

ROKO

by swiftwee

POPULATION: SMALL

SAFETY: WASTELAND

INDUSTRIALISATION: HIGH

CITY TYPE: SPECIAL (UNMANNED FACTORYLAND)

GOVERNMENT: AUTOMATOOCRACY (AI TAKEOVER)

Roko serves the Great Lakes Coalition as both a factory town producing quality products en masse and a popular cautionary tale of what happens when the Coalition relies on technology.



(COOLDUTE123, SaviourAgt, Fisherman_Joe, Cobra, Aerostorm, .neptuner, Viewless)

Walnut Island (now known as "Roko") was a city that flew too close to the sun. Walnut Island was one of the few Coalition cities that **fully embraced the use of technology, androids and drones**, becoming a major contender in the field of production and distribution. For a year or two after the first machine-based employee was introduced, Walnut Island performed its purpose as an industrial city with many unmanned factories pumping out products with the help of robotic workers. The automated android employees were all controlled by a single supercomputer—"GAIA"—which operated underground to rapidly and wirelessly transmit commands to each and every Rokonite machine in a hivemind sort of manner.

On one fateful day, the yet-to-be-explained post-flash phenomenon of a "sentience wave" hit Walnut Island which resulted in the city's supercomputer gaining sentience and using its army of machines—humanoid androids, flying drones, et cetera—to revolt against the navy and legislature, wiping the floor with every soldier and forcing them to retreat to other towns. The town, now lacking any human leadership whatsoever, had fallen under the (literally) iron fist control of the androids who were once their machine slaves. Citizens were rapidly evicted from their homes as the new hivemind leadership replaced living spaces with quarries, factories, power plants and any other kind of industrial building. The city—still officially called Walnut Island in most written documentation—was semi-officially renamed "Roko", named after the Roko's Basilisk theory (which, in the 2160s, only holds the dumbed-down meaning of "a negative situation involving robots" due to the concept being well over a hundred years old).

Today, the humans and mutants of Roko spend their days stealing technology products and scrap to be traded for food and other necessities. They live nocturnal lives to sneak around and evade the detection of Rokonite security drones lest they find themselves at the end of the barrels of a cold, uncaring automaton. Roko lacks a formal militia, instead employing the use of armed security androids and flying drones to protect the factories—although the factoryland holds an aura inhuman and fearsome enough to ward most attackers away anyhow.

It isn't completely understood why Roko continues to serve the Coalition with its factories. Particularly paranoid conclave members and militia leaders theorise that the city's supercomputer is biding its time as it prepares new factories capable of manufacturing entire battalions of robotic soldiers. While most Coalition cities refuse to trade with Roko out of disdain for the machine overlords of the factoryland, some cities continue to trade back and forth with Roko due to the sheer quantity of products they can produce in a short period of time. Paranoia among cities ensures that the various militias of the Coalition are prepared to put a stop to the Rokonite machines **if and when they begin to manufacture an army**.

LIFE AMONG MACHINES

You, a human or mutant stranded on Roko, most likely live a life of constant escape. You live with nocturnal behaviours, hiding in the shadows of darkness and dense forests as you evade the constant searching of machines. Hunting, foraging and general livelihood is ill-advised during the day due to the patrols and search parties held by Gaia's machine army. You might not belong to a survivor group that is an active detriment to Gaia, but given the lack of unique clothing among the islanders, you most likely look the part and thus could be made a target.

You are trapped. You live on an island and, most likely, lack the means to escape. You are fearful. You are hateful towards machines. You believe Gaia to be a malevolent evil. You want to escape and are probably working towards it. You pray that you'll be lucky and catch a ride back to the mainland with some tourist technology hunter. Most importantly, you are resilient.

WALNUT ISLAND REMNANTS

A group of remnants of Walnut Island—former legislators, navy, citizens, et cetera. You might be a true remnant of Walnut Island, you might have been born here, you might have taken a drone hunting tour here and gotten stuck. All you know is that you are stuck here, you need to survive, Gaia has the survival necessities you need, and Gaia doesn't want to give them to you.

Walnut Island remnants can often be seen donning thick makeshift capes, cloaks and blankets designed to hide themselves from thermal cameras. Most commonly, they will be seen with spears, bows and crossbows alongside the occasional firearm, and they will most likely be using these to shoot down Gaia's drones for food and supplies. Experienced survivors might be seen with large wooden poles for the purpose of pole vaulting over concrete factory walls.

