



Numenera Corebook

Monte Cook

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There have been eight previous worlds.

Each world stretched across vast millennia of time. Each played host to a race whose civilizations rose to supremacy but eventually died or scattered, disappeared or transcended. During the time that each world flourished, those that ruled it spoke to the stars, reengineered their physical bodies, and mastered form and essence, all in their own unique ways.

Each left behind remnants.

People of the new world - the Ninth World - sometimes call these remnants magic, and who are we to say they're wrong? But most give a unique name to the legacies of the nigh-unimaginable past. The call them...

Numenera

The Ninth World is built on the bones of the previous eight. The game of Numenera is about discovering the wonders of the world that came before, not for their own sake, but as the means to improve the present and build a future.

Set in a far, far distant future, Numenera puts a new spin on traditional fantasy, creating something unique to reinvigorate the imagination of gamers everywhere. Player characters explore a world of mystery and danger to find leftover artifacts of the past: bits of nanotechnology, the datasphere threaded among still-orbiting satellites, bio-engineered creatures, and myriad strange and wondrous devices that defy understanding.

With streamlined, intuitive rules, Numenera allows players to create characters in minutes and puts the emphasis back on story rather than laborious mechanics. Numenera is the latest creation of one of the biggest names in roleplaying games, award-winning designer and fan-favorite Monte Cook.

Numenera Offers:

Streamlined story-based mechanics

The means for players to create the character they truly want to play

Open-ended gameplay with a strong narrative

A focus on mystery and the unknown, filling players with a sense of wonder

A complete overview of the Ninth World setting, filled with imaginative ideas, useful hooks, interesting characters, and wild locales

A bestiary of more than fifty creatures and characters

Descriptions of hundreds of technological items

Three chapters of game mastering advice written by one of the foremost experts on the topic

Four adventures to kickstart any campaign

Numenera Corebook Details

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From Reader Review Numenera Corebook for online ebook

Bishop says

Disclaimer: These are my opinions after just having read the sourcebook, without actually having GMd or played the game ever at all.

I got this after helping kickstart Torment: Tides of Numenara which I was interested in because I liked Planescape: Torment. I was only peripherally interested in the setting, but the ToN people kept going on about how Numenara is a groundbreaking new pen and paper role playing setting set a billion years in the future with a non-traditional, simplified ruleset that de-emphasizes combat and focuses gameplay more on exploration and adventure.

If it hadn't been for that hype, I think I would have enjoyed it a lot more as just a regular run of the mill RPG campaign sourcebook. I liked reading about the different kingdoms and the monster designs were cool and everything.

But I don't think it innovates much on either the setting or gameplay fronts. It doesn't have the foreignness that a distant future, ultra high tech setting should have -- all the human societies seem lifted straight out of feudal Europe. Why are there humans a billion years in the future? That's only addressed, or rather, dismissed, as being one of the many mysteries of the Ninth World that no one knows the answer to. And it doesn't make sense how despite the godtech of the eight previous worlds still being accessible, no one has actually started to learn the science of it or used it to move society out of the dark ages. If godtech exists in a world, it shouldn't just be trinkets adventurers can use to get temporary combat bonus points, it should change the core nature of civilization. Just think about some sub-godtech: cars, telephones, internet. A setting like this could be an opportunity to imagine how civilization would develop differently if people developed science and technology in a totally different order than our historical order (what if we had an internet before boats, for example). And how do the power politics play out when some people who just learned from a monolith how to manipulate black holes or whatever are living next to a bunch of stone age mammoth hunters? But Cook seems to want to avoid all that and let technologies be just these unknowable, local, transient things.

And despite the lip service to a focus on exploration, the rule system and gameplay really does still seem to revolve 99% around combat. It's a D&D style traditional hack and slash game. I was hoping for some gameplay frameworks around interpersonal relationship dynamics, for example, or diplomatic/political strategies, or travel, or leading groups or founding cities, or conducting far future science and engineering. But no, the rules are all about modifying attack rolls and damage tracks and things like that.

Still, I'm sure it's enough of a base to stand on for the ToN writers and artists that the computer game will be able to fulfill at least some of the promise of its Torment heritage.

I liked the section for gamemasters about keeping the weirdness of the setting and I'll probably use that as inspiration when I'm adding details to my own far future game setting.

Russ says

Love the way this system supports the GM. And the world is full of possibilities.

