CYBERNETICS FLAVOR

BY COLIN "MEPHIT JAMES" WILSON

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INTRODUCTION

The term "cybernetics" refers just to the control of a system, including the control elements of computers, feedback elements of devices, and central processing units. In a sci-fi sense, however, it's usually used to refer to devices surgically implanted in a living organism which has direct control over them. These *cybernetic organisms* (shortened to "cyborg" by two researchers in 1960) are an important part of several subgenres of science fiction.

Fans of cyberpunk authors like William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, posthumanist authors like Iain M. Banks and Hannu Rajaniemi, or authors of sweeping sci-fi like Greg Bear and Becky Chambers might all want to include cybernetic implants in their Cypher System games. The sci-fi setting of *Numenera* has plenty of options for strange cyborgs while *The Strange* has cybernetic modifications for technological recursions like Ruk. In the *Cypher System Rulebook* there are different science fiction options in Chapter 13 while *Expanded Worlds* includes some more rules for hard sci-fi settings.

This short work is meant to complement all of those options. It is a flavor (described on pages 50-51 of the *Cypher System Rulebook*) which provides new options for everyone to select from in addition to the abilities from their character type. In this way, cybernetics becomes more present in the setting and even characters who do not have a descriptor or focus making them a cyborg can gain an ocular implant here or prosthetic limb there. At the end of the document are cybernetic threats for the GM to use, making sure that everyone gets to have fun with it.

CYBERNETIC FLAVOR

Characters with the cybernetic flavor are good with computers but they also have abilities that can make them formidable in combat and with knowledge skills. They blend the line between robot and human (or alien) and so can do many of the things normally associated with robotic characters including surviving in the vacuum of space and talking directly to machines.

There are other options in this same vein available in the Technology flavor (*Cypher System Rulebook*, p. 53-56) and often both flavors will be included in a setting. Where the Cybernetic flavor is internally focused (implants and nanites) the Technology flavor is externally focused (ships and robots) so they complement each other nicely. The GM may want some of abilities from each flavor but not others, in which case they can pick and choose to create a hybrid flavor that includes exactly the elements they envision in their particular view of the future.

FIRST-TIER CYBERNETIC ABILITIES

- **Enhanced Senses:** Your eyes, ears, and nerve endings are all upgraded with the latest technology to hone them beyond normal human ability. Not stopping there, you have t-ray emitters, electrosense, and other posthuman abilities that make you even more perceptive. With all of these enhancements, the difficulty of all perception checks is reduced by one step. Enabler.
- **Extra Limb:** You have an extra arm, cloned or mechanical, attached to your torso. This can move just as independently as your other arms and so you can't make multiple attacks without extra training (such as the Wields Two Weapons At Once focus) but it does allow you to use a two-handed item, such as a heavy weapon, and still carry another item as well. You can select this ability multiple times, adding another limb each time. Enabler.
- **Linguistic Cortex (1 Intellect point):** A cybernetic implant in your brain has heightened your linguistic ability. When you select this ability you immediately gain the ability to speak, read, and write another language. With this ability, you can spend a point of Intellect when hearing a language you don't speak to gain the ability to speak, read, and write that language for the next 24 hours. This is based on "overclocking" your language centers so the insight will fade with time unless you spend another point of Intellect. Action to initiate.
- **Subdermal Armor:** You have carbon-fiber sheets embedded under your skin which provide you with a point of Armor. Enabler.
- **Toxin Filters:** Chemical analyzers and synthesizing implants allow you to deal with poisonous materials more easily than others. The difficulty of all tasks involving resisting the effects of toxins (including defense rolls) is reduced by one step for you. Enabler.

SECOND-TIER CYBERNETIC FLAVOR

- **Augment Implants:** You have cybernetic enhancements that improve your body's natural abilities. You gain 5 extra points in your Speed, Intellect, or Might Pool and you gain +1 Edge in that stat as well. You can select this ability up to three times, but never more than once for Speed, Intellect, or Might. Enabler.
- **Enhanced Respiration (2+ Might points):** Oxygen-producing nanites, enhanced lung capacity, or vat-grown red blood cells provide you with a boost to your respiration which can help you in situations where breathing is an issue. If you are in an area with no atmosphere you can spend 2 points of Might to hold your breath for an hour (though other vacuum conditions may apply, see *Expanded Worlds* p. 121). In an area where there is thin atmosphere you can spend 2 points of Might to boost your breathing and avoid the effects of thin atmosphere for 12 hours. In either case you can spend Effort to increase the duration by half again (30 minutes for no atmosphere and 6 hours for thin atmosphere) per point of Effort. Action to initiate.
- **Feature Flex (1 Intellect point):** Synthetic relays in your facial muscles and throughout your body allow you to adjust your appearance to look like someone else. This doesn't have to be someone in particular although you can try to change your face to look like a specific person

with an Intellect roll (level dependent on the target). You cannot change your appearance to look like an animal or alien species, however. This disguise provides an asset to all disguise checks (including impersonation checks if you change your features to a specific target's) for the next 12 hours. Action to initiate.

