FATES WORSE THAN DEATH: RENTPUNK

WARNING

This Book Contains The Following:

drugs	crime	violence	sex & alternative lifestyles	extreme political ideas

The questionable elements in this book are:

idealized/encouraged ✗ | presented neutrally players must decide | demonized/prohibited ✗

NOT RECCOMENDED

for people with

POOR CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

This book has been voluntarily rated:

BURN IMMEDIATELY

INTRODUCTION

What is This?

Fates Worse Than Death is a gritty urban cyberpunk game first published in 2004 by Vajra Enterprises. The original Fates Worse Than Death uses the Organic Rules Components system. Fates Worse Than Death: Rentpunk is a game that takes place in the Fates Worse Than Death setting, written for the Rentpunk Game Jam (http://rentpunk.tumblr.com/) and using the Fate Accelerated rules, which have been released under a Creative Commons by Evil Hat Productions.

Fates Worse Than Death: Rentpunk Is Not For Kids

Most Vajra games can be played in a family-friendly fashion by choosing not to include certain elements that are not appropriate for younger players. However, Rentpunk is specifically about whether or not you will choose to do things that are dangerous, or gross, or hurt your self-esteem, or are illegal, or make you question whether you are still a good person. Thus, Rentpunk is not for kids.

Why Fates Worse Than Death?

When I first envisioned the Fates Worse Than Death setting, over a decade ago, I wanted to create a world where all the cool stuff that science and technology seemed destined to bring about was possible, but where the day to day concerns of modern urban life still mattered. I wanted to make a game where one day you might be trying to stop a rogue AI, and the next day you might be trying to scrounge up enough for a portable heater because your radiator stopped working in the dead of winter. I also wanted to create a game that countered the prejudice in must fiction (especially scifi) that rich people are the only people worthy of telling stories about and the only people who can improve society. I thus created a setting full of badass poor people, so as to encourage players to poor characters.

The concept of the Rentpunk Game Jam, of "what if financial precariousness was an adventure" called out to me. In fact, the first novel I wrote in the Fates Worse Than Death setting is about a teen runaway living in a Single-Room Occupancy hotel with some other runaways, and a good portion of the action in the book involves her trying to make her rent. Rentpunk stories are one of the types of stories I created the Fates Worse Than Death setting to be able to tell.

Why Fate Accelerated?

The original Fates Worse Than Death came with Organic Rule Components, which is very much an "okay, tell me exactly how many doses of antibiotic you have remaining, and we'll find out whether you live or not" kind of rule system, which is great for telling some types of stories. ORC asks "what would happen if this were real?" and Fate asks "how do we make a good story?" Both of these are good questions to ask, but since Rentpunk stories are about how you live your life, and what the things you do mean to you, Fate's emphasis on collaborating storytelling fits that bill well, and Fate Accelerated makes for the quick spin-up of characters so you can jump right into the action and discover more about your character and how he or she lives along the way.

How Has Fate Accelerated Been Changed?

Although this volume is based on Fate Accelerated Edition, a few things were tweaked to make it fit better with the mood and play needs of Rentpunk:

• The Aspects characters start with have been changed. Now one of the Aspects should be a Need.

• There are now four slot for consequences, each of a different type (physical, mental, social and financial) and each one can hold a mild, moderate or severe consequence.

• Instead of campaigns, the focus is now on month-to-month survival.

• Many of the examples have been changed to be specific to this setting, the order of things has been changed around a bit.

The Story So Far

In the aftermath of the Freedom Wars of the 2040s, the world was looking for a new way of living. The rule of puppet governments by a handful of super-powerful corporations had been dystopian, and the attempts by the Freedom Army to institute socialism had been just as bad. A new way was found with the help of mental programming technology. This tech let people peer into the minds of others, to accurately gauge their loyalties and their psychological strengths and weaknesses. With psychometric testing, a community could accept only those who would make the community thrive. Utopianist communes were the first, most radical form of new community built on this model. Then came gated communities: autonomous, self-sustaining mini-societies where the machinery of society was lubricated by the absolute trust that only accurate psychometric testing allowed. While Utopianist Communes wanted to save

the world, Gated Communities wanted only to achieve safe, comfortable lifestyles for their members. Gated Communities became so wildly popular that the post-war corporations had to adopt many of their methods in order to survive, creating private living centers for their employees. The ranks of these new planned communities swelled as everyone who could join them did so.

The island of Manhattan, in New York City, has been a major battlefield in the Freedom Wars and still wore the scars. As new communities formed outside Manhattan, the island's population shrank. Those who remained were those who couldn't or wouldn't join the new communities: addicts, the mentally ill, illegal immigrants, sociopaths, extremists, eccentrics, radicals, idealists, the selfish, the stupid and the lazy. As the law-abiding population grew smaller, Manhattan became known as a dangerous ghetto. Many of those Manhattanites who could afford to do so locked themselves in their apartments, preferring the fantasy worlds of full-immersion virtual reality to the dangers of going outside. This exacerbated the emptying of the city streets.

In recent years, one drug gang, the Drug Lords, has taken over the drug trade in the city, absorbing or destroying almost all competition. Where street gangs had been the retail arm of the drug trade, the Drug Lords gave this job to their own pushers. Without their most lucrative income source, most street gangs self-destructed, their members either joining the Drug Lords as pushers or becoming small bands of roaming muggers and burglars.

In the void left by the destruction of the drug-selling gangs, a new type of gang has emerged. Rather than seeking criminal profits, these gangs are motivated primarily by a desire for mutual self-defense. These new gangs have started to experiment with new technologies, new ideologies and new ways of interacting with the city around them and their ranks swelled to encompass a large portion of the non-shut-in population. Similarly, extended families of homeless people began to organize themselves into powerful organizations, seizing control of their neighborhoods.

Today, no one group rules the city. There is government, but it is corrupt and underfunded. Desperate addicts, the violently mentally ill, muggers, rapists and serial killers are a significant danger to those who dare to leave their homes. There are cops, but the cops have split into two major factions: once completely corrupt, the other acting like just another violent street gang. The Drug Lords are powerful and scary, but their power has been overshadowed by the new street gangs. The gangs hold tremendous power, but spend most of their time and energy fighting little wars between each other. The gangs exist in a middle ground between hero and street thug: one day a gang member may save you from being preyed upon, the next day a gang member may beat you up for looking funny at him or her. And then there's everyone else: those who don't want to join a gang, don't want to hide in their apartments like a shut in, they just want to put food on the table, pay their rent and occasionally enjoy living in a city where anything can happen.

What You Need To Play

Here's what you'll need to play:

• Three to five people. One of you will be the gamemaster, the others players. We'll talk about what those mean later.

• Fate Dice™, at least four, preferably four per person. These are a special kind of six-sided dice that are marked on two sides with a plus symbol [+], two sides with a minus symbol [-], and two sides are blank [ ]. They are also known as Fudge Dice. Alternately, you can use the Deck of Fate: a set of cards that mimic the probability of Fate Dice. You can get Fated Dice or the Deck of Fate are available at www.evilhat.com or your favorite game retailer.

> If you don't want to use Fudge dice, you don't have to–any set of regular six-sided dice will work. If you're using regular dice, you read 5 or 6 as [+], 1 or 2 as [-], and 3 or 4 as [ ].

• Character sheets, one for each player. See the appendix.

• Index cards or sticky notes or similar slips of paper.

• Tokens for fate points. These can be poker chips, beads, pennies, or anything similar. Get a handful—about 30 or 40.

Next, let's talk about how to use Fate Accelerated to tell stories together.

First, choose who will be the players, and who will be the gamemaster. Of the people around the table, all but one are referred to as players. Each player takes on the role of one player character or PC in the story, and puts themselves in their character's shoes to make the decisions that their character would make.

The remaining person is called the gamemaster or GM. The GM's duties during a game session include:

• **Run scenes**: A session is made up of individual scenes. Decide, with the help of the players, where the scene begins, who's there, and what's going on. Decide when all the interesting things have played out and the scene's over.

• **Adjudicate the rules**: When some question comes up about how to apply the rules, you get final say.

• **Set difficulties**: You decide how difficult tasks should be.

• **Play the NPCs**: Each player controls their own character, but you control all the rest, including the bad guys, the marks, the johns, the black market traders and the landlord.

All the people at the table, GM and players alike, are responsible for telling the story. When you make a decision, put yourself in your character's shoes and think hard about what they would do—even if it's not the best idea. If you're playing a character that sometimes makes poor decisions, don't be afraid to make a poor decision for them on purpose.

Think about the story that's being told. Think about the choice that would make that story even better: more interesting, more exciting, funnier. Would a certain choice give another player's character a chance to be awesome? Strongly consider making that choice.

That's how you tell great stories together—by not being afraid for your character to make mistakes, and by making choices that make the story more interesting for everyone at the table—not just you.

Fates Worse Than Death vs. Generic Cyberpunk

Generic Cyberpunk	Fates Worse Than Death
The "**Urban Sprawl**", an unending, unvaried and unknowable stretch of solid city containing every sort of culture, economy, lifestyle and organization within its breadth.	Game focuses on the island of Manhattan, detailing its boundaries and what can be found within it, including its specific and unique organizations and culture.
Most characters are **lone wolves** who travel the world giving only temporary loyalty to those who pay them (or the occasional good cause).	Most characters have an important and well-defined place in city society with duties and non-selfish motivations.
Usually **no psychic** phenomenon, or if there is it is usually a wildcard: rare freaks who can make people's heads explode.	Well defined and explained psychic abilities with clearly defined limits.
Urban populations are constantly growing, changing, and moving, leaving little focus on tradition and history.	Manhattan population is small, stable and some people live as their grandparents had, giving a sense of tradition, age and maturity to the city.
Distinction between the **powerless majority** of people who are just trying to survive and the **powerful minority** who have special skills or resources. The powerful tend to be the main players, with the powerless as a sort of background.	Focus on the idea that everyone is quite skilled at what they do, no matter what their economic status is, and that everyone is powerful and dangerous in their own way.
Focus on the **media**, on corporate advertisers creating pop culture, on who is famous, on being flashy and stylish and having 'style over substance'.	The street population of the city is basically ignored by and ignores the media. There is no real pop-culture and people become known for their deeds, not for looking cool.
VR is a gateway to adventure and a playground for the world's master hackers.	VR is an addictive escape for shut-ins, disdained by the street population. Real hackers are as likely to use a text-only interface.
Guns are common and used liberally.	Guns are rare (screened for at city entrances), used mainly by the richest criminals. The most common weapon is a knife.
Life is cheap and the death of a person usually has few consequences.	Life is cheap to some, very important to others. Each individual has many interconnections and nearly every death has consequences.
Philosophy is irrelevant, people spend their days concerned with how to survive.	Many have carved a niche for themselves in city society and have time to ask themselves questions such as "why am I here?" and "what do I want to do with my life?"
Police force is a brutish paramilitary force.	Police force is a bunch of idealistic teens who are under-equipped, under-skilled and act more like a gang than a military organization.
Gangs are short-sighted, violent, self-destructive, crazy criminals who are addicted to and sell drugs. This vision of gangs is generally based on post-crack (1980s and after) US urban street gangs.	Gangs are more-or-less "normal" people who have banded together for self-protection. Some gangs have lofty goals and ideals. Although they do have problems with violence, overall the city is a better place for their presence.
Cybernetic implants and replacements are powerful, flashy chrome and tend to turn people in to robot monsters.	Implants are either biological or small, unobtrusive electronics. They extend human capabilities but are rarely able to make people superhuman.
City is portrayed as a bright, noisy, bustling marketplace 24 hours a day.	The city is darker and quieter with a smaller population density (especially with many shut-ins) and few motor vehicles. At certain times of day the streets are almost empty.
Integration of computer chip technology in to brains creates **human-computer links** and lets human be programmed.	Neural restructuring techniques allow the brain itself to be changed, reprogrammed, even copied. Unobtrusive hand-jacks allow integration with computers.
Dreary, blighted **dystopian** setting symbolic of characters' own sense of being lost and having no control over their lives.	Dreary, blighted dismal setting as a counterpoint to and testing ground of social and individual growth.
Not as much focus on **drama, suspense and terror** because characters don't have much to lose in the first place.	Characters are given something worth trying to hold on to, making drama, suspense and terror possible.
Violence typically portrayed as the most important form of social and political persuasion, and most stories usually have at least one skilled fighter (usually a neutral party, hired and used as a tool by the PCs).	Violence is one of many tools available to characters, which can be beneficial if used wisely or disastrous if used poorly. Often, threats of violence are more useful than violence itself.
Massive difference in education, social power and culture between **rich and poor** characters.	Really rich people exist but are seldom seen. Most PCs range between what would be called middle class and very poor today. Culturally, they are more alike than different.
Exploration of **what is human** through invasive electromechanical implants turning people in to machines.	Exploration of what is human through neural restructuring, biotechnological manipulation, drugs with permanent psychological effects, etc.
Complete lack of **social support net**. There are hardly any social services except those designed to keep the capitalist system going.	There is a massive welfare system that supports most of the city, though many people do fall through the cracks. This is a system that benefits corps and government.
Corporations are a cross between governments and organized crime agencies, who regularly and directly interfere in the lives of the characters.	Corps have a lot of power (mostly economic) but they can't afford to piss-off the government and their influence on the lives of characters is usually subtle and from afar.
History usually dotted with several Vietnam-esque **wars** with limited nuclear activity.	Periods of global corporate rule, ecological crises, global anti-corporate violence (and occupation by anti-corporate terrorist armies) leading to restructuring of economies and governments.

CHARACTER CREATION

What Kind of Characters Can I Play?

In Fates Worse Than Death: Rentpunk you play as a group of roommates, pooling money every month to pay the rent on a multi-bedroom apartment. Accordingly, your character shouldn't be so poor that he or she would live on the streets, or so wealthy that he or she doesn't have to worry about making rent, but everything else about the character is up to you. Although gangs are a major part of the Fates Worse Than Death setting, this game won't provide any specific advice for making a character be a member of one of the city's powerful gangs.

In the city, there are the weak and the wretched: skin-and-bone drug addicts, shut-ins who fear to go outside, people so mentally ill that they can't speak in coherent sentences. There are also some serious badasses: gang leaders, professional assassins, elite hackers, highly-modded killing machines. For best results it is suggested that you play Fates Worse Than Death: Rentpunk somewhere in the middle. You've got some of the badass about you, but you aren't so tough or so powerful that the landlord pounding on your door demanding this month's rent doesn't fill you with dread.
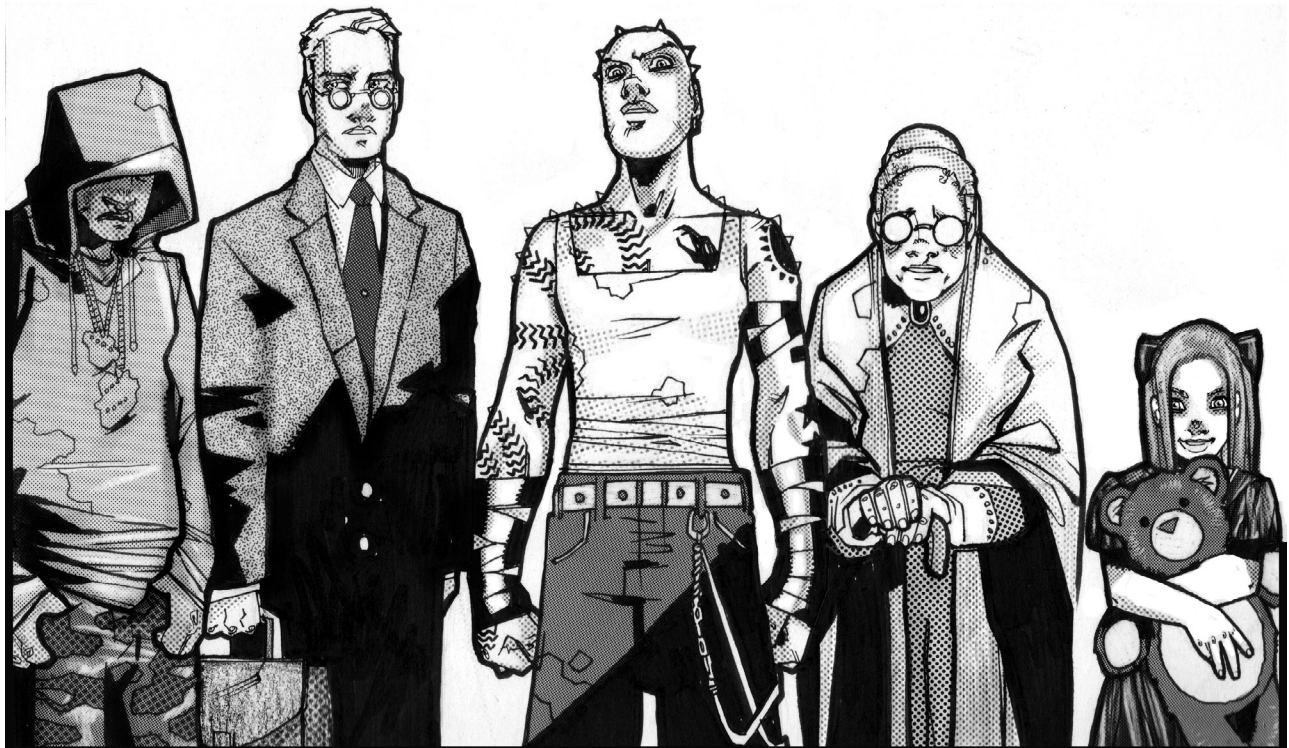
Here are some questions you can ask yourself:

Is your character an adolescent, a teen, a young adult, middle aged or elderly?

What is your legal status? Are you a runaway, an undocumented immigrant, on parole, a fugitive from justice, or are you free-and-clear in the eyes of the law?

What are the usual means of income for your character? Welfare or some other form of public assistance? Working a legit minimum wage job? Working a job where you are paid below board, but which is otherwise legit? Do you get an allowance from your parent or other relatives? Or do you make money mostly via criminal acts?

Besides what you do for a living, what does your character take pride in? What does your character want to be known for and remembered for?

What kind of Manhattan does the character want to live in? A dog-eat-dog world where the toughest rise above the rest? An endlessly fascinating metropolis where you can experience something new every day? A place where once can observe the failure of this experiment we call society? A place where ordinary people work together to make their communities better? A place where you can be free from rules and show off your inner self?

An aspect is a word, phrase, or sentence that describes something centrally important to your character. It can be a motto your character lives by, a personality quirk, a description of a relationship you have with another character, an important possession or bit of equipment your character has, or any other part of your character that is vitally important.

Aspects allow you to change the story in ways that tie in with your character's tendencies, skills, or problems. You can also use them to establish facts about the setting, such as the existence an ally or enemy, or the existence of a group the character belongs to or is an enemy of.

Your character will have a handful of aspects (between three and five), including a high concept and a trouble. We discuss aspects in detail in Aspects and Fate Points—but for now, this should help you get the idea.

Step One: High Concept Aspect

First, decide on your character's high concept. This is a single phrase or sentence that neatly sums up your character, saying who you are, what you do, what your "deal" is. When you think about your high concept, try to think of two things: how this aspect could help you, and how it might make things harder for you. Good high concept aspects do both.

Examples: *Angry Gutterpunk Brawler, Scheming Pill Broker, Bipolar Mercenary Hacker, Lived in This Neighborhood for Decades*

Step Two: Trouble Aspect

Next, decide on the thing that always gets you into trouble. It could be a personal weakness, or a recurring enemy, or an important obligation—anything that makes your life complicated.

Examples: *Pervs Always Fall for Me, Violence Begets Violence, Love Getting High Too Much, Gambling Problem, Family Members Do Stupid Things Then Need My Help, On The Run From the Law, Don't Know How to Be Anything but a Criminal, Relationship Drama, Got A Disease That's Slowly Killing Me, The Animalists Have Named Me An Enemy, Tired of Sleeping Alone.*

Step Three: Need Aspect

Choose another aspect that represents a recurring need your character has. The need could be physical, psychological, even legal. The definition of "need" is subjective. "I need to work out my stress on the dance floor" is different from "I need insulin" but both are good so long as they are strong motivators of the character.

Examples: *To Take Care of My Kid, To Keep Paying That Loan Shark, To Get Enough Drugs To Avoid Withdrawal, To Prove I'm Not Like My Dad, To Get My Sex-Change Hormones, To Get Medicine for My STD, To Believe I Have a Brighter Future, To Be Respected, To Keep My Parole Officer Happy, To Make This Marriage Work, To Win The Heart of My Crush.*

Step Four: Something Interesting Aspect

Now compose another aspect. Think of something really important or interesting about your character. Do they have a really unique body mod? Do they use an unusual weapon? Do they talk too much? Do they have an interesting sexual fetish?

Step Five: Additional Aspect (optional)

If you wish, you may create one more aspect. This aspects might describe your character's relationship with other player characters or with an NPC. Or, like the aspect you composed above, it might describe another especially interesting about your character.

If you prefer, you can leave this aspect blank right now and fill it in later, after the game has started.

Step Six: Name and Appearance

Describe your character's appearance and give them a name.

Creating Characters in Brief

• Write four aspects: a high concept, a trouble, a need, something interesting about you.

• Write another aspect (or wait and do it during play).

• Give your character a name and describe their appearance.

• Choose approaches (one at +0, two at +1, two at +2 and one at +3).

• Choose a stunt.

• Set your refresh to 3.

Step Seven: Approaches

Choose your approaches.

Approaches are descriptions of how you accomplish tasks. Everyone has the same six approaches:

Careful
Clever
Flashy
Forceful
Quick
Sneaky

Each approach is rated with a bonus. Choose one at Good (+3), two at Fair (+2), two at Average (+1), and one at Mediocre (+0). You can improve these later. We talk about what each approach means and how you use them in How to Do Stuff: Outcomes, Approaches, and Actions.

Your approaches can say a lot about who you are. Here are some examples:

> *The Brute: Forceful +3, Careful and Flashy +2, Sneaky and Quick +1, Clever +0*

> *The All-Star: Quick +3, Forceful and Flashy +2, Clever and Careful +1, Sneaky +0*

> *The Trickster: Clever +3, Sneaky and Flashy +2, Forceful and Quick +1, Careful +0*

> *The Guardian: Careful +3, Forceful and Clever +2, Sneaky and Quick +1, Flashy +0*

> *The Thief: Sneaky +3, Careful and Quick +2, Clever and Flashy +1, Forceful +0*

> *The Swashbuckler: Flashy +3, Quick and Clever +2, Forceful and Sneaky +1, Careful +0*

The Ladder

In Fate, we use a ladder of adjectives and numbers to rate a character's approaches, the result of a roll, difficulty ratings for simple checks, etc.

+8	Legendary
+7	Epic
+6	Fantastic
+5	Superb
+4	Great
+3	Good
+2	Fair
+1	Average
0	Mediocre
-1	Poor
-2	Terrible

Step Eight: Stunts

Choose one to three stunts (more means less Refresh, see below) Stunts are tricks, maneuvers, or techniques your character has that change how an approach works for your character. There are two types of stunts: those that give you a +2 bonus, and those that let you do something that few others can do. A stunt can reflect a unique background, a special skill, special equipment, special social connections, or an unusual reputation.

Like aspects, Stunts are written free-form, rather than picked from a list.

The first type of stunt gives you a +2 bonus when you use a certain approach in a certain situation. Use this template:

> Because I [*describe the skills/background/ connections/gear that makes you unique*], I get a +2 when I [*pick one: Carefully, Cleverly, Flashily, Forcefully, Quickly, Sneakily*][*pick one: attack, defend, create advantages, overcome*] when [*describe a circumstance*].

For example:

Because I **was raised in prison**, I get a +2 when I **Sneakily attack** when I **appear to be minding my own business**.

Because I **own high tech climbing gear**, I get a +2 when I **Quickly overcome** when I am **traversing obstacles in the city**.

Because I **am a stone-cold hottie**, I get a +2 when I **Flashily create advantages** when am **dealing with anyone attracted to my gender**.

Because I **have a genetic mod that makes me huge**, I get a +2 when I **Forcefully defend** when I am **in a close-quarters brawl**.

Because I **make my living as a street thief**, I get a +2 when I **Sneakily overcome** when I **liberate people's valuables**.

Because I **have a rep as crazy and dangerous**, I get a +2 when I **Forcefully create advantages** when **people are thinking about messing with me**.

Because I **have a backpack full of pharmaceuticals**, I get +2 when I **Carefully overcome** when I am **up against the weakness of human flesh**.

Because I **wear high tech armor**, I get +2 when I **Quickly defend** when **someone is trying to pierce my flesh.**

Because I **have my reflexes boosted by mental programs**, I get +2 when I **Quickly overcome** when I **am facing imminent physical danger**.

Because I **have sensory implants**, I get +2 when I **Carefully overcome** when **someone is trying to conceal something from me**.

Sometimes, if the circumstance is especially restrictive, you can apply the stunt to both the create an advantage action and the overcome action.

The second type of stunt lets you make something true, do something cool, or otherwise ignore the usual rules in some way. Use this template:

Because I [*describe some way that you are exceptional, have a cool bit of gear, or are otherwise awesome*], once per game session I can [*describe something cool you can do*].

For example:

Because I **have been taught to read minds**, once per game session I can **know what someone is thinking**.

Because I **am an accomplished hacker**, once per game session I can **find a piece of helpful, secret information**.

Because I **am an obsessive tinkerer**, once per game session I **can create a helpful device**.

Because I **am part of a close-knit immigrant community**, once per game session I can **call on a community member willing to do me a favor**.

Because I **have a secondary-nanotech disguise skin**, one per game session I can **make someone believe I am someone else**.

Because I can **read graffiti like a book**, once per game session I can **find out something useful about a neighborhood**.

Because I **look like a kid**, once per game session I **can make someone mistake me for harmless**.

Because I **broadcast my every adventure on the internet**, once per game session **a fan will offer me help**.

Because I **have an implant that increases my sense of smell**, once per game session I can **track a person or thing to its current location**.

Because I **have implants that protect my vital organs**, once per game session I can **shrug off four shifts of failure in combat**.

Special Abilities

In the Fate Accelerated rules, there are quite a few things you can try to do, and have a good chance at succeeding at, even if you haven't been specifically trained in doing that thing. However, there are some things that only those with very special training or some sort of special tech (special equipment, an implant, a mental program, etc.) can hope to accomplish. These are the sort of things you would want to have a stunt for your character to be able to do. Some examples:

Everyone Can (Try To)	**Requires a Stunt**
Fight	Do Psychic Stuff
Climb	Perform Heart Surgery
Drive a Vehicle	Make a Genetically Engineered Monster
Know Scientific Facts	Hack a Computer
Seduce	Break Modern Encryption
Speak A Few Words of a Foreign Language	Pick a Lock
Interrogate	Manufacture Useful Chemicals
Use Technology	Breathe Underwater
Hide or Sneak	See in Pitch Darkness
Resist Drug Effects	Climb A Smooth Surface

Because I **have a working car**, once per game session I can **get everyone where they need to be without complications**.

Because I **know the city's streets like the back of my hand**, once per game session I can **get somewhere first**.

These templates exist to give you an idea of how stunts should be constructed, but don't feel constrained to follow them exactly if you have a good idea.

Step Nine: Refresh & Stress

Your refresh is the number of fate points you begin each game session with (unless you ended the previous session with more unspent fate points than your refresh, in which case you start with the number you had left last time). By default, your refresh starts at three and is reduced by one for each stunt you chose after the first (your first stunt is essentially free). As your character advances, you'll get opportunities to add to your refresh. Your refresh may never go below one.

Your stress represents damage you can take without it impacting your ability to get things done. All player characters start with 3.

Step Ten: Character Advancement

People change. Your skills sharpen as you practice them. Your life experiences accumulate and shape your personality. This is reflected in character advancement, which allows you to change your aspects, add or change stunts, and raise your approach bonuses. You do this when your character reaches a milestone.

A **minor milestone** usually occurs at the end of a session of play, or when one piece of a story has been resolved. For Rentpunk, this typically means the end of the month has come and the characters have either made their rent and are okay for another month, or haven't. Rather than making your character more powerful, a minor milestone is about changing your character, about adjusting in response to whatever's going on in the story if you need to. Sometimes it won't really make sense to take advantage of a minor milestone, but you always have the opportunity in case you need to.

After a minor milestone, you can choose to do one (and only one) of the following:

Switch the ratings of any two approaches.

Rename one aspect that isn't your high concept.

Exchange one stunt for a different stunt.

Choose a new stunt (and adjust your refresh, if you already have three stunts).

Also, if you have a moderate consequence, check to see if it's been around for two sessions. If so, and if it makes sense within the story, you can clear it.

Rentpunk is primarily about dealing with the problems of the moment. Your immediate goal is to make rent this month, next month is a whole different matter, not to mention the whole rest of your life. If, however, a character is able to come up against one of the major problems in his or her life and overcome them, not just for the moment but on lasting basis, this is a **significant milestone**. Examples might include finally taking care of that psycho-ex, or getting a replacement for your damaged heart, or getting on a series of meds that are able to let you control your mood swings, or making peace with the gang that was out to get you.

In addition to the benefit of a minor milestone, a major milestone gives both of the following:

> If you have a severe consequence that's been around for at least two sessions, you can clear it.

> Raise the bonus of one approach by one.*

When you raise the bonus of an approach, there's only one rule you need to remember: you can't raise an approach bonus above Superb (+5).

Sample Player Characters

Here are a few starting Rentpunk player characters.

Nasmah El-Amin

Nasmah works in the kitchen at a fast food joint, sweating over the grill and the fry grease, and wearing the unflattering pastel colored uniform they made her buy. Her boss treats her poorly. What he and Nasmah' coworkers don't know is that in her youth Nasmah helped her family survive by stealing. Unfortunately, the others in her immigrant community do know of her skills, and are always trying to talk her into committing crimes, even though she is trying to seek a respectable life.

High Concept: Ex-Thief Fast Food Worker

Trouble: Stealing is Easier Than Working

Need: To Redeem Myself in the Eyes of My Creator

Other Aspects: Student of the Koran; Recent Immigrant

Approaches:

Careful: Fair (+2)	Clever: Average (+1)
Flashy: Mediocre (+0)	Forceful: Average (+1)
Quick: Fair (+2)	Sneaky: Good (+3)

Stunts:

> **Experienced Catburglar**: Because Nasmah learned to steal in her youth, she gets +2 to Sneakily Overcome when trying to sneak into someone's private space.

> **Faith**: Because Nasmah is a sincere believer, she gets +2 to Carefully overcome when trying to avoid doing somethings he believes is wrong.

Stress: O O O

Consequences: None:

Refresh: 2

Desmond Louis

Desmond grew up in a small mountain town with a conservative population. Being gay, he often felt like an outsider in his community, so as soon as he turned 18 he moved to the city. In the city he is a hard worker, but those times he hasn't been able to make ends meet he has turned to sex work. Between work and fun he has very little time for sleep and takes in massive amounts of caffeine, and sometimes even stronger chemicals, to stay awake. Despite the troubles he's had, the city is exciting and interesting and getting to be himself every day is wonderful, and he has never looked back.

High Concept: Young Adult Enjoying Newfound Freedom

Trouble: Bad Decisions at 3AM

Need: Something To Stave Off Exhaustion

Other Aspects: Proud To Be Who I Am; Does Everything With Style.

Approaches:

Careful: Mediocre (+0)	Clever: Fair (+2)
Flashy: Good (+3)	Forceful: Average (+1)
Quick: Fair (+2)	Sneaky: Average (+1)

Stunts:

Infectious Enthusiasm: Because Desmond is a likable and fun loving guy, he gets +2 to Create Advantages when trying to talk someone into doing something fun.

Stress: O O O

Consequences: None:

Refresh: 3

Cynthia "Hazard" Stendahl

Cynthia is a gutterpunk with a passion for music. Her goal in life is to be a professional musician. Her clothes, attitudes and body mods are chosen to give the impression that she doesn't give a fuck about anything and will bash your head in with a nail-studded baseball bat if you mess with her. She doesn't care much for personal hygiene and she tends to leave a trail of destruction wherever she spends time. Her shameful secret is that she depends on handouts from her suburban parents to support her city lifestyle.

High Concept: Gutterpunk Musician

Trouble: Appetite for Destruction

Need: To Become a Real Musician

Other Aspects: Covered in Spikes; Punk Sneer.

Approaches:

Careful: Mediocre (+0)	Clever: Average (+1)
Flashy: Fair (+2)	Forceful: Good (+2)
Quick: Average (+1)	Sneaky: Fair (+2)

Stunts:

Prepared to Sleep in a Gutter: Because Cynthia wears many layers of leather and denim and has trained herself to put up with physical discomfort, once per game session she can shrug off up to 2 levels of physical stress.

Stress: O O O

Consequences: None:

Refresh: 3

Victor Ybarra

Victor's parents were welfare recipients and early on Victor decided that being poor wasn't for him. Since grade school he has worked himself hard, studying long hours, with the ultimate goal of gaining entrance to a prestigious gated community. Things seemed to be going well until his senior year in high school when he discovered he was badly manic depressive. He is on medication now that is keeping his issues mostly under control, but this pre-existing condition has caused all his application to gated communities to be rejected. He continues to study, hoping that if he gains enough skills he will be valuable enough for this minor condition to be overlooked.

High Concept: Manic-Depressive Student

Trouble: Manic Depression

Need: To Get Into a Gated Community

Other Aspects: I Did a Training Module on That; Electronics Tinkerer.

Approaches:

Careful: Good (+3)	Clever: Fair (+2)
Flashy: Average (+1)	Forceful: Mediocre (+0)
Quick: Fair (+2)	Sneaky: Average (+1)

Stunts:

It's On the Net Somewhere: Because Victor uses the internet as a resource for information (rather than for gossip, porn and watching funny videos) he gets +2 when he Creates Advantages by doing research online.

Stress: O O O

Consequences: None:

Refresh: 3

Alice Berkley

Alice wasn't prepared to become a mom at 17, but she made it work. Now she's 21 and her four year old son Evan means the world to her. Even dealing with the bullshit of being on welfare, even living in a tiny room in a crap apartment, she is happy so long as she is with him. What's more, being a mom has revealed an inner toughness. She used to be rather timid, now she knows that if someone so much as thinks about hurting her son she'll claw their fucking eyes out.

High Concept: Protective Teen Mom

Trouble: Falls For Sketchy Guys

Need: To Take Care of My Son

Other Aspects: Handy with a Toolbelt; (Figurative) Eye in the Back of My Head.

Approaches:

Careful: Fair (+2)	Clever: Average (+1)
Flashy: Average (+1)	Forceful: Good (+3)
Quick: Fair (+2)	Sneaky: Mediocre (+0)

Stunts:

Don't Mess With a Mama Bear's Cubs: Because Alice loves her son so much, she gets +2 when she is Forcefully Attacking to eliminate someone or something that threatens him.