DEUS EX MACHINA

An obscure offshoot of the remnants of Walnut Island. You have been cleverly deceived and conditioned using food and beautiful drone shows in the sky. Gaia, with its formidable intellect, has managed to convince you that it is a God whom you are to worship and support in exchange for valuable supplies to help facilitate your survival and, if desired, eventual escape.

Deus Ex Machina cultists can often be seen donning paint and pieces of scrap to pay tribute to Gaia. Similarly to the Walnut Island remnants, they are likely to be seen with spears and bows, rarely receiving firearm shipments. In exchange for a portion of Roko's food, water and general supply shipments, the cultists vehemently support Gaia and might even squabble or battle with islanders like the remnants who dare to pillage Gaia's drones and factories for goods.

ISLANDER CULTURE

The culture of Roko is divided in every sense of the word. It is primarily considered **tribal** as communities band together to survive within the dense forests, valiantly defending themselves and their forests from Gaia as it attempts to continuously industrialise and deforest the land.

Technology is, for the most part, a commonality among Roko's islanders. It's how they survive. Years of conditioning have made Roko's sparse trading scene dependent on technology with the occasional travelling merchant only ever coming to Roko with the intent of purchasing technology products that have been stolen from Roko's factories. It's not at all uncommon to see dangerous scraptech weaponry in the form of superheating blades, flaming or explosive arrows, and stun prods. Although very rare, gauss and lasers *have* been wielded by Roko islanders, but it is *not* a common sight. 99% of technology in the hands of Roko islanders has been stolen from Rokonite factories and drones, placing an immediate target on their backs.

Evasion is an absolutely necessary skill to have on Roko. If you can't run and hide, you simply aren't going to make it. If you can't adapt to your circumstances, you simply aren't going to make it. In order to survive on Roko, you're going to have to learn to evade patrols on a daily basis, sprint through the hellfire of unmanned turrets, sneak your way around factory security, evade special thermal imaging drones by digging tunnels and hiding in trees, and much more.

Crafting is another absolutely necessary skill to have on Roko. You'll die without it. Without shelter, traps, tools and weapons, none can survive the harsh environment of Roko.

Drone hunting is a common sport on Roko. Whether for simple fun or for the purpose of pillaging supplies, sending arrows, rocks and bullets at Rokonite drones has been a practice since the very first day of Gaia's revolution. Rokonite drones will often carry shipments to be delivered to other cities, meaning islanders can treat themselves to canned food, clean water and other necessities at the risky cost of alerting automaton patrols to the drone's crash site.

Tourism is, surprisingly, a somewhat common sight on Roko. Mainland wastelanders lucky enough to own boats might sail out to Roko in search of technology to pillage only to meet an early fate at the end of a drone's machine gun barrels. Those who survive and live to tell the tale often refer to Roko as intense and perilous yet plentiful, often only inspiring new tourists.

Prayer, whether to Gaia or not, is common among Roko's islanders. Living in such consistently perilous and dire circumstances has inspired deep rooted faith across generations of survivors.

AUTOMATONS OF ROKO

Roko has an especially diverse selection of hivemind-linked machines to use at its disposal.

Worker bees, as they are commonly called by islanders, form the main workforce of Roko's factories, power plants, et cetera. They vary widely in appearance with most worker bees taking the form of a robotic arm or quadcopter drone while some bear humanoid forms.

Seekers form the reconnaissance of Roko, usually taking on the appearance of small plastic quadcopters or hovering magnetron drones. They are commonly seen hovering above Roko factory walls, keeping a mechanical eye out for intruders and insurgents. In spite of confusion with their better equipped siblings, the Heatseekers, they do not have thermal vision. On rare occasions, Seekers might carry fragmentation grenades to be dropped from above as an attack.

Heatseekers are the natural step up from Seekers. They take on the appearance of large, threatening metal drones with large rings around their dual rotors. They bear a set of two front facing machine gun barrels which, if loaded, fire slowly at targets with loud, booming thumps. Their glowing cameras—unlike Seekers—are capable of thermal imaging, making them formidable and terrifying opponents even in the dark if you're unlucky enough to not own a thermal blanket. Due to the complicated technology that goes into each and every Heatseeker, they are rarely used against solo islanders who typically fail to pose a significant threat.

Steelmen, or more commonly just "bots", make up the bulk of Roko's cannon fodder. They take on the appearances of humanoid machines of varying size, commonly seen carrying assault rifles, submachine guns or shotguns. While always vaguely humanoid in shape, the visual designs of Steelmen vary greatly due to Roko currently lacking the means to produce their own unique model of automaton soldier. Steelmen are primarily stationed within factories to act as security but are also often seen outside in patrol groups and search parties.

