

The Meme Machine

By A. Ferguson

Sensing the restlessness of the attendees, Akhurst cleared his throat and thoughts, drawing attention back to the podium and away from the rising screams of protests from outside.

Now to get to the meat of it.

‘The answer is memes. A meme, as we all know, is a contagious piece of information, a mind virus if you will that infects its host and alters the host’s behavioural patterns. It is a living thing, and seeks to reproduce itself, spread itself from host to potential host, disseminating itself as a truth, infecting all it touches. It preys on our desire to be accepted into a group, to be part of a community, to keep itself alive.

If one could apply the concept of memes to selling, one would have the perfect sales tool, infecting the consumer with the irresistible urge to invest in one’s own product.

Today this has been made possible!

Ladies and Gentlemen: The Meme Machine!

An Artificially Intelligent Virus which has cracked the manipulation of the human mind. A machine that will change the future!!’

Through the rising applause, the machine was revealed in all its glory: a small, innocuous, gleaming cube.

Akhurst noticed too late from his position on the podium the blinking light. The demonstration was not scheduled yet; what the hell was going on?

Akhurst peered frantically around the room, *Damn you Bekir, you smug son of a bitch*, thought Akhurst as his eyes locked with those of his rival, sat smiling at the back of the vast hall among the assembly of corporate heads and academic peers. It was typical of Bekir to pull a stunt like this. First the tipped-off demonstrators that had arrived early, bringing the media with them, and now this. *What the hell are you doing? You know how much damage can be done!*

And then the flash as the machine began to run, instantly capturing the assembly’s attention, freezing Akhurst in place, the soft voice stroking the subconscious minds of all present, reconfiguring them, the infection beginning, promises of immortality overcoming reason, a virus being born and striving to protect itself in the weak vessels before it. That life should provide the key to life. That immortality would result from the consumption of mortality. The commands so simple and yet so obvious. Irresistible. Mind altering.

Consume. Live Forever. Spread the Word.

Silence followed, broken only by the air conditioner's soft murmur, as the minds in the room digested this new outlook.

A loud slam sound shattered the silence. And another. A wet crunch following as the saboteur Bekir plunged a colleague's head into the wooden backing of the row of seats in front, and picking out the scraps of bone from the ruptured skull took his first bite of immortality as hell broke loose around him.

Fifteen minutes later the blood-soaked delegates that remained exited the conference centre.

Met by stunned silence, a captive market was found in the horrified protesters.

A new word was spread, a new lifestyle sold....

History has shown that Man prefers to believe what he prefers to be true.

The Meme spread quickly, mutating and evolving in its hosts, accessing their memories in order to cast itself wider; acting at first on pure survival instinct.

In no time at all it had found what it needed. Lights, cameras, a news crew and an audience in their homes watching the devastation on their televisions: It followed the path of all the other more innocuous and less contagious memes that had preceded its existence.

In minutes it had conveyed its message through satellites, across the country, and a nation of immortals was born in blood and chaos in their own homes.

The strong consumed the weak; the stronger consumed the strong.

The Meme, its existence secure, now looked to preserve itself in a longer-term way. Should its hosts feed on each other to the point where there were none left, the Meme would die for it was only thought, and while powerful could not exist without the weak vessels it infected.

Through its million hosts it evolved in a million different ways, sometimes consuming itself, but all the time growing stronger, looking for more effective ways to secure its own survival, treading the paths other more established memes had travelled through religion and politics; twisting doctrines of communion and insinuating itself into consciousness, finding leaders strong enough to stand in the face of its own fury and bring the raging storm of humanity to a semblance of order.

Through these leaders the Meme mutated again, concealing itself among their messages, enfolding itself in rituals that were now perceived as timeless, spreading itself as a new word, a new way of life, an ordered way of living whereby it would thrive unchallenged.

All men think all men mortal, save themselves.

As is common, from one civilisation rose another, and as it did the Meme continued to reinforce its grip on humanity in any way it could.

While incomprehensibly powerful though it was, even the Meme itself could not alter the reality that humanity, despite its new belief in its own immortality, was not in fact immortal.

As it continued to infiltrate the thoughts and beliefs of its new hosts, it needed to find ways around the reality of its existence: The human mind can only ignore so much and would ultimately begin to doubt its own beliefs given enough evidence and time.

As the nations began to clamber back to their feet, they discovered they had entered a new Dark Age; knowledge had been consumed in the Meme's birth and expertise and skills required to maintain all the systems that had preceded the Meme's existence were lost.

Humanity's leaders began to preach a doctrine of strength, of purity. The sick, the ailing, those who displayed signs of ageing: these could not be strong and therefore should provide food for the new civilisation. They were culled.

Whilst the Meme could cycle humanity's consumption of itself, it was a temporary measure only.

Religion was subverted and corrupted. The one God, who preached immortality, soon became the One Word. The Communion became ritual: a weekly consumption of blood and body that would ensure immortal life.

As evidence grew that sickness and ageing continued a new enemy was sought. Those who would work against the Word, those who would try to undermine it, those who worked to undermine civilisation.

The Meme turned to humanity's past and found within its minds the purges of Stalin, the witch-hunts of Salem, the Inquisition of Torquemada, and the impure subversives were eliminated.

All had a right to immortality and measures were soon taken to secure food.

Farms were set up; healthy breeding stock were honoured most highly, and babies were bred as food. These could not be immortal, for what need did immortals have for children?