When I Calls You By Your Full Name You Know You're In Trouble: Because Alice often has to use her voice to stop a pre-schooler in his tracks, she gets +2 when she is Forcefully creating advantages when she is yelling at people who are doing stupid things.

Stress: O O O

Consequences: None:

Refresh:2

RULES OF PLAY

Outcomes, Actions, and Approaches

Say you need to leap between rooftops. You need to pick a lock to get inside an apartment. Someone spiked your drink and you need to find someone you trust before the drug takes full effect. How do you figure out what happens?

First you narrate what your character is trying to do. Your character's own aspects provide a good guide for what you can do. If you have an aspect that suggests you can use a computer, then start typing. If your aspects describe you as a knife fighter, flick your switchblade out and have at it. These story details don't have additional mechanical impact. You don't get a bonus from your hacking or your knife, unless you choose to spend a fate point to invoke an appropriate aspect. Often, the ability to use an aspect to make something true in the story is bonus enough!

How do you know if you're successful? Often, you just succeed, because the action isn't hard and nobody's trying to stop you. But if failure provides an interesting twist in the story, or if something unpredictable could happen, you need to break out the dice.

Dice or Cards

Part of determining your outcome is generating a random number, which is usually done in one of two ways: rolling four Fate Dice, or drawing a card from a Deck of Fate.

Fate Dice (sometimes called Fudge dice, after the game they were originally designed for) are one way to determine outcomes. You always roll Fate Dice in a set of four. Each die will come up as [+], [ ], or [-], and you add them together to get the total of the roll. For example:

$$- + 0 + \ = +1$$
$$+ - 0\,0 \ = 0$$
$$+ + + - \ = +2$$
$$- \,0\,0\,0 \ = -1$$

The Deck of Fate is a deck of cards that copies the statistical spread of Fate Dice. You can choose to use them instead of dice—either one works great.

These rules are written with the assumption that you're rolling Fate Dice, but use whichever one your group prefers. Anytime you're told to roll dice, that also means you can draw from the Deck of Fate instead.

Taking Action In Brief

- Describe what you want your character to do. See if someone or something can stop you.

- Decide what action you're taking: create an advantage, overcome, attack, or defend.

- Decide on your approach.

- Roll dice and add your approach's bonus.

- Decide whether to modify your roll with aspects.

- Figure out your outcome.

Outcomes

Once you roll your dice, add your approach bonus (we'll talk about that in a moment) and any bonuses from aspects or stunts. Compare the total to a target number, which is either a fixed difficulty or the result of the GM's roll for an NPC. Based on that comparison, your outcome is:

You **fail** if your total is less than your opponent's total.

It's a **tie** if your total is equal to your opponent's total.

You **succeed** if your total is greater than your opponent's total.

You **succeed with style** if your total is at least three greater than your opponent's total.

Actions & Outcomes In Brief

Create an Advantage when creating or discovering aspects:

Fail: Don't create or discover, or you do but your opponent (not you) gets a free invocation.

Tie: Get a boost if creating new, or treat as success if looking for existing.

Succeed: Create or discover the aspect, get a free invocation on it.

Succeed with Style: Create or discover the aspect, get two free invocations on it.

Create an Advantage on an aspect you already know about:

Fail: No additional benefit.

Tie: Generate one free invocation on the aspect.

Succeed: Generate one free invocation on the aspect.

Succeed with Style: Generate two free invocations on the aspect.

Overcome:

Fail: Fail, or succeed at a serious cost.

Tie: Succeed at minor cost.

Succeed: You accomplish your goal.

Succeed with Style: You accomplish your goal and generate a boost.

Attack:

Fail: No effect.

Tie: Attack doesn't harm the target, but you gain a boost.

Succeed: Attack hits and causes damage.

Succeed with Style: Attack hits and causes damage. May reduce damage by one to generate a boost.

Defend:

Fail: You suffer the consequences of your opponent's success.

Tie: Look at your opponent's action to see what happens.

Succeed: Your opponent doesn't get what they want.

Succeed with Style: Your opponent doesn't get what they want, and you get a boost.

Actions

So you've narrated what your PC is trying to do, and you've established that there's a chance you could fail. Next, figure out what action best describes what you're trying to do. There are four basic actions that cover anything you do in the game.

Creating an advantage is anything you do to try to help yourself or one of your friends. Taking a moment to very carefully aim your hunting bow, spending several hours doing research on the internet, or tripping the mugger who's trying to rob you—these all count as creating an advantage. The target of your action may get a chance to use the defend action to stop you. The advantage you create lets you do one of the following three things:

• Create a new situation aspect.

• Discover an existing situation aspect or another character's aspect that you didn't know about.

• Take advantage of an existing aspect.

If you're creating a new aspect or discovering an existing one:

If you fail: Either you don't create or discover the aspect at all, or you create or discover it but an opponent gets to invoke the aspect for free. The second option works best if the aspect you create or discover is something that other people could take advantage of (like Rough Terrain). You may have to reword the aspect to show that it benefits the other character instead of you—work it out in whatever way makes the most sense with the player who gets the free invocation. You can still invoke the aspect if you'd like, but it'll cost you a fate point.

If you tie: If you're creating a new aspect, you get a boost. Name it and invoke it once for free—after that, the boost goes away. If you're trying to discover an existing aspect, treat this as a success (see below).

If you succeed: You create or discover the aspect, and you or an ally may invoke it once for free. Write the aspect on an index card or sticky note and place it on the table.

If you succeed with style: You create or discover the aspect, and you or an ally may invoke it twice for free. Usually you can't invoke the same aspect twice on the same roll, but this is an exception; success with style gives you a BIG advantage!

If you're trying to take advantage of an aspect you already know about:

If you fail: You don't get any additional benefit from the aspect. You can still invoke it in the future if you'd like, at the cost of a fate point.

If you tie or succeed: You get one free invocation on the aspect for you or an ally to use later. You might want to draw a circle or a box on the aspect's note card, and check it off when that invocation is used.

If you succeed with style: You get two free invocations on the aspect, which you can let an ally use, if you wish.

You use the **overcome** action when you have to get past something that's between you and a particular goal—picking a lock, escaping from handcuffs, leaping across a chasm, riding your bike down a flight of stairs. Taking some action to eliminate or change an inconvenient

situation aspect is usually an overcome action; we'll talk more about that in Aspects and Fate Points. The target of your action may get a chance to use the defend action to stop you.

If you fail: You have a tough choice to make. You can simply fail—the door is still locked, the thug still stands between you and the exit, you manage to get down the stairs but the enemy is still on your tail. Or you can succeed, but at a serious cost—maybe you drop something vital you were carrying, maybe you suffer harm. The GM helps you figure out an appropriate cost.

If you tie: You attain your goal, but at some minor cost. The GM could introduce a complication, or present you with a tough choice (you can rescue one of your friends, but not the other), or some other twist.

If you succeed: You accomplish what you were trying to do. The lock springs open, you duck around the thug blocking the door, you manage to lose the alien spaceship on your tail.

If you succeed with style: As success (above), but you also gain a boost.

Use an **attack** when you try to hurt someone, whether physically or mentally—swinging a sword, shooting a blaster rifle, or yelling a blistering insult with the intent to hurt your target. (We'll talk about this in Damage, Stress, and Consequences, but the important thing is: If someone gets hurt too badly, they're knocked out of the scene.) The target of your attack gets a chance to use the defend action to stop you.

If you fail: Your attack doesn't connect. The target parries your sword, your shot misses, your target laughs off your insult.

If you tie: Your attack doesn't connect strongly enough to cause any harm, but you gain a boost.

If you succeed: Your attack hits and you do damage. See Damage, Stress, and Consequences.

If you succeed with style: You hit and do damage, plus you have the option to reduce the damage your hit causes by one and gain a boost.

Use **defend** when you're actively trying to stop someone from doing any of the other three actions—you're parrying a sword strike, trying to stay on your feet, blocking a doorway, and the like. Usually this action is performed on someone else's turn, reacting to their attempt to attack, overcome, or create an advantage. You may also roll to oppose some non-attack actions, or to defend against an attack on someone else, if you can explain why you can. Usually it's fine if most people at the table agree that it's reasonable, but you can also point to an relevant situation aspect to justify it. When you do, you become the target for any bad results.

If you fail: You're on the receiving end of whatever your opponent's success gives them.

If you tie or succeed: Things don't work out too badly for you; look at the description of your opponent's action to see what happens.

If you succeed with style: Your opponent doesn't get what they want, plus you gain a boost.

Actions & Outcomes In Brief

Create an Advantage when creating or discovering aspects:

Fail: Don't create or discover, or you do but your opponent (not you) gets a free invocation.

Tie: Get a boost if creating new, or treat as success if looking for existing.

Succeed: Create or discover the aspect, get a free invocation on it.

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Tie: Look at your opponent's action to see what happens.

Succeed: Your opponent doesn't get what they want.

Succeed with Style: Your opponent doesn't get what they want, and you get a boost.

Getting Help

An ally can help you perform your action. When an ally helps you, they give up their action for the exchange and describe how they're providing the help; you get a +1 to your roll for each ally that helps this way. Usually only one or two people can help this way before they start getting in each other's way; the GM decides how many people can help at once.

Choose Your Approach

As we mentioned in Who Do You Want to Be?, there are six approaches that describe how you perform actions.

Careful: A Careful action is when you pay close attention to detail and take your time to do the job right. Lining up a long-range arrow shot. Attentively standing watch. Disarming a bank's alarm system.

Clever: A Clever action requires that you think fast, solve problems, or account for complex variables. Finding the weakness in an enemy swordsman's style. Finding the weak point in a fortress wall. Fixing a computer.

Flashy: A Flashy action draws attention to you; it's full of style and panache. Delivering an inspiring speech to your army. Embarrassing your opponent in a duel. Producing a beautiful graffiti burner.

Forceful: A Forceful action isn't subtle—it's brute strength. Wrestling a bear. Staring down a thug. Leading a denial of service attack against a server.

Quick: A Quick action requires that you move quickly and with dexterity. Dodging an arrow. Getting in the first punch. Disarming a bomb as it ticks 3… 2… 1…

Sneaky: A Sneaky action is done with an emphasis on misdirection, stealth, or deceit. Talking your way out of getting arrested. Picking a pocket. Feinting in a sword fight.

Each character has each approach rated with a bonus from +0 to +3. Add the bonus to your dice roll to determine how well your PC performs the action you described.

So your first instinct is probably to pick the action that gives you the greatest bonus, right? But it doesn't work like that. You have to base your choice of approach on the description of your action, and you can't describe an action that doesn't make any sense. Would you Forcefully creep through a dark room, hiding from the guards? No, that's being Sneaky. Would you Cleverly kick the door down? No, that's being Forceful. Circumstances constrain what approach you can use, so sometimes you have to go with an approach that might not play directly to your strengths.

Roll the Dice, Add Your Bonus

Time to take up dice and roll. Take the bonus associated with the approach you've chosen and add it to the result on the dice. If you have a stunt that applies, add that too. That's your total. Compare it to what your opponent (usually the GM) has.

Decide Whether to Modify the Roll

Finally, decide whether you want to alter your roll by invoking aspects—we'll talk about this a lot in Aspects and Fate Points.

Challenges, Contests, and Conflicts

We've talked about the four actions (create an advantage, overcome, attack, and defend) and the four outcomes (fail, tie, succeed, and succeed with style). But in what framework do those happen?

Usually, when you want to do something straightforward—swim across a raging river, hack someone's cell phone—all you need to do is make one overcome action against a difficulty level that the GM sets. You look at your outcome and go from there.

But sometimes things are a little more complex.

A challenge is a series of overcome and create an advantage actions that you use to resolve an especially complicated situation. Each overcome action deals with one task or part of the situation, and you take the individual results together to figure out how the situation resolves.

To set up a challenge, decide what individual tasks or goals make up the situation, and treat each one as a separate overcome roll.

Depending on the situation, one character may be required to make several rolls, or multiple characters may be able to participate. GMs, you aren't obligated to announce all the stages in the challenge ahead of time—adjust the steps as the challenge unfolds to keep things exciting.

The PCs have all just been poisoned. The GM suggests this sounds like a challenge. Steps in resolving this challenge could be noticing the oncoming symptoms, doing research to find the poison and its treatment, racing to find the drugs that will allow them to live through their symptoms, and finding a safe place to wait out the poison.

Contests

When two or more characters are competing against one another for the same goal, but not directly trying to hurt each other, you have a contest. Examples include a car chase, a public debate, or a street basketball game.

A contest proceeds in a series of exchanges. In an exchange, every participant takes one overcome action to determine how well they do in that leg of the contest. Compare your result to everyone else's.

If you got the highest result, you win the exchange—you score a victory (which you can represent with a tally or check mark on scratch paper) and describe how you take the lead. If you succeed with style, you mark two victories.

If there's a tie, no one gets a victory, and an unexpected twist occurs. This could mean several things, depending on the situation—the terrain or environment shifts somehow, the parameters of the contest change, or an unanticipated variable shows up and affects all the participants. The GM creates a new situation aspect reflecting this change and puts it into play.

The first participant to achieve three victories wins the contest.

Conflicts are used to resolve situations where characters are trying to harm one another. It could be physical harm (a knife fight, wrestling, trying to push each other off of a building), but it could also be mental harm (a shouting match, a tough interrogation, an attempt at psychic mind control).

Conflicts In Brief

- Set the scene.
- Determine turn order.
- Start the first exchange.
- On your turn, take an action.
- On other people's turns, defend against or respond to their actions as necessary.
- At the end of everyone's turn, start a new exchange or end the conflict.

Setting Difficulty Levels

When another character is opposing a PC, their rolls provide the opposition in a conflict, contest, or challenge. But if there's no active opposition, you have to decide how hard the task is.

Low difficulties are best when you want to give the PCs a chance to show off and be awesome. Difficulties near their approach ratings are best when you want to provide tension but not overwhelm them. High difficulties are best when you want to emphasize how dire or unusual the circumstances are and make them pull out all the stops.

Rules of Thumb:

- If the task isn't very tough at all, give it a Mediocre (+0)—or just tell the player they succeed without a roll.

- If you can think of at least one reason why the task is tough, pick Fair (+2).

- If the task is extremely difficult, pick Great (+4).

- If the task is impossibly difficult, go as high as you think makes sense. The PC will need to drop some fate points and get lots of help to succeed, but that's fine.

Optional Rule: Approach-Related Target Numbers

Sometimes being Careful makes things a lot easier; sometimes it just takes too long. The GM may wish to adjust the target number up or down by 1 or 2 depending on whether you choose a fitting or a problematic approach. This makes things a bit more complex, but for some groups it's worth it.

Setting the Scene

Establish what's going on, where everyone is, and what the environment is like. Who is the opposition? The GM should write a couple of situation aspects on sticky notes or index cards and place them on the table. Players can suggest situation aspects, too.

The GM also establishes zones, loosely defined areas that tell you where characters are. You determine zones based on the scene and the following guidelines:

- Generally, you can interact with other characters in the same zone—or in nearby zones if you can justify acting at a distance (for example, if you have a ranged weapon or psychic abilities).

- You can move one zone for free. An action is required to move if there's an obstacle along the way, such as someone trying to stop you, or if you want to move two or more zones. It sometimes helps to sketch a quick map to illustrate zones.

Thugs are attacking the characters in an abandoned storefront. The street outside is one zone, the retail area of the store another, the back room a third, and the bathroom a fourth. Anyone in the same zone can easily throw punches at each other. From the street outside, you can throw things at people in the retail area or move into the retail area as a free action, unless the doorway is blocked. To get from the street outside to the back room or bathroom requires an action.

Determine Turn Order

Your turn order in a conflict is based on your approaches. In a physical conflict, compare your Quick approach to the other participants'—the one with the fastest reflexes goes first. In a mental conflict, compare your Careful approach—attention to detail will warn you of danger. Whoever has the highest approach gets to go first, and then everyone else goes in descending order. Break ties in whatever manner makes sense, with the GM having the last word.

GMs, it's simplest if you pick your most advantageous NPC to determine your place in the turn order, and let all your NPCs go at that time. But if you have a good reason to determine turn order individually for all your NPCs, go right ahead.

Exchanges

Next, each character takes a turn in order. On their turn, a character can take one of the four actions. Resolve the action to determine the outcome. The conflict is over when only one side has characters still in the fight.

Damage, Stress, and Consequences

When you're hit by an attack, the severity of the hit is the difference between the attack roll and your defense roll; we measure that in shifts. For instance, if your opponent gets +5 on their attack and you get a +3 on your defense, the attack deals a two shift hit (5 − 3 = 2).

Then, one of two things happens:

• You suffer stress and/or consequences, but you stay in the fight.

• You get taken out, which means you're out of the action for a while.

Stress

If you get hit and don't want to be taken out, you can choose to take stress.

Stress represents you getting tired or annoyed, taking a superficial wound, or some other condition that goes away quickly.

Your character sheet has a stress track, a row of three boxes. When you take a hit and check a stress box, the box absorbs a number of shifts equal to its number: one shift for Box 1, two for Box 2, or three for Box 3.

You can only check one stress box for any single hit, but you can check a stress box and take one or more consequences at the same time. You can't check a stress box that already has a check mark in it!

Consequences

Consequences are new aspects that you take to reflect being seriously hurt in some way.

There are four types of consequences (mental, physical, social and financial) and you can only have one consequence of each type at any given time. Once one of those four slots is filled with a consequence, you have to wait for that consequence to go away (see below) before you can put another on there.

When you choose to take a consequence, you can choose to take a:

Mild Consequence (worth 2 shifts)

Moderate Consequence (worth 4 shifts)

Severe Consequence (worth 6 shifts).

These numbers represent how many shifts of a hit the consequence can absorb.

A major downside of consequences is that each consequence is a new aspect that your opponents can invoke against you. The more you take, the more vulnerable you are. And just like situation aspects, the character that creates it (in this case, the character that hit you) gets one free invocation on that consequence. They can choose to let one of their allies use the free invocation.

Consequences come in four basic types: mental, physical, social and financial.

• A **mental** consequence might be becoming deeply depressed, being traumatized or developing a paralyzing fear of some bad thing happening again.

• A **physical** consequence might be a broken bone, disfiguring scabs, complete exhaustion, an infected wound or a severe drug withdrawal.

• A **social** consequence might be your family deciding not to speak to you, the local street gang putting you on their shit list or your landlord deciding he hates you.

• A **financial** consequence might mean being robbed of the cash you have on you, getting a hole punched in your front door (which your landlord will make you pay for), having your only pair of shoes ruined (so you have no choice but to buy a new pair) or having to go into debt to someone.

Let's say that you get hit really hard and take a 4-shift hit. You check Box 2 on your stress track, which leaves you with 2 shifts to deal with. If you can't, you're taken out, so it's time for a consequence. You choose to put a Mild Consequence (worth 2) in the physical consequence slot. You choose, Blood in Your Eyes. Those final 2 shifts are taken care of and you can keep fighting! Later in the battle you get hit again, and this time you have 4 shifts to deal with. You choose to take a Moderate Consequence. You can't take another physical consequence, so decide that as you stumbled to the side to avoid the blow you accidentally pushed your friend in a way that looked like you were throwing your friend in front of the weapon. Now you have a social consequence *Your Friends Think You Are A Jerk*.

If you're unable to absorb all of a hit's shifts—by checking a stress box, taking consequences, or both—you're taken out.

Stress & Consequences In Brief

Each character starts with three stress boxes.

Severity of hit (in shifts)
= Attack Roll – Defense Roll

When you take a hit, you need to account for how that hit damages you. One way to absorb the damage is to take stress; you can check one stress box to handle some or all of a single hit. You can absorb a number of shifts equal to the number of the box you check: one for Box 1, two for Box 2, three for Box 3.

You may also take one or more consequences to deal with the hit, by writing a consequence and its severity, in one or more of the slots on the character sheet labeled Mental Physical, Social or Financial. A Mild consequence can absorb 2 shifts; a moderate can absorb 4 shifts and a severe can absorb 6 shifts.

If you can't (or decide not to) handle the entire hit, you're taken out. Your opponent decides what happens to you.

Giving in before your opponent's roll allows you to control how you exit the scene. You also get one or more fate points for doing this!

Stress and mild consequences vanish at the end of the scene, provided you get a chance to rest. Other consequences take longer.

Getting Taken Out

If you get taken out, you can no longer act in the scene. Whoever takes you out narrates what happens to you. It should make sense based on how you got taken out—maybe you run from the room in shame, or maybe you get knocked unconscious.

Giving In

If things look grim for you, you can give in (or concede the fight)—but you have to say that's what you're going to do before your opponent rolls their dice.

This is different than being taken out, because you get a say in what happens to you. Your opponent gets some major concession from you—talk about what makes sense in your situation—but it beats getting taken out and having no say at all.

Additionally, you get one fate point for conceding, and one fate point for each consequence you took in this conflict. This is your chance to say, "You win this round, but I'll get you next time!" and get a tall stack of fate points to back it up.

Recovery

At the end of each scene, clear all of your stress boxes. Recovery from a consequence is a bit more complicated; you need to explain how you recover from it—whether that's an ER visit, taking a walk to calm down, or whatever makes sense with the consequence. You also need to wait an appropriate length of time.

- **Mild consequence**: Clear it at the end of the scene, provided you get a chance to rest.

- **Moderate consequence**: Clear it at the end of the next session, provided it makes sense within the story.

- **Severe consequence**: Could take several game sessions to clear, and even then only when it makes sense within the story.

Renaming Consequences

Moderate and severe consequences stick around for a while. Therefore, at some point you may want to change the name of the aspect to better fit what's going on in the story. For instance, after you get some medical help, Painful Broken Leg might make more sense if you change it to Hobbling on Crutches. You can also change a consequence from one type to another, e.g. change *Damaged Heart* (a physical consequence) to *Paying Off That New Heart* (a financial consequence).

Aspects and Fate Points

An aspect is a word or phrase that describes something special about a person, place, thing, situation, or group. Almost anything you can think of can have aspects. A person might be the Greatest Knife Fighter in Chinatown. A room might be On Fire after you knock over an oil lamp. After an encounter with a genetically engineered creature in the sewers, you might be Terrified. Aspects let you change the story in ways that go along with your character's tendencies, skills, or problems.

You spend fate points—which you keep track of with pennies or glass beads or poker chips or some other tokens—to unlock the power of aspects and make them help you. You earn fate points by letting a character aspect be compelled against you to complicate the situation or make your life harder. Be sure to keep track of the fate points you have left at the end of the session—if you have more than your refresh, you start the next session with the fate points you ended this session with.

You earned a lot of fate points during your game session, ending the day with five fate points. Your refresh is 2, so you'll start with five fate points the next time you play. But another player ends the same session with just one fate point. His refresh is 3, so he'll begin the next session with 3 fate points, not just the one he had left over.

Types of Aspects

There's an endless variety of aspects, but no matter what they're called they all work pretty much the same way. The main difference is how long they stick around before going away.

Character Aspects: These aspects are on your character sheet, such as your high concept and trouble. They describe personality traits, important details about your past, relationships you have with others, important items or titles you possess, problems you're dealing with or goals you're working toward, or reputations and obligations you carry. These aspects only change under very unusual circumstances; most never will.

Examples: *Night Shift Manager at Chucky's Del Taco; Hunted by the Drug Lords; Attention to Detail; I Must Protect My Brother*

Situation Aspects: These aspects describe the surroundings that the action is taking place in. This includes aspects you create or discover using the create an advantage action. A situation aspect usually vanishes at the end of the scene it was part of, or when someone takes some action that would change or get rid of it. Essentially, they last only as long as the situational element they represent lasts.

Examples: *On Fire; Bright Sunlight; Crowd of Angry People; Knocked to the Ground*

To get rid of a situation aspect, you can attempt an overcome action to eliminate it, provided you can think of a way your character could accomplish it—dump a bucket of water on the Raging Fire, use evasive maneuvers to escape the motorcycle that's On Your Tail. An opponent may use a Defend action to try to preserve the aspect, if they can describe how they do it.

Consequences: These aspects represent injuries or other lasting trauma that happen when you get hit by attacks. They go away slowly, as described in Damage, Stress, and Consequences.

Examples: *Sprained Ankle; Fear of Spiders; Concussion; Debilitating Self-Doubt*

Boosts: A boost is a temporary aspect that you get to use once (see "What Do You Do With Aspects?" next), then it vanishes. Unused boosts vanish when the scene they were created in is over or when the advantage they represent no longer exists. These represent very brief and fleeting advantages you get in conflicts with others.

Examples: *In My Sights; Distracted; Unstable Footing; Rock in His Boot*

What Do You Do With Aspects?

There are three big things you can do with aspects: invoke aspects, compel aspects, and use aspects to establish facts.

Invoking Aspects

You invoke an aspect to give yourself a bonus or make things a bit harder for your opponent. You can invoke any aspect that you a) know about, and b) can explain how you use it to your advantage—including aspects on other characters or on the situation. Normally, invoking an aspect costs you a fate point—hand one of your fate points to the GM. To invoke an aspect, you need to describe how that aspect helps you in your current situation.

I attack the mauler addicts with a wildly swinging machete. I know mauler addicts are *Easily Confused*, so that should help me.

I really want to get this crowd's attention. I've heard they *Love Violence*, so I'll bite the head off a pigeon before I start my speech.

Now that the guard's *Distracted*, I should be able to sneak right by him.

This drug cocktail needs to be really powerful—I'm *This Century's Answer to Hunter S. Thompson*, and powerful drug cocktails are my bread and butter.

What does invoking the aspect get you? Choose one of the following effects:

Add a +2 bonus to your total. This costs a fate point.

Reroll the dice. This option is best if you rolled really lousy (usually a −3 or −4 showing on the dice). This costs a fate point.

Confront an opponent with the aspect. You use this option when your opponent is trying something and you think an existing aspect would make it harder for them. For instance, a drug dealer wants to draw his pistol, but he's Buried in Debris; you spend a fate point to invoke that aspect, and now your opponent's level of difficulty is increased by +2.

Help an ally with the aspect. Use this option when a friend could use some help and you think an existing aspect would make it easier for them. You spend a fate point to invoke the aspect, and now your friend gets a +2 on their roll.

Important: You can only invoke any aspect once on a given dice roll; you can't spend a stack of fate points on one aspect and get a huge bonus from it. However, you can invoke several different aspects on the same roll.

If you're invoking an aspect to add a bonus or reroll your dice, wait until after you've rolled to do it. No sense spending a fate point if you don't need to!

Free Invocations

Sometimes you can invoke an aspect for free, without paying a fate point. If you create or discover an aspect through the create an advantage action, the first invocation on it (by you or an ally) is free (if you succeeded with style, you get two freebies). If you cause a consequence through an attack, you or an ally can invoke it once for free. A boost is a special kind of aspect that grants one free invocation, then it vanishes.

Compelling Aspects

If you're in a situation where having or being around a certain aspect means your character's life is more dramatic or complicated, anyone can compel the aspect. You can even compel it on yourself—that's called a self-compel. Compels are the most common way for players to earn more fate points.

There are two types of compels.

Decision compels: This sort of compel suggests the answer to a decision your character has to make. If your character is Orthodox Jewish, for example, you may need to stay to stay home and observe the sabbath rather than accepting that package delivery job. Or if you have a *Defiant Streak a Mile Wide*, maybe you can't help but mouth off to your landlord when you see him going through your mail.

Event compels: Other times a compel reflects something happening that makes life more complicated for you. If you have *Pervs Fall For Me*, that guy you've been chatting up in a bar wants to lock a remote punishment collar on you. If you *Owe Eun Drake a Favor*, then Eun shows up and demands that you perform a service for her just when it's least convenient.

In any case, when an aspect is compelled against you, the person compelling it offers you a fate point and suggests that the aspect has a certain effect—that you'll make a certain decision or that a particular event will occur. You can discuss it back and forth, proposing tweaks or changes to the suggested compel. After a moment or two, you need to decide whether to accept the compel. If you agree, you take the fate point and your character makes the suggested decision or the event happens. If you refuse, you must pay a fate point from your own supply. Yes, this means that if you don't have any fate points, you can't refuse a compel!

GMs' Fate Points

As GM, you don't need to track fate points for each NPC, but that doesn't mean you get an unlimited number. Start each scene with a pool of one fate point per PC that's in the scene. Spend fate points from this pool to invoke aspects (and consequences) against the PCs. When it's empty, you can't invoke aspects against them.

How can you increase the size of your pool? When a player compels one of an NPC's aspects, add the fate point to your pool. If that compel ends the scene, or when an NPC gives in, instead add those fate points to your pool at the start of the next scene.

Fate points you award for compels do NOT come from this pool. You never have to worry about running out of fate points to award for compels.
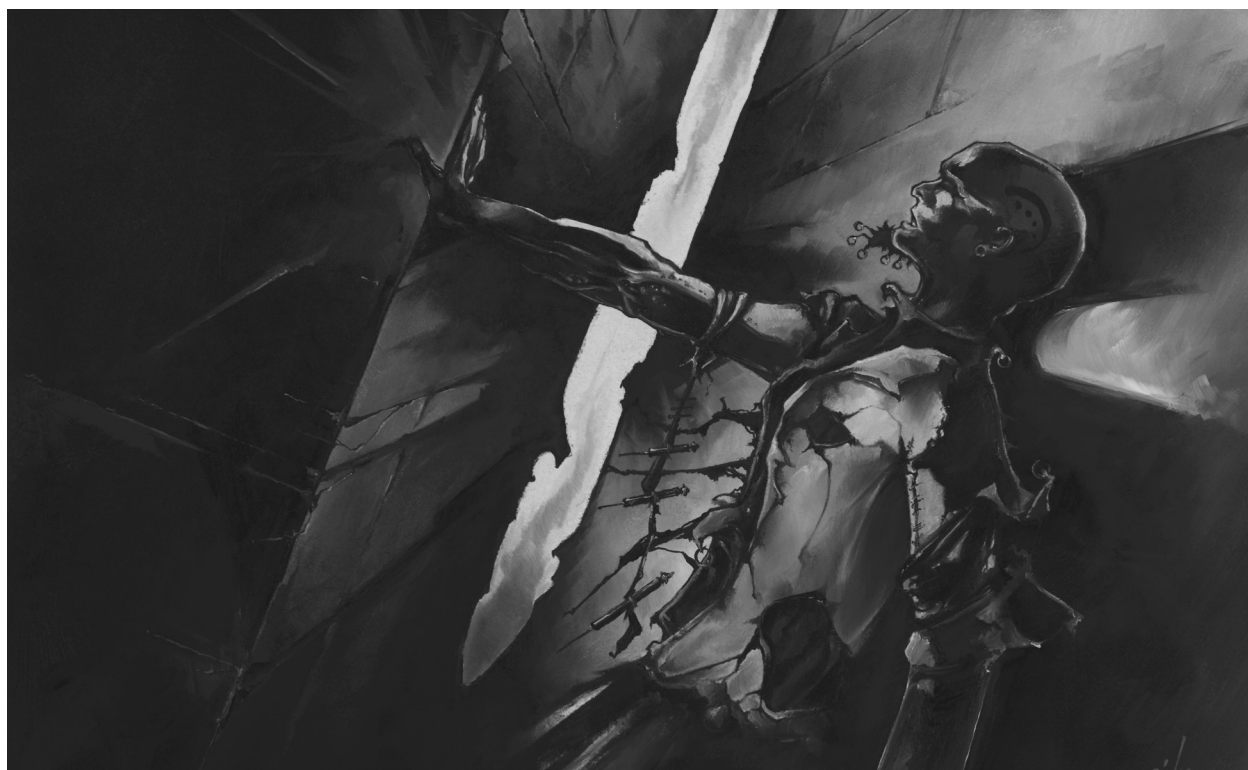
Establishing Facts

The final thing that aspects can do is establish facts in the game. You don't have to spend any fate points, roll dice, or anything to make this happen—just by virtue of having the aspect *Mother Figure to the Runaways of Mott Street*, you've established that there are a group of runaways living on Mott Street and that your character has both influence over and responsibilities towards them. Having the aspect Inventor of the "Horrorshow" War Drug Cocktail establishes that the setting has a cocktail of drugs that many people take before going into battle and that you invented it. If you take the aspect *Refugee From the Greenland Civil War*, you establish that there was (and possible still is) a war going on in Greenland and that this war forced you to leave the country.

When you establish facts of the setting this way, make sure you do it in cooperation with other players. If a fellow player is playing someone from Greenland, you should make sure they're okay with their having been a civil war there.

Also, be wary of any aspects that would change the basic concepts of what technology can or can't do in the setting. Although Fates Worse Than Death is a setting where a lot of amazing things can happen, it's also a setting where people (or at least poor people) live under the same basic limitations they do today when it comes to health, aging, transportation, shelter and basic physical needs. An aspect like *I Own a Time Machine* or *Can Convert Lead Into Gold* would mess with those limitations and fundamentally change the nature of the story being told.

Composing Good Aspects

When you need to think of a good aspect (we're mainly talking about character and situation aspects here), think about two things:

• How the aspect might help you—when you'd invoke it.

• How it might hurt you—when it would be compelled against you.
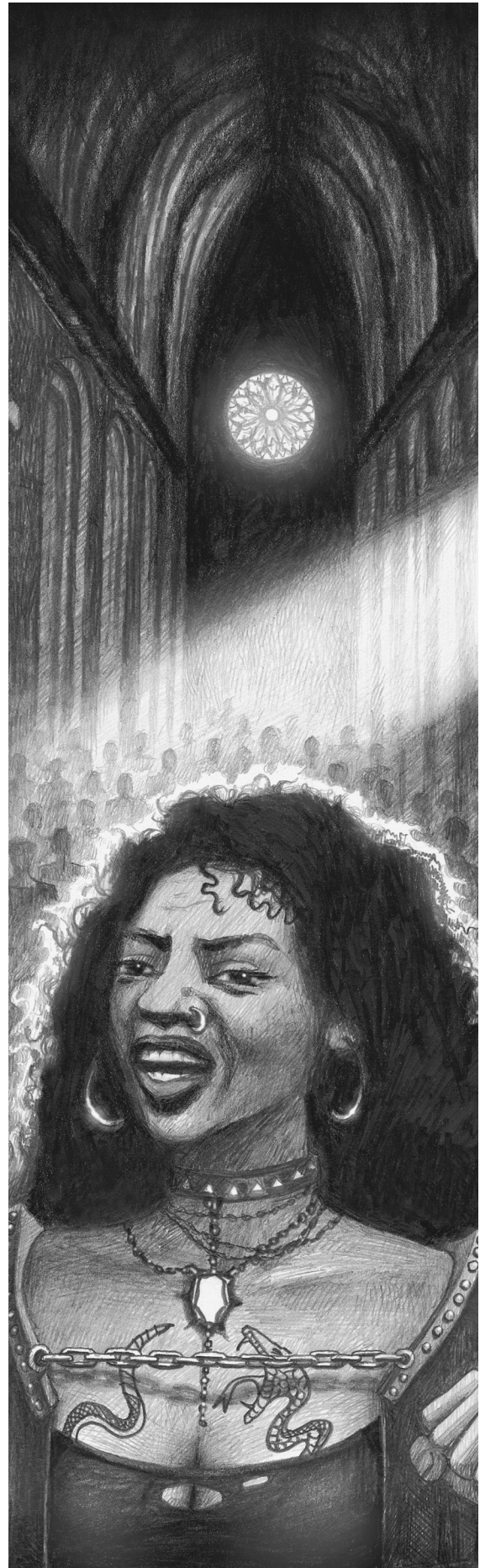
For example:

I Hate Cops

Invoke this when acting against cops to improve your chances.

