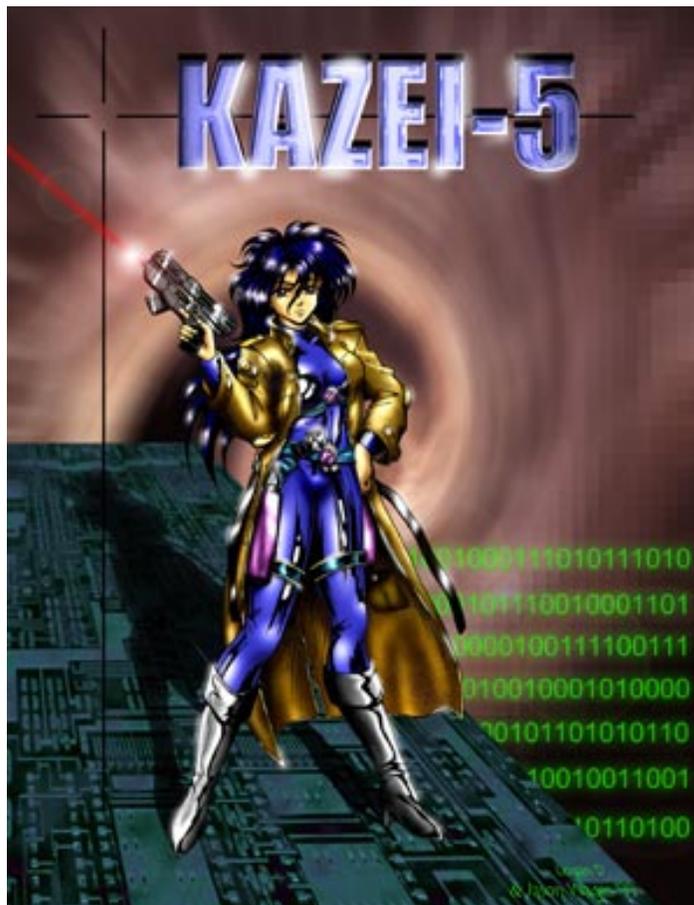# KAZEI-5

BY MICHAEL SURBROOK

HERO GAMES

KAZEI-5

BY MICHAEL SURBROOK

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Dedicated to: Katsuhiro Otomo, Masamune Shirow, Adam Warren and the creators and designers of *Bubblegum Crisis*.

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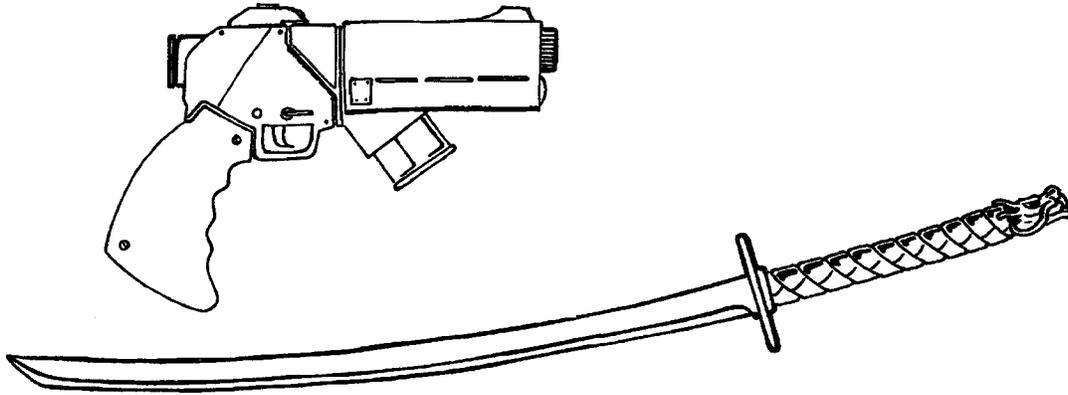
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INTRODUCTION

In recent years the availability of Japanese animation (i.e. anime) and comics (i.e. manga) has reached an all-time high. Videotapes of many popular shows are available for either sale or rent at most video stores, while several comics publishers offer translated editions of a variety of titles. Often the stories presented are quite different from what many people might expect, and contain genre conventions radically different from American cartoons or comic books. This book is an attempt to present one aspect of the anime and manga field, that of the near future anime-cyberpunk genre. As with the original source material, the world presented here is a dark one, and presents its subject matter in a serious tone. Although this specific field may not be for everyone, elements of this genre can be adapted for use in many other games.