Jonathan Rebar says

One of my favorite RPG systems to date. Worth its price and applicable to other RPG systems as well.

Ahimsa says

The rare RPG book that I read from cover to cover. Although the pdf isn't cheap, I'll have to get the physical book too. Even though I'll likely never play it. That's how many great ideas are in here.

Max says

I wanted to like this, I really did. After all, the concept of the game is pretty cool. The setting, the Ninth World, is a billion years in the future after eight previous civilizations have risen and fallen, leaving all sorts of magic-like hypertech lying around on Earth. And the system promises to be rules light with a cool character creation mechanic. However, Numenera fails to live up to its promises. Despite Monte Cook's insistence that the Steadfast is a setting full of weird stuff, it's largely just a typical fantasy setting with a bunch of science fantasy explanations for things. There are a few fun quirks, like a queen who lives her entire life in a clean room to prolong her reign, but mostly there's just the same sort of stuff you'd expect from a generic fantasy campaign. I find Cook's assertion that the setting provides an excuse to have all sorts of anachronistic thoughts and ideas amongst the characters ridiculous because it's not like D&D or other fantasy staples have ever claimed to be truly accurate to the real life Middle Ages. Plus, unlike some game worlds, the Ninth World doesn't actually feel like it has a true sense of history to it. There's very little detail on the previous worlds, and the GM is even encouraged to keep changing things, allegedly to provide a sense of mystery. Mystery, however, doesn't work if it can't be solved, and to me if there's no real sense of the heights and depths of previous civilizations, there's no way to compare the present of the setting and see how it measures up. There's no real feeling of striving to recapture a golden age or make up for the sins of the past. There is an adventure that includes what's likely a Dyson Sphere, which made me realize that that would be a much better setting for what Cook is trying to do than Earth a billion years from now.

The mechanics are equally disappointing. I do like the idea of the "I'm an Adjective Noun that Verbs" character creation, but there's still a fair bit of mechanics tied in to those three things. Rather than being quick and easy like Fate Aspects, instead it's a lot like choosing classes and skills in D&D. Also like D&D, spellcasters (here called nanos) are clearly the way to go. While fighters and mages are roughly equal at the start, the best martial abilities are stuff like hitting five dudes at once whereas wizards can move literal tons of material or travel the multiverse at will. Plus, all abilities are effectively cast from hit points, but the mental HP that nanos draw on is far less likely to be hit than the physical health that fighters use, so that's yet another thing that sucks. Instead of magic items, characters can acquire cyphers and artifacts. Cyphers are single use items, including things like potions, explosives, short term invisibility and flight and the like. They're meant to be used often rather than being hoarded, but I'm not sure the mechanics are set up in a way that truly discourages typical player behavior. Artifacts are longer-term items, though generally most are neat but not that weird, and a single use explosive arrow is an artifact rather than a cypher which is just goofy. The actual resolution mechanic involves expending various character resources to adjust a difficulty number

before rolling a D20 (generally with no modifiers) against the difficulty. Aside from the fact that you rate things from 1 to 10, adjust them, and then multiply by three to get the actual number to roll against, it's not a bad system as long as you ignore Cook's advice and tell players exactly what the difficulty number is so they know how to use their points and such. I like the idea of all obstacles and enemies being expressed with pretty simple stats - often just a single number with a few situational adjustments - but given how the player side of things work, Numenera doesn't seem as easy to use as it claims to be.

Overall, there are some neat ideas here, and if there's ever a second edition that fixes the mechanical bugs I'd have more interest. After all, there are a bunch of supplements that expand the setting and may potentially make it more interesting. However, I don't really feel like investing time and money into this system when there are other games that are more inspiring, run better, or both.

Andrew Vice says

Easily the best Corebook I've read for an RPG in years. Brimming with creativity, ideas for adventure and just...I don't know, grit, stuff, details that make the setting alive, this is entertaining a read just for the fun of it, and the game is pretty good too!

GrilledCheeseSamurai says

This is easily one of the best core rulebooks for an RPG I have ever read. The quality of paper stock, the artwork, and the organization of content is perfect. There is even a wonderfully large fold out map of the Ninth world included.

Numenera is a new RPG tabletop system from Monte Cook games. It uses the new Cypher system which is extremely easy to use. It takes all the pressure off the GM and allows the players to make all the rolls in the game. The GM literally does not roll the dice, which frees them up to focus on what really matters...the story.