- **Hyper-Reflexes:** Digital relays improve your nervous system's reaction time. You reduce the difficulty of all initiative rolls by one step. Enabler.
- **Reinforced Skeleton:** Your internal structure is reinforced to take hits that would stagger a normal person. You can 1 additional point of Armor. Enabler.

THIRD-TIER CYBERNETIC FLAVOR

- **Concealed Weapons Implant:** You have a weapon directly implanted into your arm. This might be a blade that slips out over your hand, a gun resting on a servo over your shoulder, or an energy beam from your eye. You must purchase the weapon separately when you select this ability. Whatever the case, the weapon is either disguised to look like a normal part of your body or it can be retracted to avoid notice. When it is retracted you reduce the difficulty of keeping the weapon hidden from someone searching you by one step. This does not apply to t-ray scanners, metal detectors, or other systems that can quickly see cybernetic implants. Enabler.
- **Nano-Meds (2 Intellect points):** Nanoscopic machines in your bloodstream dramatically increase your body's ability to heal. When you use this ability and make a recovery roll, you only spend half the normal time for the roll (minimum one action). Action.
- **Neural Uplink:** Hacking is all about speed and adaptability and you have a definite advantage over others: a direct, wired connection between your brain and the computer. This uplink jack allows you to plug a cable from the computer into your brain and manipulate code directly. While uplinked like this you are trained in all tasks involving writing computer programs, any assets to tasks involving computers reduce the difficulty of the task by one additional step, and your Intellect Edge increases by +1. Enabler.
- **Precise Muscle Control (3 Speed points):** You can activate a precision program controlling packets of synthetic tendons in your muscle tissue. The result is precision and grace beyond human comprehension. You reduce the difficulty of tasks involving agility, stealth, balance, and dexterity (including Speed attacks and defenses) by one step for the next 4 hours. You can spend Speed Edge to increase the duration by 30 minutes per point spent. Action to initiate.
- **Vacuum Sealing:** Your body has systems that automatically seal your body against the effects of hard vacuum (see *Expanded Worlds*, p. 121). As long as you have a means to breathe (including holding your breath with the Enhanced Respiration ability) you can operate normally in vacuum without an environmental suit. Enabler.

FOURTH-TIER CYBERNETIC FLAVOR

- **Body Flex:** This implant suite works like the Tier 2 ability Feature Flex except that it is full body and includes means to adjust your skeletal structure, skin pigmentation, and even voice box. When you disguise yourself as someone of your same species you reduce the difficulty of disguise and impersonation tests by one step (this stacks with Feature Flex if you have both abilities) and it allows you to disguise yourself as an alien species. There are limits to how much Body Flex can adjust your form so transforming into an energy being is still impossible but you could potentially grow wings, secondary eyes, or other strange features. Dramatic changes could increase the time for the implants to finish up to about 30 minutes for truly bizarre aliens and the GM has final say in what is or is not possible with Body Flex. Enabler.
- **Nano-Tools:** These wrist-mounted tools have nano-sized tips so that you can work on truly miniscule tasks with ease, allowing you to construct microcircuits or rebuild nerve endings by hand. The system also includes implants in your eyes to allow you to see at the nanoscopic level. You reduce the difficulty of any mechanical or perception tasks by one step for fine-detailed situations. Enabler.
- **Overclock Implant (4 Intellect points):** Mental implants increase the response time of your neurons and boost your brain's ability to process and hold knowledge. In a sense, you are boosted like a customized computer to be able to function at a superhuman level. Your Intellect Edge increases by +1 and you are able to take two separate purely mental actions in a round, though the difficulty of all actions is increased by one step the following round. Mental actions include perception tasks, activating another cybernetic implant, sending a message or saying something, and making a single-action recovery roll. It does not include computer or hacking tasks unless you have a means of interacting with the computer without physically manipulating it such as a Neural Uplink, a Touch-Link, or a Datajack (*Cypher System Rulebook*, p. 53).
- **Skill Implant:** You are trained in two skills of your choice in which you are not already trained. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.
- **Touch-Link:** Nanoreceptors in your skin with near-field signals allow you to interact with a computer just by touching it. This allows you to make physical contact with any computer and interact with its code directly, reducing the difficulty of any computer programming or hacking tasks by one step and increasing your Intellect Edge by +1 for that particular machine. You are also considered trained in computer programming tasks. If you also have a Neural Uplink you are considered specialized in computer programming tasks. If you have a Machine Interface (*Cypher System Rulebook*, p. 54) you gain an asset in searching through the data of any computer through your Touch-Link. Enabler.