What You Get

The *Kazei Five* (i.e. K5) Worldbook is designed to allow a Game Master to create and run a campaign using elements common to many near-future cyberpunk anime. The book is divided into several sections for ease of use. They are:

Introduction: The section you are reading now; this also includes a short discussion of the anime and cyberpunk genres and how they relate as well as differ.

Anime/Cyberpunk Sourcebook: Written to be as compatible as possible with the Kazei Five universe, this section describes how to express certain ideas common to the anime and cyberpunk genres using Hero System game mechanics, including such subjects as cyberware, cyborgs, cyberspace, mecha and psychokinetic powers. To help familiarize Game Masters and Players with the concepts presented, these sections contain numerous references to specific anime and manga. It should be noted that this section also presents a number of optional rules, and all such rules should be carefully examined and evaluated by any potential Game Master before being adopted into their campaign.

Kazei Five Worldbook: This section presents the Kazei Five universe itself. Beginning with a discussion of campaign styles, it then presents ideas on character creation before starting an in-depth examination of the background and makeup of the Kazei Five world. Next, the Kazei Five organization is presented in detail, allowing the Game Master to start a new campaign quickly and easily. Finally, attention is then given to the hardware needed for such a campaign, with extensive listings of arms, armor, gadgets and vehicles, complete with design notes.

Characters: This section presents a number of different character types, including possible PCs, as well as NPCs, enemies, robots, and even mecha. Although meant for the Kazei Five universe, most, if not all the characters can easily be adapted to Star Hero, Dark Champions or Champions campaigns with ease.

Scenarios: Five scenario seeds designed to get the PCs involved quickly in the Kazei Five universe and to help the GM provide direction for the campaign.

How To Use This Book

Any Game Master wishing to use this book should, at the very least, read through the Sourcebook section before making any decisions about what sort of campaign he wants to set up. The Game Master should also make clear to his players which sections of the book he is using, and which he is not, as the book presents a wide range of genre ideas. Players should feel free to make a thorough examination of the book as well, although they should try to avoid the Scenarios section.

Designer's Notes

The book you hold in your hands *Kazei Five* has literally been years in the making. I first conceived the idea when I walked into a video store one afternoon and found a videotape case showing a woman in a suit of blue power armor, standing inside of a larger exoskeleton. In turn, the exoskeleton, which vaguely reminded me of the power lifter from *Aliens* was gripping the *biggest* cannon I had ever seen. The tape in question was Bubblegum Crisis Episode 1, and from that image of Priss and her MotoSlave alone, I began to formulate some of the basic ideas for the campaign. When I finally rented that particular tape, and actually saw what it contained, I was hooked and rapidly began laying out certain ground rules. As time passed I tinkered with the game off and on, but I wasn't actu-

Since we have a new format, we have a new look for two old stand-bys.

The Magnifying Glass Icon has been replaced by a Caution Sign.

The Stop Sign Icon is new and colorful.

These symbols will help you quickly spot things to watch out for.

ally running it as a campaign, so the desire to flesh out the rules wasn't a driving need. Then, as fate would have it, I was appointed Game Master by a group of local players, and used the opportunity to spring the campaign idea upon them. Unfortunately, the game folded shortly after conception. Undaunted, the remaining player and I recruited new people to the game, and the process started anew.

Kazei Five has been a most interesting project from the start. Many of the things I wanted to do weren't covered in the rules or, in the case of cybernetics, were presented poorly. In many cases I was creating new concepts from scratch — making it up as I went, so to speak. The creation process was further hampered by my growing exposure to anime and manga. I was lucky to enter into a unique relationship with the owner of a local comic store. I wrote reviews of newly released anime, and he let me rent anything I wanted for free. Thus, I was able to watch a wide variety of anime films, discovering new ideas with almost every viewing. As a result, the campaign changed constantly, as ideas were revised reworked and redefined.

Considering the nature of the subject matter in this book, and its emphasis on high technology, I am amused that, in many ways, the Internet is directly responsible for the fact this book even exists. My initial proposal to Hero Games was sent via the Internet, and almost all the rules revisions, suggestions, commentary and editing were accomplished by people I knew only via e-mail. At times, portions of the campaign were run over the Internet, in a manner similar to Aaron Allston's bluebooking from *Strikeforce*.

It's now something like three years since Kazei Five was first created. What you hold is the end result — I hope you like it.

Michael Surbrook

Anime and Cyberpunk

What is Anime?