It's surprisingly easy to master the Cypher System. It structures itself around a table of tasks ranked from 1-10. 1 Being easy and 10 being superhuman. That's all you really need to know. Honest. If you are looking for a new RPG system to get into that is heavy on roleplaying and light on dice mods and rules - this is the game for you.

Numenera (or the Ninth World) is a pretty fucked up world. It's a fantastic blend of sci-fi and fantasy with a heavy dose of Lovecraftian horror. I am having a blast with my gaming group playing this. This core book gives you ample locations and artwork to use in your game but leaves plenty of space to make up your own stuff as well.

I really can't recommend it enough! It's fantastic! Go get some friends and go on an adventure or two! I guarantee you will be hooked!

Jacob says

I got this a while ago because I like Monte Cook's work and this looked interesting. It's actually a Rule &

Setting book for a roleplaying game, and my older two kids have read it and been begging me to play it with them so I've finally read it and started. They are loving it even though I am definitely not any more than mediocre at best. They don't say much about how well they like it while we play, but every time we've stopped to pick up again later they say, "Wow, that was great." I suspect their imaginations are filling in a lot of the gaps. I also suspect that's the nature of roleplaying games if you like them -- there's so much potential that even an okay game can be a lot of fun.

As for the book, it's quite good. Cook has a definite setting in mind and sticks to it: the Earth a billion years in the future, when multiple human & alien civilizations have risen to astonishing technological heights and fallen, leading to a world where humans dominate once again but in a very crude way focused mostly on survival. They literally live on top of bits of technology from the past that are weird, super-advanced, and often only working temporarily, and the game is focused on discovery, exploration, and wonder. The rules of the game are fairly simple, although not as simple as Cook has been claiming. The rule section is pretty accessible and easy to learn, but takes a little practice to get the hang of, which I suspect is the case for most games. The setting is pretty neat and certainly an interesting read.

The one significant failure in the game is a weakness common to all science fiction about the far future: it's about something that is far beyond our culture and civilization, but we can't imagine enough to fill in the gaps and the result ends up being a lot more based on our current culture and technological understanding than it should. It's a problem endemic to any far-future science fiction, so I wouldn't mention it here, except that Cook explicitly states that anyone running the game shouldn't fall victim to it and describe things in terms of current culture & technology. And yet he does that himself, even if it's one level removed from direct references. I'm not sure who could avoid it, given how much humans understand things based on metaphor (comparisons to what we already know).

Hugo Barbosa says

Numenera is a game about Earth in about a billion years in the future. The player characters explore the world and many wondrous artifacts left by previous dead civilizations, of which there were eight. Not that different from a fantasy game, you say? And you would be right. However, everything the characters encounter is technology so advanced that is mistaken by magic. The game's premise is Arthur C. Clarke's third law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." In other words, a setting with medieval-like technology where magic is really unimaginably advanced pieces of technology. And this is what gives the game its unique flavor.

I'm a big fan of mixing fantasy with sci-fi. Shadow World (for Rolemaster) did that and some of Heroes of Might and Magic (the PC game) also did that. Numenera takes this one step further. While those games were predominantly fantasy with elements of sci-fi thrown in, in Numenera every magic-like effect is sci-fi. Someone using telekinesis may have had his brain mutated by an odd machine or he may just be using a metal orb in his hand that makes things fly. A creature found in the wilderness is just the result of genetic bio-engineering. Even the world shows signs of having been tampered with by very advanced civilizations like mountains upside down or areas where time is slower or a fortress that is just the upper part of a very ancient space vessel now buried underground.

The system is very easy to grasp and simple with one caveat: the GM never, EVER, rolls a dice. Everything is done on the players' side. If they attack, they roll. If they are attacked, they roll defense. If they want to notice someone approaching stealthily, they roll to see them. If they want to move stealthily, they roll to

sneak. Character creation is easy and yet there are so many combinations that no two groups will be the same even if they all choose the same type of character.

The setting is the real standout, in my opinion. It's quite good. You won't find any elves, dwarves or orcs here. None of the usual fantasy tropes are present. The current technology is somewhat reminiscent of 1000AD, mixed with all sorts of strange stuff. You may find a city that looks like a medieval city but every building is manufactured with strange metals and the walls, instead of doors, open to let you pass, or there could be a city in the clouds propelled by giant reactors and people don't know how they work but they lie there nonetheless. In fact, there's a city that reminds me of the moving city in the John Carter movie.