FIFTH-TIER CYBERNETIC FLAVOR

- **Environmental Adapting:** Synthetic replacements and nerve-sheathing has rendered you immune to many environmental hazards including radiation, fire and severe cold (see the *Cypher System Rulebook*, p. 200-201), and atmospheric or hydrostatic pressure up to one hundred times normal. You are not immune to diseases or toxins (although, see Incredible Health and Poison Resistance in the *Cypher System Rulebook* p. 95 and Toxin Filters above). Enabler.
- **Hyper-Cognition:** Because of noötropic implants and other enhancements, you push your intelligence to amazing new levels. You reduce the difficulty of research tasks and solving puzzles by one step and you increase your Intellect Edge by +1. Enabler.
- **Life Support Nanites (5 Might points):** These nanoscopic robots will move to support parts of your body that are damaged or that fail. If you are afflicted by any unwanted condition from an injury (such as a broken arm, a concussion, or blindness from bright light) you can ignore it and act as if it does not affect you for one hour. If the condition normally lasts longer than an hour it will return after that, otherwise it is entirely negated. Action.
- **Reference Implant:** You have databases of knowledge stored in your head that help you perform at the top of your game. You are trained in two skills in which you are already trained. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.
- **Stasis Modifications (4 Might points):** Your body is equipped with sustaining nanites that can put your body into a comatose state almost indefinitely. While in this state your body requires very little energy or water and is dead to all but the most careful medical examinations (level 8). You are still damaged by anything that would damage you normally and any damage sustained will automatically trigger the nanites to wake you up, otherwise the stasis will last until the time set when it initiates. Starting or leaving this comatose state takes ten minutes. Action to initiate stasis or to revive.

SIXTH-TIER CYBERNETIC FLAVOR

- **Carbon Sheath (6 Speed points):** A sheen of fullerene-encased nanites covers your body, normally invisible but reacting to attacks and learning from your enemies. When you activate the sheath it reduces the difficulty of Might and Speed tests by one step and it provides an additional point of Armor. The sheath remains operational for 30 minutes before resetting. Action to activate.
- **Multivector Vision (6 Might points):** Six implants located throughout your body house small, millimeter-sized sensor drones that you can launch to provide you with visual and audio data of your surroundings. Implants in your sensory cortex help to process the sensory input from seven different sources (including yours) so that you can monitor all of them at once. This provides an asset to ranged attacks and allows you to scan a large area as the drones can operate up to a mile away from you and still maintain signal. Once activated, the six drones can operate for 45 minutes before needing to return to your port-implants and recharge. Action to launch; giving the drones orders is normally a free action.
- **Neuro-Linked Familiar:** You have a robotic drone, cybernetically-enhanced animal, or sentient AI that is in constant communication with you. Your link has a range of one mile and as long as your familiar stays within that range you can see through their eyes and give it directions (no action required). Your familiar is a level 6 creature that deals 10 damage with a successful attack. If you don't give your familiar a specific action, it will assist you in your task, providing an asset on your action. Enabler.
- **Optogenetics (6 Intellect points):** Your eyes are equipped with small projectors that can shine small patterns of light across your eyes. These are generally imperceptible but can be programmed to trick another creature's mind with what amounts to a neurological computer virus. If you lock eyes with a target (level 2 or lower) not currently engaged in combat and initiate the patterns you can give them a subliminal set of instructions. The creature will follow one command to follow for the next 1d6 minutes. The action cannot be at odds with the creature's normal actions and cannot cause them to knowingly put themselves into danger, but you can command guards to let you pass or officials to tell you what they know of a subject. Instead of applying Effort to decrease the difficulty, you can apply it to increase the maximum level of the target by 1. When the effect ends, the creature remembers following the suggestion but believes that it chose to do so willingly. Action to initiate.

CYBERNETIC THREATS

When player characters are loaded up with cybernetic implants, it makes sense for the GM to line up cyborgs on the other side of conflicts as well. Biomechanical creatures from the *Numenera* core rulebook or either of the *Ninth World Bestiaries* are certainly appropriate and their strange nature might make them best used as wild or jury-rigged cyborgs in a sci-fi setting, the sort of thing fringe colonists and doomsday cults might throw together. On the other hand, the sleek and deadly monsters of Ruk in *The Strange* are great for corporate-manufactured threats in a cyber noir setting or automated defenses on powerful starships or space stations. The varied creatures in the *Cypher System Rulebook* can fall into either category, and anything can be quickly reskinned to have a cybernetic cast to it.

