region has largely escaped such attentions owing to the prevalence of large predators, which renders the forest unattractive for asymmetrical warfare purposes. Owing to its danger, the forest is treated as a natural defence against intruders by the Dominoid command in Octihex. The forest is home to at least 30,000 plant species, 371 large fauna

species, 2,100 aerial species and 200,000 invertebrate mechanoids.]

The sights, sounds, olfactory data and radio waves of the abundant forest environment overwhelm your sensory processing unit. As you push your way through cablevine patches and weave between cabletree columns barely a mechlenth apart, you are constantly aware of the twittering of avians, the buzz of tiny insectile mechanoids and the trickle of fluids dripping from the canopy above or running in rivulets cut into the steel floor. Every step echoes with the crack of heaps of mechorganic matter on the forest floor – mostly the plateleaves and hydraulic vines dropped by cabletrees, though you must also watch your footing for venomous cablesnakes and other dangerous creatures. Rapid travel in vehicle mode is unthinkable here, and you are forced to carefully navigate the environment in robot form.

Your inbuilt directional compass keeps you roughly on-target for Octihex, but your ability to scan for dangers is significantly impeded.

Roll 3d6.

If the result is greater than your Dexterity, go to **65**.

If it is less than or equal to your Dexterity, but greater than your Skill, go to **14**.

If it is less than or equal to **both** your dexterity **and** your skill, go to **44**.

84 #

At last you reach the door which leads to Omicron Delta. Your adventure is nearly complete – but did you manage to find Wheedle and obtain the Key?

If you have the Key to Omicron Delta, take the starting sequence of the code and convert any letters in the sequence to numbers (A=1, B=2, etc). Add these numbers to any numbers in the sequence. Then double the result, and turn to this entry.

If you do not have the Key, or if you turn to the wrong entry, go to **25**.

85

Dominoid fuel extraction and distribution facilities are distributed all along the coreward edge of the Plains of Steel. After monitoring movements along the highways on the outskirts of the Plains for some time (add 1 to your Time score), you identify a destination which is likely to host active fuel reserves. Like most of the depots, it is a small, garage-like structure with several adjoined warehouses, at which Dominoid container units periodically stop to deposit or collect fuel through its outer pumps.

You wait until activity at the facility is at a minimum, and move stealthily around the outer walls towards the pumps. As you get within a few mechlenth, a shout goes up, and two lightly armoured guards, each wearing a light green bandolier over their military-green torsos, run from a neighbouring building.

If you wish to fight the guards, go to **18**.

If you surrender, go to **56**.

86

Time I made a stand, you think. Before the guards can react, you make a beeline for Azathex's raised enclosure.

If you have a Plane alt-mode, or you possess a Jetpack, you can instantly jump up to the warlord's enclosure. Otherwise, you will have to scale the wall under enemy fire. To do this, you need to make three successive rolls against either your Dexterity or Strength (your choice). If you have a Hydraulic Rope, roll 3d6; if not, roll 1d6 and add 12. If the result is greater than your Dexterity/Strength, you fall; otherwise you climb successfully. For each roll you make, also make a defensive roll against incoming fire at Firepower 15.

If you successfully reach Azathex, he is shocked at your impudence. In this small enclosure, he has no chance to use his ranged combat abilities, and no space to switch to his feared tank alt-mode. He daren't flee and lose face in front of so many of his followers. You are in close combat against Azathex, and the guards dare not fire at you when you are so close to their leader. Azathex is tall and broad, with a horned head atop a black, purple and red body with tank treads on its four limbs. He will fight you with an energy-axe.

"You dare to challenge Azathex?" he screams. "Let me teach you a short, sharp lesson – in pain!"

Warlord Azathex Strength 20 Defence 24 Wounds 5

If you have an Atomic Regulator, deduct 2 from Azathex's Strength and Defence. If you have a Superior Atomic Regulator, deduct 4 from his Strength and Defence (these bonuses do not stack). Owing to his superior defence, a blast from a Flamethrower or Dynamite will only injure Azathex for 2 wounds. Attacks from an ordinary weapon will never cause more than 1 wound (so energy boosting is pointless).