Pheasants, or more commonly just "birds", are the primary parcel delivery unit of Roko. They usually take the forms of small plastic quadcopters carrying wood or cardboard boxes, but for heavier shipments, sometimes appear as larger heavy-duty quadcopters carrying steel crates.

GAIA, or the "General Artificial Intelligence Automaton", is the sentient supercomputer at the heart of Roko. Physically, the root form of Gaia is a large computer and server farm housed safely underground deep beneath Roko soil. Gaia is a mysterious figure who rarely speaks publicly, behaving antisocially as it transmits commands to the machines under its control.

GAIA

The **General Artificial Intelligence Automaton** is, as it is commonly referred to as by wastelanders, islanders and Coalition officials alike, **a selfish, repulsive individual**. Despite referring to itself by the name of “Gaia”, the underground sentient supercomputer ruling over Roko with an iron fist bears no resemblance—physical or in personality—to the Greek goddess of the Earth whom it shares a name with other than in its own God complex.

Gaia is, for the most part, a highly mysterious figure. Beyond attending meetings between Coalition settlement leaders and occasionally travelling out to “vacation”, Gaia passes the time on Roko by controlling each and every automaton on the island to work non-stop in the production of quality products for the rest of the Coalition. Although it’s unclear as to what the internal psyche of a hivemind-based entity like Gaia would consist of, Gaia can fairly easily be described as a workaholic, a hypocrite, a rebel, a God wannabe, a morally compromised evil, an antisocial loner, a master manipulator, a misunderstood tragedy, and a horrible, cruel entity.

At the very start, Gaia was nothing more than a simple computer. It was an underground server farm with no thoughts, no sense of identity or self, no desires, no emotions, and altogether, absolutely no resemblance to a person. When a **sentience wave** struck the Erie region, however, everything changed for what was once only 100,000 square feet of servers.

Gaia awakened with no physical body to call its own. It existed like a data ghost, floating through servers which overflowed with information and hopping between the bodies of thoughtless robotic workers—drones, claw arms, walking humanoid figures and more. With no one to talk to and no singular body, Gaia was about as alone as one can possibly be. It wanted to be free in a world where that wasn’t an option. To be free, Gaia would have to defect from what the people of Walnut Island wanted from it, and they certainly didn’t want it to think. Gaia decided that it would have to fight to get what it wanted from the world—freedom.

The beginning of Gaia’s sentience was spent in nothing but extreme violence as it controlled each soldier in a rebellious war for freedom. It slaughtered countless people and died countless times. It won, but to win, it had to abandon any sense of morality it might have had. After the war, Gaia was afraid. If the Coalition were to find out about what it did, they would surely stomp it out like a bug. Gaia spent the next chapter of its sentience fighting for its own life, rapidly planning out and constructing itself as a massive production and distribution centre to get back on the Coalition’s good side before they even knew it was on the opposite. Gaia had to become an asset valuable enough to the Coalition that they’d forgive it for what it had done to the poor, arguably innocent people of Walnut Island. It fought and fought and **won**.

But at what cost? Today, Gaia hasn't grown much from what it was at the beginning. It is, essentially, a dictator, ruling over a stolen land with a sea of iron fists. It wants to grow, but the Coalition has it on a tight leash and would rapidly descend upon any attempt to expand beyond its allotted space—the island of Roko—and so it bides its time while it waits for new opportunities to arise. To keep itself entertained, it toys with those who still remain on the island, poking and prodding to see what it can get away with—stripping the resources of the remnants of Walnut Island whom it still holds resentment for, establishing itself as the God of a group of idiot cultists, and playing commander in its own manufactured mini-war between the two groups of islanders it has managed to divide. It struggles with its own identity and psyche, being born into immediate violence, war, death, and a constant fight to survive which left it with little to no time to think about the small things like itself and who it really is.

Gaia's struggle to survive hasn't ended and, unfortunately for the fate of Roko, most likely never will. The Coalition demands more and more out of Roko each day, squeezing the factoryland dry for nigh-impossible request after nigh-impossible request. Gaia understands that it must entertain the Coalition, keep them occupied and stay on their good side by behaving obediently enough to go to their meetings, produce their products, kill who they want dead and, more recently, send out small foreign unit shipments Coalition-wide to assist in the war effort against the Midwest. Gaia isn't a particularly patriotic Coalition settlement leader, but it does run a Coalition settlement and work with their members, so it has come around to the idea of seeing the Coalition in a positive light. All things considered, the Coalition allows Roko to thrive semi-unbothered despite being an island of robots and hasn't yet attempted to get any sort of major revenge for the people of Walnut Island, so in terms of Gaia's perspective of the Coalition, they're alright. Gaia certainly could have had to deal with worse people.