Get a fate point when your dislike for cops makes you do something foolish to try to get him.

Hair Trigger Nerves

Invoke this when being extra vigilant and careful would help you.

Get a fate point when this causes you to be jumpy and be distracted by threats that aren't really there.

Obviously, your trouble and need aspects are supposed to cause problems—and thereby make your character's life more interesting and get you fate points—so it's okay if they are a little more one-dimensional, but even these aspects can, if you are creative, help you out at least sometimes.

Non Player Characters

Minor Characters

These are the NPCs that the PCs will most likely only have a passing interaction with. This could be the addicts trying to rob the PCs, the security guard whose store the PCs are trying to steal from, the neighbors who are threatening to get the PCs evicted if they don't keep the noise down, etc.

Here's how you create their stats:

• Make a list of what this minor character is skilled at. They get a +2 to all rolls dealing with these things.

• Make a list of what this minor character is bad at. They get a −2 to all rolls dealing with these things.

Everything else gets a +0 when rolled.

• Give the minor character an aspect or two to reinforce what they're good and bad at, or if they have a particular strength or vulnerability. It's okay if a minor character's aspects are really simple.

• Minor characters have zero, one, or two boxes in their stress track, depending on how tough you imagine them to be.

• Minor characters can't take consequences. If they run out of stress boxes (or don't have any), the next hit takes them down.

Sample Minor Characters

Drug Addicted Sneak Thief

Aspects: Desperate for Cash

Skilled (+2) at: Sneaking, lying in wait, blitz Attacks, knowing who has cash.

Bad (-2) at: Fair fights, sitting still, sober thinking, staying healthy.

Stress: O

Feral Dog

Aspects: Dangerous When Hungry, Pack Animal

Skilled (+2) at: Finding food, running.

Bad (-2) at: Problem solving, standing their ground.

Stress: None (first hit takes it out)

Cultist

Aspects: Fanatical, Brainwashed

Skilled (+2) at: Finding someone in crisis, luring people to their place, brainwashing.

Bad (-2) at: Critical thinking, acting independently, self-awareness.

Stress: OO

Crazy

Aspects: Psychotic, Paranoid

Skilled (+2) at: Ignoring pain, yelling loudly, not being sweet-talked.

Bad (-2) at: Discerning danger, staying on meds, personal hygiene.

Stress: OO

God Killer Rampager

Aspects: Fearless, Delusional

Skilled (+2) at: Ignoring pain, ignoring fear, not backing down.

Bad (-2) at: Resisting urges, grasping reality, calculating risks.

Stress: OOOO

Mauler Addict

Aspects: Brain Damaged, Animalistic

Skilled (+2) at: Sensing danger, eating people alive.

Bad (-2) at: Thinking, being brave, staying healthy.

Stress: O

Pounder

Aspects: Homeless, Bully

Skilled (+2) at: Intimidation, protecting their turf, stomping people.

Bad (-2) at: Empathy, spending money wisely, being sober, making friends.

Stress: OOOO

Mugger High On God-Killer

Aspects: Violent, Wants Cash

Skilled (+2) at: Resisting fear, resisting pain, brutality.

Bad (-2) at: Patience, calculating risks, resisting drug cravings.

Stress: OOOO

Abusive John

Aspects: Sadistic, Preys on Sex Workers

Skilled (+2) at: Using money to entice, blitz attacks, convincing people not to fight back.

Bad (-2) at: Healthy relationships, not being in control.

Stress: OOO

Drug Pusher

Aspects: Pistol Packing, Ruthless.

Skilled (+2) at: Calling for help from the Drug Lords, intimidation, shooting people, making money.

Bad (-2) at: Making friends in the community, treating others as equals.

Stress: OOOO

Major Characters

When you make an important NPC, someone who is going to be a major, recurring influence in the PCs' lives, you can stat them out exactly like the PCs, with approaches, aspects, stress, and consequences. Examples: The PC's stalkerish ex, the landlord, the serial killer who has been preying on the neighborhood, the gang leader who has sworn revenge on one of the PCs, a PC's child, etc.

Sample Major Characters

Colin Barley

Colin is a serial killer who kidnaps people and uses mental installer technology to copy his mind into their bodies. Since there are so many copies of him around he is practically immortal and thinks of himself as a god. Only the rarity of mental installers has kept Colin from overrunning the city. Authorities outside the city consider him an urban legend, but city resident know he is real. When he can't find the means to reproduce himself, he keeps himself busy with outrageous and cruel murders, especially those that mock the Judeo Christian god, who he sees as his nemesis. Colin is an extremely powerful character and should not be put into a game session lightly.

High Concept: Self-Reproducing Serial Killer

Trouble: City's Most Hated Person

Need: To Kill People Cruelly

Other Aspects: No Fear of Death, Braggart, Loves a Challenge, Sadistic.

Approaches:
Careful: Good (+3)
Clever: Great (+4)
Flashy: Fair (+2)   Forceful: Fair (+2)
Quick: Good (+3)   Sneaky: Great (+4)

Stunts:

Brand New Body: Because he can put his mind in another body, once per game session he can appear in a brand new body, having shed any physical consequences.

Expert at Cutting People Open: Because he has lots of experience knives, he gets +2 to Quickly Attack when he is using a knife.
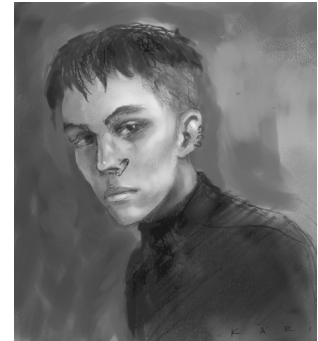
Ex-Computer Nerd: Because he was once a big huge computer nerd, he gets +2 to Cleverly Create Advantages when using a computer.

I'm In Your House: Because he often breaks into the homes of his victims (before or after he takes over their bodies), he gets +2 to Sneakily Overcome when faced with barriers to entering a dwelling quietly.

Stress: O O O O

Consequences: None:

Refresh: 5

Habey Cox

Habey is the founder of the Freaks and the closest thing this band of anarchistic street performers has to a leader. On stage his specialty is slam poetry in which he encourages people to embrace and enjoy that which makes him different. He is a pansexual hedonist, willing to explore any sort of kink. He organizes and chooses headliners for the Festival of the Freak, a quarterly street festival where hundreds of performers compete for the eyes and dollars of the crowd.

High Concept: Leader of the Freaks

Trouble: Anarchists Don't Have Leaders

Need: To Find the Next Frontier of Freakiness

Other Aspects: Slam Poet; Will Try Anything Once; Doesn't Care if You Approve

Approaches:

Careful: Mediocre (+0)	Clever: Fair (+2)
Flashy: Great (+4)	Forceful: Average (+1)
Quick: Fair (+2)	Sneaky: Average (+1)

Stunts:

Hypnotic Voice: Because he is a seasoned performer who really believes what he is saying, Habey gets +2 when he Flashily Creates Advantages when he makes a persuasive speech.

Cult Following: Because so many people look up to him, once per game session he can call on a fan who is willing to do just about anything for him.

Eat Scorpions: Because he has conditioned his body to do so, once per game session he can eat live, venomous scorpions with no significant effect on his health.

Stage Magic: Because he has been trained at sleight of hand, Habey gets +2 when he Sneakily Overcomes when he is trying to misdirect someone from what he is doing with his hands.

Stress: O O O O

Consequences: Physical - Moderate (4) - Walks with a limp.

Refresh: 4

Altair Nguyen

Altar is a daughter of an ultra-rich Vietnamese computer magnate. Altair grew up immortal (thank to brain backups and cloned bodies) and thus with no fear. She travels the world, accompanied by whatever sexy daredevils she meets along the way (who she jettisons when she grows bored of them). She likes to go to the world's most dangerous inner cities and engage in the most dangerous sports and other past-times that these places have to offer.

High Concept: Idle Rich Daredevil

Trouble: Doesn't Take Losing Well

Need: Excitement

Other Aspects: Poor Temper; Looking For Fun, Fearless.

Approaches:

Careful: Mediocre (+0)	Clever: Mediocre (+0)
Flashy: Good (+3)	Forceful: Good (+3)
Quick: Fair (+2)	Sneaky: Mediocre (+0)

Stunts:

Immortal: Because her mom has her brain backed up every time she comes home, once per game session Altair can come back from the dead, missing only a few weeks of memories.

No Sport Too Extreme: Because she has tried every dangerous sport, Altair gets +2 to Flashily Overcome when she is doing an athletic stunt.

Extremely Rich: Because she carried a huge wad of cash around with her, Altair gets +2 to Create Advantages when she bribes people.

Toughness Implants: Because she has multiple implants that help her resist injury, Altair starts with 2 extra stress tracks.

Stress: O O O O O

Consequences: None.

Refresh: 3

Kenton "Lord Jesus" Sanders

"Lord Jesus" is a mentally ill homeless person who believes he is Jesus. He is also a powerful psychic, who uses his powers to make other people believe he is Jesus. He is followed by an entourage of mentally ill people who think of themselves as his disciples. He tries to spread peace and love, but mostly just messes with people's heads.

High Concept: Psychic Who Believes He is Jesus

Trouble: Delusional Schizophrenic

Need: To Prove Himself Right

Other Aspects: Judges People's Sins, King of Peace and Love.

Approaches:

Careful: Mediocre (+0)   Clever: Mediocre (+0)
Flashy: Good (+3)   Forceful: Fair (+2)
Quick: Average (+1)   Sneaky: Mediocre (+0)

Stunts:

Heal the Sick: Because he can psychically control people's basic autonomic processes, once per game session he can remove up to 2 points of stress.

Swords to Plowshares: Because he is a trained psychic, Lord Jesus gets +2 to Flashily Overcome when he is trying to psychically force angry or violent people to calm down.

Convert the Unbelievers: Because he is a trained psychic with a powerful delusion, lord Jesus gets +2 to Forcefully Attack when he is trying to psychically force someone to believe he is Jesus.

Show Miracles: Because he is a trained psychic, Lord Jesus gets +2 to Create Advantages when he psychically forces people to experience things that aren't real.

Disciples: Because he has loyal followers, once per game session he can ask a follower to do anything for him.

Stress: O O O O

Consequences: None:

Refresh: 3

Morris "Monkeywrench" Tenaka

Morris is among the most extremist of anarchists. He believes in destroying all forms of authority by any means necessary. He is homeless, depending on others to let him couch-sit and give him the necessities of life. Wherever he goes he tries to find people abusing their authority. When people ask for help, he tries to help them, no matter what risk to himself, and when he sees someone using violence to subjugate others he has no qualms about killing that person.

High Concept: Homeless Extreme Anarchist

Trouble: Believes All Authority is Wrong

Need: To Help Anyone Fight Oppressors

Other Aspects: Snappy Dresser, This Anarchist Squatter Collective Isn't Anarchist Enough For Me; Willing To Die For My Principles.

Approaches:

Careful: Mediocre (+0)   Clever: Average (+1)
Flashy: Good (+2)   Forceful: Fair (+2)
Quick: Good (+3)   Sneaky: Average (+1)

Stunts:

No Slave to the Past: Because he believes in living in the moment, and not thinking about the past, once per game session he can remove up to 3 points of Mental Stress or one Minor Mental Consequence from himself.

Unload a Clip: Because he owns a pistol, Monkeywrench gets +2 to Flashily Attack when nobody is expecting him to take out a pistol and start firing.

Poisoned Screwdriver: Because he owns a screwdriver with a tip coated with deadly Drake poison, Monkeywrench gets +2 to Quickly Attack when he is disregarding his own safety.

Stress: O O O O

Consequences: None:

Refresh: 3

MAKING RENT

A Rentpunk Game Session In Brief

In a Rentpunk game session, the players find themselves approaching the end of the month and behind on rent money. The players go on various missions and come up with various schemes to make enough money to pay the rent. The players and game master narrate these missions and schemes and find out if they were successful or not. Count down the days until rent is due, and see if the characters can make enough money to avoid getting evicted.

How Did We Get Here?

A typical rentpunk game starts a handful of days from rent being due. The game master decides how many days are left and how much more the group, collectively, needs to obtain to make rent. For example, the game master might say that it's 5 days from rent being due and you need to raise another $100.

The narrative begins as the roommates count out their cash and discover that they aren't going to have enough to make rent.

Each character, at some point, had hopes (maybe even a reasonable expectation) that they would be able to pay the rent. Then life got in the way. Each player should explain, briefly, what happened. Typically this will be something that was beyond the PC's control (e.g. I got mugged, I got fired, my kid needed new shoes, I got sick and couldn't work). Occasionally it might be something that was the PC's fault (e.g. I blew my money on a card game, I failed to keep my spending in check) or it could be something that's somewhat, but not totally, your fault (e.g. I quit because my boss treated me like shit).

Finding Cash

Now it's time for the players to come up with schemes to pay the rent. Maybe they're working together, maybe they're operating separately (keep in mind that working together is usually more fun). You can try anything, but here are a few possibilities:

Working

This can mean a lot of things. It could mean working a graveyard shift at the fast food restaurant. It could mean delivering a package for a local black market trader. It could mean impersonating your brother, who is sick, and doing his shift at the factory, even though you have no idea how to work the machines. It could mean standing on a street corner selling volumes of the erotic poetry you've written. Work is probably the first thing players will think of, but it can also be very hard to find. Possible complications can include physical danger (from the nature of the job, or just from being out on the streets) as well as sleep deprivation (from working graveyard or swing shift) or physical exhaustion.

Criminal Work

This is like working except your boss is a criminal and what you're doing is clearly illegal. Maybe you're delivering drugs to buyers, maybe you're standing guard outside a brothel, maybe you're shaking down deadbeats on behalf of a loan shark. They pay is usually good for this kind of work, when you can get it, but there are many potential complications. You could suddenly find yourself involved in something way more unethical than you bargained for, the cops could show up, an enemy criminal could attack in an attempt to eliminate the competition, or the criminal you work for may decide not to pay you.

Begging

This could mean sitting on the street, begging for change from passers by. It could also mean begging for handouts from friends and family. Complications might include being attacked, bad weather or running into someone who wants a "favor" in exchange for the handout.

Collecting Money Owed

Perhaps someone owes the PC money and now it's time to get that person to pay up. Complications may involve finding the person, dealing with excuses or lies, perhaps even having a physical confrontation to make the person hand over what they owe.

Scrounging

Most easy to get to sources for scroungeables (e.g. dumpsters, the first floors of abandoned buildings) are so picked over that it is rarely worth the trouble. Better is if the PCs can find a part of an abandoned building that few scroungers have entered (perhaps the top floor of an abandoned skyscraper, perhaps an underground vault beneath a pile of rubble). Complications can involve unfriendly squatters, feral dogs, traps or collapsing floors.

Pawning Your Stuff

You may end up taking your stuff to a pawn shop or a black market trader and pawning or selling it. The problem is that you don't have a lot of stuff, and most everything you have is there for a reason, so no sooner have you paid your rent then you now have to try to afford a way to get your stuff back.

Getting a Loan

Maybe you can talk someone into loaning you a few bucks. Perhaps a friend, perhaps a relative, perhaps a local criminal. The problem here is that if you don't pay back, there can be serious consequences, from losing a friend to having thugs sent out to break your fingers.

Sweet Talking the Landlord

With a con, by flirting, through intimidation, or just by begging, you might be able to talk the landlord into letting you be a bit late with the rent. Potential consequences are that the landlord gets tired of hearing it, or that the landlord wants you to do something you don't want to do in payment of "the kindness" of letting you be late.

Sex Work

This can be one of the surest ways to get money, yet it is also uniquely fraught with potential complications. You could meet with a violent john, you could get shaken down by corrupt cops, you could catch a disease (venereal or otherwise) from a john. There are also many psychological or social consequences: you may find your work disgusting or degrading, it may damage your sense of self-worth, it may run contrary to your religion or the ethical standards you have set for yourself, or it could hurt your relationships with others who find out you do sex work.

Stealing

This may be the most fun, in terms of game play. There's lots of ways to steal: shoplifting, picking pockets, burglary, stealing a vehicle, mugging, a con game, card or pool sharking, armed robbery of a store, etc. The most successful thefts involve careful planning and use of various skills to overcome security measures and deal with unexpected problems that pop up along the way. Possible consequences include getting caught by the cops or private security, the people you stole from trying to track you down, or ethical dilemmas about taking other people's stuff.
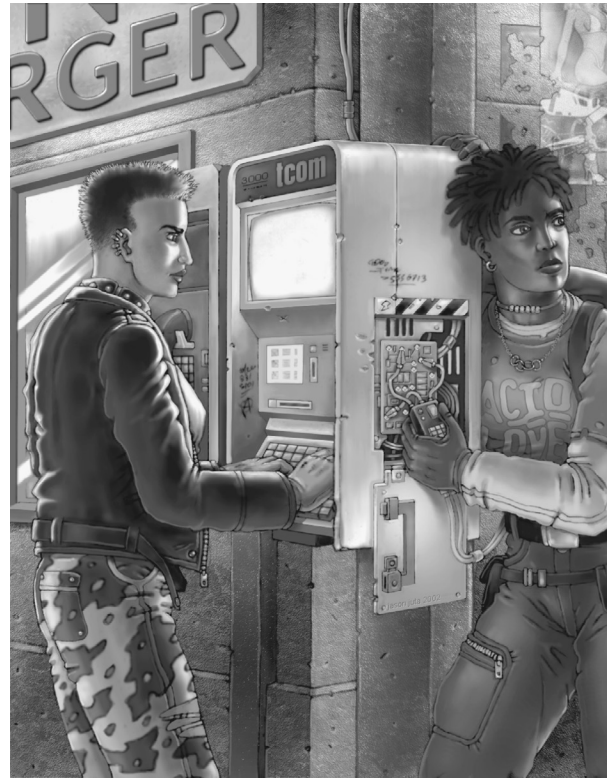
Other Complications

Other things can get in the way of the characters achieving their goals that are tangential to what the characters are trying to do. For example, characters could be going about their business and run into:

- A mugger.

- A power outage.

- A bad disease sweeping the city.

- A con artist with an offer to make money quick.

- An industrial accident that fills the streets with noxious pollution.

- A snowstorm/heat wave/torrential downpour.

- Getting caught in the middle of a gang war.

- A riot.

- A serial killer.

- Getting harassed by Day Shift cops.

- Being falsely accused of a crime.

- Being the subject of a mentally ill person's delusions.

- Being the victim of identity theft.

- Failure of a utility in one's apartment (e.g. the water won't work).

Creating Your Super

A bit of semantics: your landlords are the people who owns your apartment. In New York City this is often a faceless property management community that owns hundreds or thousands of buildings and no person at the head office would recognize your name without consulting their computers. Your Super is the person who maintains the building and usually lives in it, often in exchange for free rent. The super enforces the rules set down by the landlords and deals with the tenants. The super is often the person the tenants pay their rent to, but sometimes rent is paid directly to the local office of the rental management company. (In more prosperous places, rent is paid electronically, but Manhattan is one of the few places left where a lot of people operate on a cash-only basis). For the many tenants who interact only with their Supers, the Super might as well be their Landlord.

The characters' super will be a major character in Rentpunk and so it can be a good idea to create the landlord as a fully fleshed out character. The players probably won't get into a physical confrontation with the super (and if they do then they've probably already lost), but characters may want to seduce, persuade, trick, bribe or psychically manipulate the super. You'll want to know how well the super will be able to resist these forms of non-physical challenges.

The mental image that most likely spring to mind of a super is of a gruff, middle-aged white guy who has heard every sort of excuse or sob story and is sick of hearing them. He's weary, grumpy and gets a small thrill over exerting control over his control over his tenants. He doesn't want to be liked, only feared, and he will brazenly disrespect the tenants and their privacy and dignity. This is a perfectly realistic template to build a super on.

However, it may make things more interesting to resist these stereotypes. Perhaps the super is a nice semi-retired lady, whose house is filled with white ceramic figures of kittens and angels, who is always ready to lend some grandmotherly advice, and who really would like you to be late with your rent but the property management company that employs her wouldn't like it. Perhaps the super is a recent immigrant, speaking stilted English, who always greets you with a smile, who works tirelessly and who is endeavoring to be the best employee of the property management company that he can be. In some ways it is harder to deal with a nice super than a mean one, because you can feel guilty about manipulating to a nice one.

Downtime and Distractions

Not every moment should be spent in pursuit of cash. For one thing, each character has a Need aspect and at least one of these should come into play in each game setting. It can also be interesting and fun to narrate what the PCs do while they are killing time between rent-making opportunities. Sometimes these downtime and distraction scenes can provide characters with unexpected opportunities to make money.

What if You Succeed?

At the last moment the characters stuff that envelope of cash through the slot and they are, for the moment, safe from eviction. However, there's always next month. There are also the various complications that came up in the course of that month's gameplay. Maybe a character borrowed money, which will have to be paid back. Maybe a character made an enemy, who will be looking for the character. Maybe a character had to take a Consequence, which will make it even more difficult to make next month's rent. The byproducts of one month's adventures thus make it difficult to make rent next month (and thus perhaps, necessitate doing something even more dangerous next month). Over the course of several months, the game becomes about not just "can we make rent" but "can we pull ourselves out of this downwards spiral?"

What If You Fail?

You may not be able to gather up the funds to pay the rent, and you may fail to talk your landlord into giving you another extension. What happens next is that the landlord pays some private security people to enter your apartment, move your stuff out onto the street and change the locks.

The group can choose, at this point, to say that you've lost the game and end it there. Or, if the group wants to, you can keep roleplaying what happens next. Can the characters squat somewhere, or couch surf, or survive nights on the street? And after that, can the characters scrape up enough to pay the deposit on a new apartment and become renters once again?

Characters may get imprisoned or killed or join the ranks of the long-term homeless. On the other hand, they may gain enough money or status to no longer have to worry about whether they can pay the rent each month. At that point, the best thing to do may be to create a new character. After all, when one roomie leaves the natural thing to do is look for a new roomie.

Tips for Game Masters

Make things interesting, not just difficult

Nothing ever goes according to plan. Your main job as a GM is to take the schemes that players come up with and throw in various twists and turns. This doesn't necessarily mean opposing them and making everything the players want to do as difficult as possible. Try to surprise the players. Make some things surprisingly difficult, some things surprisingly easy. Throw in unexpected opportunities, coincidences and various weirdness.

Defy Stereotypes

People who act exactly as the players expect them to act can be boring to deal with. In real life people seldom match their stereotypes (and if you think you do, maybe you just don't know them very well), so defying stereotypes makes the story more realistic and more interesting. Try to give each non-player character something that goes contrary to the stereotype for that type of character.

Keep things moving

If the players don't know what to do next, it's your job to give them a nudge. Never let things get too bogged down in indecision or because they don't have enough information—do something to shake things up.

Make sure everyone has a chance to be awesome

Make sure every PC gets a chance to be the star once in a while, from the big bad warrior to the little sneaky thief. Help them find opportunities to succeed in spectacular ways, ways that only their character can.

When you've got nothing, move on to the next scene

It's fine if you don't have any good ideas for how to make a scene interesting or challenging. Just say "well, that worked out smoothly. Mission accomplished. So what are you going to do next?"

Tips for Players

A messy life is better than a simple one.

Make your game life almost as complicated as your real life, with a lot more danger and drama. It will give you more opportunities to earn Fate points and tell interesting stories.

A crazy scheme is better than a sane one.

If this were real life, a boring, cautious plan would be better. The GM shouldn't punish you for having an audacious plan, although that doesn't mean your plan will go off without a hitch.

Have morals, but take them to the edge.

A Rentpunk game where your character is a complete sociopath, willing to do anything and everything and immune to guilt, is boring. It's boring because it makes everything too easy (and, in game terms, gives you no decision compels to earn Fate points with). Instead, give your character some rules about what he or she is willing to do, then put the character in situations that tempt him or her to break those rules. Roleplay the consequences when the player does do something that violates his or her moral standards.

Find ways to include your roomies.

When it comes time to say how your character is going to make his or her part of the rent, it might seem easier to go off on your own, but that doesn't make for game play which fun for everyone. Come up with an excuse to have your roomies there, or at least nearby, when you go out on your quest to make some cash. Remember that any trip out onto the streets of the city carries with it a significant chance of being targeted for robbery or violence, so it only makes sense that a character would want someone watching his or her back, no matter what the character is going off to do.

ABOUT THE CITY

Black Market

In Brief- The black market is huge, decentralized and efficient. Through traders and their multiple connections, one can get almost anything.

The modern black market was formed back during the occupation of the city during the Freedom Wars. The black market is made up of an army of independent traders, each of whom has contacts with many other traders and hundreds of other contacts. Every criminal enterprise in the city (except the Drug Lords, who have a vertical monopoly on drug distribution) depends on the black market for their existences. Even semi-legit organizations rely heavily on the black market. The black market has no leaders (although some traders are wealthier and have more economic influence than others) and no real structure.

A common saying on the streets is that the black market can get you anything if you're willing to pay enough for it. There is some truth to this saying. If someone asks a trader for something, the trader first checks to see if it is in his or her current inventory. If not, then the trader finds out how much the customer "wants it" (in other words, how much of a markup he or she is willing to pay). If the person wants it badly enough, a request may jump from trader to trader to trader (each taking a percentage) before it reaches a trader who has or can get the thing in question. If nobody on the black market has a product, it is easy enough to hire someone to steal it. Through this network of contacts, it is conceivable that someone could come to a local black market trader with a few billion dollars and, in a week, get the Mona Lisa.

For traders, information is a good just like anything else. Traders pay for, hoard and sell information whenever they can. Services are also sold (from spying, to a plumbing repair, to a legal bribe, to a massage, to a murder). The trader matches a person needing the service with the person who can provide it, and takes a commission for himself or herself. Some traders (though not all) are also loan sharks, giving loans to people who could not normally get loans, though with ridiculously high interest and mercenaries as debt collectors. Traders who act as loan sharks make it a point to tell the debtors what they are getting in to: they don't want anyone claiming that they got a raw deal from the trader.

Despite its seeming clumsiness, the black market is very efficient.

Traders

In Brief- Independent and powerful traders make up the black market. They seldom exert political power but can have a large influence.

The black market is traders. Without traders, people could steal but they wouldn't have an efficient mechanism to get stolen goods to the people. Crime would be crippled in the city without traders.

Most traders are indies that operate out of their homes. A trader's apartment is a heavily guarded cache of goods. Most traders have either expensive security systems or 24 hour guards at their apartments. A minority of traders are in debt to other, larger traders, and act as employees. Many became traders so they wouldn't have to answer to anyone.

It is easy to ignore traders: they are not organized and they don't go to war to avenge each other (except in the case of personal friendships). For those interested in gang politics, traders are sort of like the scenery: always there when you need them.

Traders see it differently: they always keep an eye on gang politics (as it can greatly effect their business) and they can use their economic power to nudge a situation in one direction or another. For instance, a trader might decide that a gang war would hurt their business (by disrupting people's ability to travel freely through the area). To stop the war, a Trader may share information, send runners to take messages between gang members interested in a truce, or loan the weaker side some very nasty weapons so they appear less vulnerable.

Transactions

In Brief- Most transactions are face-to-face in trader homes. Other transactions are handled using locked accounts and homeless runners.

For most products that a black market trader sells, the standard deal is that the cash and product are handed over at the same time, usually in the traders home (where the trader has defenses ready in case of any malfeasance). If a trader has to "special order" a product, he or she usually asks for some amount (such as 10%) up front. For known clients, with whom the trader has established a trust, a trader may extend a line or credit. For very large deals, and when face-to-face transactions are not possible, Traders use cheap internet escrow services.

Escrow Services- The health of the black market depends upon people who do not necessarily trust each other being able to do large transactions relatively quickly. Escrow services make this possible. Money is transferred to the escrow service, who keeps a hold of it until both parties log-on to say that the transaction was concluded. If the parties can't agree, the escrow service keeps the money.

Runners- Not all transactions happen face to face. Sometimes a buyer wishes to remain anonymous. Sometimes the item is too worthless or the transaction too routine for someone to bother to walk all the way down the block to the trader's home. Sometimes the item being purchased is for some emergency and the person needs the thing right away. Sometimes the item is being delivered from one trader to another. In all of these cases, traders use homeless Runners they have at their disposal to take money, goods and messages back and forth. The runners are every bit as professional, skilled and efficient as the traders they work for.

Guns

In Brief- Very few in the city own guns. Those that do own guns are either rich enough to have them smuggled in, or use unreliable homemade guns. Gun owners are generally given a wide berth. Outside the city, most guns have technology to prevent unauthorized use.

Only a small minority in the city own guns. Of those that do, many have homemade weapons. Some can only be fired once, others can be used multiple times but because they are home-tooled they have a large chance of misfiring and even injuring the shooter.

Guns are equally likely to come from three basic sources: First, those smuggled in to the city and sold on the black market. Second, those manufactured in the city. Third, those in the city prior to the 2050s that were not found during Freedom Army sweeps.

City residents are very wary about people with firearms. Even those gang members who will jump fearlessly in to any fight will try to avoid combat when the opponent has a gun. Often, when someone has a gun, it is the one and only advantage that they have.

Gun Technology- Federal law requires modern guns to be manufactured with security chips. These chips test the DNA and/or voice print of the users. When the chip recognizes an authorized person, it sends electrical signals to piezoelectric strips within the gun that allow the gun to fire. Simply tearing out the chip will make the gun unable to fire. The registered user(s) of a gun is set in the gun store, and is entered in to a federal database.

Some communities require additional technology above and beyond the federally mandated security chips. Some have GPS (Global Positioning System) chips and keep a permanent record of exactly when and where the gun was fired. Some guns send a signal to the police every time the gun is fired. Some guns have tracking devices which are always on. Some guns have chips that check DNA and only let registered owners use them. When gated communities allow guns, it is usually with these restrictions. When the national guard brings guns in to the city (the only time guns can be legally brought in to the city) their firearms have all of these security features.

Most guns sold on the black market were created before these new laws were made. Otherwise, the guns either have been physically modified or hacked (both of which

Why People Don't Buy Children on the Black Market

Some things are just so morally reprehensible that people do not buy them from the normal black market. There are willing buyers and willing sellers, and some traders will be willing, but too many black market traders who would make it their business to fuck up someone who tried to make this sort of purchase.

Say someone goes to a trader and inquires whether the trader can procure a child for him or her. The trader might flat out say no. The trader may, however, say that he or she can procure a child. Most traders are good liars and the person wishing to purchase the child has no way of knowing, when they go to pick the child up, whether they will actually get a child or whether they will be ambushed and killed by an army of angry Orphans who the trader secretly contacted.

Body Modification

Decoration

In Brief- City residents of every income level user body modifications to improve their looks or make themselves appear tough, including piercings, implanted spikes, tattoos, tissue dying, scarring and surgical changes.

Piercings- These are probably the most common body modification in the city. Professional and amateur piercers in the city will take on any request, from the mundane to the very creative. Among favorers of the gutterpunk style, spikes are common. Spikes can be implanted just under the skin, and this is the easiest and least painful method, but the spikes are not very secure. A more skilled piercer (or Black Med or legitimate doctor) can connect spikes to the bones.

Tattoos- Most tattoos are done by a computer and are cheap and fast. Any image can be placed on someone's skin, either permanently or semi-permanently. It is mostly poor people who go for traditional (needle-gun) or archaic (skin abrasions) methods. Some gutterpunks go to practitioners of Maori style tattooing (a chisel is used to abrade the skin, then ink is painted on) to prove how tough they are. Some "posers" go to computerized tattoo parlors and get tattoos that are almost indistinguishable from authentic Maori style tattoos.

Coloring- Non-toxic dyes can semi-permanently dye hair, skin, teeth and even eyes to some color that the person requests. In general, changes in shade are the cheapest and easiest to get, while extreme changes (like going from caucasian skin coloring to jet black skin) are expensive and take special procedures.

Scarring- Some in the city (most often poor teens and mentally ill people) engage in scarification of their own bodies as a means of decoration. Most of them are people who have some vested interest in advertising to others how tough or self-destructive they are.

Surgical Modifications- The Freaks may invest money in scary looking surgical modifications which will be part of their acts. Sex industry workers may borrow money to invest in plastic surgery, hoping to enhance their careers. It is only Indies who can afford surgical mods purely for the aesthetic value. These mods can include vat-grown parts, like third eyes, tails, extra-fingers. Parts can be functional or non-functional. The mods can also include non-organic substances (e.g. glass, metal, plastic, even stone) implanted in the body.

Implants

In Brief- Black market implants, both electronic and biological, can give people special powers.

For those that can afford them, legal and black market implants, both electronic and biological, can be useful tools and weapons. Implants can impart a wide range of abilities on their owners. In general, implants that give people concealed weapons are illegal, while implants that act as tools or sensors are legal when implanted by a licensed physician.

Jack- The most common electronic implant is the Jack. A jack puts a small data plug in the hand which connects to the brain through a pair of normal nerves. A simple multidevice interface mental program lets the user control and recieve feedback from the device mentally. Everything from construction equipment, to auto-aiming weapon systems, to musical instruments are available with jack controls. Fortunately, the multidevice mental program has a lot of safeguards and it is nearly impossible for a improperly or maliciously programmed device to kill or injure the person attached to it.

Electronic- Electronic implants usually have compact rechargeable batteries which can be recharged by placing an electromagnet over the skin. A few implants have external control devices (e.g. a touch pad on the back of the hand). Most are controlled mentally by linking the device with motor and sensory nerves, which are then hijacked from their original purpose and fed in to a special mental program designed to let the owner control and receive data from the implant. The installation costs of these mental programs add significantly to the cost of the implant.

Biological- These implants are coded to a person's DNA (so the body does not reject them) and grown in a vat. Upon implantation, they become just another part of the person's body. If nerves are hooked up, users can learn to control and interpret sensations from these new parts. The most popular biological implants are implanted muscles.

Replacements- The same techniques can be used to grow limbs and organs to replace limbs and organs that were lost due to accident or disease. Most decent health insurance will pay for this procedure, especially because it is more economically efficient than comparable prosthetics.