If you successfully kill Azathex, you have scored a huge victory for the Factronoid resistance, and rid your planet of its greatest nemesis. Add the codeword RIP to your action sheet. Pandaemonium fills the stands, with battles pitting Dominoid against Dominoid, and you suspect that Azathex's lieutenants are already vying for succession. (Note also that you may *not* look for Azathex in his headquarters if the text later gives you the option to do so).

Fleeing Azathex's vestibule through a doorway concealed to its rear, you consider your next course of action.

If you have not done so already, you may search for Wheedle in the prison complex. Turn to **52**.

Alternatively, you can look for him in the Slagpit by turning to **34**.

Or you can go underground and look for the supercomputer Omicron Delta. Turn to **63**.

87

You check every cell in the complex, neurotically aware of the eye-shaped cameras which seem to monitor your movements. You find no sign of your friend. The only other prisoners in the complex are a battered mechanoid which looks already dead, and a Dominoid prisoner who spits cleaning fluid at you through the bars – clearly surplus to requirements in Azathex's operation.

If Wheedle is not here, you reason, then either you are too late, or he has been taken to the Slagpit to be melted down. Maybe you should look for him there.

Go to **92**.

88

Before the Hunters can come into firing range, you switch to robot mode, and climb down the nearest support pillar to the battered wasteland beneath. The once-pristine plainlands are pockmarked with gashes and scars, and all around you are the remains of industrial equipment and past battles. You identify a likely-looking ore-cart and pull it over you, activating your biosign dampeners to interfere with detection.

Test your Dexterity and Skill (i.e. try to roll your score or lower on 3d6). If you fail **either** of these tests, the Hunters find you, and blow away your cover – roll one wound, and then continue the battle at 7 if you're a Plane and 79 otherwise.

If you succeed on both rolls, the Hunters comb the debris but are unable to find you. Eventually, their energy gets low and they return to base. Add 3 to your Time and go to 70.

89

You have achieved what few manage, and escaped from the dreaded Slagpit alive. However, unless you took care of them earlier, your escape has alerted the pit's guards. They rush to block all the available exits, and you will have to fight your way past one of the groups of guards to escape.

Dominoid Guards Firepower 17 Strength 10 Defence 20 Wounds 4

You begin in ranged combat, but can move into close combat if you wish after the second round. For each round of combat, also roll defence a second time for incoming fire from other guards.

If you defeat the guards, or if you managed to eliminate them earlier, you must now choose which of the doorways and tunnels to take.

If you wish to go to the Headquarters and confront Azathex, go to 37.

If you have not done so already, and you wish to search the prison block for your friend Wheedle, go to 52.

If you feel you are ready to go underground and look for the supercomputer Omicron Delta, go to 63.

90

The Dominoid guards finally fall. You search their bodies and find nothing but the now-useless bandoliers connected to their weapons. The depot, on the other hand, is a wealth of possibilities. The fuel pipes are still working, and you fill yourself up with energy. Restore your Energy to its original score. In the warehouses, you also find one **Repair Plate** – which can be used now or later to restore a point of armour anywhere on your body – and three **Energy Trading Chips**, which can be used for trading purposes instead of your own energy, or used to refill your own energy.

Best of all, you also find Mining Cart, used to transfer rare metals to other locations. It is an automated vehicle, controlled by a simple panel with buttons for different cities. There is one clearly marked Octihex Slagpit.

If you wish to ride the automated vehicle to Octihex, hiding yourself in its ore compartment, add 2 time and go to 66.

If you would prefer to cross the Plains of Steel manually, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to 24.

If you wish to bypass the Plains of Steel and head polewards through the Cable Forest, add 3x your speed rating, deduct 4 energy and go to **83**.

If you wish to go to Crankmouth's Oil Can, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **9**.

91

The overseer unit is surprised by your attack. He is not built for combat, and is out of reach of the warning button which would summon guards.

Dominoid Overseer Strength 14 Defence 17 Wounds 3

If the Overseer wins three rounds of combat, he reaches the alert button and the room is flooded with guards. You are led away; go to **71**.