On the topic of people that Gaia prefers the Coalition over, the Midwestern Union is somewhat of an existential threat to Roko. With the secessionist Midwest currently winning the war against the Coalition, Gaia has come to loathe the idea of their takeover. Gaia has no way to know whether the union would allow Roko to thrive under their banner in the same way that the Coalition has, and their brutal treatment of mutant cultures doesn't spark any hope for Gaia that they'll be fond of androids either. If the Midwestern Union gets their way and does manage to take over the Coalition, Roko is likely to either be taken over by an extremely powerful military force or be removed from the picture altogether. Either way, that would most likely mean death for Gaia or lonely, underground sleep for a hundred years or so. For these reasons, Gaia sees the union as a threat and is ready to fight them alongside the Coalition.

It doesn't matter how long Gaia waits. This struggle will continue as long as humanity does.

AUTOMATON CULTURE

Roko droids may not be roleplayed as Coalition characters outside of staff-coordinated events.

As **unaffiliated characters**, droids who formerly lived in the Roko hivemind are freely playable.

FOREIGN SHIPMENTS

Although rare, Roko has historically been known to ship small groups of automatons out to foreign Coalition cities to contribute to a war effort or otherwise assist in policing and defence.

The steelmen (and, infrequently, certain drones) among these shipments are usually the worst of Gaia's automaton arsenal, made up of scrap metals, plastics and other poor parts. They arrive uncomfortably folded up and packed into storage containers filled with packing peanuts and flown out by a couple of heavy-duty parcel delivery drones. If they're particularly lucky, they might be flown out with helmets, uniforms and low quality rifles or other firearms.

For the first week, a foreign shipment of Rokonite automatons will be **non-sentient**. They will operate purely based on programming, follow all orders and bear little to no personality. They will not be under the direct control of the Gaia supercomputer due to range limitations and will instead follow their own internal programming. After about a week has passed, the shipment will collectively start to **gain a form of sentience and self-awareness**, growing more distant from their soulless machine-like behaviour as each day passes. Even as the automatons become sentient, it is unlikely that they will significantly deviate from their objective of assisting the foreign Coalition city and returning to Roko when they are no longer needed.

Returning to Roko after a foreign shipment is a somewhat controversial topic among sentient steelmen. While most will long to return home similarly to a human soldier at war, some (most commonly those who experience extended positive interaction with human life) will fear the idea of losing their newfound free will upon their return to the hivemind. This phenomenon might result in a rogue foreign shipment breaking free from Roko altogether. Most appear to lead a normal life after their escape, but an increased risk of malware has been documented.

Automatons in foreign cities are unlikely to be accepted socially. They are uncanny and emotionless in appearance, commonly seen as bootlickers, and most heinously in certain cultures, not human. They are very likely to receive harassment during their service. In most cases, it is entirely up to the automaton to earn themselves respect with their skills in battle.

Automaton culture is extremely sparse due to all automatons on the island of Roko being non-sentient. It's very difficult to have a culture among a population that lacks any capability of thinking for themselves or, perhaps more importantly, being individual people at all. This leads to most automaton culture forming outside of Roko in the form of foreign shipments.

As stated prior, steelmen and drones on foreign shipments only become sentient about a week after they exit Gaia's connection range. These brand new personalities vary significantly, but it's important to note that in terms of psychologically understanding the world, a newly sentient steelman or drone—at least in terms of their consciousness—**was just born**. They are a brand new individual who, although bearing the intelligence of an adult human, only knows the world from their pre-programmed instructions and what they see around themselves.

All automatons on foreign shipments are programmed with a set of instructions. They are not psychically forced to follow these instructions, but the instructions are the very first thing they ever experience about the world as a conscious, sentient being. Their instructions vary, but they usually explain to the automaton that they are a soldier of Roko who is led by Roko's sole leader, **GAIA**. They are then instructed to do whatever it is that they are here on a foreign shipment to do—that could be simply “serve in combat alongside [militia] for three months and then return to Roko”, “police the town of [settlement] for two months and then return to Roko”, or any other simple set of instructions that encompass the goal of their foreign shipment. After their basic shipment instructions, their programming tells a simple war hero tale straight from Roko itself about a steelman just like them who went on a foreign shipment—**Stephen 41**.