Usefulness- Implants are very inefficient. It would be much cheaper and easier to buy high-tech scuba equipment than to try to get a water-breathing lung or a chemical oxygen backup implant. Anything that can be done with an implant can be done cheaper and easier with external equipment. People still buy implants, though. One reason is that implants can not be yanked away. Another reason is that people with implants can often gain the element of surprise over other people. The biggest reason is purely psychological: people feel more powerful when an implant allows their bodies to do something than normal people can't.
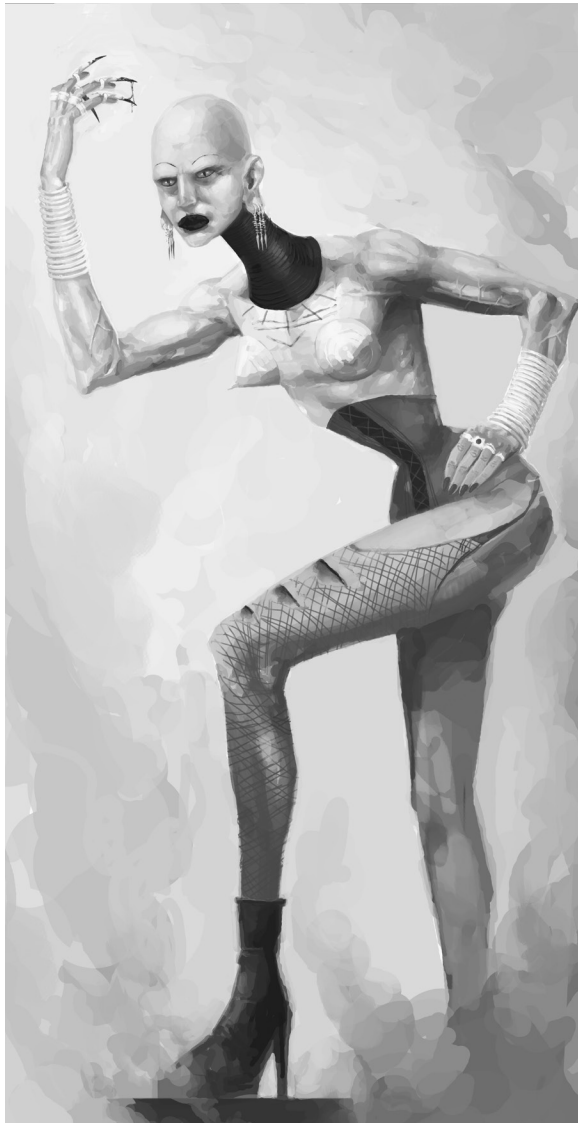
Body Mod Monsters

A horrible cycle can happen when people begin to change their own bodies through plastic surgery, genetic alterations and implants. When people look at themselves in the mirror, what they see is often quite different from what other people see looking at them. People who begin trying to fix some aspect of their bodies that they don't like often find that it doesn't make them any happier with their appearance. People find that each time they use the power to change their own appearance, it is harder to avoid using it again the next time. Many people feel they are helpless to avoid getting the next surgery, no matter what their friends say. The more control they have over their appearance, the more critically they look in the mirror, until what they see has no bearing on normal standards of beauty or on practicality.

The end result is that there are dozens of inhuman looking people wandering around the city. There are the stick figures: incredibly tall and incredibly thin, always near the verge of death because every vital part of their anatomy has been reduced or constricted to make them thinner. There are the muscle-monsters, whose muscles are so gigantic that their joints are liquefying and they can't even reach in to their pockets. Rather than actually being strong, these muscle monsters are more likely to tear something, break a bone or have a heart attack when they try to exert their strength. There are the sex monsters, with bulges on their groins or chests so huge that they look like ridiculous caricatures of people. Their health problems are numerous and they are feared or disdained by most of the population. Although there are some fetishists who seek out sex with these sex monsters, most normal forms of intercourse are impractical or impossible because of the sex monsters' distorted anatomy. There are even a few people who have regressed themselves in to crude versions of toddlers in an attempt to gain a permanent look of youth. These are just the most common examples, there are different and more bizarre people running around the city. There are constant sightings of an "animal man" who behaves like a feral dog and looks like a terribly deformed human on all fours.

It is a common misconception that these are people who went crazy and then turned themselves in to monsters. The truth is that the process of going crazy and the process of turning themselves in to monsters was one in the same.

On Evolution, Culture, Body Modification

"Okay, lookit. It's really hard to improve on nature because nature had, like, a billion years to make the human body like it is. So you're a dumbass if you think you can make the body better at doing what it was supposed to do. Its that "supposed to do" thing that's important, because we don't want to prowl around in the grass, eat roots and crank out babies, do we? We want to do something different with out bodies, and that's when we need body mods. They way I see it, body mods are our way of defining what we think our bodies are for. When some wacko first cut his dick off, he was saying 'hey fuck you nature, you may want me to go around spooging my DNA all over the place, but that's not what I want to do with my life.' And that's what you've got to think about when you shop for any body mod."

Death Borgs

In Brief- Some people have implanted death-switch bombs, meant to deter potential killers. Can be deactivated. Known by metal forehead protrusions, though there are fakes.

Death Borgs are the street name for any implant that activates upon the death (usually the brain death) of the implant's owner. Most death borgs explode, killing anyone in the area. Death Borgs have large, flashy chrome protrusions (typically on the forehead). All Death Borg implants can be controlled by tapping on the protrusion in a pre-set sequence. The implant can be disarmed or forced to go off prematurely.

People who get death borgs tend to be wealthy, to have a lot of enemies, and to have little compassion for other people (including innocent people who are killed when death borgs explode). Traders have the highest percentage of death borgs of any city group.

The purpose of a Death Borg is typically to deter would-be murderers. It is fairly successful in this regard, although it also tends to deter people from living near or even walking near a death borg (for fear he or she will die unexpectedly). Death borgs also have led to some morbidly common scenes: e.g. muggers who just stabbed someone trying desperately to save him, or people putting a plague victim with a death borg in a shopping cart and trying to roll her in to the river.

City Culture

Origins

In Brief- City culture is mostly practical, but draws elements from gang culture, homeless culture, radical utopianism and teenage rebellion.

For the most part, city culture has created itself. It is not so much a set of shared traditions as it is a bunch of people, each reacting to their environment as rationally as they can. Similarity to other cultures, past or present, is probably just because something happens to be an effective way of doing things. However, there are some city traditions which can be traced directly back to specific roots.

Gang Culture- Gangs have changed a lot recently. In fact, many gangs have done whatever they can to differentiate themselves from the randomly-violent, self-destructive drug gangs of the old times. However, certain elements remain, especially in gangs with an old history (Roofers, Risen) or with elder members. Major contributions: revenge as a means of deterrence, the idea of the gang as one's family.

Homeless Culture- Whereas the Indies and Wells have "found the streets," the homeless and unborn have always had them and have had good ways of dealing with their dangers. Wells and Indies new to the streets have often incorporated homeless ways of doing things because they work. Major contributions: respecting other people's boundaries (to a fault), theft seen as morally justifiable and the idea of giving others every chance to live-and-let-live.

Radical Utopianism- For a while in the late 2050s, utopianism was the major radical movement of the day. Radical Utopianists believed that community was more important than government and that "perfect communities" could change the world's culture. Major contributions: emphasis on self government, use of banishment as a punishment.

Teenage Rebellion- There is a lot of teenage rebellion in the culture of the city. For centuries, teenagers have been growing up pressed up against the flaws of their parents' lifestyles. Many of the teenagers have decided, however naively, that anything would be better than living as their parents did. For Wells, the single most common reason for leaving home is not wanting to be like parents. So, many city values are really just the violent rejection of the values of VR addicts. Major contributions: devaluation of safety, comfort and economic stability.

The State of Equality in 2080

In Brief- Women, homosexuals, ethnic minorities face little or no discrimination. Poor, immigrants, transsexuals, "ugly" people face some discrimination. City residents discriminated against by those outside the city.

Victories- Over the last century, American culture (and most other cultures in the industrial world) has rid itself of nearly all cultural and institutional prejudice against women, homosexuals and racial minorities. These people can join military service, the clergy of most religions, street gangs, and almost all private clubs (including the masons). To most people it would be a bizarre and alien thought to think that these people are inferior or bad in any way. In the city, the only exceptions are mentally ill loners who may decide they hate a certain gender, sexuality or ethnicity. Some Immigrants and religious extremists discriminate against minority sexualities, but they are outsiders with social little power. Every once in a while, a small group of young teens who share a certain prejudice will get together to commit hate crimes (usually cornering and beating people up). Many serial killers are misogynists (people who hate and fear women). Women are targeted for sex crimes more often then men, but most people see this as a vulnerability of male psychology, not a female weakness.

Failures- Certain people still face cultural and institutional prejudice. Even in the city, where even the richest are considered poor by most standards, there is still prejudice against poor people. People who are poor are more likely to be thought of as stupid, immoral, dangerous and diseased. This is especially true of shut-ins, who regard homeless people as something like wild animals. Similarly, immigrants are commonly thought of as ignorant, unsophisticated and unfriendly. The physically disabled and elderly are thought of as being less capable than others and are often denied membership in city groups (including some gangs) and in gated communities and corporations.

Transsexuals have made significant gains in recent decades, but still face hostility from some quarters, especially when they are transsexual and poor. Transsexual groups have sought to have government healthcare pay for their sex changes, which caused a backlash by groups who didn't think "their tax dollars" should be paying for such things. Although some in the city have anti-transsexual sentiments, city culture as a whole is much more accepting of transsexuals than many other communities (especially culturally conservative rural communities) and many transsexuals move to the city to enjoy a less judgmental atmosphere.

"Lookism" is not as prevalent in the city as it is in other parts of the country. The main reason is that, on the streets, people often put a higher value on looking tough than on looking attractive. Also, the city has a plurality of very different styles and thus more than one "ideal" of physical beauty. Despite this, people who are considered attractive find they have an easier time getting jobs, joining groups and gaining power.

City Residents- Any resident of the city will find himself or herself discriminated against by people from outside the city. People living in gated communities or corporate living centers assume that anyone living in the city either couldn't pass screening tests or was too crazy to want to. They assume that any city resident is either mentally ill, stupid and uneducated, drug addicted or evil. People who choose to be out on the streets are often thought of the same way by those who choose to be shut-ins.

Fashion & Style

In Brief- The major themes people mix and match from are homeless/grunge (warm flannels), gutterpunk (tribal and punk), bollywood (East Indian), goth (dark and scary, lots of makeup), corp/mod (conservative, suits and ties), gang old school (paramilitary and hiphop) and straight (simple, cheap and flattering).

Style among young adults in the city is a hodgepodge of seven basic elements. Only a small percentage of people are true to one style, most mix and match:

Homeless/Grunge- Clothing is mainly grays & mixed patterns, including dull-colored plaids. Clothing is selected mostly for warmth: flannel shirts, jeans, sweatshirts. Knit caps and fingerless gloves are common. Clothes are loose fitting. Street people, and anyone else who can't or won't spend a lot of money on clothing, wear this style. The point is to wear clothes that are warm, comfortable, and don't need constant washing.

Gutterpunk- Hair spiked and/or shaved, dyed black, red, green or purple. Ritual scarring. Maori style tattoos. pierced-septum nose-rings. Black leather jackets, bright colored plaids. Chains worn as jewelry. Makeup is uncommon, but when present it is usually in the form of green or purple lipstick. Clothing is often torn, often held together with safety pins. Razorblades are a common form of jewelry. The point is to look dangerous and tribal, and to wear clothing (such as leathers) that can survive harsh conditions.

Bollywood- This style derived from a 2020's fascination with Indian culture. Females wear this style more often then men. Most cloth is made from colorful, intricate floral or abstract patterns, focusing mainly on warm colors (reds, browns, oranges). Clothing is long and flowing with many wraps, dresses and thigh-length shirts. Jewelry is silver or gold and is very complicated (different pieces may be connected by thin chains). Tikas (reddish dots in the middle of the forehead, made with makeup or a tattoo) are common on women. Anklets and body jewelry (jewelry which is temporarily glued to the skin) featuring jewels, silver and circular patterns. Nostril (not septum) piercings. Colorful veils which partially hide the face are common for women. The point of this style is to make people look sophisticated and exotic.

Goth- Clothing is almost entirely black. Hair is usually black, long on both men and women. Men are clean-shaven. Makeup is common on both sexes (although women wear more). Makeup is dark and accentuates pale skin. Lipstick is usually blood-red or black. Jewelry is silver, much of it has points, barbs or cutting edges. Rings with claws on them are common. Much of the jewelry uses holy-symbols from living or past cultures. Capes and cloaks common when it is cold. Clothing is often torn. Use of fishnet material on shirts, stockings and as gloves is common. Nails are usually long (both sexes). Women's shirts are usually designed to show cleavage. The point of this style is to enhance certain features (e.g. lips, eyes, cleavage) and to make people look dangerous, depressed and aroused.

Corp/Mod- Hair cut short & styled (parted for men, bangs for women). Bowler style black felt hats are common. Business attire: suits, dress slacks, neckties. Most of the clothing is black. Briefcases and expensive cigarettes are common accessories. The point of this style is to look sophisticated and professional.

Gang Old School- Very lose fitting clothing of thick materials (e.g. denim) with sleeves long enough to partially conceal the hands. Sport team jerseys are common, as are baseball caps. Tattoos are small and serve of marks of important events (gang membership, people the person killed, etc.) rather than decorations. Clothing is usually dark or jungle-camouflage. Body jewelry is gold. Hard kneepads and elbow pads are common. Sunglasses and bandannas conceal the eyes. The point is to show off personal wealth, identify oneself as a gang member and to wear clothing which aids in urban guerrilla warfare (camouflage, elbow and knee pads, concealed hands and eyes, etc.)

Straight- Straight is a style which focuses on simplicity. Men wear crew-cuts, women cut their hair short or wear it in pony-tails. Jewelry and makeup is minimal. Clothing is solid colors: black, white, beiges, reds and greens. Clothing seldom has logos on it. Clothes fit snugly and nothing hangs loose. Turtle-neck sweaters, t-shirts and tank-tops are common. Pants are simple slacks. Many sexologists wear this style, seeing it as the most unobtrusive and non-degrading way to show off the human form. The point of this style is to wear clothing which is cheap, easy and comfortable while still looking good.

Sleepy Style

The newest trendy style among young people, especially young club-goers, is the "sleepy" style. Hair is mussed up and flattened down on the head, there is little or no makeup, eyes are kept squinted as often as possible, clothing is pajamas (unbuttoned to show chest and midriff). Other affectations include teddy bears, pillows and blankets. This style is not seem very often outside of clubs (it is not a general "street wear" fashion).

Graffiti

In Brief- Art, self-expression, communication and historical records all in one.

Timeline

1930s- First gang graffiti in US.

1949 – Spraypaint invented

1968 – Julio 204, first city 'writer'.

1970 – Taki 183 makes the news, makes 'writing' famous.

1971 – First writing crews.

1973 – City spends $10 million removing graffiti.

1973 – Strong anti-graffiti laws.

1972 – First burner (large mural masterpiece).

1982 – First large scale wars between writing crews.

1985 – NY writing declines after crack cocaine takes over the lives of more urban youth.

History- Historically, there have been two different (but never completely separate) types of graffiti in the city. Gang graffiti has been seen in the city's poor ethnic neighborhoods before World War II. Gang graffiti was meant to communicate information to other gang members: it was incomprehensible to most non-gang members and even to gang members from other areas. As time went on, the language of gang graffiti became more complex and more things could be communicated with gang graffiti: the limits of turf, threats and challenges to other groups, listings of the members of gangs, memorials for dead gang members, and even descriptions of battles or other accomplishments. An increasing involvement of street gangs in drug sales spread a more uniform gang culture around the country and made it so that people from one city could often understand much gang graffiti from another city.

In New York, in the late 1960s, graffiti as a unique form of self-expression was invented. Early "taggers" or "writers" would write their nickname (and the street they were from) on anything and everything they could. The media took the story and ran with it, making writing increasingly popular. A whole lifestyle evolved: kids would shoplift cans of spraypaint, form crews, spraypaint huge murals on subway cars or buildings. Crews would even get in to bloodless "wars" where they would paint their own marks over each other's marks.

Graffiti itself was also an act of daring: putting graffiti up in gang turf, or somewhere where one risked being caught by authorities, or in a dangerous place proved the graffiti artist's bravery. Graffiti artists of the 1980's and 1990's were urban explorers, going in to tunnels, hopping barbed-wire fences, climbing bridges. Writers would often paint beautiful murals in places where nobody but other writers, homeless people living underground, and the occasional stray utility worker would ever see them. Many of these underground paintings are still there, a hundred years later, having outlasted many city buildings.

Because some of the murals created by writers were quite beautiful (at least to some) this lent some amount of respectability to graffiti writing. Some started using the phrase "graffiti artists." This term pissed off the property owners and city government, who were paying millions a year to clean up graffiti. Although the police continued to crack down on it, writing became the domain of kids of all social classes, not just poor kids.

Modern Graffiti- In the city today, graffiti continues to be something that crosses social and economic boundaries. Graffiti ranges from a bare, utilitarian scrawl meant to convey a message (even if the message is as simple as "I was here") to large, attractive murals that take twenty to thirty cans of paint. Much graffiti falls somewhere in-between: it tries to send a message as well as showing the skill of the writer.

Some graffiti uses easy to understand pictures, symbols and language. Others use symbols that only members of a particular group might understand. Others use a "language" of symbols known only by experienced writers. At its best, graffiti is not only beautiful, it is a historical document that skilled graffiti artists can read in the same way one might read a newspaper.

Slang

The culture of the streets has developed several new slang words, mostly in response to new things that there weren't simple terms to describe. Most groups in the city, gang and non-gang, tend to have slang to describe the things they deal with in particular. An analysis of city slang can provide insights in to the worldview of the people who speak it.

"Borg"- Many slang words use the suffix "borg," taken from the word cyborg. "Borg" indicates that something has been replaced by something else artificial. The X + Borg formula commonly refers to both the technological measure and the person benefiting from it. For instance, the Skin Borg gang are people who wear high tech armor almost 24 hours a day, replacing the weakness of human skin with the strength and powers of high tech materials. Death Borgs are people who have had their normal processes of death replaced by a bomb which explodes upon death. Kid Borgs is a term used to describe people who use mental copying technology to move their minds in to the bodies of children.

"Black"- Many slang terms have this prefix, as in "black market." It typically indicates that something is illegal and being done underground. E.g. a "black corp" is a division of a corporation that operates in secret, using illegal means to make money for the parent corp. "Grey" is used to describe things that dance the line between being legal and illegal.

"Hunting for Souls"

In city slang, "hunting for someone's soul" means trying to take away someone's free will. A person's free will can be removed by means of drugs, mental programs, brainwashing, psychic attacks or implants. **Drugs** can temporarily inhibit free will, but cannot remove it altogether. **Mental programs** are expensive and take a long time to install, but can let a person command (e.g. with spoken "keywords") any element of a person's mental functioning. Mental programs can turn on or off emotions, paralyze people, block memories, or other nasty things only limited by current knowledge about the brain. **Brainwashing** is low tech but effective. It involves forcing someone say what you want them to believe, and then slowly reducing their mental capacity until they start believing what they are saying. **Psychics** can control what people, think, feel, do or even believe, but rarely for more than a second. **Implants**, put in people against their will, can let people monitor, punish and even kill by remote control.

Philosophy

In Brief- The city gives many opportunities for philosophy. Eccentrics and street people have many philosophies. It could be said that everyone in the city has their own philosophy, whether or not they can put it in words.

Eccentrics are stereotyped as the city's philosophers. The classic image of an Eccentric is someone who sits back and observes everything going on in the city, and draws conclusions from it about abstract subjects such as human nature or ethics. For this person, the anarchy of the city is a laboratory of all the principles of human life. Every possible combination of peoples, motivations and situations come together at some point or another. There is also the unregulated use of technologies that raise important philosophical questions. Mental copying technology raises questions about human identity and the idea of a unique soul. Mental installer technologies, psychics and drugs raise questions about free will. Virtual Reality raises questions about what is real, and under what circumstances reality is really necessary. AI and genetic engineering raises questions about what is human.

One very inaccurate stereotype is that while the rich think about philosophy, the poor do not. In fact, homeless street people think about philosophy as much as any Eccentric. It is mostly boredom that prompts thinking: philosophy (along with sex and poetry) is one of the few free past-times available to street people. Street people have many philosophies and opinions, though they often resemble "folk wisdom" more than academic philosophy. Rather than trying to extract abstract theorems from a priori logic, street philosophers try to extract abstract principles from things they see around them. A street person might come up with some simple rule (e.g. "'free' just means you don't know what the cost is right now") and then spend hours delightfully pointing out every real-life story in which that rule holds true. Street people entertain each other for hours discussing what is the best way to deal with certain people or situations; what is right and wrong; what parts of people's behavior are innate and what parts are a reaction to the environment; what are the core motivations of human beings; and what makes things aesthetically pleasing.

Everyone in the city, though, has some theory, strategy, opinion, explanation or worldview which is unique to them. Many gangs have their own philosophies, though each individual member puts his or her own spin on that philosophy (or, in some cases, rejects it altogether). Groups sometimes teach their philosophy through lectures, but most often they teach it by the way they act, the goals they seek and the way they deal with problems.

The Ten Worst Ways To Die

By Carl Finnix (Roofer Founder and Battle General)

10. "I guess some of the plagues we've had around here have been pretty bad. You remember that one we had last Summer, the one where you bleed out and the blood's all black, and you go to the doctor and the doctor says 'Your organs are dead, so all we can do is give you a bunch of pain killers.' That one was pretty bad."

9. "And the Drakes have some pretty nasty poisons. There's this one that you just go crazy, like the worst possible drug trip, and then you have a heart attack and die. Come to think of it, I guess the Drakes are pretty cool. I mean, they have this shit but most of the time they use poison that kills you painlessly."

8. "There's that disease, the one that gives you boils all over and the people who gave it to you charge you a thousand dollars for the cure. I hear it feels like there's bugs crawling under your skin. It could be worse, there could be real bugs crawling under your skin. They're probably working on that next."

7. "A buddy of mine once got put in an oven and cooked. The sad thing is that if he could have just grabbed on to those heating coils and yanked them out of the wall, he could have saved himself, but they was just too hot to touch. So he died knowing the one way to save himself, but being unable to do it."

6. "I guess Mauler addicts have it pretty bad. I mean, you just get dumber and dumber and you can feel your being a person just slipping away. Then, when you finally forget how to buy drugs, the withdrawals are so bad that you end up scratching yourself to death."

5. "There's that leash program. You know, that mental program that you put in someone's head and you can command them. You can make them feel all kinds of pleasure, or all kinds of pain, just by saying a certain code word, and there's nothing they can do about it. Or you could just paralyze them and stomp them to death, and they can't do nothing."

4. "Being eaten by rats has gotta suck. Like, if you go in to a place with a lot of rats, and if you get paralyzed, like a mental program malfunctions. The rats are gonna come sniffing around to see if you'll do anything, and if you don't do nothing they'll come a little closer, and if you don't do nothing they'll take a bit out of you. Then all of a sudden there's a dozen of them chawing down on you."

3. "I've heard that really powerful psychics can just take over your head and make you stab yourself. That's gotta be pretty bad, especially if you don't even know who the psychic is who's doing it to you. Say there's a bunch of people around you. It could be any one of them."

2. "I saw this guy once and someone had fucked him up good, like surgically, you know. I once got told it would cost two hundred dollars to put my nose back straight, so what they did to this guy must have cost a million dollars. I'd hate to be so fucked up that I would want to do that to somebody else. The guy was just… I can't describe it. Not like a person, not like any animal I ever heard of. He couldn't walk, he just kind of flopped around. A foot must have seemed like a mile to him."

1. "The worst, I guess, is my dad. He wasn't tortured or anything, so maybe it wasn't that bad, but it makes me the saddest because I know the guy had it in him to be something great. When I hear about these young guys and girls fighting Colins, making deals with corporate operatives, negotiating peace between warring gangs, solving murders, shit like that, I imagine that my dad could be doing that. But all he ever did was sit around in VR all day. He thought he was a good parent, but he wasn't even in the real world enough to realize that he wasn't. I don't know… maybe torture's better. Torture, you go nice and crazy after a few days and you don't really feel it so much anymore. And at least you did something with your life."

Rumors

In Brief- Rumors travel to every corner of the city and are an important, though inaccurate, source of news.

Benefits- There is no newspaper for people on the streets in the city, no news service that keeps them up to date with the happenings of the city. People gain almost all of their knowledge about what's going on in the city from word of mouth.

One reason that people like to have friends outside of their own gang or social grouping is that they can receive important information. There are so many bonds of friendships between different gangs, groups and social classes that people are seldom more than four or five degrees of separation away from any knowledge within the city. Like the decentralized black market, the speed, efficiency and usefulness of rumors in the city surprises many outsiders.

Flaws- Rumors have their limitations. One common problem is that, as the rumors are passed on, theories are stated as facts. This is why Matt Timm, known as the street's best known expert on the moles, refuses to speak any sort of conjecture about the moles. He has seen too many theories and inferences stated as known fact. Another problem is that the source of a rumor often becomes lost or misstated (some of the "facts" about moles are incorrectly attributes to Matt). Another common problem is that while the basic message of a rumor rarely changes, specific facts (and especially numbers) can change radically. Of a hot rumor, a person will probably hear multiple versions, and will probably choose the most dramatic version to repeat to his or her friends. The death of three in a gang battle can easily become the death of one hundred. This caused problems when many people refused to believe information about the large number of Colins prowling the city, believing that those numbers must be exaggerations.

The most intelligent way for someone in the city to deal with rumors is to take them as a warning that something might be the case. A rumor, at best, will prompt someone to seek out further information.

Time

In Brief- Morning: gang members sleep, addicts buy drugs. Afternoon: gang members take care of personal business. Evening: gang activity starts. Madrugada (midnight to dawn): mostly gang members on the streets, and near dawn the city is quiet.

For city residents, a day is broken down in to four parts:

Morning- (dawn to noon) Most people in the city are asleep. Most gang members sleep through morning. If they haven't arrived home before dawn, they arrive shortly after and go to sleep. Addicts wake up, their bloodstreams empty of drugs, and desperately seek out their next fix. When VR Addicts and other shut-ins are forced to go outside, they choose this time of day, knowing that it is the safest.

Afternoon- (noon to sunset) Many gang members sleep in a few hours in to the afternoon. Afternoon is usually thought of as a leisurely time of day. People who have "business" to take care of do it now: errands, training, shopping, paying bills, doing welfare paperwork, working at part-time jobs, etc. Street People (who typically work 12 or more hours a day) get started working. Addicts have comfortable levels of drugs in their bloodstreams and are out trying to get food and money.

Evening- (sunset to midnight) This is the most active time on the streets. When something important happens on the streets, it most likely happens in the evening, and anyone who wants to watch or be a part of city life is out. As sun falls, gang members head toward their turf to meet up with their friends. The Arcadians start assembling in their arcades. The Risen meet up in their packs. Boarders start showing up in parking lots and doing tricks. The Humankalorie assemble in Oht arenas and set up matches. Later in the evening, when all the gang members are together, discussions turn to serious gang business, and when gang members set off to make war it is usually around 10 pm. In the evening, all other types of "street life" are out in force, from charity workers, to freelancers, to sex workers.

Madrugada- A Spanish word, now part of city vocabulary. Madrugada is generally thought of as the time that weird things happen. "Madrugada stories" is a slang term for any tale of the weird, scary or unexplained. As it gets later, and dawn approaches, there are fewer and fewer people on the streets. People out to make money (jacks, sex workers, etc.) go home, as there are too few people on the streets. Addicts typically find some place safe to take the last of their drugs and crash. Those left on the streets tend to be those who are under the influence of stimulant drugs, those who are heading back from some cross-town excursion, and those whose lives are in some sort of crisis.

City Geography

In Brief- "The City" is the island of Manhattan in New York. 2 by 11 miles.

Manhattan

What is known popularly as "the city" is the island of Manhattan. The city is approximately 1.75 miles long and 11.8 miles wide, 19 square miles altogether. In the 1660s, the size of the island was increased by sinking old ships and covering them with dirt. In the 2040s, due to rising ocean levels, about 5 square miles around the city were partially submerged (now known in city slang as "the sunken city").

Manhattan is on the East coast of the United States, surrounded by rivers (the Hudson to the West, the Harlem and East Rivers to the East) with New York Bay on the South. Manhattan runs Southeast to Northeast. The Bronx, Brooklyn and Newark are across the water from the city. Manhattan is part of the state of New York, the bulk of which lies to the North of Manhattan.

Manhattan was once part of a system of boroughs which made up New York City. After the reformation, Manhattan was changed from a borough to an independent city. In the early 2060s, as people were setting up prestigious communities outside the city, congressional districts were redrawn (gerrymandered) so that Manhattan would never have its own representative.

Most of Manhattan has a very easy to understand street plan. Streets run roughly East to West and are numbered from 1st Street (Southernmost) to 220th Street (Northernmost). Avenues run roughly North to South, from 1st Avenue on the West to 11th Avenue on the East end of the island. The names of most avenues change while in Harlem, having been renamed after figures in African American history. The regular street plan dissolves in to a tangle of named streets at the very Southern tip of the city (the very old financial district) and the very Northern tip of the city (the hilly and once very wealthy Inwood district).

City Access

In Brief- Only two bridges and one tunnel still work. They have automated gates that keep guns and explosives from moving in and out of the city.

Most of the tunnels and bridges leading to the city were destroyed by rising ocean levels and by terrorist action during the Freedom War. There are now only three ways to access Manhattan by foot or land vehicle:

-**George Washington Bridge** connects the East side of the Inwood/Washington Heights neighborhood (in the North) to the Bronx, across the Harlem river.

-**The Holland Tunnel**, downtown, on the East, connects to New Jersey.

-**The Manhattan Bridge**, downtown, on the West, connects to Brooklyn. This bridge also provides freight-trains access to the city.

These two bridges and one tunnel contain automated contraband stops, of the kind built all over the country during the 2040s. These stops have heavy metal gates which close to enclose a vehicle while it is scanned by x-rays and chemical sniffers. If firearms are detected, an automated system informs the driver that firearms are illegal in the city, and allows the person to back out. If drugs, explosives or biological weapons are detected, the gates stay closed until a team of heavily armed Bridge and Tunnel Authority officers can come from their office in Queens. Trains traveling over the Manhattan bridge are scanned as they go through.

Travel to and from the city by means of water is nearly impossible. Powerful currents flow through the partially submerged buildings of the sunken city and any vehicle trying to come through risks being smashed in to the sides the buildings. The city is also very strict about issuing permits to fly over the city. Usually only the National Guard, CDC and medical helicopters are allowed to fly over and land in the city.

Inwood/Washington Heights

In Brief- Northernmost city, old Indie neighborhood with large industrial/railroad complex, Skin Borg turf.

The Neighborhoods of Inwood and Washington Heights form the Northernmost tip of the island. They run South to 165th Street. South of this is Harlem.

Inwood, in the North, was (until a few years ago) a sought-after indie neighborhood. There was a quiet residential district on the hills in the Northwest, dotted with expensive homes. The rising ocean levels did little damage here. Also on the hills is the Cloisters, a museum built from pieces of European monasteries and now home to the Lumens cult. To the East of the hilly area is a large industrial area, with some abandoned factories, some in-use factories, some warehouses and a large railyard.

Secret Geography of the City

For only $300, you can purchase a pair of geo-info goggles. These goggles have GPS (global positioning system) and gyroscope chips inside, so they know where you are and what you are looking at. Spend a few bucks more on a "tourist chip" and glowing green arrows and words will appear everywhere you look. Look over here and a green box will pop up informing you that Frank Lloyd Wright designed this building more than a century ago. Look this way and you will see that on this spot was a wall of sharpened logs, built to protect early settlers from Indians, from which Wall Street took it's name.

If you have some black market contacts, you can buy a chip designed for police officers. Look to the apartment building to your right and you will see that a parolee lives here, having served a sentence for conspiring to smuggle weapons in to the city. Composite crime rates are available at the turn of a tiny wheel on the side of the glasses: this alley sees 0.62 murders a year, turn the wheel and you will see that it will play host to 2.41 muggings.

Imagine that such chips are available for the geographic knowledge from the minds of other city residents. Plug in the chip for a VR addict and you might see the most brightly lit streets, the closest payphones to dial 911 from, and a bright beacon shining high above the safety of home.
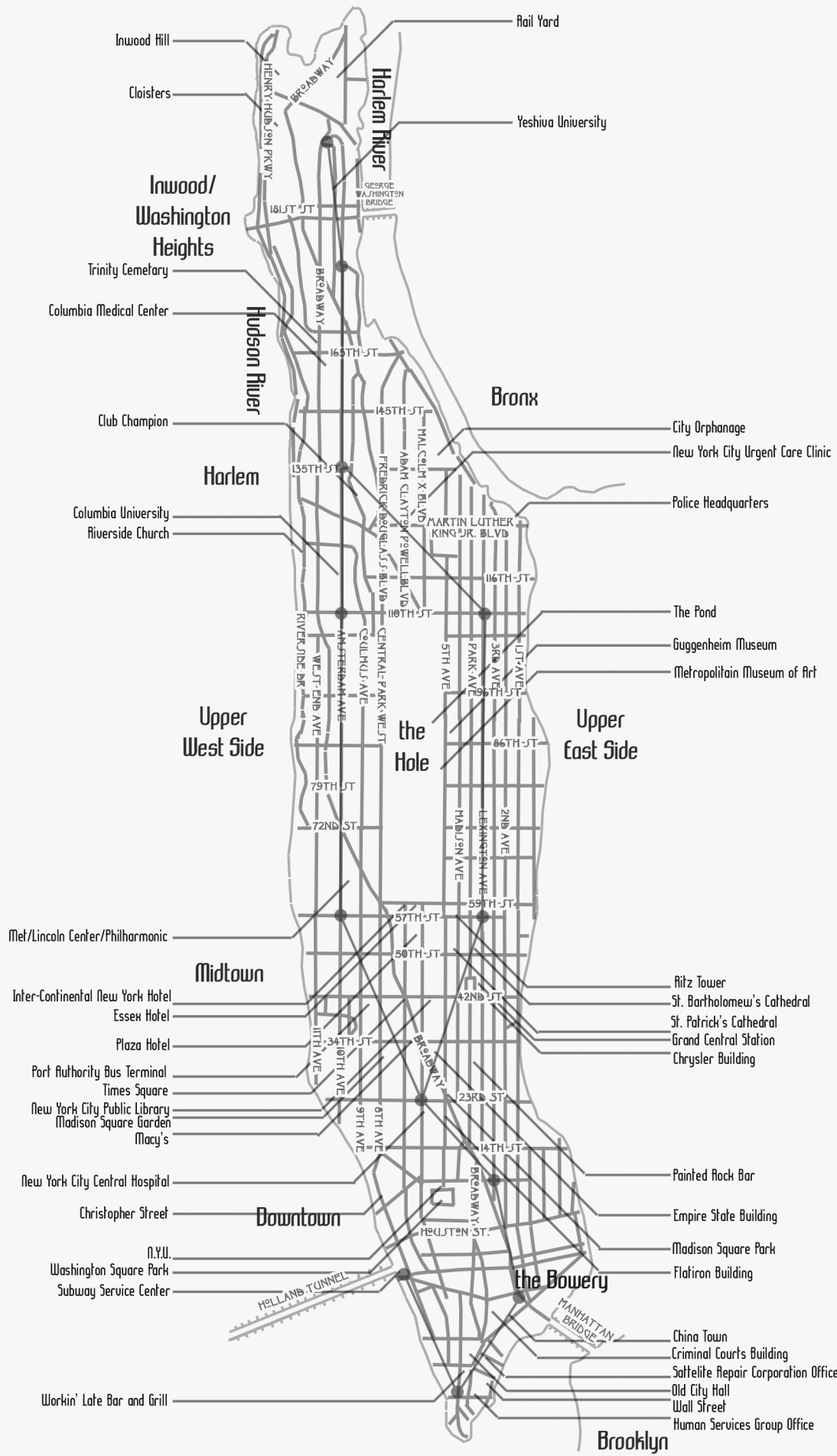
A gang member chip would plaster the walls with tiny green sigils to remind you what gang holds claim to this part of town. Look up the street and you might see the solid line of a well established turf, the fuzzy line of a poorly established turf and the zigzagging lines and spinning green daggers of a war-zone. Major hangouts for the members of various gangs would pop up.