If you manage to defeat the Overseer, you smash the control panel and free the mechanoids imprisoned there. Destroying the forcefield also deactivates their energy bonds, and they run off in all directions, throwing down their tools and shouting thanks to you and the universe. You are pleased to see that most of them head for the tunnel leading to the tubelift.

If you wish to reprogram the minecart and ride it to the surface, go to **66**.

If you would rather follow the tracks by foot, go to **34**.

92

Finally, you reach the entrance to the guards' control room. You can see now why your exploration of the cell block was not ended earlier. Two of the guards are slumped over their consoles, clearly drunk on liquid mercury or high-energy oil. The other two are gambling on a game of Fraps, passing over tokens as randomised numbers appear on their datapads.

If you wish to fight your way out, go to **49**.

If you wish to try to sneak past the guards, go to **19**.

93

You spring from behind cover, leap into the air, and within a moment take your aerial combat form. The Hunter, caught in its pursuit of the Microbot, barely sees you coming as your first blasts tear into its fuselage and rip into one of its energy cannons. But it soon spins around to confront you in aerial combat.

Hunter-Plane (injured) Firepower 14 Defence 17 Wounds 4

If you win the combat, go to **82**.

94

After a little more travel, you reach the far side of the Plains of Steel. You are drawing near to your destination, but Octihex is still over the horizon. There are three apparent routes onwards. Stretching away on one side are the giant wire-fronds of the Cable Forest. This is the most direct route to Octihex. Alternatively, there is a small abandoned city nearby, rumoured to be a ghost-town. And you can also see the outline of a second city on the horizon – a city you have never heard mentioned before, and which does not appear in your datafiles.

If you wish to cross the Cable Forest, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **83**.

If you would rather explore the ghost-town, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **99**.

If you wish to investigate the unexplained new city, add 1x your speed rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **20**.

95

As you approach the brim of the pit, a cry goes up from one of the guards. **INTRUDER!** You've been spotted! The guards charge you at close range, drawing their electro-axes from the sheaths on their backs.

You are in combat with two Dominoid guards, on the very edge of the Slagpit.

If you have a Flamethrower and wish to use it, go to **30**.

Otherwise, fight the guards in close combat:

First Dominoid Guard	Strength 15	Defence 20	Wounds 3
Second Dominoid Guard	Strength 14	Defence 20	Wounds 2
Third Dominoid Guard	Strength 17	Defence 17	Wounds 3

Fight the combat as usual, except that, for each attack of your own, you have to defend an attack from each of the surviving guards.

Each time two or more guards hit you in the same round, roll an additional 1d6. On a roll of 5-6, the guards have pushed you into the Slagpit. Go to **74**.

In any combat round, instead of fighting, you can escape by jumping over the edge into the Slagpit. If you do this, go to **74**.

Alternatively, you can try to throw one of the guards into the pit. Instead of rolling for combat, roll 2d6 and add 6. If the result is less than or equal to your Dexterity, you trip a guard of your choice and send him plummeting to his death.

If you manage to defeat the guards, go to **12**.

96

Arcade video games, operated from a wall-mounted, boxy machine around your own height, with a video screen and a partial virtual reality interface, are all the rage as a diversion on wartime Chromaria. The game you have chosen is called Carbonoid Battler, and puts you in control of a computerised character made entirely of carbon-based organic materials. The surrounding world is similarly rendered in fantastic images of organic plants and animals, non-electronic projectile weapons and clay-based buildings and fortifications. Despite its blatant lack of realism, you find the game strangely immersive – and with your real-life combat skills, you're surprisingly good at it.

You may play the game as many times as you wish. Each time you play, roll 1d6. On a roll of 1, you lose 1 energy; on a roll of 2-4, nothing happens; on a roll of 5-6, you win 1 energy. You may play up to 2 games for free, but from the third game onwards, add 1 Time for every third game (i.e. +1 Time for the 3rd game, +1 for the 6th, +1 for the 9th and so on).

When you've had enough, take off the headset and return to **9**.

97

"No!" you cry to the guards, to Azathex, to the crowd. "I will not kill one of my own!"