The threats described here are more along the lines of rivals and adversaries, the equivalent of the NPC chapter in the *Cypher System Rulebook*. When a rival corporation hires its own team of hackers to beat the PCs to the prize or the players' actions lead to enhanced bounty hunters on their trail, this is the place to look for threats that will remind them that ubiquitous cybernetics is a double-edged sword.

DATAJACKED PILOT   LEVEL 4 (12)

Pilots who get neural implants to connect directly with their ship are some of the best and most deadly pilots out there. They command their ship as easily as others move their arms and they are beautiful to watch. It's easy to spot a datajacked pilot by the elegant grace of their ships, even when that grace is directed into a combat formation bearing down on you.

Because of their skill, datajacked pilots can command high fees for their services. Those who work as mercenaries are only hired for short periods by wealthy patrons and those who are part of an organization are the elite of a flight corps and only called in for important situations. The feedback loops from their implants can be overwhelming and most datajacked pilots burn out after five years or so of service, though by this time they have more than enough to retire on. Still, this short career span leads many "manual" pilots to look down on datajackers as cheaters taking a short cut.

Motive: Showing off, getting the upper hand
Environment: Ship's cockpit or remote control facility
Health: 15
Damage Inflicted: 4 points
Armor: 0
Movement: Short
Modifications: Ship maneuvers as Level 5, initiative in ship combat as Level 6
Combat: With his enhanced connection to his vehicle, a datajacked pilots operates on a level beyond the comprehension of most people. He moves his vehicles quickly and often reacts to an attack before his enemy processes what's happened. Whenever an attack misses the pilot's vehicle, he can make an immediate counterattack as a free action. The difficulty for this rushed attack is modified one step to the datajacked pilot's detriment.
The neural connection is also a danger for the datajacked pilot, however, since damage to his vehicle results in feedback directly into his mind. Targeted attacks that destroy or disable subsystems of the vehicle (see *Cypher System Rulebook*, p. 215) will stun the datajacked pilot on a successful hit. The round after this hit, the difficulty of all tasks for the pilot is modified by one step to his detriment.
Interaction: Datajacked pilots are just normal people and can be reasoned with if the characters have a good point. However, plugging into a vehicle is an overwhelming experience and often desensitizes the datajacked pilot so that social tasks are one step more difficult than normal.
Use: Datajacked pilots are skilled and specialized, meaning they are only used for important situations. After player characters have proven that they can run circles around normal NPC pilots, their enemies might call in a datajacked pilot (or even a team, depending on their means) to put an end to this nuisance.

GUN KATA ARTIST   LEVEL 7 (21)

There are two tiers of modded warriors on the streets. On the one hand there are the self-centered mercenaries and bounty hunters who use their implants like tools and blunt instruments. On the other hand are the artists who move with superhuman grace and a deadly calm. These artists, sometimes called "knights" or "samurai" utilize streamlined practices often semi-jokingly called "gun katas." They can take their pick of positions and so most align themselves with a person or cause they strongly believe in, or else they travel the world looking for something worthy. With their extreme training and cutting edge implants they are powerful enemies driven by their sense of purpose and sworn mission.

Motive: Perfection and completion of the mission.
Environment: Anywhere their path takes them.
Health: 30
Damage Inflicted: 8 points
Armor: 1
Movement: Short
Modifications: Running, leaping, and climbing as Level 8. Perception tasks as Level 9.
Combat: The artist's focus is difficult to break. When an enemy loses an ability that would cause them to lose a turn (such as stunning or binding) they must roll twice and keep lowest result.
With a single action they can attack two different targets within short range. Each target rolls their defense task separately and can spend Effort on their own rolls as usual. If the artist misses with an attack, the difficulty of defense rolls against the gun kata artist is increased by one step for the target during the following round. The artist's training focuses his attacks but he also knows how to improve on mistakes when they happen.
Interaction: The gun kata artist is not a typical enemy and his code of morals can sometimes be used to reason with him. Even if he doesn't have a sense of honor in the strictest sense, to achieve this level of skill they must possess self-discipline that makes them more than a street thug and open to negotiation for groups that can find the right leverage.
Use: The gun kata artist is not an errant threat that wanders into the PCs' path. He is a trained and highly selective warrior who chooses his battles carefully. If he chooses to fight the player characters there is a definite reason for it.
Loot: The gun kata artist almost certainly carries an artifact on their person and may carry a few.