The chip for a street person would be a constant barrage of pointers and signs showing places to hide, places to stay warm, places to get food, places to beg, places with dumpsters overflowing with food or salvageables, automated recycling booths, and the meandering lines of the well established daily routes of friends and enemies.

An addict chip would show monochrome green-and-black head-shots of the pushers gangs that operate on each couple of blocks. Under the headshots would be little notes: "likes to beat people for no reason", "cuts stuff with baking powder", "probably high on god killer" or "has got a limp from some recent injury."

The info pulled out of people's heads could make thousands of chips, each with a detailed and unique geography of the city. Outreach workers would see places where the homeless like to sleep. Perverts would see places to buy illegal pornography, hire prostitutes or meet with brothel owners for a (blindfolded) trip to the brothels. Corporate agents and LBRA corp hunters would see corporate logos hovering over every store, apartment building, even vending machine. Hackers would see a tangle of green lines, information snaking under the streets of the city, ready to be tapped, ending in paycomputers, security cameras, remote-controlled security systems and more. Runners would see signs pointing out every major shortcut through the city. Thieves would see tiny symbols plastered on each building: stick figures holding clubs would mean a security guard, a camera would mean surveillance, a suitcase would mean the residents are on vacation.

There are billions of pieces of geographical information about the city, some are known to all, some are available to anyone who cares enough to inquire, and some are closely guarded secrets. Some say that there are many cities, all coexisting all at once, all mutually invisible.

Rail Yard

Inwood Hill

Cloisters

Yeshiva University

HENRY HUDSON PKWY

BROADWAY

Harlem River

Inwood/
Washington
Heights

GEORGE
WASHINGTON
BRIDGE

181ST ST

BROADWAY

Trinity Cemetary

Columbia Medical Center

Hudson River

165TH ST

Bronx

145TH ST

Club Champion

135TH ST

MALCOLM X BLVD

ADAM CLAYTON POWELL BLVD

FREDRICK DOUGLASS BLVD

Harlem

City Orphanage

New York City Urgent Care Clinic

Police Headquarters

MARTIN LUTHER
KING JR. BLVD

Columbia University

Riverside Church

116TH ST

110TH ST

RIVERSIDE DR.

WEST END AVE.

AMSTERDAM AVE.

COLUMUS AVE.

CENTRAL PARK WEST

5TH AVE.

PARK AVE.

3RD AVE.

LUT AVE.

96TH ST

The Pond

Guggenheim Museum

Metropolitain Museum of Art

Upper
West Side

the
Hole

86TH ST

Upper
East Side

79TH ST

72ND ST

MADISON AVE.

LEXINGTON AVE.

2ND AVE.

59TH ST

Met/Lincoln Center/Philharmonic

57TH ST

50TH ST

Midtown

42ND ST

Ritz Tower

St. Bartholomew's Cathedral

St. Patrick's Cathedral

Grand Central Station

Chrysler Building

Inter-Continental New York Hotel

Essex Hotel

Plaza Hotel

Port Authority Bus Terminal

Times Square

New York City Public Library

Madison Square Garden

Macy's

11TH AVE.

34TH ST

10TH AVE.

BROADWAY

New York City Central Hospital

Christopher Street

Downtown

9TH AVE.

8TH AVE.

BROADWAY

23RD ST

14TH ST

Painted Rock Bar

Empire State Building

N.Y.U.

Washington Square Park

Subway Service Center

HOLLAND TUNNEL

HOUSTON ST.

the Bowery

Madison Square Park

Flatiron Building

MANHATTAN
BRIDGE

China Town

Criminal Courts Building

Sattelite Repair Corporation Office

Old City Hall

Wall Street

Human Services Group Office

Workin' Late Bar and Grill

Brooklyn

South of Inwood is Washington Heights. This was once a neighborhood for successful blacks who moved out of Harlem (to the South). In recent times, it has been primarily a lower class area with a high density of apartment buildings. 181st Street in Washington Heights was the birthplace of the gang that would become known as the Skin Borgs. The Skin Borgs have expanded rapidly in recent years, taking over all of the Inwood and Washington Heights areas and some of Harlem. The Skin Borgs destroyed or forced out every other gang in the area. Most of the indies fled Inwood when the Skin Borgs took over and the whole area is economically depressed.

The buildings in this part of town are mostly residential, with a number of large housing projects. There are trees on many of the sidewalks. The most impressive buildings in this part of town are abandoned, and include a football stadium and an old Jewish college.

Harlem

In Brief- Old black and Hispanic area, North of the hole.

This district runs from 165th Street to 110th Street. Historically, Harlem was an African American ghetto, founded by laborers who were brought in to build the first subway. In the 1920s and 1930s Harlem was the center of a "black renaissance," where much of modern African American art, music and culture was born. Later, it became known as an African American ghetto. In the 1920s, Puerto Rican immigrants started moving to East Harlem, later followed by other Spanish speaking immigrants, and the area soon became known as Spanish Harlem or El Barrio.

145th Street in Harlem is the scene of the blockade of the Skin Borgs by the Purists, Hummingbirds and Immortals. The street is a war zone with battles happening every day. Other gangs with a presence in Harlem include the Orphans, Immortals, Math Addicts, Humankalorie and Bleeders.

Harlem has the city's highest percentage of old brownstones. These are thin, two or three story buildings, built in tight rows during the 19th century. They are made from reddish sandstone (which has turned brown from pollution). These buildings are attractive, but have cramped interiors and no elevators.

Upper West/East Side

In Brief- To the East and West of the hole (Central Park) are now Indie neighborhoods.

This part of town runs from 110th street to 59th street, South of Harlem and North of Midtown. It is divided down the center by the hole (Central Park), forming three columns.

The Upper East/West sides are now a mostly Indie territory, with a lot of small homes owned by Indies, a few high class condos or apartment buildings, and shops that cater to Indies. This is the closest the city has to a "wealthy neighborhood" though there are just as many street people and addicts. Indie gangs rule most blocks and keep them relatively peaceful. The Sexologists and Arcadians rule the Upper East Side. The Dragons, Omniscients and Bleeders rule the West Side.

Before the Freedom Wars, real estate near Central Park was the highly valued. Near the park, on either side, were many museums and mansions (homes to millionaires and foreign embassies). Today, most of these museums and mansions are in ruins, victims of Freedom War violence or random destruction by the Dragons. Farther away from the park, near the East Hudson river, are working-class brownstone apartment buildings, breweries and small factories. In between is a nice Indie area, with many restaurants, boutiques, shops and nice apartment buildings. There are trees on the sidewalks. The apartment buildings were mostly built before WWII. They are handsome, 10-30 story co-ops with high ceilings, arched doorways and hardware floors.

The Hole

In Brief- What was once a huge rectangular park in the middle of the city is now fenced off ruins and untamed wilderness.

Approximately in the middle of the city, between the Upper West and Upper East Sides, is what was once Central Park. This was one of the largest urban parks ever, approximately 2500 ft. by 13250 ft. It had a museum and two large bodies of water. During the Freedom Wars, Freedom Army forces started building a complex of buildings in the hole. The complex was supposed to incorporate the beauty of the park and much of it was underground. Some of the buildings were in operation and some were being constructed when the rebels blew up several of the buildings. This act brought on the end of the Freedom Army occupation of the East Coast. The hole, as it is known today, is ruins choked with unmaintained greenery. Despite the nuclear cleanup preformed by the restoration committee, the hole is slightly radioactive and the hole is surrounded by a barbed wire fence. The Keepers, a street family, consider the hole to be their territory and guard it viciously, so few people go in to the hole.
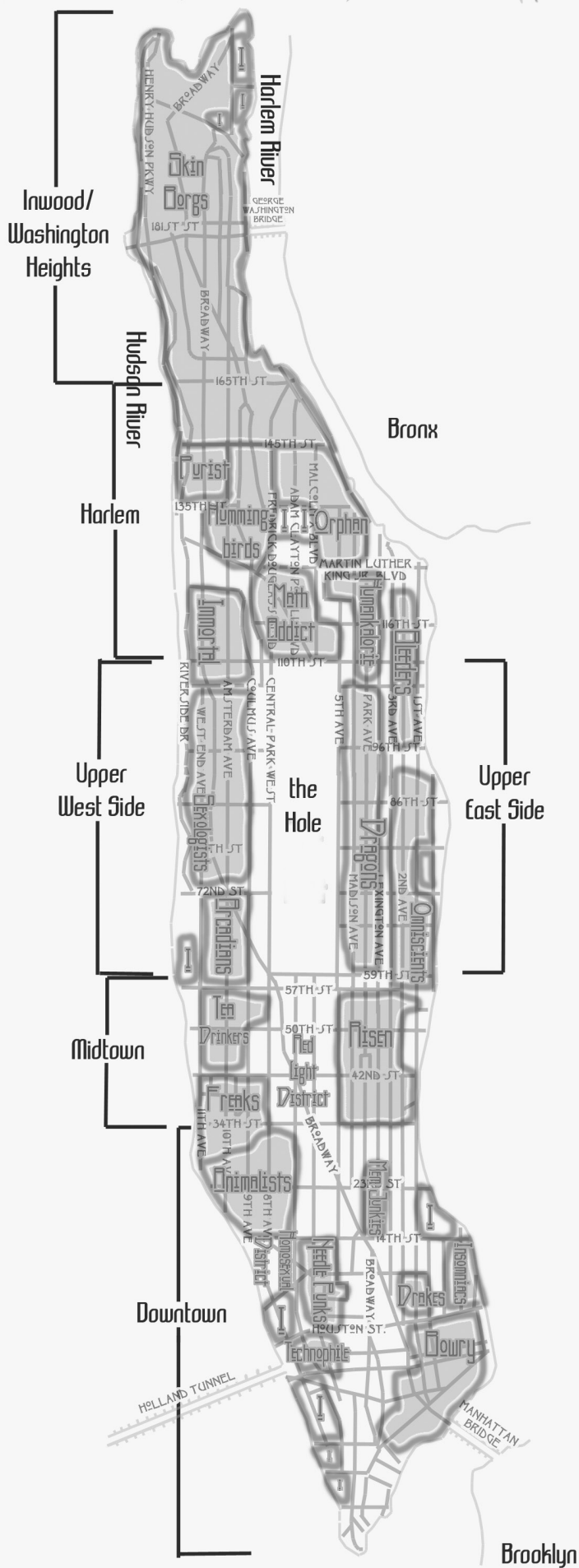
Midtown

In Brief- South of the park, has the red light district (hotels, prostitutes), Indie and Well gangs.

Midtown runs from 59th to 34th street. The Upper West and East Sides (and the Hole) are to the North and Downtown is to the South. Midtown was once the tourist capital of the city, dotted with luxury hotels, massive department stores, trendy neighborhoods and architectural landmarks. Today Midtown still plays host to the city's few tourists, as well as most of the city's sex industry and the Tea Drinkers, Freaks and Risen.

On the South end are the ruins of Macy's, once the largest store in the world, now mostly demolished. On the very Eastern edge, near Risen territory, is the New York Public Library. It is closed to the general public, but historians make occasional pilgrimages to the library to search through its collections of old paper-printed books. Nearby is Rockefeller center, a selection of large buildings (the largest being the RCA building at 70 stories). Impressive churches of Midtown include St. Patrick's Cathedral (a Catholic church, built in the 1800s, still in use) and St. Bartholomew's (which is now a meeting place for the Risen).

To the East, in Risen territory, is the Chrysler Building (a 77-story high skyscraper built in 1928-1930) and Grand Central Station (once a major transportation hub, the Freedom Army bolted the doors because they feared it would give rebels access to tunnels under the city). The half-collapsed ruins of the United Nations building lies, partially submerged, in the sunken city to the East.

Inwood/
Washington
Heights

Hudson River

Harlem

Upper
West Side

Midtown

Downtown

Harlem River

HENRY HUDSON PKWY

BROADWAY

Skin
Dorgs

181ST ST

GEORGE
WASHINGTON
BRIDGE

BROADWAY

165TH ST

Bronx

145TH ST

Jurist

135TH ST

Hummingbirds

MALCOLM X BLVD

ADAM CLAYTON P. BLVD

FR. FRNK. DOUGLESS BLVD

Orphan

MARTIN LUTHER
KING JR. BLVD

Math
Addict

Immortal

Humankind

116TH ST

Bleeders

3RD AVE

1ST AVE

110TH ST

RIVERSIDE DR.

AMSTERDAM AVE

WEST END AVE

COLUMBUS AVE

CENTRAL PARK WEST

the
Hole

5TH AVE

PARK AVE

96TH ST

Upper
East Side

Sexologists

79TH ST

86TH ST

Dragons

LEXINGTON AVE

MADISON AVE

2ND AVE

72ND ST

Arcadians

Omniscients

59TH ST

Tea
Drinkers

57TH ST

50TH ST

Red
Light
District

Risen

42ND ST

Freaks

34TH ST

10TH AVE

11TH AVE

BROADWAY

Animalists

9TH AVE

8TH AVE DISTRICT

23RD ST

Meth
Junkies

14TH ST

Insomniacs

Needle
Funks

Homosexual

Drakes

HOUSTON ST.

Technophile

Dowry

HOLLAND TUNNEL

MANHATTAN
BRIDGE

Brooklyn

Red Light District- South of the hole, N. of 23rd St., W. of 8th Ave., E. of 8th Avenue. This is the part of town where most prostitutes operate from. The Red Light District is also home to adult book stores, strip clubs and pornography studios. The red light district is centered around Times Square (the intersection of Broadway, 7th Ave., and 42nd St.).

People come from throughout the city and throughout this part of the country to partake in the city's sex industry. The average "tourist" is a businessman from a nearby private city, corporate living center or high-class neighborhood, who wants to spend the weekend in the city doing drugs and sleeping with prostitutes. Not everyone in the red light district wants sex or pornography, some are people staying in the city who want a cheap hotel room. Accommodations in the red light district range from seedy converted office buildings that cost $30 a night (or $10 an hour) to former luxury hotels (like the Ritz-Carlton, the Hotel Wellington, the Salisbury, Park Lane and the Plaza Hotel) that overlook the Hole and cost $60 or more per night. In each of these former luxury hotels, the management can only afford to maintain a small portion of the hotel (usually the first few floors) but the parts that are maintained are clean and retain a little of their former grandeur. Only the best-dressed prostitutes in the city are allowed to hang around in the lobbies of these hotels and harass potential customers.

Broadway is one of the busiest streets in the city, and Times Square was once the heart of shopping and tourism in the city. Huge buildings, including the New York Times building, were built around Times Square, mostly to impress visitors. Multi-story high billboards and electronic signs are now cracked or peeling. Most of the buildings have spacious commercial frontage, which is now taken up by strip clubs and porn shops. Although half the neon lights are out, Times Square is still the best lit part of the city. All around Times Square there are old theaters and television studios which are now mostly used for creating pornography. There are dozens of theaters, some of which are forcefully co-opted by the Freaks for stage shows during the Festival of the Freak. Carnegie Hall is a famous old music studio which, although boarded up most of the time, is sometimes rented out to legitimate musical groups in the city who want to hold recitals.

Downtown

In Brief- Southern tip of the city, home to the Bowery (large street people area), homosexual district, financial district, many skyscrapers.

Downtown Manhattan, which is everything South of 34th Street, is the most varied section of town, with commercial centers, industrial complexes, old residential neighborhoods and old skid-row neighborhoods. Less than half of the area of downtown is gang territory, making it the lowest concentration in the city. Downtown is also the oldest part of the city. Street gangs fought bloody battles here in the mid 1800s. At the very Southern tip, the regular street plan dissolves in to a tangle of ancient streets.

Large portions along the West side are actively used industrial complexes, employing many of the city's working classes (who live in corporate owned apartment buildings nearby). The majority of downtown is commercial, and though the tallest skyscrapers are in midtown, downtown boasts the highest concentration of skyscrapers. The residential areas are mostly very old ethnic neighborhoods, and most are now occupies by well

gangs (the Technophiles, Animalists and Needle Punks). Downtown has the Holland Tunnel (to the West) and the Manhattan Bridge (to the East), two of the three working ways in and out of the city.

Residential Neighborhoods- Downtown's residential neighborhoods had the city's first ethnic neighborhoods, and some have seen many groups of immigrants come through. The neighborhoods to the West (Chelsea, Soho, Greenwich Village) are generally "trendier." Although they have their share of Victorian tenements and old industrial buildings, they also have a lot of nicely renovated buildings that serve as Indie apartments. Loft space is plentiful, and a lot of the city's small "art scene" happens in small cafes and galleries here.

The Eastern residential neighborhoods (Lower East Side, Little Italy, China Town) have mostly been swallowed up by the growing Bowery (see below), yet some of their ethnic population and unique character remains. These neighborhoods are known for their high concentration of old tenement buildings. These buildings feature commercial frontage, party walls (walls shared with other buildings), no elevators, and dim interiors. Walking in these neighborhoods, one sees blocks filled completely with four to six story tenement buildings, they are mostly red and grey brick and the front of the buildings are covered with a maze of windows, ledges and fire-escapes.

Chinatown has a significantly different architecture from the other residential districts. Chinatown has some of the oldest buildings in the city that are still standing. The buildings are very cramped, even by city standards, and the architecture shows an unmistakable Chinese influence. The Chinese population here is still very high, enough so that corporate chain stores operating here find it profitable to advertise their services with Chinese neon signs.

Homosexual District- Originally centered around Christopher street (in what used to be called West Village), the homosexual district has grown to encompass most of the West Village and most of Greenwich Village. The homosexual district is roughly triangular, bordered by Greenwich Ave. on the Northeast, Christopher St. on the Southeast and the sunken city on the West. Many gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transvestites, including members of most of the city's gangs, live in apartments here. There are many bars and cafes here that are hangouts for the city's homosexual population (and heterosexuals who simply enjoy the atmosphere). There are many nice restaurants in this district.

Bowery- An ancient skid-row neighborhood, the Bowery has grown since the massive exodus from the city in the early 2060s. This huge section of town is home to the Black Meds, Crackers and thousands of other homeless street people. The current Bowery is sprawled along the Southeast corner of the city, incorporating the Lower East Side and most of Little Italy and Chinatown.

The buildings in the Bowery are drab, almost all abandoned. There are many ruins of ancient shops, bars, theaters, music halls and hotels. The buildings still in operation are bars, liquor stores, churches, shelters, and cheap hotels. Even those buildings still in use are very old and weathered and are on the verge of falling apart. There are many fenced off vacant lots (now taken over by groups of homeless people) and piles of rubble from buildings that fell down. Many buildings show scars: holes that have been boarded over, buildings that shared a wall that have been torn down (leaving doorways that open up on to empty space), spots where crumbling red brick have been quickly replaced with concrete, etc.

As much as street people in the city have a culture, the Bowery is a center of that culture. The Black Meds, the street family that provides black market medical services to other street people, live here. The Bowery has the highest concentration of Street People of any part of the city, the majority of the (numerous) abandoned buildings have Street People living in them.

On the Southwest corner of the Bowery is the Criminal Courts Building, the only courthouse still in use in the city. It is nicknamed the Tombs, has 835 jail cells and is shaped much like a ziggurat.

In the middle of the Bowery is the Manhattan Bridge. When cops pick up homeless people in the nice neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Queens, the homeless people are usually given a choice: go to jail or go to Manhattan. Those that choose Manhattan are driven over the Manhattan Bridge and dropped off there. This part of town is sometimes known as "the drop off point." At any given time, hundreds of new city residents are sleeping on the streets or living in cheap hotels near the drop-off point. Cult recruiters prowl this part of town in force, and it is a coveted location for pusher gangs.

Financial District- Located at the Southern tip of the city, this neighborhood was once a center of international commerce. The major pre-Freedom War corporations had huge complexes here. The streets here are very old, are much narrower than in the rest of the city (created for horse and buggy traffic) and do not conform to the city's regular street plan. The abundance of tall, blocky buildings and narrow streets make this the most claustrophobic part of the city, with only a tiny portion of sky visible from the streets.

More than half of the office buildings are abandoned. Of those that aren't, usually only the first few floors are in use. The Satellite Repair Corporation, the Human Services Group and most Y1s have offices here. In the North part of the Financial District is the civic center, an abandoned complex with the old City Hall, a park, commercial office buildings and hall of records.

Sunken City

In Brief- Rising ocean levels created a dangerous ring of semi-submerged buildings around the city.

This term is used to refer to all the urban areas in Manhattan and Roosevelt Island that were semi-submerged when ocean levels rose during the 2030s. The "sunken city" has eaten up all of Roosevelt Island (in the East River), several blocks around Downtown, a few blocks all along the East side of the island, several blocks on the East coast of Inwood/Washington Heights and a large bite from the very Northern tip of the island.

At the high-tide line, barbed wire fences, propped up by sandbags, are meant to keep people out of the sunken city. Many of the fences have been knocked down, and other have had holes cut in them. The water flowing through the sunken city is fast-moving, turbulent and typically very cold. Many people trying to wade through the sunken city are knocked down, sucked under and never seen again.

The Water Rats, an unborn family, live in the ruins and have secret ways to get there safely.
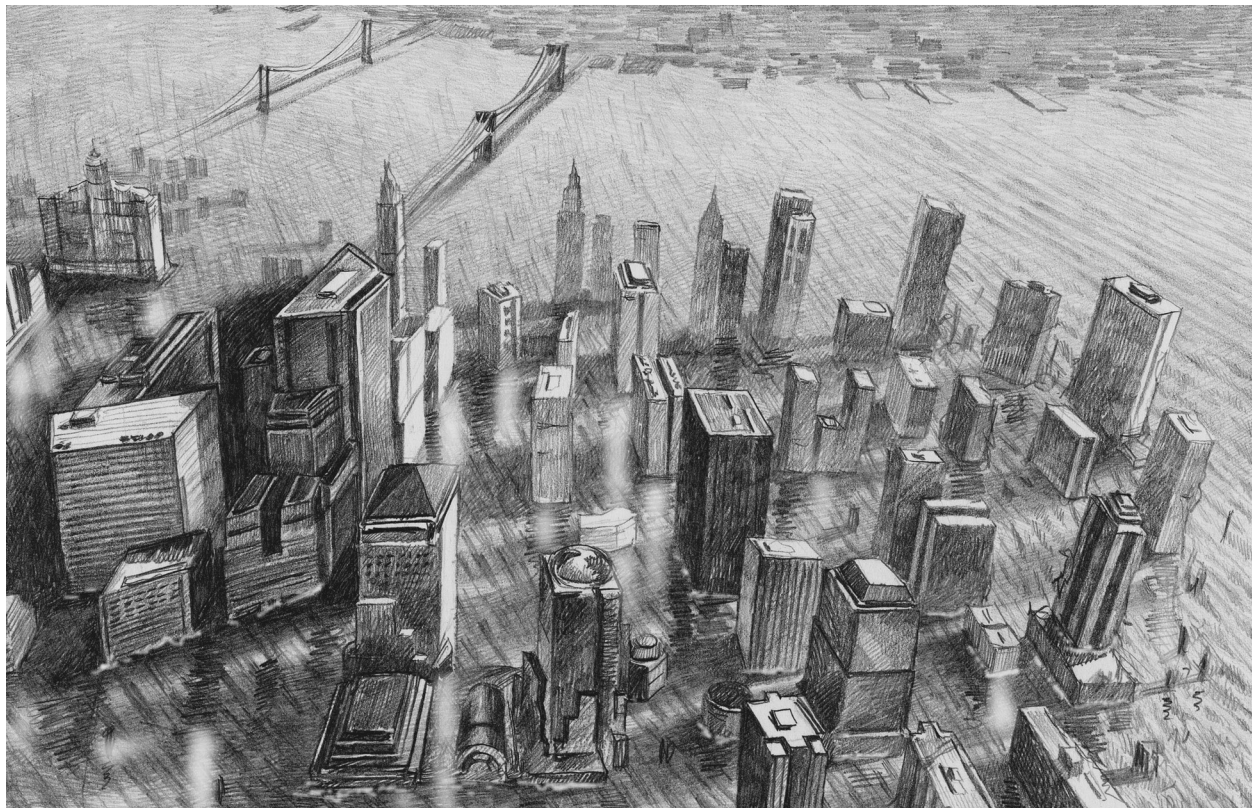
City History

Early 21st Century

Urban problems such as crime, disease and poverty continued to grow worse throughout the early 21st century. Despite this, Manhattan remained a "hip" place to live and a birthplace of new cultural trends up until the 2030s. In the 2030s and 40s, the city took the brunt of a population explosion. The massive overcrowding was even more than the ambitious city government could deal with. Parks were paved over to build hospitals. Homeless people packed shanty-towns in to every available space. Riots were plentiful during this era, mostly initiated by unemployed working-class people.

In 2045, the Industrial Fire Disaster put many thousands of tons of black ash in the atmosphere. This started a chain reaction which accelerated the rising ocean levels. Super-storms racked the coast. The city, already dangerously overcrowded, shrank as rising water partially submerged many parts of the city. Many bridges and tunnels were damaged and the city did not have the budget to repair them.

In 2046, God Killer hit the area. New York law enforcement did not have the resources to deal with it. The population lived in fear of crazed God Killer addicts rampaging through the streets mowing people down with automatic weapons. The city built high-tech checkpoints at every way in and out of the city, but drugs managed to get in regardless.

Freedom Wars

Corporate complexes in Downtown Manhattan were blown up during the massive first-strike by the Freedom Army. Manhattan's population was scared and rioted, trying to grab up as many goods as they could. In the massive rioting the police and National Guard were forced to flee the city.

Jeffrey Hernandez, head of the Freedom Army, needed a base of operations for the Freedom Army. Manhattan was the perfect place: there were only a few ways in and out of the city (which had checkpoints) and the sunken city made travel by water very difficult. Hernandez also wanted to create a thriving, successful metropolis, to show that the Freedom Army could build as well as destroy. Manhattan had the infrastructure to make this possible.

The Freedom Army set themselves up in office buildings and conscripted the whole population of the city as labor to build the new government and infrastructure. Factories were created, manufacturing everything from weapons to medical supplies. The Freedom Army started work on a complex of government buildings in the middle of central park. These half-underground fortresses were planned to serve as the world capitol of the Freedom Army.

Manhattan residents became increasingly dissatisfied with being forced to work for a government that couldn't even keep them fed. Hernandez became increasingly paranoid that rebel elements in the city would destroy the socialist metropolis he was trying to create. The Freedom Army swept the city for weapons and explosives. Hernandez locked up every manhole in the city and built a new (more secure) subway system.

The Freedom Army's paranoia helped create some of its worst enemies. In 2054, city rebels detonated a small nuclear bomb and several non-nuclear explosives, destroying the Freedom Army government complex. City residents rioted against the surviving Freedom Army soldiers. This bombing was a fatal blow to the Freedom Army, and within two years the Freedom Army was destroyed.

The surviving population of Manhattan was shuttled to refugee camps outside the city (where many died from disease). The Restoration Committee did a quick nuclear cleanup of the city. After the cleanup ended, refugees were put back in to the city. For a brief period the city was a huge homeless shelter. Parcels of property were quickly sold to companies which converted buildings in to low income housing.

Old Times

During the land grab of the early 2050s, the newly formed corporations and gated communities bought huge tracts of property in New Jersey, Queens, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Staten Island. None of these groups wanted property in Manhattan (thanks to few working bridges, a huge homeless population, many bombed out ruins and a slightly radioactive Central Park). Outside Manhattan, low income housing was bought up and renovated, the poor people forced to move out. Soon, Manhattan was the only place left in the area for displaced poor people to go to. Even as poor people were moving to the city, there was a massive exodus of the middle and upper classes out of the city. Those who stayed in the city found the streets becoming increasingly dangerous, and they chose to lock themselves away in their apartments. The new VR companies gave these shut-ins access to VR fantasy worlds to keep them occupied.

Quickly after the Freedom Wars, the drug market in the city re-established itself. Criminal entrepreneurs in the city bought God Killer from Appalachian biker gangs, sold it to the new street gangs, who sold it to the general population. These drug entrepreneurs (who quickly became known as "Drug Lords") became the richest and most powerful people in the city. The gangs that sold the drugs grew quickly. In a few years they went from small groups of a dozen people to organizations with thousands of members. The gangs used their drug profits to have guns smuggled in to the city, and they fought bloody battles against each other.

So, for more than a decade, the majority of city locked themselves away to escape from the violence of gang warfare. Most of the people on the streets were either gang members or drug addicts. Everyone else on the streets (including the city's large homeless population) tried to stay hidden. Anyone on the streets had to be very careful, lest they be caught in the crossfire of a gang war, be forcefully inducted in to a street gang, or be mugged by desperate addicts.

In 2075, this era abruptly came to an end. The Drug Lords formed in to a single organization and yanked drugs away from the drug gangs. The gangs quickly self-destructed and the Drug Lords, with their highly efficient structure and powerful new drugs, seemed on the verge of ruling the entire city. However, a new generation of gangs would appear that would frustrate the Drug Lords and make the city streets safer.

# *City Infrastructure*

Buildings

The city has hundred of architecturally impressive buildings, most of which are abandoned. Some buildings include banks, concrete parking structures, Madison Square Garden (an indoor sports arena), courthouses, college campuses, movie theaters, museums and large hospitals. Since property values were so high, and lots were small, buildings in the city tend to be tall, thin and deep with very little space between them.

Abandoned Buildings- "Abandoned" is, like "homeless," a misnomer. About half the buildings in the city are not used by anyone with a legal right to be there, but most are used in some way. Most abandoned buildings have been given over to the city (the owners got tired of paying property taxes) and the city posted up big "condemned" signs and forgot about them. Of those buildings that are being used by the owners, almost all of those have some unused areas. In some buildings there is a "bad floor" that no one ever bothered to clean up and is used for storage. In some cases, only the first two or three floors are used, the rest are not kept up at all.

One result of all the free space is storage space is plentiful and cheap in the city. Anything that people are obligated to store, but don't really care if it gets damaged or stolen, is stored in the city. Dark, unmaintained buildings throughout the city are home to millions of boxes of old paper files, drums of semi-toxic refuse, old paper-printed books, and cheap plastic coffins.

A lot goes on in abandoned buildings. Some buildings are hangouts for gang members, littered with cigarette butts and beer bottles. Some buildings are used as repositories of trash and human waste by street people (who have nowhere else to put their waste). Many buildings are homes for the "homeless." Homeless living spaces range from the barely maintained (a cold and dirty place to pass the night) to the lavish (home to a large extended family who have spent hundreds of hours remodeling and fortifying the building). Most abandoned buildings are not used in a regular fashion, but they are routinely used for something, be it a party, a meeting, a place to stay the night or a place to hide bodies.

Industrial Complexes- The one city industry that actually grew after the Freedom Wars was high-pollution manufacture and chemical production. Every other community in the area blocked high-pollution factories from being built near them, so they all came to the city. Most industrial complexes are in current 24-hour a day use. Trains run in
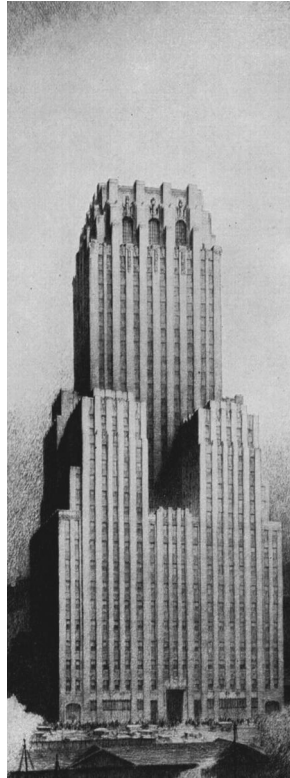
and out of the city constantly, bringing in materials and bringing out finished products. These complexes usually take up a city block (or more). They are gated with barbed wire fences, security cameras and round-the-clock guards. Some industrial complexes are abandoned (often because an accident happened and the corp found it cheaper to build a new complex than to clean up the old one).

Inside an industrial complex there are typically a few large warehouses and garages, some small offices (usually temporary buildings and trailers), and industrial machinery (large tanks, furnaces, pumps and smokestacks). Smoke and fire can be seen coming from the top of smokestacks and cooling towers 24 hours a day. Explosions, fires and chemical leaks happen here often. Because the city fire department is so poorly funded, most complexes have their own fire fighting equipment and marginally trained staff. Employees toil around the clock: most are minimum wage workers who live nearby, managed by a few corporate employees who commute from nearby corporate living centers.

Skyscrapers- A handful of skyscrapers dominate the city skyline. Built during a time when cheap labor was plentiful, Manhattan once had the highest skyscrapers in the world (now Asia boasts the world's tallest buildings). The majority are found in Downtown and Midtown. By most definitions, a skyscraper is a building with 20 or more floors (though some have as many as 102 floors). Skyscrapers became possible at the end of the 18th century when people learned to build large buildings with the building's weight supported by steel cages rather than masonry walls. The first skyscrapers were huge blocks. Fearing that they would block out the sun, the city required skyscrapers to have a tapered shape.

Skyscrapers are more than just tall buildings, they operate on a different set of rules than normal buildings. They take up whole city blocks and the networks of maintenance passages within them are so complex that it would take years to explore them all. Special pumps are needed to make water reach the upper floors. Normal elevators move too slowly and stop too often, and so people must travel through the building using express elevators to get near their desired floor and then normal elevators to get the rest of the way. Radio repeaters are necessary to let people inside the buildings receive radio or cellphone signals. Special dampeners let the top of the building sway several feet in a heavy wind, yet keep the sway slow enough that people can't feel it.