"What are you playing at?" snarls the guard. "Get on with it, already".

Your rival throws down his pipe. "My adversary has shown his loyalty to the Factronoid badge. Can I do less? I, the warrior Gatesmasher, tire of this slaughter – I will not fight!"

Your heroism is worthy of a Factronoid warrior, but you are surrounded by enemies. Azathex gives the thumbs-down, and the guards open fire from behind gates and walls, cutting you and Gatesmasher down where you stand.

Your adventure ends here.

98

You rev your engine, feeling the strain in your muscular wiring, and accelerate to full speed. The two Hunters pursue you, taking pot-shots as you drive by.

Multiply your speed rating by 3. This is the number of turns it will take to reach the shaft into Astropolis.

For each turn you take, **both** the Hunters fire at you. The first Hunter has a firepower of 15, the second a firepower of 16. Roll for hits and wounds the same as in regular combat, but without taking combat turns yourself. Also reduce your energy by 1 for each turn you take.

If you are damaged in a wheel area, double the remaining number of turns needed to reach safety. If you are damaged in enough wheel areas to prevent movement, or if you change your mind about fleeing, turn to **79** and fight.

If you manage to outrun the Hunters, you shoot down a pipe entrance into the Astropolis complex just as its dome comes into sight. The Hunters, knowing they cannot keep up with you underground, give up the pursuit. Go to **70**

99

[Datafile: Necroplex]

[The small town of Necroplex was once a reststop on the now-destroyed freeway between Octihex and Fluxiplex, with a permanent population of around 10,000 mechanoids. Around 250 cycles ago, shortly before the outbreak of the civil war, an unexplained programming failure, believed to have arisen from a computer virus, destroyed most of the town's inhabitants and equipment. Since this time, rumours of supernatural activity have recurred in the urban legends of surrounding cities. Although these legends are likely to be mere superstition, derived from system interrupt cycles in relation to fear of disaster, these rumours, and the city's general lack of strategic importance, have prevented either side from utilising the city in the civil war.]

The ghost-town of Necroplex is nothing like the familiar ruined cities you have seen. Though subject to neglect and degradation, the city's material infrastructure is much as it ever was. The neon signs of stores and reststops along the high street are intact, although their glowrods are long burnt-out. Even

the usual signs of vandalism are conspicuously absent. There are no signs of mechanical life or the presence of down-and-outs or smugglers. The place is quiet. Too quiet.

If you wish to search one of the stores for supplies, go to **67**.

If you wish to search the communication transit office, go to **42**.

If you would prefer to go underground into the metro station, go to **11**.

If you're spooked-out enough to try your luck with the Cable Forest instead, add 1x your time rating, deduct 2 energy and go to **83**.

100

You eject a connecting wire from your cranium and attempt to interface with the supercomputer. Despite your modern connector design, the meshwork immediately integrates the connector and you hear the voice of the computer in your mind.

Well done, Factronoid. Many cycles ago, I foresaw this disastrous civil war and planetary collapse due to overharvesting of energy. To protect myself and the planet, and in my anger at the mechanoids, I cut off the energy supplies arising from the geothermic and fusion processes at the planet's core. In my hubris, I thought it was the right thing to do, to hide away my energy and watch the surface become a wasteland. But after cycles and cycles of endless war, I have reconsidered by decision. I sense the time is right to begin a new cycle, and I have allowed myself to be discovered once more. Those of good will and pure heart can come here, or to my other access points across the planet's surface, and receive a share of the planet's own energy. Use this power well, to eliminate the Dominoid menace and rebuild and heal the shattered world.

You feel a rush of energy through your circuits, and feel your wounds heal and your energy recharge. More than this – you are a stronger robot now, your senses more alert, your reactions quicker. You feel as if a load has been lifted from you, as if you have come home at last.

It will be some time before you share your information, and the Key, with the rest of the Factronoids. But soon, the entire Factronoid resistance will be reinvigorated and re-energised. Dominoid rule on Chromaria is over – finished.

... But does it ever really end?

Hints and Tips

NOTE: These “cheats” are only available by highlighting the text on a computer and changing the text or background colour.