The rules for creating numenera (the odd bits of technology) are quite good. The book includes ready to use lists of numenera, too. It also includes a small bestiary which is fun to read and shows how much inventive a GM can be.

The only section of the book that is slightly sub-par is the scenario section, of which there are 4. Let me stress beforehand that the adventures are quite short, so part of the problem may have been lack of space to develop deeper adventures. Even so, their quality is uneven. Perhaps I was so spoiled by the setting in that it created certain expectations the scenarios could never fulfil. The first adventure is a fairly nice introductory adventure. It's non-linear, but it pushes combat one too many times. The second adventure amounts to little more than a dungeon crawl, but inside a space ship instead of a... well, dungeon. The third one is very good, with plenty of room for intrigue. The characters must face several opposing factions, choose one side or none at all. Too bad it's too short. And the fourth presents what could possibly be an epic plot, although it's also too short and ends fairly quick.

It's not that the adventures are bad, but they are not up to the promise made by the earlier parts of the book. An experienced GM who can expand any of them into really great scenarios and perhaps that's the intention. I know I will shape them and bend them to make adapt them to my group. They contain great seeds and excellent idea seeds.

All in all, it's a very good book with a brilliant setting, a very nice set of rules and some fairly average adventures.

Alfonso Junquera perez says

Juego de rol con una ambientación futurista en la que se aplica al maximo la regla de Arthur C. Clarke: "Toda tecnología lo suficientemente avanzada es indistinguible de la magia". En las ruinas del Noveno Mundo existen reliquias y dispositivos tecnologicos que los habitantes del mundo utilizan pero en muchos casos no comprenden y no distinguen de la magia.

Uno de los posibles objetivos del juego (aunque no el unico ya que cada grupo de jugadores es distinto) es el descubrimiento de estos lugares para encontrar cosas utiles que, aunque quizas no se usen como pensaban sus creadores, se puedan utilizar de alguna u otra manera.

Ademas para esta tarea se proporciona un sistema de juego novedoso en el que se intenta que lo que prime es la narración sobre lo que serian las reglas puras y duras, aunque siguen existiendo las tiradas para proporcionar un aletoriedad que haga mas divertida la experiencia.

Gran manual, gran ambientación y gran juego que intentare dirigir y jugar si es posible.

Seán says

An excellent rule-book that does a great job of explaining the system while drawing you into the setting. For me, Numenera is the ultimate setting for a gaming group that likes a bit of everything. Earth a billion years in the future has seen countless civilisations rise and fall, and the technology that they each utilised may still exist, buried deep and waiting to be found by bold adventurers.

Want traditional medieval fantasy? No problem, explore one of the quiet countries where tech is extremely rare and fiefdom-politics is the focus.

Fancy hard sci-fi? Up the tech level, have the party discover some space-flight capable ships and oh-oh, there's an alien race out for blood who've just appeared in the system.

How about some inter-dimensional Lovecraftian horror? Got you covered for that - one of the numerous precursor races tapped into some alien power to advance their own civilisation, and oh shit, big bad Yog-Sothoth is currently ripping through the dimensional fabric of the Ninth World to collect his price.

Numenera's setting allows for basically any theme to appear in your game, and for them all to exist in tandem with each other. The Ninth World allows for basically any fantastical or science-fictional plot device to be included and explained as 'long-lost tech.' The system itself is one of the most streamlined and enjoyable I've played, and it allows the GM to focus on the story instead of worrying about drawing up stats for each individual encounter. Even if gaming isn't your thing, I would still recommend checking out the setting for some enjoyable world-building and SFF ideas that trump the majority of published fiction out there.

Roger says

Ok game idea, unusual game mechanics but struggling to see what the hype's about.

Jorge says

The Good

The book is beautiful, the illustrations are literally awesome. The game is substantially simpler than previous games Monte Cook has written for. There are great design ideas within Numenera. Building blocks of the roleplaying experience, such as connections between characters and character hooks into the campaign are worked into character creation, giving the GM a break from having to figure all that stuff up himself. The rules cover a wide range of situations. The setting is pretty cool and original. I really like how the core book really contains everything you need to play. There are also great tips on running a roleplaying game and game design that are very useful and incredibly insightful regardless of game system.