Urban Exploration Kit

Crowbar (For prying open doors)

Dust Mask (For crawling around in dusty spaces)

Nightvision Goggles: Cheap (for seeing in the dark without attracting attention)

Swiss Army Knife (+knife, metal file, wire clippers) (for cutting things like wire fences)

Rope and Grapple (For climbing on to roofs and into attics)

Palmtop GPS (For knowing where you are)

Electronic City Map (To look at the blueprints of buildings on the wayfinder)

Digital Camera: Cheap (For taking pictures of places where you're afraid to stick your head)

Backpack (For holding gear and souvenirs)

Bottled Water (Because exploring can make you thirsty)

Nutrient Bar (Because nobody wants to break for lunch)

Protective Gloves (For climbing on barbed wire fences)

Skyscrapers are so expensive to maintain that none of the skyscrapers in the city have more than the first few floors in use. The first five floors can be maintained without much cost, while the upper floors are sealed off or used for storage. Other skyscrapers are closed altogether, abandoned. Homeless people live in the first few floors, but since there are no elevators, anything higher is an inconvenient place to go to. Sometimes, people will haul themselves up dozens of flights to hide themselves or to hide important objects. Sometimes secret meetings are held in rooms deep inside skyscrapers. City skyscrapers have an average of 3000 rooms, making finding anyone or anything the equivalent of finding a needle in a haystack.

There are also a few secret apartments and offices hidden in the empty depths of the upper floors of some skyscrapers. Rather then hooking in to the system for the rest of the building, water and fuel for generators is delivered every few weeks and waste containers are taken out. Tenants typically enter the building through underground tunnels and ascend through dark elevator shafts using personal ascending devices. The security guards who sit in the lobbies of the buildings typically do not know that such apartments exist. These apartments and offices are in sharp contrast to the building around them: behind armored doors they are warm, well lit and luxurious, while all around them the abandoned floors are cold, dark, dirty, laden with trash and dust, utterly without life. The owners of these apartments and offices are wealthy and secretive. It is common knowledge in the city that such apartments exist, but nobody knows who uses them.

Luxury Hotels- Most of the city's luxury hotels are still open, but only the first few floors are maintained. When in operation, these were some of the world's most prestigious luxury hotels. They are wide buildings, all over 20 stories tall. In addition to more than a thousand guest rooms, they have huge lobbies, tiny shopping malls (containing dozens of stores), gyms, indoor swimming pools, movie theaters, pharmacies and doctors offices, huge banquet halls and conference rooms, restaurants, bars, and helicopter pads on the roofs (now all unused). Underneath the hotels: a maze of hotel offices, storage rooms, kitchens and laundry facilities. The most expensive "rooms" include huge living rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms and even kitchens.

Most of these hotels are in Midtown (the center of city tourism) and most of them were built overlooking Central Park. Today, these hotels do not have nearly the amenities that they once did, but they are still the nicest places to stay in the city (especially if one has an interest in history, grand architecture, or a view of the hole). When wealthy people stay in the city they usually stay in these hotels.

Churches and Cathedrals- The city has some of the country's most impressive old cathedrals and churches. Most are still in use, although the congregations are much smaller. Most churches in the city lose money: the tiny crowd of parishioners that come in give what they can but it is not enough to even pay the ministers' wages. Appointments in these churches used to be prestigious and sought after, but today the churches are lucky to get volunteers willing to live and work in the city. Fortunately for the ministers, anything of value was carted out of the church during the Freedom Wars. Many churches operate tiny homeless shelters and soup kitchens, usually from the back of the church. They may also rent out church offices and old Sunday-school rooms to community groups like Alcoholics Anonymous.

Apartment Buildings- The most consistently used buildings in the city are apartment buildings. The rental market in the city is so complex and varied that city residents have created a whole vocabulary to describe the different types of rentals. In order from the most desired to the least desired:

Highrise: Thirty to Fifty floors. Built in the late 20th, early 21st centuries to house the upper-middle class. These large buildings have big windows (giving splendid views of the city), roomy interiors and central heating and air. They either have attendants at the door or an intercom and camera based buzzer system. Typically have balconies, kitchens with modern appliances, health clubs, underground garages and other amenities.

Doorman: Twenty to forty floors. Built during the 1950-70s. These are luxury buildings, home to trendy indies, with an attendant at the door 24 hours a day. They have few modern amenities, but the architecture is nice (lavishly decorated lobbies, detailed façades) and there are relatively-modern elevators.

Loft: Six to Twelve floors. Formerly used for light manufacturing, they have been converted in to spacious apartments, perfect for artists or engineers who need a large working space. Typically have a large cargo elevator. Most are found Downtown.

Elevator: Nine to twenty floors. Built through the 20th century as housing for the middle class. Typically have an intercom security system. May have rooftop patios.

Brownstone: Three to five floors. This is a red sandstone version of the typical late 1800s/early 1900s townhouse or rowhouse (a long, thin, tall building, built to be sandwiched in rows on a block). Originally built as a single family home, but later converted to apartments (4 to 10 apartments). The rooms are small, but have charm and sometimes have amenities such as wood floors, fireplaces, terraces and private gardens in back.

Projects: 10 to 40 story high buildings. Built in response to the massive need for low-income housing during the 1970-80s and 2030-40s. These buildings are
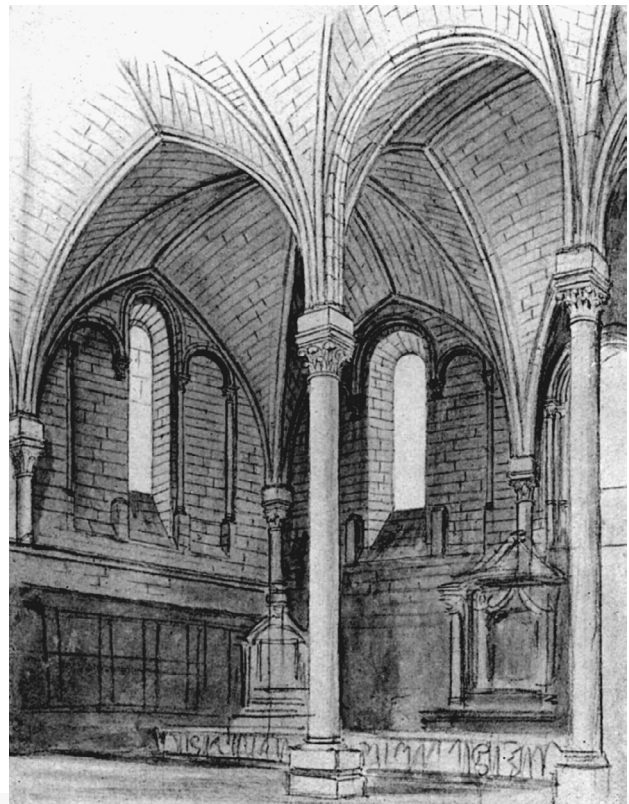
huge unattractive blocks, sometimes cloned on several consecutive blocks. They are built unimaginatively, of cheap materials and have few amenities. At best, each building has a laundry room, a small "community area" and possibly a black-top playground. Inside, seemingly unending hallways with stained grey carpet and dim florescent lights lead to hundreds of plain wood doors, each opening up to a tiny apartment.

Walkup: Three to five stories. Containing 12 to 30 small apartments. These are old tenement buildings, built in the late 1800s through the 1960s, to house the very poor. There are no elevators, just dimly lit wooden stairwells, usually with trash inside them. The apartments are cheap, cramped, dark with little or no ventilation. There may be dark airshafts in the walls, but they are typically plugged up with trash. Exterior fire-escapes are often the only place where people can hang out and get fresh air, though not every apartment has fire escape access.

Many old buildings in the city still use steam based furnaces for heating in the winter. Except for the very cheapest tenements, most apartment buildings have a live-in superintendent who is responsible for collecting rent, doing minor repairs and hauling the trash out on trash days. The super is paid by the land management company that owns the building, which is itself owned by a larger corporation.

Streets

The city has some of the worst streets in the US. The corrupt city government rarely repairs streets unless forced to by corporate pressure. When the major avenues get so bad that trucks can't deliver groceries to grocery stores, the streets get repaired. Apart from those major avenues, however, most streets are unusable except with a vehicle with a powerful engine and four wheel drive. There are cracks, potholes, old craters from Freedom-War explosions, rubble, trash and even old non-running cars in the middle of the streets. In come cases there are holes in the streets that go straight through to old utility tunnels below. The cheap electric cars that are being cranked out now don't have the power to travel over these streets. Most people who ride motor vehicles in the city depend on old gasoline-powered vehicles (and have to buy prohibitively expensive gasoline). In some parts of town vehicle traffic is so infrequent that homeless people camp in the middle of the streets with no fear of being run over.

Utilities

Trash- Trash is omnipresent in the city. It can be dangerous, when characters are forced to wade through it and may miss hazards such as holes, sharp pieces of metal, etc. Trash can also be a blessing when it allows characters to hide from their enemies. In some places there is so much trash that it creates a physical barrier.

There is garbage removal city in the city, but it is chancy. Dumpsters are often overflowing in to the streets by the time apartment managers can convince the garbage removal services to do what they are being paid for and come pick up the trash. There is no garbage removal on the streets, in public areas and in the abandoned places where people live. The fences that were put up to keep people from going to the sunken city keep trash from blowing out to sea and make the city a sort of cage full of trash. When strong winds blow, trash flies through the air from one side of the city to the other, where it piles up against fences. There are some small parks and other public areas that are enclosed by fences and walls and these places usually have trash several feet deep. Alleys are a common dumping place for trash that is too heavy to blow away, and some alleys are filled, end to end, with trash piled higher than a person. Some homeless people who squat in abandoned buildings do not carry out their trash, they leave it there until the house becomes too choked up with it, then they move on.

Electricity- Most power comes from Hydro-Quebec which gets it's power from hydroelectric sources, including Niagara falls. The many factories in the city also create their own power and resell the unused power to the city. Power outages are common and are a major cause of riots.

Sewage and Water- Probably the city's most dependable utility. Centuries old water and waste tunnels are kept running by a tiny staff of city workers and second-hand robots. These robots travel through the tunnels keeping the pipes clean, cutting up obstructions and patching holes. At the Northern end of the city a large plant (mostly underground) uses secondary-nanotech filters to create (mostly) clean drinking water out of polluted water from the Harlem river. Sewage is processed: the water is removed and dumped in the river, the solid elements are loaded on trains to be sold as fertilizer.

City Population

In Brief- 210,000 people on island of Manhattan, much less than in the past.

There are currently about 210,000 people living on the island of Manhattan, only one seventh of its population at the end of the 20th century and about one tenth of the island's population in the 1920s. This is a population density of about 11,000 people per square mile.

In terms of socioeconomic classes: there are 28,000 indies (7.5%), 151,000 wells (72%) and 31,000 street people (14.5%).

In terms of allegiance (or lack thereof) to city power structures: 120,000 (57%) are shut-ins, 55,000 (26%) do not belong to any gang or family, 30,000 (14%) belong to gangs or major street families and 5,000 (2%) belong to the Drug Lords organization.

There are also about 1,000 people just passing through in the city at any one time. If they are staying for the night, they are likely staying in hotels in the red light district, at cheap motels near the drop-off point, or at the homes of relatives in the city. These travelers have every conceivable motivation for being in the city, legal and illegal, ethical and unethical, exotic and mundane, but the majority are New York area businessmen coming to the city for drugs and prostitutes.

Manhattan Area and Population			
Date	Above Water Area	Population	Density
1920's	24 mi^2	2,300,000	95,000/mi^2
1990's	24 mi^2	1,500,000	65,000/mi^2
2080	19 mi^2	210,000	11,000/mi^2

Death

In Brief- 17 deaths/day, some go to mortuaries, others are eaten by rats, most are cremated and buried in unmarked graves.

17 people die in the city every day. About 12 of them end up in the city morgue or a funeral home. It can take weeks for bodies to be discovered and taken to the morgue (especially shut-ins, who may not be discovered until neighbors complain of bad smells). 5 of the people do not end up in the morgue: the bodies are hidden, buried, or never found. When bodies are left laying around, rats eat most of the flesh and the bones become just another part of the city's massive amount of trash.

The city morgue is located in the basement of the New York City Central Hospital, downtown. About half the corpses that pass through it are unclaimed and are cremated and buried in Potter's Field (located on Hart Island on Long Island South) with no marker.

If they are claimed by a mortuary, the body is picked up and prepared for burial. There is no cemetery space in the city, so the families have the choice of having the body buried in upstate New York, or (the cheapest and most popular option) put in to one of the many city buildings that have been converted to mausoleums. The mausoleums look like old unused office buildings, they are kept unheated, dimply lit, and are filled with air-tight concrete or plastic crypts.

City Population

Out of 210,000:

Addicts/Winos	15,000	(7%)
Crazies	5,000	(2%)
Drug Lords/Pushers	5,000	(2%)
Indies (in gangs)	5,000	(2%)
Indies (not in gangs)	4,000	(1.9%)
Miscellaneous	16,000	(7.5%)
Shut-Ins	120,000	(57%)
Street People (in families)	5,000	(2%)
Street People (not in families)	5,000	(2%)
Wells (in gangs)	20,000	(8%)
Wells (not in gangs)	10,000	(4%)

Group	Avg. Life Expectancy
Indies (Non-Gang)	65
Indie (Gang)	61
VR Addicts/Shut-Ins	58
Wells (Gang)	51
Wells (Non-Gang)	49
Street People (Family)	40
Street People (Non-Family)	30
Winos	25
Crazies	24
Addicts	22

Top Causes of Death for All City Residents

#1- Heart Disease
#2- Drug Overdose
#3- Stroke
#4- Exposure
#5- Communicable Diseases

Top Causes of Death for City Residents Ages 18-25

#1- Drug Overdose
#2- Murder
#3- Communicable Diseases
#4- Accident
#5- Exposure

Shut-Ins

In Brief- Many people are afraid to leave their houses and have all their needs delivered. Most spend their days in full immersion VR fantasy worlds that are as addictive as drugs.

The dichotomy between people "on the street" and shut-ins is more important to city residents than socioeconomic classes. Shut-ins aren't a part of the city culture: they don't know the traditions, slang and survival techniques that anyone who spends time on the streets quickly learns. Shut-ins can get virtually every physical need, from groceries to clean clothes, delivered to them by teen Wells working for minimum wage. The very paranoid don't even have to interact with the delivery people: instructions to leave the packages outside the door are common, and some apartments have sophisticated drop boxes so residents can receive deliveries without coming in to contact with anyone.

Some people are shut-ins because they are physically or mentally disabled. Most, however, are simply afraid of the city around them. Their isolation feeds their fear. City shut-ins who meet in VR or on net sites often trade terrible stories about the things happening on the streets around them. Shut-ins trade these stories so they can help each other justify their decisions to stay inside.

Out of 120,000 Shut-Ins:

VR Addicts	70,000	(58%)
Ronin	20,000	(17%)
Hospice	10,000	(8%)
Otaku	10,000	(8%)
Other	10,000	(8%)

Disappearances

In the city, about 500 people disappear per year, more than one per day. The Math Addicts have concluded that these disappearances can be explained without resorting to paranoid theories of evil conspiracies. The Math Addicts best-guess break down of disappearances is as follows:

175 people died of **natural causes**, bodies not found or found and not identified.

130 people **murdered** and the bodies hidden or disposed of.

90 people who **left** the city or **moved** to another part of the city, not telling anyone where they were going.

25 people who entered **cults** and were asked (or forced) to leave their friends and family behind without a word.

25 people being **held** against their will, inside or outside the city, for purposes of forced slavery, prostitution or the creation of illegal pornography.

20 people whose minds were **wiped** and bodies were sold on the black market.

20 people killed and **eaten** by animals or mauler addicts.

10 people who **lost** their **memory or sanity**, and who are still wandering about the city as homeless crazies.

5 people who **drowned** in the sunken city and were carried off by the water.

VR Addicts- Virtual Reality is both a way of dealing with the isolation and claustrophobia of being a shut-in and also a reason that many people become shut-ins. People who depend on Virtual Reality for most of their entertainment and social needs are known by those on the streets (and by the rebellious adolescents they keep locked up with them) as VR Addicts.

Modern virtual reality uses radiochemical neural stimulation to put users in a full immersion, nearly photorealistic, environment. The worlds of VR are loosely called "games." Although there is some element of "play" in them, for most the VR worlds are a place to socialize, relax and spend all of their time.

Virtual Reality can be used for many very useful purposes, including "hands-on" training in everything from surgery to cliff diving. Very few of the VR services that city VR addicts subscribe to teach anything useful. These are everything-but-the-kitchen-sink fantasy worlds made up of a mishmash of world mythologies, classic fantasy novels and new fantastic creations of the designers. The players play wealthy and respected heroes and members of a vibrant and successful community. Players can participate in exploration of the fantasy world, fighting monsters, trade and community development or uninhibited hedonism.

VR companies are a lot like pushers. Both make their money by making people dependent on something that they don't really need. Subscriptions to VR worlds are always free for the first month, and the hardware and broadband internet connections come with the service. People who use VR quickly become dependent. The more they are in VR, the less they attend to matters such as personal hygiene, fitness, cleanliness of their apartments, and non-VR social contacts. Heavy VR find any time they are forced to spend outside of VR is, at best, an annoyance. "VR Withdrawal," as proposed for consideration for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, has the symptoms of depression, panic attacks and insomnia. Used to sleeping on feather beds, eating enormous gourmet feasts, and hearing beautiful background music, the VR addicts find themselves in an alien world of bad smells, bad food, pain and nausea. VR serves the same purpose that drugs do: it gives an escape from an unpleasant life. VR companies purposefully charge as much as the average well can afford.

VR is the second biggest money maker in the city (next to rent) and has the highest profit margin. A lot of political influence from the corporations goes in to protecting the ability of city residents to use Virtual Reality.

Ronin- The term Ronin originally referred to a Japanese samurai without a master. Later, at the end of the 20th century, it came to refer to a student who did not pass college entrance exams and spent a year studying to take them again. Today, the term is used to refer to people who were never able to pass the screening to get in to a gated community or corporation and spend their time trying to improve themselves so they can try again. The term also can mean people who were kicked out of a corporation or gated community for dropping below the minimum requirements and they are studying to try to re-enter.

The Ronin usually pay to have independent testing companies test them and tell them what they need to work on. They might be working on education, cognitive skills, mental health, loyalty or morality. Instead of blowing their

money on VR fantasy worlds, they enroll in courses that advertise significantly increased passage rates. Although some Ronin are only willing only to put a few hours a week in to studying, most are intense students who live an ascetic sort of lifestyle. They spend 8 to 16 hours a day on the computer. They read textbooks, listen to lectures, work through VR scenarios, run hypnosis programs and take evaluation tests to see how far along they've gotten. Some Ronin stay inside all day, not because they are afraid of going outside, but because they don't have time. Other Ronin don't want to go out on to the streets because they are afraid they will be pulled in to a world of drugs, sex and adventure that will undo all their manipulation of their own personality.

Some Ronin have been known to be desperate enough that they will go to quite extreme measures to up their scores. Some can be quite competitive and may try to sabotage other Ronin. Others have sought out dangerous and unproven technology, like Behavior Mod.

Otaku- The word Otaku comes from a formal, and slightly archaic, Japanese greeting. In the 1980s, computer connectivity first let people engage in social interaction without leaving their houses. Socially inept computer geeks sometimes gained the name Otaku because they would use this awkward and disconcerting greeting. Today, the term Otaku refers to a subset of Shut-Ins who rely on the internet for social contact and entertainment, yet shun popular VR fantasy worlds.

The majority of Otaku are male. Most don't get, or need, much face-to-face human contact (even in VR). The Otaku fall in to a spiral: the less time they spend interacting with people, the more their social skills deteriorate. The few social interactions they have become increasingly uncomfortable and anxious, which leads them to spend even less time interacting with people.

The Otaku tend towards solitary entertainments: novels, movies, one-person VR games. When they engage in multiplayer games it is usually strategy or combat games that don't include any social interaction other than taunting or swearing at opponents. Since this is the only form of positive self-esteem that many of them get, Otaku take these games quite seriously. They play with an urgency and vehemence that often frightens non-Otaku who try to play. They also tend to engage in obsessive fandom and trading. The things they are obsessed with tend to be the sort of things intelligent adolescent males are commonly interested in: video games, hacking, popular music and acting stars (especially attractive females ones), the military, VR fiction (especially the sub-genres with a lot of sex, violence, humor and juvenile wish fulfillment) and pornography.

If the Otaku's tastes seem juvenile, it is because their obsessions are usually first formed in adolescence. As an adolescent, an Otaku might develop a minor obsession with an attractive music star. As the Otaku grows older, the music becomes less entertaining and what fuels the obsession is the challenge involved with collecting every piece of information and media pertaining to that star. An Otaku might not even listen to the star's music anymore, but might spend hours a day creating net-shrines, writing love poems to the star, trading obscure bits of gossip and media files, etc.

Famous People

There are few famous people in the media today. The average person out on the streets could not name the current president, much less famous media stars.

People who spend most of their time on the streets have little access to the media. Shut-ins spend most of their time in VR, but spend the majority of time in VR fantasy games where they are the star. When they do watch movies, listen to music, or watch news reports, the "people" are as likely to be photorealistic computer-generated simulations as they are to be real.

When asked to name a current celebrity, people most often name, in descending order: a politician, a news reporter, a criminal, a writer or VR designer, a corporate CEO, an actor, a singer or an athlete.

Most Otaku are harmless geeks, content to stay in their homes and collect via the internet. However, Otaku are the most dangerous of the shut-ins because of two exceptions to this general rule:

Stalkers of famous people, including the violent ones, typically come from the ranks of the Otaku. The Otaku become unsatisfied with simply collecting media clips and decide to go meet the subject of their obsession in person.

Violent Fetishists often start out as Otaku who are obsessed with pornography. These Otaku create their own VR sexual encounters where they interact with computer-controlled partners. Having too much control can quickly make the simulations boring (see text box, below), and the Otaku quickly transgress every taboo they can think of just to keep it interesting (including rape, torture and murder). When all the virtual taboos are transgressed, the only things left is to either give up the pornography or to go out on to the streets and make the violent sexual fantasies real.

Complete Control: A Fate Worse Than Death

Humans are used to being limited in everything they do. Life is, for most people, a constant give and take between what people want and what they can actually get away with. People are not used to having total control and when total control is granted, it often ruins them. This is nothing new: there is a long history of emperors, kings and queens, dictators and ultra-rich people who, after being given virtually unlimited power, proceed to go insane and ruin their lives. The difference is that today, the average well can gain complete control with a VR system, a good computer and a little programming knowledge.

Most shut-ins spend their days in multiplayer VR fantasy worlds controlled by VR companies. They are given enough to keep them happy, but they are seldom given everything they want. There are a few anti-social shut-ins who prefer their own private virtual worlds, filled with AI characters they control. Some may try to create a world with challenges and rules, but most end up cheating at some point. Cheating becomes easier each time, more of a habit, until they go from being players in their VR worlds to being gods. And being a god is boring, but by this time they no longer have the skills or patience to be anything less, so the only thing they can do to keep themselves entertained is to break taboos. These VR autocrats slowly become terrible, evil, violent perverted gods who drive their VR world deeper in to hell every day. Once they reach bottom, there are few places the VR autocrat can go. Some commit suicide, some become serial killers, some quit VR and find life in the real world. Most are stuck, however, trapped in a hell they created, because spending every waking moment being a god has eroded the skills they need to deal with reality (or even the tiny bit of reality found in VR multiplayer fantasy worlds).

Hospice- Ten thousand of the city's "shut-ins" are people in the process of dying. The city has several hospice facilities, some run by the city and others private, which take care of dying people. This portion of the shut-in population has the least effect on the world: they are too sick to interact with people on the internet or exert any political power. Their biggest effect on the city is that hundreds of young wells gain employment as hospice workers.

Others- There are about ten thousand shut-ins who don't fall in to any of the above categories. They are not dependent on VR for entertainment or social contact, they are not obsessive antisocial geeks, they are not studying to get in to somewhere better and they are not dying. These shut-ins vary a lot but they all find some way to entertain themselves without VR or leaving the house. Some find entertainment and social contact on the internet, but not in VR fantasy worlds. They socialize on message boards, watch movies, read books and play in solo VR games. Some live life vicariously through Night Walkers. Others find non-internet ways to entertain themselves. Some grow plants (including drugs), raise pets or raise children. Some read from floor to ceiling stacks of old paper-bound books. Some write or paint or engage in some other creative endeavor. They might enjoy their lot in life, or they might find it desperately boring and unfulfilling. Regardless, they spend most of their days inside.

Citizen's Groups- Shut-Ins do have money and votes, which gives them power. There are dozens of citizen's groups in the city that have the job of making the desires and fears of the shut-ins (no matter how unfounded) known to the city and state government. The main thing that hampers the Citizen's Groups' power is a lack of accurate feedback about what's actually going on. Shut-Ins believe sensationalistic and inaccurate news stories and they often lobby for things that aren't really needed. The citizen's groups are often referred to by politicians, civil servants and criminal organizations as 'the sleeping giant'. As long as they can be kept blissfully unaware of what's going on around them, they are unlikely to do any harm. Even the Drug Lords, the most powerful criminal organization in the city, is careful to keep its activities just under the radar of the corporate news media and the shut-ins.

The AI Tax, Welfare and VR Addiction

In the early 2060's, in the aftermath of the Freedom Wars, the "AI tax" bill was passed by congress. It was designed to ease the massive unemployment caused by Artificial Intelligences replacing more-and-more workers. The AI/unemployment problem had been a major factor that led to the Freedom Wars. The AI tax takes big chunk of profits made using AIs in "traditionally human occupations" and earmarks it for unemployment and welfare programs. Many of the larger corporations actually supported this legislation, for reasons which will become apparent shortly.

Large corporations own almost all of the credit card companies that welfare recipients are in debt to. They own most of the land holding companies that own the apartment buildings welfare recipients live in. They own (or are paid interest to by people who own) the liquor stores, grocery stores, security companies and practically every company that caters to the shut-in welfare class. For every dollar that the large corps give to the AI tax, they get 95 cents back. And five cents is a small price to pay to prevent anti-corporate rioting. The only people who don't make their money back are the small start-up companies who can't yet afford to think on such a vast socioeconomic scale. For these companies, the AI tax is another barrier that keeps them from making it big and competing with the big corps.

Children

In Brief- 20,000 children in cities, raised by parents, Orphans, foster system. Most children educated in cheap VR schools. 'Kid Borgs' are adults in children's bodies.

Out of 210,000 people in the city, about 20,000 of them are below the age of 15 (the number 15 is used because this is youngest age where most gangs will let a person join). There are children being raised by every social class in the city. Some have fewer children (like the addicts, whose drug use usually kills fetuses, and shut-ins, who have a hard time meeting real-world lovers) and some have more (street people in families have the highest). Although shut-ins have the lowest birthrate, they make up 57% of the population, and thus there are more children of shut-ins than of any other city group.

When children do not have parents who can or will take care of them, many end up in the hands of the state. Many Wells and Indies in the city earn some extra money by taking in foster children on a semi-permanent basis. Foster parents range from the genuinely good parents, to the abusive, to indescribably worse than abusive. If there are no foster homes available, a child is sent to the state run city orphanage. The orphans in the orphanage know the dangers of foster homes and will not let a child go to a foster home once they have entered the care of the orphanage. The orphanage is run by grownup orphans who took a vow to protect those smaller than them. The corrupt state workers who are being paid to run the orphanage don't dare to come near it. Some parents have been known to drop off their children in Orphan territory temporarily. The Orphans don't approve of this, and will make life as hard on the parents as possible, but this doesn't stop them from watching over the children.

Some children have no one to take care of them, yet they are lucky enough to have gained the street smarts to survive on their own. Children who learned to survive on their own from a very early age are rare enough to have gained semi-mythical status. They are often called "wilderns" in city slang.

Among the Unborn, children are put to work as soon as possible. The children contribute, even in a small way, to the health of the family, but at the same time they learn the skills that they will use to make a living later in life. Unborn children are very skilled: a Black Med can usually set and splint a broken bone at 6, a Cracker can rip off a payphone at 7, a Drake is given a sharp scrap of metal or glass (coated with a poison Drakes are immune to) at 3.

Education- Gated communities and corps run their own schools, for which they gain significant tax breaks (thanks to the self sufficiency acts of the early 2060s). Since most children born in a corp or gated community will end up becoming a member, it is a wise investment for the corp or gated community to pay for good education.

The pool of funding for public schools is very low. Since the early 2070's there has been one virtual reality system which acts as a public school for the entire state. Students and teachers log in from home. Students who do not have full immersion VR hardware will be loaned old hardware (donated by VR companies). Students who don't have a safe place to log in go to a schoolhouse (an old converted office or school bus with a security guard and VR terminals). The teachers do very little: mostly the students run pre-written learning programs (ten years older than those used in corporate schools). In theory, parents should make sure children go to a schoolhouse or log in every day. If parents don't make sure a child goes to school, child protective services can be called. In reality,

few parents ever face such punishments and truancy is common. Many students drop out of school when they turn eighteen, completely illiterate.

Kid-Borgs- Some people have been known to use mental programming technology to transfer (or copy) their minds in to the bodies of children. Some use children whose bodies were grown in a vat and who never had any real consciousness, but most use the bodies of real children who had their minds wiped. The main reason criminals choose children is because they think they can get away with more as children. Because of this phenomenon, children who are encountered on the streets without any parents are usually regarded with suspicion.

Kid Gangs- Just as adults join together in to gangs for the purposes of self-protection or to bully around others, so do street kids. Kid gangs are usually small (four to seven kids, only a few are as large as twenty) and they tend not to last very long. Like adult gangs, some kid gangs steal and rob from other children and some act as benevolent protectors. Kid gangs rarely mess with adults, and so the world of kid gangs is generally invisible to adults. The only adults who are really aware of kid gangs are those who prey on children (and try not to prey on members of kid gangs).

Top 5 Children Not To Mess With

Drake Kid- From a very early age, Drake children are given tiny amounts of poisons, especially the Drake Fungus Poison. By the time they are walking and talking, they can take massive amounts of the fungus poison without it hurting them. They are on a steady diet of this poison so that their very blood has enough poison in it to kill most people. Drakes learn from an early age to throw pieces of poisoned glass with deadly accuracy and they are seldom found on the streets without these deadly weapons in their pockets. Even if a Drake child can be disarmed and bound they know that they can kill with a bite and they are not afraid to bite as hard as they can.

Leader of a Kid Gang- Some kid gangs do not have a real leader, but some do. Those leaders have a significant amount of power at their command: a tiny army of rough street kids armed with rocks, knives and clubs. Kid gangs have learned the lesson of revenge early on and they will go to great lengths to pay back someone who has injured them.

Baby Colin- Colin doesn't just copy his mind in to the minds of adults. He inhabits a fair number of children in the city, and he uses their supposed innocence to his advantage. Even though too small to fight with an adult, little Colins wait until those who trust them are sleeping and then slit their throats with a knife. Baby Colins like to travel in packs so that their collective strength is enough to pull down a person, knock them out, and drag them to whatever dark basement their mental installer is in.

Orphan Babysitter- From as early as they can understand anything, those kids who end up at the city Orphanage are taught to protect younger children. Orphans as young as 3 have been known to attack full grown adults to protect their charges. The Orphans are trained in a martial art specially designed to let small groups of children attack and kill adults. They are all armed with railroad spikes that have been sharpened to wicked points. They know every spot on an adult that is within their reach that will paralyze with pain, cripple or kill. When there are multiple Orphans they act in concert, encircling opponents and stabbing them in the back.

Cult Kid- Cult kids are generally pretty harmless to adults. They are sent out in small groups to try to lure street kids back to the cult compound, bribing them with candy and friendship. They are usually under orders to stay away from adults (who might try to save the kids from the cult). When the cult leader feels that his or her power is in danger, though, the kids become very dangerous. The kids are brainwashed in to believing that death should not be feared. It is not uncommon for cult leaders to strap homemade explosives to kids and send them to blow up some of the cult's (real or imagined) enemies. The kids look perfectly normal, may even come begging for help, but they know when to hit the button to take out their enemies. These kids are perfectly fearless, so certain are they that a perfect life awaits them.

Immigrants

In Brief- Many legal and illegal immigrants come here to escape terrible conditions. Some are kept ignorant of US ways so they can be exploited. Some are literal slaves in brothels. Some immigrants form small xenophobic communities.

Each year, millions of people come to the United States from countries ravaged by war, political oppression and economic collapse. Some immigrate legally and quickly join gated communities or corporations. Others enter the US illegally, entering with false visas. They cross the Mexican border with the help of "jackals" (professional people smugglers), ride homemade rafts up the coast, or pay to be smuggled in to the country onboard cargo ships. Those immigrants who have entered the country illegally can not get welfare or legal jobs and so they end up in inner cities, usually living as street people.

Slave Trade- Many illegal immigrants are dangerously ignorant of American ways, and some people take terrible advantage of this ignorance. There are con artists in the city who specialize in catching immigrants in scams. Sometimes they bring them over at little or no charge, but put them in debt with interest so high they can never pay it off, turning the immigrants in to indentured servants.

The worst examples of taking advantage of illegal aliens is the slave trade. Some people are enticed in to coming to the United States on false pretences, promised legitimate work or marriage to a loving spouse. Others are physically kidnapped or bought in third world slave markets and smuggled in to the US as chattel. Once in the US they are virtually brainwashed in to believing that if they are caught by the government they will suffer a terrible fate. They are told that illegal immigrants are put in to violent and disease-filled prisons. Fear keeps the immigrants from leaving the homes, factories or brothels where they live or work.

This slavery does not happen only in the city. Many people living in private cities or wealthy neighborhoods have live-in maids who get paid nothing and are afraid to leave the homes.

There are secret brothels in the city where women, children and a few men are kept inside by fear of their captors and fear of what lies outside the brothels. Most of the people in these brothels were kidnapped by organized crime gangs in Southeast Asia, Russia and Central America, smuggled over in cargo ships, and sold to the brothels at a few thousand per head. The Sexologists have made it their personal crusade to hunt down the operators of these brothels and kill them, but there are still some left in secret locations in the red light district.

Immigrant Communities- Most illegal immigrants merge seamlessly in to the city society and economy, taking on the roles played by unborn. Some even marry or are 'adopted' in to powerful street families. No matter how well they fit in to the city society, most immigrants feel most comfortable around people who speak their language and share their culture.

There are some people who fail completely to acculturate themselves to city society. They suffer from a sort of culture shock where they turn inwards and refuse to try to fit in or even learn the language. They tend to form small, insular communities which they defend against outsiders. When they are forced to leave these communities (for instance, to scrounge for food) they refuse to communicate with other city residents.