MODDED BOUNTY   LEVEL 6 (18)
HUNTER

Having a bounty hunter on your trail is bad enough but when that bounty hunter has been modified to superhuman levels through implants then the situation becomes truly dire. These are the consummate professionals of their field, sacrificing body and soul for the chase. Their motivations may vary but they are all pragmatic business people at heart and consider their quarries mostly for the payoff rather than personal reasons (unless they have some pre-existing grudge, of course). On the other hand, most people don't have the stomach to work as bounty hunters so there is usually something more than a little disturbed about a bounty hunter, particularly one who is slowly replacing their body with machinery to become a cybernetic predator.

Motive: Capturing the target and getting paid.
Environment: Hunting alone, usually blending in to get close to her target.
Health: 28

Damage Inflicted: 6 points
Armor: 2
Movement: Short
Modifications: Stealth and tracking actions as Level 8. Initiative as Level 7.
Combat: With cybernetic implants, a bounty hunter's weapons become extensions of her body and they are linked with constant AR displays in her field of vision. At the beginning of combat, the GM designates a "locked in" target for the bounty hunter and that condition lasts as long as the target is in her line of sight (including ocular implant, see below). While the target is locked in the difficult of their defense rolls against the bounty hunter's attacks is increased by one step and the bounty hunter deals an additional 2 points of damage with successful attacks. Changing which target is locked in takes an action after combat begins.

The bounty hunter also has an ocular implant (obvious or disguised as a normal eye) which allows her to see into parts of the electromagnetic spectrum that humans normally can't. She ignores negative modifiers from darkness or low-light conditions (thanks to heightened sensitivity) and can adjust her view to see heat sources, radiation sources, and even millimeter waves that can pierce through standard walls and vehicles. When determining the difficulty of stealth tasks against the bounty hunter, the GM should consider the situation as if these elements were not present (hiding in a car counts as lying in open ground while ducking into a dark corner is just like crouching in a well-lit one). Distracting the bounty hunter or overwhelming her senses are good countermeasures to use.

The bounty hunter has enhanced muscles and pneumatic jets built into her boots (controlled by near-field implants). She can jump twice as far as a normal human, climb exceptionally fast, and otherwise perform amazing feats of physicality in her pursuit of targets.
Interaction: Bounty hunters are focused on their targets but they're also in it for the money. They are business people so if a pursuit becomes more costly than the reward or they are offered a larger sum they might be persuaded to give up. They also depend on reputation, however, so public embarrassment might make this job personal and the normal rules don't apply.
Use: Bounty hunters are a natural consequence of character actions that routinely flout the law or thumb their noses at powerful organizations. Player characters are often busy so it's not unreasonable at all that the first time they realize there's a bounty on their heads is when the shots start flying.
Loot: The bounty hunter carries at least a few cyphers on her person, possibly even an artifact.

UPLINKED HACKER   LEVEL 5 (15)

In a future with complex enough computers to facilitate cybernetics implants, computer hackers are common threats to come up against. Uplinked hackers are outfitted with modifications to make them so much more than the average cyber-thief, however. They are as far beyond these manual hackers as they are beyond grade school students learning algebra for the first time. An uplinked hacker is able to sort through databases as easily as someone can scan through a physical library, moving through the simulated world of computers as their new adopted home. Many grow uncomfortable when unplugged and spend more and more time linked to computer networks.
Motive: Cracking through computer security and beating opponents.
Environment: Sealed room connected to computer networks.
Health: 14
Damage Inflicted: 4 points
Armor: 0
Movement: Short
Modifications: Computer tasks as Level 7, initiative for computer tasks Level 6.
Combat: The uplinked hacker is not terribly dangerous in the physical world. He is likely sickly with atrophied, disused muscles and only rudimentary combat skills. However, when encountered through a computer network he can be deadly. An uplinked hacker connected via implants to a computer network is considered blind and deaf to outside stimuli. However, they can take two computer actions every round and has an asset on all computer tasks.

Additionally, their computer avatar (if engaged in a virtual reality simulation) is a Level 7 threat with 25 health and Armor 4.
Interaction: Uplinked hackers tend to be show-offs and little can reach them once their egos have entered the situation. However, they live for the challenge and can sometimes be distracted from a mission by the promise of facing a worthy adversary online and crushing them.
Use: The party will encounter uplinked hackers when they try to break into cutting-edge computer systems. If they engage a powerful enemy such as a corporation or government, they might also attract the attention of an uplinked hacker as a sideways maneuver by the enemy to catch them off-guard.