Anime is the Japanese term for their animation industry. As such, it not so much a genre unto itself, but a storytelling medium, much like television or comic books. For a long time, the term "anime" immediately brought to mind images of giant robots and small girls with overly large eyes, a stereotype that, upon closer examination, doesn't quite hold true. Anime covers a wide range of genres, including (but not limited to): fantasy, giant robots, horror, martial arts, romantic comedies, science fiction, sports... in short, subjects as varied as those found in the Hollywood movie industry. Thus, any attempt to write an anime sourcebook would be fruitless, as there are too many fields to cover.

There are several broad generalizations that can be made about anime, especially concerning the type of anime that is usually commercially distributed outside of Japan. Regardless of the genre, most anime have the following things in common: an emphasis on action, competent female protagonists, elements of Japanese culture and reasonably mature or complex plots and stories. Naturally, there are exceptions to every rule, and there are dramatic anime films where the emphasis is on character development and not action, as well as anime where the main character is male, or where the setting is somewhere else than Japan, or that have plots that are rather basic and thin.

It is the intent of this sourcebook to cover the cyberpunk genre, as protrayed in anime films, which is only a small segment of anime in general. Also within this sourcebook will be ideas and suggestions that can be used to help simulate other types of popular anime, such as giant robots or science fiction, but the material presented here is not directly concerned with those genres.

What is Cyberpunk?

The word cyberpunk has currently become a catch-all expression used to describe anything computer-related that is new and on the cutting edge of technology. Popular media has adapted it as a buzzword, mangling it into something that has little to do with its original meaning.

The concept of the cyberpunk genre was started in the mid-80s with William Gibson's book *Neuromancer*. It postulated a dark, dystopian future where corporations had become more important than governments; information, no matter how insignificant, was more important than money; and people struggle to retain their own humanity in the face of body-altering technologies. Other writers, most notably Bruce Sterling and Walter John Williams, joined into this new aspect of science fiction, adding their view of the future.

A number of themes or trends emerged as standard features of the cyberpunk genre. The most notable was the of melding of man and machine into a

single, augmented individual, where technology is used to make man faster, stronger, and, in some cases, smarter. This technology is often referred to as cybernetics, or more simply, cyberware. The concept of cyberspace was also introduced, where all the world's computers were linked together into one massive information net. Those with the wit and skill, equipped with virtual reality interfaces, could access and plunder this network in an era where information is the highest commodity. Finally, these stories also tend to feature violence, sex, rock music and an extensive influence of Japanese culture.

What is Anime Cyberpunk?

Naturally, there are anime examples that have been labeled "anime cyberpunk." In most cases this is a valid assessment, since the stories in question feature many of the same concepts one finds in Western cyberpunk literature. The stories often deal with a dark future, plagued by over-population, pollution, and war. The concept of cybernetic enhancement is often used to explore questions concerning the nature of humanity, and what it means to be a human. Politics often play an integral role in these stories, as the main characters find themselves caught up in events outside of their control.

On the other hand, the anime cyberpunk genre differs from mainstream cyberpunk as well. It often features phenomena that gos far beyond the "hard" science fiction realm of standard cyberpunk. Examples would be the somewhat impractical (and impossible) giant robot, incredibly powerful psychics, and wild, bizarre mutations. It should be noted that such common subjects as cybernetics and cyberspace are usually downplayed in this genre, the emphasis being more on the characters and their actions. Cybernetics, cyborg bodies, and cyberspace are usually treated simply as means to an end, a way for the character to accomplish his objectives, as opposed to being a central component of the story.

Just as there are differences between cyberpunk and anime cyberpunk, there are also differences between conventional anime and anime cyberpunk. Anime cyberpunk seldom deals with the flagrant sentimentalism and romantic notions of most other anime. The field of anime cyberpunk is grittier in this respect, and deals with issues central to the human condition. Examples are a loss of humanity in the face of overwhelming technology, coping with experiences not meant for mankind, dealing with the implications of modern society where morals seem to be worthless, the status of artificial creations in relation to the rest of humanity, and so on.

What is Kazei Five?

The Kazei Five Sourcebook falls somewhere between the realms of cyberpunk and cyberpunk anime. It draws upon common elements of both genres to present a dark and different view of the future. It is not a purely anime universe per se, but neither is it the commonly perceived cyberpunk-styled world. Kazei Five is meant to be mixture of both genres, a world using common elements of the cyberpunk genre combined with a heavy anime influence, represented both in stylization and design.

The Kazei Five universe melds such traditional cyberpunk themes as large, faceless totalitarian corporations with common anime cyberpunk subjects as powered armor and psychokinetic powers. Thus, one will find chapters discussing cyberware, cyberspace, mecha, powered armor, psychokinetic powers, as well as other related subjects so Game Masters may better understand and simulate the desired setting.