One example is a camp of refugees from Sierra Leone in midtown in a vacant lot at the corner of 47th St. and 8th Ave, East of Tea Drinker territory. The camp is fenced off with barbed wire, inside the concrete has been torn up so that crops could be grown in the dirt. The camp has 30 people living there, some interact with city residents, some don't and a few refuse to leave the camp even for medical care. No outsiders are allowed in to the camp, even for a visit, and the camp recently repelled an attack by a coalition of four local pusher gangs.

Colin

In Brief- Serial killer, kidnaps people and copies his mind in to theirs (thus creating copies of himself), thinks he's a god, city residents have found him impossible to wipe out.

History

In 2075, amateur profilers were investigating a series of mutilated priests found in churches. When they caught the perpetrator in the act, what they saw frightened them: a group of small children. They were unable to take the children alive, but they autopsied the bodies and found evidence that each child's mind had been wiped out and over-written with a new mind. They could reach no other conclusion other than that someone had erased the children's minds and copied another mind in to their brains. What was worse, it was a mind that was capable of mutilating priests. The profilers immediately raised every alarm they could, and whole gangs took to the streets to find what they assumed was one perpetrator with one mental installer.

Colin himself revealed the truth to the profilers and the truth was much more horrible than they had thought. They had imagined one person with a mental installer manufacturing serial killers. In reality, each copy of Colin was an independent agent. Each copy went out and did whatever possible to make as many copies of himself as possible. Like a virus, any single Colin could reproduce exponentially in the right conditions. The copies were not just children, they were everyone: young people, old people, gang members, members of the Drug Lords, wealthy and powerful people, anonymous homeless people. Colin was infiltrating every sector of city society.

Each copy struck out on his or her own, meaning that not even Colin really knew who was a Colin or how many Colins there were out there.

A paranoid witch hunt began, peaking in a few months. Every person who had gone away for any period of time or who was acting differently in any way was suspect. Many hundreds of people were lynched in the streets and many mental installers were destroyed. No one knows how many real Colins were killed, but there are at least a hundred people now believed to have been wrongly murdered. The witch hunt died down as people began to believe that Colin had been destroyed.

This pleasant belief lasted only a few months before Colins were caught again. Another, smaller witch hunt occurred, but tapered out as people began to see the uselessness of a witch hunt. Colin was too good at staying hidden and anonymous, he was as likely to be the leader of a lynch mob as he was to be the victim of one. Many said that Colin could only be fought with constant vigilance. Many were of the opinion that Colin just could not be destroyed by any means.

Now, about one Colin is discovered every month. Math Addicts have given various estimates of the current population of Colins as being somewhere between 20 and 500.

Colin Hunters

In Brief- Some people specialize in hunting Colins.

Colin scares most people more than anything else in the city. Some people have transformed their fear in to a "no tolerance" policy towards Colins: they will immediately kill anyone that they even suspect of being a Colin. Other people, especially people who have been hurt in some way by Colins, have decided to devote their lives to hunting Colin. Others hunt Colin as a hobby, some even find it fun.

Colin hunters come from all ranks of city society. Some are Hunters, some are Eccentrics with a law enforcement background, some are young people who are hobby profilers. Together they form a small community that investigates Colin, shares information, and creates theories about his psychology. When they discover a Colin, they have a small army of volunteers willing to help them capture or kill the Colin. One thing they wonder about is why Colin hasn't tried to wipe them out yet. Their major theory is that Colin likes people studying him.

Church of Colin

In Brief- A few people pretend to worship Colin in exchange for his anonymous protection.

There is a small group of individuals who "worship" Colin as a god. Their official position is that Colin wants (some would even say needs) worshippers and is willing to offer a great deal in return. Colin worshippers wear black, wear bowl-cuts with the sides of their heads shaved and wear silver crosses upside down. This is said to be Colin's original appearance, although no one knows where this information came from.

Colin worshippers are, obviously quite hated, but the people who hate them rarely do anything to them for fear of being attacked by Colins. Worshippers will do many things to please Colin, including defacing churches with pro-Colin graffiti, proclaiming from street corners that "Colin is a God," building public shrines to Colin and leaving offerings (usually in the form of food, money and weapons) to Colin.

In exchange, Colin worshippers are watched over and protected by an invisible hand. Colin never contacts these worshippers, but the most devout worshippers are under constant surveillance by Colin. One rude remark to a Colin worshipper can be enough to cause a person to be attacked by Colins. Colin Worshippers often have a lot of Colin hunters around them, looking for Colins.

Although Colin does not communicate with his worshippers, the zeal with which he protects them or does not protect them gives some clue about what behavior Colin likes or does not like. Colin likes fear, awe and christianesque worship. He also likes when worshippers talk as if he was a popular-culture icon. He likes worshippers who do not claim to have personal powers, but who rely on the power of Colin to protect them. For instance, Colin might not protect someone who says "You can't mess with me, I'm a Colin worshipper, you'll be killed," while he might protect someone who says "I put my faith in the power and infinite wisdom of Colin." Colin does not like worshippers who try to be like him, he has killed at least one worshipper who tried to copy his mind in to a victim's mind.

There are about 10 to 15 Colin Worshippers in the city. The Church of Colin has no formal organization, but Colin McKray, the first Colin Worshipper is the most powerful, has "converted" the most people and has the most influence over other Colin Worshippers.

Strains

In Brief- Different strains with different skills/knowledge; some Colins may have decided to quit reproducing.

Any time Colin changes, if he is gaining a piece of knowledge, learning a new skill, or gets a new mental program, every Colin that Colin creates is subtly different. Since Colin has been reproducing for 10 years, and has been actively trying to improve himself, there are many different strains. A new strain that is significantly better (e.g. has powerful psychic skills, or is a master martial artist) could reproduce more quickly than other Colins and could be an immediate threat to the city.

Colin's personality doesn't change much. Colin Hunters attribute this to the powerful megalomania that has dominated every aspect of his life for the last decade. However, personality change is probably inevitable if Colin survives long enough.

"The Dropout Effect"

This is a theory by Colin Hunters. They say that at some point (if it hasn't happened already) some Colin will change (either because of experiences or because of errors in the copying process) to the point that he doesn't want to be a Colin anymore. Yet the effect on the Colins as a whole will be almost nil. Those Colins will "drop out" but other Colins will continue. In the animal world, a mutation might make an animal not want to have sex, but since that gene is not carried on to a new generation, the effect on the species is nil. Thus, say Colin experts, Colin may continue to reproduce forever if we allow him.

Finding a Colin dropout would be a major coup for the Colin Hunters, who could find out more about Colin's psychology. However, a drop-out may not necessarily be a nice or safe person to be around.

Criminals

It is hard to find someone on the streets who does not break some law or another. Many people use illegal drugs, most people buy stolen merchandise from black market traders, most people trespass on to abandoned property. Many people will end up doing some job that they get paid under the table for. Violence in the name of vigilante justice or revenge is common. For street people, their very existence violates anti-camping and anti-vagrancy laws.

Most city residents would divide criminals in to one of four categories:

Incidental Criminals: Commit crimes that are incidental to their lifestyle: a Roofer trespasses on rooftops, an Insomniac uses illegal drugs, a Risen participates in gang warfare. The majority of people on the streets count as this type.

Professional Criminals: Make a living off of crime. In order to survive they must be skilled and patient. They seek the easiest and least dangerous way to commit their crimes, and so they are seldom violent (the major exception being professional assassins, who practice efficient violence with nothing left to chance).

Impulsive Criminals: Typically Wells. Commit crimes to get money for drugs, prostitutes or other expensive vices. Impulsive criminals would make poor professional criminals: they are not skilled, patient or careful enough. They typically commit crimes under the influence of drugs (most commonly alcohol and god killer) and they are very likely to use violence.

Sadistic Criminals: Commit crimes solely to victimize others. Include rapists, serial killers, child molesters and hate criminals.

Top 10 Shoplifted Items in the City

1. Cigarettes
2. Liquor
3. Condoms
4. Over the Counter Medicines containing Pseudophedrine*
5. Spray Paint
6. Razors
7. Disposable Lighters
8. Data Cards
9. Baby Formula
10. Batteries

*from which Methamphetamines and God Killer can be manufactured

Burglars

In Brief- Cat burglars are stealthy and skilled. Smash-and-grab burglars are violent.

There are two distinct types of burglary as practiced by professional and impulsive criminals. The first type is cat burglary, where not being seen takes precedence over getting something of value. Burglars of this type are usually professional unborn thieves with in-depth knowledge of how to bypass alarm systems. The second type is the smash-and-grab: gangs of armed youths break down a door or smash a window. They run in and subdue anyone who happens to be present with violence or threats of violence. They run away before security can come en-masse. This type of burglary is a big problem in the city: hundreds are killed each year and many more are injured. The burglars tend to prey on those who can not defend themselves and more than half of those who are killed are elderly.

Muggers

Muggers are typically small groups of desperate

In Brief- Small gangs of youths ambush people to get money for drugs.

addicts or violent teenagers. They seek out those least able to defend themselves: intoxicated people, old people, sick people, anyone who looks like a VR addict out on the streets for the first time in months. Typically, the group waits in dark alleys, waiting for a spotter to tell them that a lone traveler is coming by. The muggers ambush the traveler, usually attacking with blunt objects. The point is to incapacitate the victim, the muggers seldom care whether they kill or not.

Types of Alarms

Infrared Beams

Recognizing: Visible with infrared sensors, or look for the holes in the wall the beams come out of.

Uses: Infrared beams are a cheap way of protecting some passageway against anything moving through it. They are only useful indoors, where it is unlikely that pigeons or wind-blown trash will interrupt the beams.

Bypassing: One or two beams can be stepped over. If beams completely block passage, they can be redirected with semi-reflective mirrors or fiber-optic cables.

Floor Sensors

These are sensors on the floor that set of an alarm when weight is put on some part of the floor.

Recognizing: Loose tiles or a thin layer of spongy or flexible material on the floor.

Uses: Floor sensors are a good supplemental security system for rooms which no one should be in during certain hours, such as an office or vault.

Bypassing: Sensors on top of the floor can usually be erased with a spray of acid. If sensors are under the floors, thieves can glue the tiles in place or build a bridge.

Door/Window Sensors

When the door or window is opened, an electrical contact is broken and an alarm is activated. High quality alwaysrun wires through the door or window so thieves cannot cut a hole in the window or door.

Recognizing: Electromagnetic sensors are a sure way, but most can be seen by shining a flashlight in to the crack.

Uses: Making sure doors and windows stay closed.

Bypassing: With cheap sensors, the easiest thing to do is to cut a hole in the window or door. In high quality devices, thieves must drill in and insert wires to maintain connections.

Ambient Temperature Sensors

High definition heat sensors which are hooked up to the air conditioning and heating systems. When a temperature increase indicates a human presence, an alarm is triggered.

Recognizing: Typically a small thermostat box on one wall.

Uses: Useful only in temperature controlled environments, such as the rooms supercomputers are housed in.

Bypassing: A high tech temperature regulating body suit, or a thick wool suit filled with ice-packs.

Human Recognition Sensors

Recognizing: Small cameras, usually mounted on ceilings, that sweep back and forth. Typically transmit wirelessly to a security computer.

Uses: Used in outside areas where people are not supposed to be at night and where wind or animals might set off other types of alarms. In very high-security corporate offices, every employee wears a security badge that the computers read. If any human appears and there is not a corresponding security badge signal, an alarm is triggered.

Bypassing: Thieves create trash suits that make them look like a shambling mound of trash. Thieves must also know how to move in a manner that doesn't read as human. Accomplished thieves look so weird in their shambling-trash mode that human guards are often shocked for several seconds upon seeing them.

Motion Detectors

Recognizing: Small boxes mounted on the ceiling. When well hidden, they are pinholes in the wall.

Uses: Used in rooms where there should be zero movement in the off hours.

Bypassing: Motion sensors can be bypassed by moving extremely slowly (a moderate END roll and a hard AGY roll.)

Pounders

Although many street people band together for the purposes of self-protection and cooperative labor, some street people form small groups that bully and exploit other street people. They are known as "pounders" because of their propensity for ganging up on and beating up street people. These groups are typically made up of 5 to 20 males in their twenties and thirties, most of whom are physically large. There may or may not be a leader. Most of these groups are ethnically homogenous (e.g. all white, all asian, etc.). Most drink alcohol as their primary form of entertainment.

The group bullies around other street people. The get the best camping sites (typically a vacant lot with a barbed wire fence and abandoned cars to sleep in). The group takes over the best canning routes and begging spots. When semi-legitimate jobs are offered to street people (for instance, a shop owner may pay street people to sweep up in front of the shop, or an apartment manager may pay street people to carry garbage bags to the dumpsters) these gangs muscle in and take over the jobs. The gangs may also steal directly from street people.

At night these street people use their ill-earned money to buy drugs and alcohol and have parties. They play music on car stereos and use drugs and alcohol. The drugs and alcohol are used to lure street women in to the compound where they will be given drugs and taken advantage of.

Pounder gangs typically stay away from each other. The pounders also stay away from the large street families who would fight back against them. Like most bullies, they only want to deal with the weak.

High Class Thieves

There are a small class of elite criminals that travel around the globe doing high-cost and high-payout jobs. They have the best equipment, help and skills. Most fantasies about the lives of these thieves are false: they are not free spirits, they do not live luxurious lifestyles, they are not doing what they would like to be doing for a living. They are victims of various vices and personality problems, they are often broke, and they are usually under the control of some organized crime figure who finances them but takes most of their profits

Assassins

In Brief- Many think they are skilled enough to kill for money and there is a glut of people offering services.

There are a large number of people in the city who wouldn't mind killing a complete stranger for money and who think they have the skills it would take. These are mostly young well freelancers who idealize violence, are too independent to join a gang and too wimpy to engage in fair fights. Most people who want to be assassins see the world as a place where force alone rules. Assassins hang around on internet newsgroups with other wanna-be assassins, bragging about their skills and hoping that someone will contact them with an invitation. Potential assassins may also advertise to the local black market traders. Most assassins advertise but are never given an offer.

When assassins are hired, they are given instructions and paid anonymously (either through a black market trader, or through anonymous transaction internet sites). The average job pays $400. Almost half are paid to kill spouses or lovers.

Terrorists

In Brief- The terrorists who were the heroes of the Freedom Wars, and the culture they helped create, linger now as mercenaries and lone radicals.

Terrorism was a huge part of the Freedom Wars. Terrorists could operate without the support of a bureaucracy or infrastructure, and were thus able to do damage in lands completely controlled by the enemy. Terrorists helped both sides, and some terrorists even switched sides midway through the war.

Before the initial attacks of the Freedom Wars, Jeffrey Hernandez created training camps for terrorists in sparsely populated areas of Mexico. Over five thousand people were trained in demolitions, intelligence, sabotage, assassination and brainwashing. These highly skilled terrorists went out and trained other terrorists. Some of these terrorists defected when they saw what Jeffrey Hernandez did with his power. There was never just one resistance and there was never really one Freedom Army: there were many completely independent cells and lone individuals, each with their own view of what the outcome of the Freedom Wars should be and with different ideas of what methods were acceptable.

After the Freedom Wars ended, the Restoration Committee's primary goal was to end rioting, fighting and terrorism. The made concessions to any group they worried might resort to terrorism. Thus, much of the globe was balkanized. Most of the terrorists who had fought in the Freedom Wars decided that they had won (the Freedom Army had wiped out the corps, the resistance had wiped out the Freedom Army) and retired. A few however, were too radical to accept even partial victory. Like all good terrorists, they went in to hiding to await the time to strike. Now, 24 years later, the FBI estimates that there are a thousand terrorists in the US and 100 in the city. Many terrorists, trained in methods of indoctrination, have indoctrinated new terrorists (including their own children). Most acts of terrorism committed in the US today are committed by people 18-30.

A few terrorists have gone in the other direction and become mercenaries. Some live in the city while awaiting jobs. They use the same methods as politically motivated terrorists, but they destroy whoever or whatever their employers want them to.

Genius Serial Killers?

Like most violent criminals, the average serial killer has lower intelligence and lower self-control than the average city resident. Despite this, they often spend so much time thinking about ways to kill people that they come up with clever strategies and ploys. Serial killers of above average intelligence do exist, but they still have poor impulse control and get caught almost as quickly as their stupider brothers and sisters.

Serial Killer or Normal Killer?

A lot of people in the city kill, and for a lot of reasons. Finding a set of dead bodies killed with a similar M.O. does not necessarily mean that a serial killer is at work. Is it a mugger who likes to bash people's heads in, or a serial killer who happens to rob his victims? Is it vigilante justice or systematic revenge? Some Hunters have been known to murder members of a group (like pusher gangs), but believe they are doing good. Some profilers have even gone so far as to call certain Hunters "good serial killers."

Two clues tell profilers that they should use a classic "serial killer" profile in trying to solve a series of murders: First, the victims all belong to a class of people (e.g. attractive women, old winos, etc.) but are not actually related. Second, there is evidence that the killer is trying to recreate some internal fantasy in the external world. The murder is often careful, ritualistic, and bodies are often posed. A god-killer addicted mugger doesn't create a fantasy world about bashing people's heads in, he or she just goes out and does it. It is the serial killers who are trying to make fantasies real.

Serial Killers

In Brief- The city has around 100 serial killers at any one time, who enact violent fantasies for anxiety relief and self-esteem.

The city has one of the highest concentrations of serial killers in the world. There are estimated to be about 100 serial killers operating in the city at any given time. There are many reasons for this, some obvious and some subtle. To illustrate, here are some of the childhood environmental factors most strongly correlated with the development of a serial killer:

• Moderate (but not extreme) poverty.
• A tragedy or trauma in early life.
• Little or no supervision by authority figures during childhood.
• Few friends and social contacts.
• Emotionally distant parent(s).
• Early access to pornography, especially violent pornography.
• Nothing that would provide a strong sense of identity (e.g. a strong talent or membership in a minority group).

Many of these factors (moderate poverty, emotionally distant parents, poor supervision and few social contacts) are consistent with the environment in the homes of shut-in well VR addicts (the largest part of the city's population).

Pornography- Most serial killers in the city are male and most appear to be dependent on pornography and violent sexual fantasies. The relationship between serial killers and pornography seems equivalent to a drug addiction. Most serial killers have very low self-esteem and feel a transient feeling of power when they view pornography or have violent fantasies. Like a drug user who gains a tolerance for the drug, serial killers need increasingly intense stimulation, and use more and more "hardcore" pornography and fantasies. Eventually, the only way to get enough stimulation is to commit a real act. Serial killers must kill increasingly often to fight away the 'withdrawal' of low self-esteem anxiety.

The most disturbing aspect of the serial killers' fantasy worlds is that they have an obsessive need to dehumanize their victims. A serial killer's self-esteem is so fragile that they are only comfortable living in a world where they are the only one with an identity and free-will. All else who share this world with them must be nothing more than flesh and base emotions at the control of the serial killer.

Partnerships- Most serial killers prefer to work alone, though there are instances of siblings, lovers and friends working together. In most cases, only one of the people is truly 'in to' killing people, the other one is simply along for the ride. When both are true serial killers, they work together for the same reason drug addicts work together, because they see mutual benefit in it, not because they like each other or want to share their experiences. Most partners of this type meet on the underground market for illegal pornography. Very few ever form what city residents would think of as a deep or fulfilling friendship.

Cults

In Brief- Many cults in city, prey on psychologically weak, can be dangerous.

Cults are a major problem in the city. There are about four thousand people in some cult or another. About two people per day are recruited in to a cult. Most cults only last a few years before breaking up (or ending in mass suicide). Cults recruit from every level of the population, rich and poor, shut-ins and street people. Most cults in the city are small (20-100 people). A few cults become large enough to have some political pull in the city. The Lumens are currently the largest cult in the city and have been able to take on gangs.

Characteristics

In Brief- Prey on the confused and vulnerable, offer companionship and safety, teach people not to think for themselves, charismatic leader.

Cults prey on those who are experiencing stress or trauma. Runaways are the biggest target, and many cult recruiters hang around the bus stop in the Bowery where most runaways come in to town. The cults give a person in crisis a comforting atmosphere, friendship, encouragement, love and sometimes even sex. In exchange, the cult controls the person's surroundings 24 hours a day, controls what information the person has access to. The person's thinking is distracted so he or she doesn't have the time, energy or inspiration to question the doctrines of the cult. The wild ideologies seem normal when everyone else believes it. Finally, the cult member learns to censor his or her own thoughts. The member is taught that "bad thoughts" will harm his or her spiritual progression and should be avoided at all costs.

Almost universally, cults are led by a charismatic person who is thought of as superhuman by his or her followers. Cult members are taught a sense of superiority over anyone else not in the cult. They are taught that the lifestyle of outsiders is evil and dangerous to their souls, that common knowledge from the outside world is ignorance and propaganda, and that cult members (especially the leadership) do not need to follow the laws of the outside world.

Some think that the Purists and Dragons are cults. They both have charismatic leaders who have unique spiritual ideas. They both have followers who believe in the ideas of the leaders and live as the leaders suggest. However, because members of the Purists and Dragons both enjoy freedom of association, most people classify them as gangs and not cults.

Lumens

In Brief- City's biggest cult, live in Cloisters, use bright lights for ceremonies and for blinding opponents.

The Lumens are well known because they have taken on both the Skin Borgs and the Drug Lords and survived. The Lumens live in the Cloisters, European monk's cloisters reconstructed in 1914, in Inwood hills on the North of the island. This is right in the middle of Skin Borg territory.

Social Structure- The Lumens call themselves "penitents" and their church "church of the infinite light." The name Lumens was given to them by city residents. No one outside of the Lumens knows very much about the leader of the Lumens. He is said to be a handsome, middle aged male who is very intense and charismatic. Like a gang, the Lumens seek immediate revenge for the death of one of their own.

Beliefs- The Lumens believe that god is pure light and in their religious ceremonies people expose themselves to extremely bright lights (along with hypnotic chanting). The lights are supposed to help cleanse the fears and desires that remove people from god. They are also supposed to show people how beautiful heaven is. Critics point out that, since bright lights can be an effective therapy for depression, the Lumens are just curing depressed people and calling it spiritual awakening.

Recruitment- Lumens are not allowed to leave the Cloisters alone, they always travel in groups of four or more. When they are recruiting, though, one member does the recruiting and the others hang around nearby, pretending not to be associated with the recruiter. Lumens wear "humble" clothing, which usually means that they dress like Street People. They all carry knives and each team that leaves the cloister has one high-tech portable spotlight. In combat they shine this light at their opponents. The Lumens are used to operating in very bright light and are not blinded as badly as their opponents.

Lumens look for people who look like they are having a hard time with life. One Lumen strikes up friendly conversation, gets to know the person, then offers the person a hot meal and a place to stay the night. The person is brought back to the Cloisters and treated with kindness and respect. Any time the recruit asks to leave, the Lumens make up some imaginary crisis that is keeping them busy (but promise to let the person leave as soon as it is done). If the person tries to force his or her way out of the compound, the person will be grabbed and put in a brightly-lit cell. Someone sits outside the cell preaching, 24 hours a day, until the person submits.

Battles- From their inception, the Lumens have been very good at recruiting drug addicts. The Lumens will capture drug addicts, bring them to the cloisters and keep them prisoner until they have detoxified (during which time they are thoroughly brainwashed). Taking drug addicts (and thus income) away from the Drug Lords had prompted several attacks on the Lumens. The Lumens have held their ground, refusing to change their behavior. The Drug Lords have not called off the war against the Lumens, they still offer a reward to any pusher or addict who kills a Lumen, but they have stopped ordering tactical assaults on the Cloisters. The Drug Lords have stopped after two dagger teams were destroyed. Hundreds of Lumens were killed in the battles, but the Lumens didn't seem to care.

As the Skin Borgs expanded, they ran in to the Lumens. At first, the Skin Borgs were determined to take over this cult like they have taken over all the other gangs in their way. The Skin Borgs quickly gave up, telling themselves that this didn't count as a loss because the Lumens weren't a gang. There is still a lot of hostility and warfare occasionally ignites.

Disease

Healthcare

In Brief- Most Indies have high quality health insurance. Wells have poor quality government healthcare, with two big hospitals in the city. Street People go to the Black Med family for care. ERs must provide emergency care for indigent.

Indies- Most indies pay for subscriptions to HMOs. The city hospital and several clinics around the city take indie health insurance, but Indies who want quality care travel to clinics and hospitals outside of the city. In emergencies (and for a reasonable co-pay) subscribers can be flown out of the city by helicopter to an emergency room in Queens. Private healthcare will pay for advanced pharmaceuticals, psychiatric mental programs, therapy and cloned parts (to replace missing or damaged organs and appendages). They will pay some of the costs of inpatient drug rehabilitation. They will not pay for the terminally ill to be copied in to a new body.

Wells- Government Healthcare is available for everyone on government assistance. A person with a healthcare card has to wait weeks to get an appointment with a dentist or GP and might wait up to eight hours in an emergency room before being seen. Many people who die in the city hospital die in an ER waiting room.

The state Department of Health Services owns the NYC Central Hospital at Park Ave. and E. 23rd St. (downtown, near midtown) and the NYC Urgent Care Clinic at Adam Clay Powell Blvd. and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd (in Harlem). The central hospital is a ten story building. The basement is the city morgue, the first floor is an emergency room and the top floor is the city short-term care psychiatric clinic. The urgent care clinic is a smaller clinic, built in an old brownstone that was once a tenement, it has a slightly smaller emergency room as well as a large hospice. Both are in non-gang territory. There are a few small specialists offices downtown that take government healthcare. The city also owns several hospices, many are built in to old brownstones in Harlem near the NYC Urgent Care Clinic.

Government healthcare will not pay for implants, replacement parts, drug and alcohol treatment, psychotherapy, newer drugs or mental programs. There are ambulances, but they are often overworked and slow to respond and the government tries to charge a $50 co-pay for each ambulance visit.

Street People- Street People go to the Black Meds, a large, old street family that specializes in providing medical care for street people. None of the Black Meds have any formal medical training. The care they provide is mostly basic first aid (sterilizing, cauterizing, sewing and splinting) and the use of herbs and placebos. Street people mostly barter for Black Med services. When it comes to plagues, Black Meds can offer little help except to make sure the victim has plenty of fluids and a warm place to rest.

The central hospital and urgent care clinic emergency rooms are required by law to provide care to any indigent person. No preventative or long-term care is provided: it is simply a matter of patching the person up and releasing them back to the streets.

Slow Killers

In Brief- Many diseases, transmitted by body fluids, that there are no cures for.

Body Fluid Transmitted Diseases (BFTDs) infect up to 5% of the city population. New strains pop up faster than cured can be discovered. The most common BFTDs only cause pain and annoyance but seldom kill. Others can not be cures and will eventually kill. Most of these are autoimmune diseases descended from HIV or from the newer HDNA diseases. These BFTDs are often called "slow killers". A majority (55%) catch these diseases through sex, 40% catch them through use of dirty needles and 5% through some other sort of body fluid contact. The slow killers cause a slow decline of health, resulting in death in 4 to 6 years. Even when there is no cure, a person's lifespan can be increased by using expensive drugs.

Plagues

In Brief- A new type of virus, made from human DNA, occasionally pops up as a horrible plague.

The 2040s were an era of plagues. Massive overpopulation, economic crises causes substandard healthcare and sanitation, and everyone from corps to terrorists were messing with the DNA of disease organisms. The worst plague of this era contained human DNA and had a protein coating that was virtually invisible to the human immune system. Three million people around the world were killed before the first strain of this virus was brought under limited control.

Many of the terrible plagues of this era are waiting, living in other hosts and waiting to infect the human population. Plagues are worst in inner cities, and the city has been the source of several recent plague outbreaks. Countless untold diseases are living in the city's massive rat population (not to mention stray cats and dogs, pigeons, squirrels and bats). A random bite by a rat can introduce a new strain in to a population. Or, in an even worse scenario, a mutated strain starts killing all the rats, and the billions of fleas jump off the dead rats and bite humans (thus spreading the disease to them).

Quarantines

In Brief- The CDC locks down the city during plague outbreaks, provides emergency care.

The city hospital reports disease stats to the CDC. When the CDC fears there is considerable danger from a disease, it issues a quarantine. The city is locked down, no one can enter and leave except for CDC doctors in CDC helicopters. CDC doctors set up inflatable labs where they can work on finding some treatment for the disease. Helicopters with powerful speakers move through the city ordering everyone to stay inside. Anyone could be arrested for going out on the streets (or disobeying a CDC doctor) but the CDC seldom has the time or employees to enforce such rules. The Central Hospital and Urgent Care Clinic (and sometimes the blocks surrounding them) become triage units where people die en masse and a fine disinfectant mist is being constantly sprayed from the ceilings. After one hour, the subways are shut down.

Any city resident who's lived through a plague develops a sixth sense during outbreaks: every doorknob, pool of blood, delirious addict, even the air around a corpse seems to glow with disease energy. Many times "business" can't be stopped, even during a plague, and while city residents move through the city they recognize death everywhere, just waiting for the right time to strike.

Plague Survival Kit

Gasmask (to protect against airborne diseases)

Sterilization Spray (to sterilize food)

Latex Gloves (to protect against contact based diseases)

Trenchcoat (to protect the body from bites and scratches)

Insect Repellent (to repel insects that might carry diseases)

Drugs

Drug Addicts

In Brief- Drug addicts mostly dangerous, unhappy, poor. Some addicts handle addiction better than others. Many spend all day doing anything they can to get money for drugs. A lucky few become servants of addicts.

The most visible drug addicts are what people jokingly call "**career addicts**": people who are so deeply addicted to their drug that they can not stay on welfare or hold an occupation (legal or illegal) or allegiance to any group. Career addicts are easy to spot: they care little about hygiene, they may stink of alcohol or have visible needle tracts on their skin, the malnutrition from each time they chose drugs over food is readily visible, and they have a desperate look in their eyes. The majority of drug addicts look like everyone else, these are the "**part-timers**" who are able to "keep it together" enough to stay at their current place on the socioeconomic ladder and maintain their membership in whatever group they belong to. Some part-timers keep their addictions secret from everyone they know, some only hang around with drug abusers and never think of not using as an option, some have admitted that they are addicted and are trying to live with their "disease" as comfortably as possible, some are trying to fight the disease with the help of friends and family.

There are 20,000 career addicts in the city and 56,500 part-time addicts. Altogether that's more than a third of the city population that is addicted to some drug, whether they are willing to admit it or not.

Public Perception- The majority of addicts do not live on the streets, they keep their lives together. However, they are not so visible, so when people think of or talk of "addicts" they typically mean the career addicts people see on the streets every day. Addicts are considered by many to be the lowest form of human life in the city. Even homeless schizophrenics who scream day and night at invisible demons take better care of themselves than some addicts do. In the mind of non-addicts, all addicts are desperate, dangerous, immoral and do not fear death. In truth, not every addict fits this stereotype, and those that do only fit it some of the time.

Most people see career addicts as hopeless losers. This is incorrect. They are very skilled at getting drugs, using drugs and operating while under the influence of drugs, it's everything else in their lives that they are bad at.

Good and Bad Addicts- The biggest difference between addicts is one of psychology: some people handle addiction better than others. Some take only as much as they need to keep withdrawals away, they are careful and sensible and always choose to get high after they have done their most important duties of the day. Other addicts use far more drugs and at inappropriate times. When they have problems, they deal with those problems by doing drugs, which only makes the problems worse. Sometimes they get passively suicidal: too scared to actually hurt themselves, but too scared of life to imagine it going on much longer. They take dangerous amounts of drugs and do dangerous things. Most addicts fall somewhere in the middle: they keep a handle on their addiction most of the time, but occasionally lose control (especially when there is extraordinary stress in their lives).

Hustling- Among career addicts, "hustling" means doing anything they can think of to get money. Generally, addicts get all their physical necessities (food, clothing, toiletries) by standing in lines at shelters and by searching through dumpsters. Addicts need money for buying drugs, and as soon as they get any money at all it quickly goes toward drugs. The average career addict spends about 14 hours a day, earning fifty cents an hour, hustling.

Hustling is not purely the domain of homeless addicts. Homeless crazies, non-addict street people and even wells hustle when they need cash and can't think of any other way to get it.

Hustling can include the following:

    Canning: Finding recyclables in the trash and turning them in to one of many recycling centers across the city. Recyclables are usually kept in large plastic trash bags.

    Begging: Going to places where a lot of people pass by, usually with a sign or a well practiced phrase.

    Salvaging: Finding usable goods others have thrown out and selling or trading them. Addicts might even go to homeless shelters to get food, toiletries and medicines, which they turn around and sell.

    Working: Doing odd jobs, usually hard labor, for a few cents worth of change. Superintendents usually get help with garbage bags for only a few quarters.

    Theft: Addicts usually steal from intoxicated fellow addicts. They may shoplift, but are typically not very good at it. They may get together in small groups to ambush and rob non-addicts.

    Sex: Providing sexual favors in exchange for money or drugs.

Lackeys- A lucky minority of addicts become servants to pushers (and even kings). The pusher gives the addict drugs, a little money for food and clothes, and sometimes even a place to stay. In exchange, the addict is on call 24 hours a day to run errands. Most lackeys realize how lucky they are and are very loyal and protective of their pusher. For the pusher this is a very good deal: a full time servant for cash and drugs that cost the pusher about $200 a month. The more successful a pusher is, the more lackeys. Some pushers have addict lackeys that do all their pushing for them, the pusher just manages the money. Despite the mutual benefit of this relationship, most pusher-lackey relationships eventually go sour: pushers are violent and irresponsible, addicts are undependable and prone to betrayal in desperate moments.

Street Drugs

In Brief- Millions are spent on legal and illegal drugs. Drugs quite harmful to the addicts and to society.

Alcohol: most abused drug in city with wide range of addicts who are better off than other addicts.

Opiates: Many abuse prescription pain killers.

Amphetamines: Popular stimulants, losing abusers to God Killer.

God Killer: Most abused illegal drug, used by many young thugs, causes megalomania, feelings of invulnerability, sometimes bloody and tragic rampages.

Chomper: 1st drug created by Drug Lords, now few addicts (ODs and more addictive drugs). Some OD victims survived inability to feel pleasure by becoming the Hungry.

Mauler: Created by Drug Lords, causes brain damage, addicts eventually become cannibalistic animals.

Trace: For "special" addicts the Drug Lords want to keep track of.

Maxin: Not a recreational drug, Maxin is very addictive because it is a powerful smart drug and without it addicts feel stupid.

Escape: Not designed as a street drug, escape is very psychologically addictive. It suppresses all feelings.

Slave: The newest drug from the drug lords and the most addictive yet.

Every day in the city, more than $700,000 is spent on alcohol and addictive street drugs. More than 21 million per month goes in to the pockets of corporations, small business owners, black market traders and the Drug Lords.

Alcohol- Alcohol has, perhaps, the widest range of addicts. There are young and successful Indies who are secretly addicted to alcohol and keep a hip flask of brandy in their briefcases. There are also homeless winos who spend every bit of spare change they can scrape together to buy bottles of fortified wine. Most alcoholics do not exclusively use alcohol, it is simply their drug of choice. More than half of winos will occasionally use god killer, amphetamines, opiates and other drugs when they can get a hold of them. Pushers often wish to force winos to become addicted to their super-addictive drugs. Pushers may force winos to use via threats of force, or they may actually hold down and inject a wino. The wino's best defense is to be indistinguishable from other addicts.