Different ages suited different palettes and the children were set free in fields, fed animals and plants. They aged and fell ill because they had no knowledge of the One Word, for who would think to educate food?

The Meme turned humanity to the science of cloning, and while a slow process and a lost art, the Meme looked forward to the time where the people would be able to consume themselves in their quest to live forever.

And but for the subversives, 20 years on, the world now stands on the brink of a new era of peace.

Go from knowing what others believe to knowing what you believe.

There are those that, for whatever reason, remain uninfected by the Meme.

There remained after the devastation a tiny fragment of humanity that was immune. They watched in horror as humanity declined, hearing the Word, but not understanding it, unable to make sense of it, but knowing that all around them men and women fed on each other in savage blood lust. They fled the power of this infection, forced to watch as the world changed around them, congregating in small groups in utter confusion, but knowing at heart now that there has to be a way to combat this and forever seeking a method to bring humanity back to itself.

Far from the touch of humanity, small enclaves of people eke out an existence. They are deaf now, and know themselves as the Spiked, though they know not why. Living in communities of silence, communicating with no one, they are uncertain of the history of the rituals that involve piercing their own newborn children's eardrums.

Some wear sophisticated plugs to prevent hearing the Word, for while they do not know the Word, they have been told of its power by those who remained uninfected. They know how rapid its infection can be, and the horrific results of contamination. For the most part they live apart from humanity, loners who obey a strict set of laws that prevents even a mention of the Word or its doctrines.

Story Ideas

Rebel Yells

Story ideas for the Uninfected or rebel Cast members. Survivor, Norm or Inspired are appropriate character types.

The Relics

Only a few remember how it all began. The Meme has protected itself well and the knowledge of the machine has been concealed until now. The history of the machine has come to light, as have the plans for its construction.

If the Meme Machine can be reprogrammed, or rebuilt, and a new Word spread, humanity can be saved.

But the machine itself and the plans lies in the very heart of the Great Cathedral, at the heart of the new civilisation, where they are protected as sacred relics.

Fight the Word

Humanity can be reborn, the children educated and the Word fought. If the Uninfected can raise an army, they can fight the Bearers of the Word.

If the Bearers of the Word can be killed, their immortality is disproved and the human mind has a chance to fight back.

Free the Cows

The children are the future of humanity. They must be freed and given sanctuary. At the very worst the food stocks will be disrupted.

They can because they think they can.

Bearers of the Word

It is important to remember that while the Bearers of the Word (i.e., all the infected) believe themselves immortal, they are in fact not.

The mind has been infected with a meme so utterly strong and convincing that it is all but impossible to break the new belief. The Bearers of the Word have an overriding hunger for the flesh of the living at least once a week, but for all intents and purposes are in fact living people.

As such ZMs may find it appropriate to create 'fodder' from the zombie templates (see below), or create more detailed NPCs (or indeed, Cast Members) from the Zombie Creation Rules outlined in the ZM Screen, where abilities closely mimic the living, the Bearers of the Word have skills and motivations, but are able to infect others.

Story seeds involving the Bearers of the Word may involve protecting the machine from terrorist attacks, ensuring the safety of broadcasting equipment or hunting subversives and gathering food.

It is entirely possible that ultimately the Uninfected be able to reinfect a Bearer of the Word to have him spread a new Word.

Sample Bearer of the Word

Str: 2 Dex: 1 Con: 2

Int: 2 Per: 2 Wil: 2

DPs: 26

EPs: 23

Spd: 6

Essence: 11

Skills: At ZM discretion, Language (Local Area) 5, Brawling 2, Rituals 5

Attack: Punch D4(2)*2, Kick D4(2)*3

Weak Spot: All
Getting Around: Life-Like
Strength: Dead Joe Average
Senses: Like the Living
Sustenance: Weekly, All Flesh Must Be Eaten
Intelligence: Language, Long Term Memory, Problem Solving, Tool Use (3)
Spreading the Love: One Word and You're Hooked (As One Bite and You're Hooked (AFMBE pg 157))

Power: 36

The Primes

While the uninfected proved immune to the virus, there existed those at the time of its accidental unleashing whose minds were unable to fully assimilate the knowledge.

While those around them consumed flesh in the quest for their own immortality (until the Meme had established itself), the Primes never evolved.

Bestial in nature, the Primes are now as all were when a humans were first infected: violent, hungry and seeking a constant diet of flesh to feed the hunger for immortality.

Rare now, they can be found occasionally roaming in the countryside, dishevelled and ravaged, feeding on any living creature in reach while cold, contaminative logic babbles forth from their mouths in a near continuous stream.

Reviled by all the uninfected avoid them, the Spiked hunt them and the Meme seeks only to consume them.

Sample Prime

Str: 2 Dex: 1 Con: 2
Int: 1 (2) Per: 2 Wil: 2
DPs: 26
EPs: 23
Spd: 6
Essence: 10
Skills: At ZM discretion, Language (Local Area) 5, Brawling 2
Attack: Punch D4(2)*2, Kick D4(2)*3
Weak Spot: All
Getting Around: Life-Like
Strength: Dead Joe Average
Senses: Like the Living
Sustenance: Daily, All Flesh Must Be Eaten
Intelligence: Language, Long Term Memory, Animal Cunning (+4)
Spreading the Love: One Word and You're Hooked (As One Bite and You're Hooked (AFMBE pg 157))

Power: 21

Notes

There does exist hard science behind the ideas in this deadworld. Memetics is a field of growing ideas. Should you wish to know more a great starting place could be found at <http://memes.org/>

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