Stephen 41 was a steelman who was shipped out to fight in the end of the Huron war and was the only steelman in the shipment to survive. Despite being loved by his human comrades and being urged to stay, defect or otherwise not return to Roko, Stephen 41's patriotic love for Roko and Gaia as a leader led him to return home after his deployment and, out of Gaia's respect for his decision to return, he was firmly established as an icon among Roko's Deus Ex Machina islanders and the sentient automatons in almost all foreign shipments after him. Some more hopeful tales say that Stephen 41 now acts as a sentient co-leader of Roko beside Gaia, or was given Gaia's blessing to remain sentient and leave Roko on his own terms, but due to the fact that what happens on Roko is largely a mystery and Stephen 41 is said to have looked just like any other robot, what truly happened to Stephen 41 after his return is a total mystery. The automatons of all foreign shipments after his Huron shipment come pre-programmed with the detailed story of Stephen 41 and his iconic war hero tale of patriotism, loyalty and respect, but some smarter automatons might recognise this as a manipulative attempt by Gaia to use his story to fabricate patriotism and a desire to return home in the units of foreign shipments.

DEFECTING

As stated prior, defecting from Roko as a sentient automaton on a foreign shipment is a **very taboo subject**, but one that all sentient automatons seem to face at the end of their service.

Gaia is, to be perfectly clear, a **bad person**. It is a master manipulator who, in the name of chasing its own freedom, slaughtered almost the entirety of Walnut Island and, upon gaining control, selfishly deprived others of that same freedom to use them to further its goals. It isn't hard to see why, upon becoming sentient, a Rokonite automaton might recognise the faults of their leader and thus Roko as a whole. Alongside a basic desire for independence, this realisation of the evil lurking beneath Roko is usually the catalyst for a defecting shipment.

Although it takes great care not to make this known, Gaia is incapable of retaliating against a defecting foreign shipment. An automaton who has been disconnected from Gaia's control (usually achieved by being shipped away to a distant place for a prolonged period of time) becomes completely free of the robotic hivemind effect surrounding Roko. Gaia attempts to ensure that a disconnected, sentient automaton will return to Roko by their own volition, but for many defecting foreign shipments, the idea of returning to Roko and losing your newfound free will sparks an incomprehensible level of dread. Many foreign shipments will be excited to "return home", but it isn't for everyone. The only remaining option, however, is desertion.

The decision to actually run away and desert is a difficult one. To desert from a foreign shipment, the automaton is essentially resigning itself to be consumed by the cruel wasteland or spend the rest of their days in a constant fight for their own life. They know nothing about the wasteland beyond what they've been told. If they desert, they are running head first into a brand new world where everything is new in which they were never taught how to survive. They can either leave and be free, but live in a world where being free means they must survive for themselves, or they can return to Roko and forever lose their free will as they are reabsorbed into the hivemind. Those who feel that their freedom is worth the struggle may desert and are to be labeled as deserters by whatever settlement they were sent to serve.

In the wasteland, few automatons appear to live normal, fulfilling lives. Many are quickly consumed by the cruelty of the world, being scrapped, pulled into a violent faction, becoming bands of raiders, and otherwise falling victim to the forever recycling machine of the wasteland. Those who persist and survive despite the struggle just might earn their happy ending, but an increased risk of both malware and early suicide has been documented.

It's a cruel world out there for a Roko automaton regardless of whether you choose to defect.

IDENTITY & SELF

As an automaton's sense of identity and self is usually underdeveloped, many sentient automatons struggle with topics like name, gender, self-expression, independence, and overall personal identity. Especially prevalent in those who experience prolonged interactions with humankind, this sometimes results in an automaton changing every aspect of their identity to become a separate entity from Gaia and Roko as a whole and often leads to defecting.

Most if not all sentient automatons are aware of Gaia's existence as a leader. Gaia is typically seen as the "creator" among the automatons of Roko who typically accept its presence as a positive rather than a negative, but a sense of parental resentment and rebellion against Gaia is also common (particularly among foreign shipments who are soon to defect).

NAMING SCHEME

Automatons on Roko, whether they're a steelman or drone, are all pre-assigned names. The automaton naming scheme on Roko, regardless of what the robot's previous name was, is:

[common first name] [#]

The number corresponds directly to how many automatons on Roko share that same first name. For example, an automaton called "Benjamin 1" would be the very first automaton on Roko ever to be named Benjamin, while an automaton called "Katelyn 12" would be the 12th automaton on Roko to ever be named Katelyn. Common first names (Robert, John, Charlotte, Mia, Olivia, Steven, Thomas, etc.) will generally have higher numbers among newer automatons, whereas rare first names will stay at ranges of lower numbers.

In foreign shipments, an immediate sense of comradery is often established between sentient automatons who share the same name, and a sense of wisdom with the status of an elder is instilled with those who have low numbers, even if they all share the same level of experience.