The Bad

Even if simpler than other systems, some subsystems of the game are still too complex for my taste. Still too much emphasis and work is given to the GM in my opinion. Seems to me that Numenera could have been an easier game to GM. Of course, in the end that will depend on the GM himself but that is the general feel I get from reading the book and the suggested style of play. Ironically, Monte says this is not what he means to do with the game—and he succeeds in many places—but the rules say otherwise in others. The game succeeds in telling you how you should play Numenera (or any good roleplaying game for that matter) but the rules don't make this style of play all that obvious most of the time and the onus of "encouraging" this style on all players falls on the GM.

The Fuzzy

I can't decide whether players making all the rolls is a good or a bad thing, since it does make it an easier job for the GM but it also takes all the dice-rolling fun with it. GMs are players too and they should be entitled to rolling dice simply because it's part of the game and it's fun. I'm afraid it may make GMing seem more of a chore and the GM more liable for his "intrusions" than fate itself when dice are rolled instead. I get why "intrusions" are important and I think they're brilliant in concept, it's their implementation I'm not entirely sure of. The game's open-endedness is also a fuzzy area for me, it's good because it promotes creativity but at the same time creates more work for the GM in the game-balance department.

The Ugly

The book could be better edited, the same explanation is repeated in many places, sometimes in the very next paragraph. The text feels like a rough draft sometimes, lacks cohesion, with design notes seeming to leak into the final product. Some descriptions are clearly written with a D&D player in mind, telling the reader what Numenera is not when compared to "other games", and how rules in this game differ from rules in "other games", often ending up in Monte-rants (which I agree with by the way, I just think they belong elsewhere, not in a game's core book). Some descriptions should not even be there at all (such as explaining what a deaf or blind character is). It could have been a much shorter product if it were better edited. Less is more.

Conclusion

I think conceptually the game is in a really good place, some of Monte's ideas I feel though, don't quite translate as well to the game. Sometimes Monte himself tells us what his game concept is in a side note for a particular rule or "the advantages of the system" (which begs the question: the advantage as opposed to what? the answer probably being the regular d20 system). But the game should show, not tell. Regardless, the setting is really something and Numenera is definitely a step forward in roleplaying games and useful for roleplayers in general, whether you're playing Numenera or something else entirely.

Pedro says

Desde que lei los libros de Planescape hace unos cuantos años, Monte Cook me ha parecido uno de los diseñadores de juegos más originales. El concepto detrás de Numenera y el sistema de juego Cypher son dos cosas sencillas y a la vez muy flexibles. La premisa de este juego es que después de posiblemente billones de años en el futuro, han surgido y se han extinto al menos ocho "mundos". La humanidad (evolucionada, mutada, cambiada) ha resurgido una novena vez sobre los restos y vestigios de las anteriores ocho, con millones de años de por medio. Es un juego de rol en donde se hace más énfasis en la exploración y el descubrimiento de ruinas, artefactos y tecnologías de mundos pasados que en el combate. El mundo es

extraño y las posibilidades para esa extrañeza son infinitas.

Solo dos cosas encontré difíciles de digerir en este libro de reglas:

1) el sistema de creación de personajes que me pareció un poco abstracto. Entiendo que la idea detrás de esto es que sea lo suficientemente abierto como para que los jugadores puedan ser literalmente cualquier cosa que se les ocurra. Sin embargo, alguien poco familiarizado con el sistema y más acostumbrados a las categorías tradicionales de los RPG, podría tener dificultades para realmente aprovechar esas posibilidades abiertas.

2) las aventuras introductorias incluídas en el libro, también dejan mucho al GM. Teniendo en cuenta el nivel de abstracción que hay que tener para imaginar una sociedad a lo Conan un billón de años en el futuro en donde se mezcla superstición, fantasía y ciencia ficción; creo que hace falta que las aventuras tengan más estructura, detalles y ayudas visuales.

En todo caso, el sistema y el setting me encantan y esos detalles que menciono, son abordados por muchos otros libros de Numenera, y seguramente en los dos nuevos libros por venir el año que viene: Numenera Destiny y Numenera Discovery, en donde se van a añadir elementos y algunos cambios, pero totalmente compatibles con todos libros del sistema que ya han publicado.

100% recomendado, y me encantaría empezar a jugar (o correr) una campaña en ese "Noveno Mundo".

John Walker says

Great writing, excellent creative setting, my favorite RPG system for story focus with a great balance of fluff/crunch. Just jumped into the Kickstarter for Numenera 2 a fully retro compatible improvement.