Drug	Method of Intake	Major Effects	Long Term Effects	Withdrawal	OD	Num. Of Abusers	Cost/Day to prevent withdrawal	Created
Alcohol	drink	anxiolytic, pleasant buzz, clumsiness	brain and liver damage	delirium tremens	vomiting, coma, convulsions	5,000 career 20,000 part-time	$5	Prehistory
Opiates	swallow pills shoot-up	sedation, anxiolytic, pain relief, pleasure	poor immune system	cramps, insomnia, flu-like symptoms, diarrhea	heart attack, fluid in lungs, inability to breathe	2,000 career 7,000 part-time	$8	Prehistory
Amphetamines	swallow pills	excitement, pleasure	malnutrition, paranoia, ulcers	depression, anxiety, shaking, insomnia	difficulty breathing, irregular heartbeat coma, spasms	1,500 career, 5,000 part-time	$7	1932
God Killer	smoke	excitement, megalomania	emphysema, cancer, brain damage	anxiety, panic attacks.	psychosis, heart attack	3,000 career, 10,000 part-time	$10	2046
Chomper	shoot-up	mood swings, anxiolytic	hair loss, liver damage, anemia	shortness of breath, panic attacks, vertigo, headache	endocrine collapse	1,000 career, 1,000 part-time	$7	2076
Maxin	swallow pills	irritability, excitation, increased intelligence	weakened bones	feel stupid	heart attack, stroke	500 career 2,000 part-time	$20	2076
Mauler	paper under tongue	narrowing of attention, pleasure, excitement	brain damage ("animal state")	burning, itching sensation on skin	loss of blood pressure, hypothermia	2,500 career, 1,000 part-time	$7	2077
Trace	shoot-up	sedation, pleasure	poor immune system, arthritis	migraine headache, poor hearing, poor vision	paralysis, inability to breathe	500 career, 1,000 part-time	$7	2077
Escape	smoke	emotional detachment	loss of personality, insomnia, poor vision	none	catatonia, coughing blood	1,000 career, 7,500 part-time	$20	2078
Slave	smoke	anxiolytic, psychedelic, "mellow excitement"	weight loss, pale skin, liver damage	"the uglies", loss of willpower	diarrhea, vomiting, brain swelling	3,000 career, 2,000 part-time	$8	2078

Although they try to stay camouflaged in the background, winos are the best-off of any of the career addicts. Alcohol is cheap, so addicts spend less time hustling and more time taking care of personal needs, including social needs. Winos are the most likely of the addicts to form close friendships or small groups, and these social bonds are a source of power on the streets. Because they have more time to relax and look at their surroundings, they tend to be more aware of that's going on around them than other addicts. People who need informants on the streets often hire winos. Alcohol is legal, and so is less dangerous to buy and use. Alcohol does have debilitating long term effects (severe liver damage and brain damage leading to severe memory problems) but these effects happen more slowly (take decades rather than years). Alcohol even provides some nutrition, so winos are not as skinny as some other addicts.

Alcohol is also less addictive than most of the modern street drugs. Most winos will "go straight" (detoxify or stop using) several times and may stay straight for several months before relapsing back in to alcoholism. When they do drink, though, winos don't just drink to stave off withdrawals. They drink because they suffer from chronic pain, because they suffer from anxiety over the constant uncertainty of life on the streets, because they suffer from painful self-esteem problems and because life on the streets can be very boring.

Alcoholics have a number of choices for alcohol. Fortified wine, sold in liquor stores, provides the most alcohol per cent of any legal alcoholic beverage. Because it can be obtained legally, the majority of shut-ins who are addicted to some drug are addicted to alcohol. Young people working part-time jobs delivering groceries to shut-ins often deliver dozens of bottles of liquor in a day. Pushers

and black market traders sometimes try to compete with liquor stores by selling moonshine. Winos try to avoid this liquor because it can be dangerous if improperly prepared and it is sometimes doped with other drugs. Some winos make their own alcohol, known generally as pruno, out of yeast and fruit. Most pruno is brewed in a tin can sitting next to a hot water pipe and tastes awful. If an alcoholic can not buy alcohol in a store (e.g. because the liquor stores are closed due to a riot) the alcoholic may buy (or shoplift) mouthwash that contains alcohol and combine it with fruit juice to make it palatable.

Even though they are the best off of the addicts, few non-addicts envy winos. People beat, rob and rape winos, thinking that the winos will not try to defend themselves and have no one willing to revenge them. Most winos are eligible for welfare but their lives are too unstable for them to go through the necessary paperwork. They are chronically poor, don't eat well, can't stay clean, suffer from diseases and infections (they must wait until they are life threatening before they can get treatment at an ER). Some winos don't even seek medical care when they can because they are too drunk to notice an illness. Winos sometimes pass out on cold nights and freeze to death.

"You can't trust anyone out here on the streets, not even your best friend, because drugs erode people's principles. You see, drugs are about constant desperation and need, so no matter what kinds of principles you got, it's only a matter of time 'till your mind is on something else and you forget about one of your principles, let it slip just a bit. Each time you let it slip, the next time's easier, 'till one day you realize there's nothing you won't do for drugs. You think you got a strong will, solid principles? That just means it will happen slower is all."
-Delilah Mungial, Addict

Opiates- Opiate chemicals are derived from a chemical found in high concentrations in the opium poppy, which has been used since pre-history for pain relief.

The addictive power of the "new drugs" has been enough to almost completely destroy the trade ring that once brought large quantities of haroin in to the city. Today, most people who are addicted to opiates are addicted to prescription pain killers. Most addicts either scam or bribe a doctor to get a painkiller prescription, or they buy the same drug off the black market. The Drug Lords would like Opiates eliminated from the city (so their drugs have less competition) but because opiates are brought in to city pharmacies legally, the Drug Lords can't do much.

Opiate addicts are, on average, older than most other addicts and many have legitimate physical conditions that cause pain. The typical addict is a shut-in well, around 40, with some physical disability who scams prescriptions off of doctors. There are about 2,000 career addicts in the city and about 7,000 part timers.

Opiates cause euphoria, sedation, pain relief and relief from anxiety. Withdrawal from opiates has very unpleasant effects, including cramps, insomnia, flu-like symptoms, diarrhea and profuse sweating. Long term addicts suffer from constipation (which can be deadly if not treated) and a poor immune system.

Amphetamines- Since prehistory, the Chinese and Native Americans used herbs that contained the drug ephedrine. In 1932 amphetamine, a drug made from ephedrine, was invented. During WWII, both sides used amphetamines to keep soldiers awake and alert, and heavy amphetamine use was one reason for the success of Hitler's blitzkrieg. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, amphetamines competed with crack cocaine as the top drug of abuse. In the 2040s, God Killer displaced both, and amphetamines only remained abused because they could be stolen or scammed from pharmacies.

Amphetamines are powerful synthetic stimulants. Their effects are a euphoric mania. Effects for long-term abuses include malnutrition, paranoia, ulcers and skin diseases. Withdrawal symptoms for addicts are depression, anxiety, shaking and sleep disorders.

God Killer- In 2046, God killer was introduced on the streets. In many ways it was the first "modern" drug: a cocktail of drugs designed for maximum addictive potential. God killer quickly forced crack cocaine and methamphetamines out of their economic niche. In 2048, god killer replaced crack cocaine as the most abused illegal drug in the US.

God killer is created by organized crime syndicates operating in the Appalachians. Genetically engineered plants (looking like normal weeds) growing on mountainsides are harvested and turned in to god killer in little labs built in tiny wood shacks. The rich and powerful "mountain gangs" that create and sell god killer have their roots in the biker gangs of the early 21st century and may have Freedom Army war criminals in their ranks.

Although the drugs created by the Drug Lords have been gaining steadily in popularity, God killer is still the most abused illegal drug in the city and provides most of the Drug Lords' income. The "typical" addict is a young male well, who uses god killer to feel powerful and commits crimes under the influence of god killer.

God killer is a powerful stimulant, it also reduces pain and anxiety. It increases self-esteem, making users feel powerful, and causes delusions of grandeur and invulnerability. The drug gained its name because some addicts, while under the influence, think they are powerful enough to take on whatever god(s) they believe in.

Long term god killer use causes emphysema, increased risk of cancer, and brain damage (leading to mental retardation).

God killer addicts are famous for doing stupid things that hurt others and themselves. Any dosage of god killer increases the chance that a user will do something stupid. God killer users think they have infinite power. A god killer user, for example, may break his daughter's neck, expecting to be able to resurrect her by force of will. A god killer addict may jump out of a window expecting to be able to fly, might break a leg and get a severe concussion, but will be unable to believe that he or she failed and will hobble off (not noticing the pain) to go do something else stupid. The most dangerous thing that can happen to a god killer user (and the people around the user) is a "rampage."

Some rampages are caused by accidental overdose (a person gets a stronger-than-normal batch). Typically, through, a god killer addict starts out meaning to use only a little god killer. The addict uses a little bit, then (feeling on top of the world) decides that moderation is for the weak and smokes every other pellet he or she has. Wanting desperately to not come down, the addict runs off and spends every bit of money on god killer, smoking it all. When that starts to run out, he or she commits some crime to get more. At some point, the abuser decides that he or she is immortal and omnipotent and decides to go around destroying anything that he or she doesn't like. From this point, there are very few ways it can go that doesn't end up with the user dying.

They wander around the city attacking anyone they dislike in any way. They may shout out challenges, and may even demand that god come down to fight. They may seek out old enemies or bullies. They may show up at the houses of ex-lovers, expecting to be taken back. Intimidation doesn't work against rampagers. Appeals to morals or compassion are useless. Pain and injuries are shrugged off. Setbacks do not phase the abuser, since he or she simply doesn't believe in them. Rampagers are stronger and faster. Rampagers do not defend themselves: they focus on hurting their opponents as much as possible. A fight with a rampager is always very messy.

Chomper- The first drug created by the newly incorporated Drug Lords. Only a year after their coming together in to a single entity, the Drug Lords caused a huge shortage of street drugs and flooded the streets with cheap chomper. Chomper was also the first drug so addictive that pushers could hold people down, force them to use it, and make life-long addicts. The fatal flaw of chomper was that it was too easy to overdose on it. When Mauler and Trace were invented, addicts were encouraged to switch to these drugs. Chomper use peaked in 2076, the year it was released, with 7,000 addicts. Now there are only 2,000 addicts (about 1,000 career and 1,000 part-time).

Chomper causes powerful and thrilling mood swings. Anger, depression and happiness are all equally pleasurable while on chomper. Chomper also enhances the pleasurable effects of many other drugs, and is still used by many addicts as a "booster." Chomper gained its name because users tend to clench or grind their teeth. Withdrawal for addicts causes shortness of breath, panic attacks, vertigo and headaches. Long term chomper users suffer from hair loss, liver damage, anemia and their teeth tend to break from clenching and grinding.

Chomper overdoses create a condition called endocrine collapse. The pituitary gland in the brain, which uses hormones to control most of the other glands in the body, suddenly and permanently stops working. Most people who overdose on chomper die. The lucky ones get an implant that take over many (but not all) functions of the pituitary gland. The implant cannot regulate pleasure and causes a total anhedonia (the inability to feel pleasure). Anhedonia typically causes suicide, but a small group of ex-Chomper addicts called the Hungry have devised a way to keep themselves going and are a powerful enemy of the Drug Lords.

Mauler- Introduced by the Drug Lords in 2077, an eagerly needed replacement for Chomper. Mauler is a distant relative of LSD and is manufactured in city labs from "crops" of the ergot fungus. Mauler turned out to have severe long term effects and is currently being phased out by the Drug Lords. There are about 2,500 career addicts and about 1,000 part timers.

Mauler is sold as little scraps of white paper with distinctive symbols on them. Each batch has a different symbol and addicts would refer longingly to "red stars" or with disgust to "clown head." The scraps are put under the tongue. Mauler causes stimulation, pleasure, and a narrowing of attention. Mauler addicts under the influence feel that the focus of their attention is the only thing in the universe. A Mauler addict might spend hours examining the cracks in the wall, oblivious to anything that doesn't actually touch them. Withdrawal from mauler causes a torturous burning/itching sensation on the skin.

About a year after Mauler came out, people began to realize that it had a terrible side effect. Mauler addicts received brain damage. Some people seemed to receive brain damage faster than others, but it was apparent that all mauler addicts would eventually end up the same way. The parts of the brain that were being destroyed were those responsible for language, memory, self-consciousness and logical thought. People working with addicts watched in horror as the minds of mauler addicts slowly turned in to the minds of animals. The mauler addicts were oblivious. By 2079, two years after Mauler was released, people began to see packs of mauler addicts on the streets, communicating with barks and howls and eating human flesh.

For a while, mauler addicts exist in a twilight state: they spend most of the day in an animal-like state of being, yet they occasionally get better for a few hours and they are able to use this time to buy drugs. Even in their most animalistic states they can attack people and will remember to steal cash and valuables. Mauler addicts eventually stop having lucid moments. Unable to buy drugs, most scratch themselves up during painful withdrawals and die from infections. Those that live eventually form in to packs with other addicts.

Today there are about 1000 ex-Mauler addicts living as animals throughout the city. Mauler addict packs tend to go after the weak, intoxicated or injured. They will follow blood trails to find potential prey. If a victim turns out to be able to defend himself or herself, the pack will scatter.

Trace- Trace was introduced in 2077, only a few months after mauler. Trace is a grayish powder that must be cooked in a spoon or bottle cap and injected intravenously. Trace causes intense pleasure and sedation that starts to taper off immediately and slowly dwindles to nothing.

Trace has a special purpose for the Drug Lords. Anyone who the Drug Lords feel they might want to "keep an eye on" is forced to become addicted to trace. An addict with special skills, a potential enemy or someone with special knowledge is a candidate for forced addiction to trace. Only certain kings are given trace to sell and those kings give trace to only a few of their pushers. This means that trace addicts only have a few places they can go to get drugs and if the Drug Lords decide they want someone they can find them easily. Trace also makes the skin of users pink and blotchy, making addicts still easier to find.

Trace is made in city drug labs. Trace is synthesized mostly from heroin and tetrodotoxin (a poison found in the puffer fish). Because the Drug Lords must import these ingredients, trace is expensive for the Drug Lords to make, and they make very little profit at the price they sell it at. This is probably another reason that the Drug Lords chose to use it as their "special" drug.

Maxin- Maxin does not fit the mold of the other drugs. Only recently have the Drug Lords realized the potential profit from carrying this drug, before that it was the exclusive providence of black market traders and goods. There are 500 career addicts and 2,000 "part-timers" who might not even realize they are addicts. Maxin is illegal in the US, but is available as a prescription drug in Mexico (where most maxin is smuggled in from). Maxin comes in a small inhaler.

Maxin is the most powerful smart drug created to date. Maxin is also the most unpleasant smart drug around. Its effects have been described as "like not sleeping for two days, drinking ten cups of coffee, and getting continuously slapped in the face." Maxin users are excited, irritable, their hearts beat dangerously fast and they get muscle cramps. On the other hand, their speed of thought, powers of memory, creativity, logic and intuition are all increased significantly.

There are no real withdrawal effects except for a desire to crawl in to bed and sleep and the occasional headache. The problem is that after being so much smarter, Maxin users feel incredibly stupid. People feel that their thoughts are slow, their memories are poor, every intellectual task is so hard that it is painful. They are not any stupider than they were before, they just feel that way in comparison. This withdrawal doesn't go away easily: for years after an addict quits he or she may report feeling stupid.

Maxin is only addictive to people with a certain type of personality. People who don't mind being stupid won't become addicted to Maxin. People who are likely to become addicted are people who are goal oriented, spartan, utilitarian, overachievers (the type of people least likely to become addicted to other drugs). The typical Maxin user is an Indie gang member who is a highly skilled psychic, hacker, technician or medic.

The bones of long term Maxin addicts lose calcium and become very weak. Those who have been using Maxin since it hit the streets in 2076 can be killed by a simple fall.

Escape- Like Maxin, Escape was never meant to be a drug of abuse. The FDA recently made this drug illegal after many psychiatrists and GPs got their patients addicted to this drug. Escape was the "surprise" drug of the 2070's: no one expected it to addict so many people and for those addictions to be so resistant to treatment. After becoming illegal, it quickly became a very popular street drug. It currently has 1,000 career addicts and 7,500 part-time addicts. At $20 a dose, escape is usually a "rich person's drug and addicts living on the streets with no source of income usually turn to other drugs instead of escape.

Escape can be taken as pills, but hardcore addicts prefer to sprinkle powdered escape on tobacco or some other smokeable herb and smoke the mixture.

More than any other drug, escape shows the power of psychological addiction. Escape has no withdrawal symptoms, yet it is highly addictive. Escape is a dissociative: it removes people from their emotions. It was originally created to help people deal with traumas, to help ease them in to feeling the terrible emotions. Armies throughout the globe have found that escape is very good for eliminating post-traumatic stress disorder until the soldiers can return to relative safety.

While on escape, everything feels like it is happening to somebody else. Users are still in control of their bodies and still retain enough feelings of self-preservation to stay out of danger and feed themselves. In fact, escape users typically engage in all their normal habits, the habits just don't mean anything to them. Acting, not acting, it's all the same to the escape user. Fortunately, escape blocks feelings of boredom as well. The escape user doesn't even care that much about getting more drugs, until the drugs start to wear off. Then, all the feelings the person was trying to escape start to come back, as well as a new feeling: fear and self-loathing about being an addict.

Long-term escape addicts usually become shut-ins on welfare. They stay in all day, nothing motivating them to go outside. Desires and opinions slowly fade away from disuse until the person really has no personality at all. The ability to sleep is also damaged and the person slowly goes blind.

Slave- In 2078, only two years ago, slave first hit the streets. Pushers sold it cheap, giving it to God Killer addicts who could not afford to buy God Killer. Slave proved to be much more addictive than God Killer. Only 5,000 in the city are currently addicted to Slave (3,000 career, 2,000 part-time), yet growing quickly.

Slave comes in tiny bluish-white pellets that can be smoked with a god killer pipe. The effects of taking the drug are good but are also "nothing special." Other drugs provide a more pleasurable experience. Slave reduces anxiety and pain, it creates a paradoxical "mellow excitement" where the user feels excited and giddy but doesn't want to do anything, and it has mild psychedelic effects.

Slave is said to have the worst withdrawal of any drug. Slave withdrawal is known as "the uglies" by addicts. During withdrawal, every single thing the addict experiences or imagines seems unbearably ugly and disgusting. Even the idea of being clean, of defeating the drug addiction and never having to face the uglies again, seems like a terrible and disgusting idea. The uglies do not go away quickly, they can last for weeks or even up to a month in hard core addicts.

Although slave has only been around for two years, long-term-effects have started to appear. Those who work with addicts predict that Slave users will die within a few decades from damage to the liver and digestive system.

Drug Lords

In Brief- Drugs sold by a mysterious, ruthless, monopolistic, efficient organization. Small, violent gangs sell drugs (sometimes forcefully) on proscribed turf. Some pushers keep their turf orderly and peaceful. Other pushers transgress in to other turf and wage war against each other (despite possible punishment). Kings distribute to pushers from home fortresses. Kings are controlled by Lords, who are secretive, enforce a strict law (don't touch Drug Lord employees, don't interfere of compete with drug sales) using "daggers" (elite teams of trained killers with black motorcycles). Drugs manufactured in the city by production teams.

Pusher Gangs- Pusher gangs are the foot soldiers of the Drug Lords. The average pusher gang is made up of five teenage males armed with knives, clubs and one pistol. They are the children of wells, but are not old enough (or don't have their lives together enough) to be on welfare. They use drugs themselves (typically god-killer or alcohol) yet are not "career" addicts. They have a history of crime, especially theft and assault. They make about $2,000 a month each, but spend their money quickly. The members of the gang grew up on the streets, ambitionless young men, hanging together and using their numbers to intimidate others. They did minor crimes to gain money and used money to buy weapons. At some point they felt they had made a name for themselves and they petitioned the local king (and gave a small bribe) for a recently vacated piece of pusher turf.

Pusher gangs vary from this standard template wildly. Some gangs have only one member, others have twenty. Some pushers are sadistic sociopaths, others are almost Goods and know their addicts by name. Some are adolescents, some are in their forties. Some pushers make as little as $250 a month each, others make up to $10,000 a month.

Most pusher gangs forcibly addict people to their drugs. Some grab anyone walking past who appears vulnerable. A few will go so far as to break in to the apartments of shut-ins to forcefully addict them. The Drug Lords discourage this extreme behavior for fear that it will attract the attention of the corporate news media and citizens' groups .

Most pusher gangs operate by a code of revenge much like that of gang members. They hunt down and kill anyone who has messed with them. Most pusher gangs understand only military force, and they feel free to mess with anyone they think they can beat. They may kill someone for something as small as giving them a dirty look. The pusher gangs typically don't mess with large gangs or street families.

At first, pusher gangs appear completely independent. They purchase drugs from their local king and sell it for as much as they want (usually a 100% markup), they can even sell to resellers. When the Drug Lords have an enemy, the pusher gangs are offered a reward for the enemy's head. Despite this apparent freedom, a lot of what pusher gangs do is controlled by the drug lords. The pusher gangs must meet a weekly quota, they are assigned a specific area they are allowed to sell in, and they aren't allowed to fight with each other.

Most pusher gangs don't have any real ambitions. Most are living for their next hit of God Killer. The few ambitious pushers hope to someday make a bid to become a king.

Lords- Even before the consolidation of the Drug Lords (in 2075), the lords were very secretive. They had reason to be: they were the wealthiest and most powerful drug traders in the city, they dealt with international drug cartels and they sold to the city's most powerful street gangs. They were also at constant war with each other and were not afraid to assassinate each other.

Little is known about the events of 2075. Some lords were executed, the rest joined together in to a single entity that worked with uncharacteristic efficiency. Every move by the Drug Lords, since 2075, has been made with a logical intelligence that amazes even the Math Addicts. Within a year, the lords had destroyed every major enemy, had created a vertical monopoly over drugs in the city, and were working on freeing themselves from dependence on the drug cartels. They created new drugs that were much more efficient and could be manufactured from sources found in the city (as opposed to Heroin and God Killer, which came from Asia and the Appalachians).

Nobody could have predicted the effect on the city of the destruction of the old drug-selling gangs. By taking drugs away from the gangs, the Drug Lords inadvertently opened gang membership up to a new type of person. These new gangs (including the Night Shift) are capable of standing up to the Drug Lords and willing to do so. These new gangs are the only major setback the Drug Lords have faced since their consolidation.

No one knows exactly who all the lords are, or even how many there are, but anecdotal evidence shows that there are about 7 of them and they have divided the city in to equal parts. Each lord has a well equipped strike team ("daggers") and a number of subordinate managers. Unlike the kings, whose bases of operation are public knowledge, enemies of the Drug Lords have been unable to figure out where the Lords operate from. When lords appear on the city streets, which is rare, they usually appear in armored cars with a multitude of bodyguards armed with machine guns.

Employment

Legal

In Brief- Legal jobs plentiful for those who want them, but not all pay well or are safe.

To obtain legal employment in the US, a person must have proof of citizenship or a work visa. All wells and indies, and some street people, meet these criteria. There aren't enough jobs for everyone in the city, but there are typically enough jobs for everyone who wants one to get one.

Minimum Wage- The majority of available jobs are part-time, minimum wage jobs in the service industry. Many young people, including many gang members, make a couple of extra hundred a month (on top of public assistance) at a part-time job. The most common minimum wage jobs for teenagers in the city are: fast food, store clerk, janitor, grocery delivery and hospice assistant.

Security- Able bodied young people can make more money, if they don't mind a little extra danger. There are hundreds of part and full-time jobs available as security guards. Unfortunately, since security guards often have run-ins with gang members, most gang members cannot become security guards. Besides all the stores, offices and high-class apartment buildings that need full-time guarding, many shut-ins subscribe to pay-per-month services or pay-per-use for services of security companies. Many VR addicts have security alarms that will automatically summon security guards. It is not an uncommon sight to see a car with two young security guards racing to a call.

Skilled- People with actual skills can usually find a good-paying part-time job, usually one they can perform with a computer and an internet connection. With the low cost of living in the city, people can survive quite comfortably on a part-time job. Many Indie gang members have jobs like this. The most common skilled part-time jobs among young people in the city: tech support, network installer, chef, bartender and office assistant.

Fighting For Money

There are a few places in the city where a good fighter can make a few bucks. Most good fighters, however, know that every fight is dangerous and won't risk it.

Alley Fights: Most fight betting is started by homeless professional gamblers. Two people are arguing and appear ready to fight, people stop to see what is going to happen, and a gambler collects bets. In most cases it is a setup: the fight is fixed and the fighters and gambler will each take a cut.

Warehouse Fights: Some gamblers and traders hold larger indoor fights. The audience must pay a small cover to get in (they usually also bet money once inside). Some fight promoters try to boost the audience by doing something exotic (e.g. fighting with saws). The fighters in these cases are typically practiced martial artists who make a circuit of major inner cities. They may appear injured (or may even appear to die) but they are seldom badly injured. The chances of some random person off the street beating these fighters at their own game is very small.

Death Fights- Even rarer, some people in the city will stage fights-to-the-death. These are small operations, with few attendees. Often the people who stage the fights are the same people who make illegal pornography. They will record the fights and sell the recordings on the black market. Fighting is done with bare knuckles, or with small hand weapons (nothing that will kill too quickly). The fighters are typically career addicts who desperately need the money. The fight promoters usually give the fighters free God Killer so the fighters will fight without fear of death. Winners are paid between $200 and $750.

Hunters- Some hunters pay people to be their prey. Few hunters care for fair fights, and people are more or less paid to run away and try to survive being hunted.

Red Light District- Some of the bars in the red light district feature occasional catfighting or sexual wrestling to attract portions of the fetish crowd. It is mostly sex workers who do this but anyone could walk in off the street and apply for the job. The fighters are usually not paid any extra for winning, in fact some may be paid extra to losae and take a good beating.

Child Boxing- One disturbing sport, brought to the US by Southeast Asian immigrants, pits children against each other in bare knuckle boxing and kickboxing matches. The Orphans have only recently heard of this and have declared that they will kill anyone who forces or coerces children in to engaging in this practice.

Illegal

In Brief- People who can't get legal jobs can work below board or as criminals.

Illegal jobs are in much greater demand and are much harder to get. There are a lot of people in the city who can't get a legitimate job and desperately want the extra income that a job will give. Some illegal jobs pay well, but the majority pay less than minimum wage.

Below Board- These are a lot like the jobs that wells engage in, but the employees are paid "under-the-table." The employees don't need to show any identification, and nobody pays any income taxes. Almost every small-business owner in the city hires the occasional below-board employee with little fear of getting caught. The most common below-board part-time jobs in the city: assistant to a black market trader, maid, exotic dancer and light manufacturing.

Criminal- This is where people are paid to do something that is completely illegal. See the section on criminals for more information. The most common criminal positions in the city are: pusher, prostitute, mercenary and runner.

Public Assistance

In Brief- Most people don't work, get money by the government, but even this is not easy.

The majority of people in the city do not work at any kind of job whatsoever, they receive public assistance from the government. The funds for this public assistance comes from the AI Tax. Getting and staying on public assistance is not easy. It requires being able to, month after month, prove that one is still eligible for assistance. One missed phone-appointment with a social worker can mean being cut from the rolls.

The major three categories of public assistance in the city are:

Disability: For people who can prove that they have a disability (and can re-prove it every few years).

Unemployment: For people who recently had a job and lost it and can prove they are seeking a job. Pays slightly more than welfare. Only lasts a limited period of time.

Welfare: The most common type of public assistance. To get on it, a person must be an adult, a citizen, and prove that he or she has no means of income and no property that could be sold in lieu of income.

Environment & Ecology

Pollution

In Brief- Factories in the city create much pollution, it is dangerous but usually blown out to sea.

Corporations have used lobbyists to make sure that the city was zoned for high-pollution industry. The reason is that the corporations want to make money by running high-pollution factories, but they don't want them in the corporate living centers where corporate employees might suffer from health problems. So, in the corporate living centers, corporate employees work at low-danger and low-pollution factories, while in the city, 'workers' (who enjoy none of the benefits of corporate membership) work dangerous jobs in factories that spew huge columns of pollution in to the sky above the city.

Coastal winds usually scatter the pollution, taking most of it out to sea (where it pollutes the oceans). Enough of the pollution stays in the city, especially on days when the wind is relatively still, to cause health problems for many thousands of people in the city. Rates of asthma and cancer are higher in the city than in surrounding areas. An accident, a fire or a broken pollution scrubber could mean that noxious smoke and gasses can be expelled from the smokestacks. Such accidents have, in recent years, killed hundreds and put thousands in the hospital. Some have been permanently disabled with scar tissue in their lungs or neurological damage.

When the pollution builds to dangerously high levels, the cloud forms (see below). Most people who expect to be out on the streets during these days own some sort of gas mask or improvise one.

Weather

In Brief- The weather is wildly unstable, with temperature extremes and massive rainstorms, windstorms and blizzards.

The greenhouse effect has caused a partial melting of the polar ice caps, which has caused rising ocean levels, which has changed weather patterns worldwide. In general terms, the earth has become a warmer place by about seven degrees. This is not an absolute, however. The weather has become very wild and unstable.

The modern era is one of super-storms. Superstorms last for weeks, even months, crossing oceans and sometimes almost circling the globe. Most superstorms that hit the city come from the sea and bring huge amounts of water and heavy winds. Fourteen hurricanes have hit the city in the last two decades. During winter, superstorms can travel down over Canada and create blizzards capable of choking the streets with snow and winds that can freeze a person in minutes. At any time of year, strong winds tossing trash and knocking over children are common.

Wildlife

In Brief- Wildlife returning to city, including pigeons, stray cats and dogs and other small animals. 10 million rats cause health problem and bite the defenseless.

Since the massive exodus from the city in the early 2060s, nature has, bit by bit, begun to return to the city. Weeds grow in unrepaired cracks in streets up and down the city, and trees are even growing out of some of the larger cracks in sidewalks.

About 10 million rats inhabit the city. These rats were brought to New York in the 1700s from Norway, on sailing ships. Much bigger than native rats, they weigh about a pound each and can grow to be up to 18 inches long. Through natural selection, these rats have become immune to most

poisons they have been introduced to over the last few centuries. Rats have also developed an urban wit: they will watch their fellow rats going in to new situations and are smart enough to avoid anything that killed a fellow. Rats have been known to bite humans who are sick, intoxicated, wounded or otherwise helpless. Their teeth can gnaw through most barriers and they can decimate food supplies in a single night. Rats also carry diseases. Rats once carried the bubonic plague, now they carry rabies and strains of different plagues.

Another immigrant to the city is pigeons. Pigeons lived on cliffs in Europe and came to America (along with sparrows) in the grain holds of ships. Like rats, pigeons are omnivores and reproduce quickly. They nest on the ledges of buildings, creating terrible messes. Their dropping are acidic enough that they have caused metal cables on city bridges to snap.

There are thousands of stray cats and dogs living in the city. The stray dogs have reverted to living and hunting in packs, like wolves. Stray dogs can attack children and may attack adults when hungry. Dogs can contract rabies, which makes them irrational and dangerous.

Other city wildlife that may be seen on the streets are squirrels, raccoons, bats, blue jays, robins and sparrows. Red-tail hawks and falcons make their nests on the top of tall buildings and hunt street wildlife.

The city also has quite a lot of insect life. The most insidious are cockroaches.

The Hole

In Brief- Largest and most wild park in the city, has many animals and plants (including coyotes and deer), all under the stewardship of the Keepers.

The city was once known for its parks. Those that weren't paved over in the 2040s are now overgrown with weeds and filled with trash. These parks have quite a few animals living in them. The largest and most impressive park in the city was and is Central Park, known in city slang as "the hole". Central Park takes up 843 acres, representing more than 10% of the total acreage of the city.

Now, the park is choked with thick underbrush and trees (along with the bombed-out ruins of Freedom Army buildings). Many types of trees, grasses and bushes grow in the hole, some native to New York and others imported from all around the world. Wildlife, includes owls, warblers, blue jays, robins, sparrows, wild turkeys, rats, mice, raccoons, stray cats and dogs, bats and squirrels. There are fish, turtles and bullfrogs in the park's human-made ponds. There have been a small population of coyotes living in the park since the end of the 20th century. There is even a small population of white-tailed deer in the park. Nobody knows whether they were introduced in to the park by hunters, or whether they traveled to the park via bridges before the security gates were built.

The Keepers, the small street family who live in the park, eat all of the animals that live there (and many types of plant life). The Keepers are careful not to hunt any species to the point where they are close to extinction.

Gangs

In Brief- Drawn together for self-protection, range from anarchies to dictatorships, protect themselves with a code of revenge, members have inter-gang friendships, gang members go on "missions" which can be very useful.

One third of people on the streets (or more, if you count the Drug Lords) are in a group that could be considered a gang. This is the highest percentage in city history, and city culture is very much influenced by gang culture. Not all of those people consider themselves to be gang members (see text box) but most would be willing to admit that they are forced to act like a gang. In the city, if a group of people seems like a gang then they are treated like a gang, no matter what they say.

It works like this: If employees of the city's Satellite Repair Center all wear similar clothing, all have similar interests and hang out together in their off-hours, then people will assume they are a gang. If they assume that the Sat Jumpers are a gang, then when one Sat Jumper does something wrong, all the Sat Jumpers are targeted for vengeance. Sooner of later, the Sat Jumpers start thinking "if we're going have all the disadvantages of being a gang, we might as well have some of the benefits" and they start seeking revenge for crimes committed against them.

Structure

In Brief- "Gangs" vary from consensus-rule anarchies, to dictatorships with strict rules, to extended families.

Anarchies- Some gangs have no authorities; they are simply a group of people who choose to hang around together. When someone does something the group doesn't like, there is no official punishment, yet the person may be shunned or even attacked by individual group members. This is the city's most numerous type of gang. Examples: Animalists, Arcadians, Boarders, Freaks, Hummingbirds, Mem Junkies, Omniscients, Sexologists, Technophiles.

Elderships- Some groups have a class of "elders" who have been in the group longer, are more powerful and more knowledgeable, and can command the loyalty and obedience of younger members. The elders have complex relationships with each other, but typically work together for the common good. When decisions need to be made (e.g. whether or not to go to war) the elders decide as a group. Examples: Bleeders, Humankalorie, Immortals, Skin Borgs.

Leaderships- These groups typically have one leader, usually the person who created the group in the first place. The leader makes gang decisions and most members follow without question. Some leaders rule by pure persuasive power, others use violence to enforce their authority. Examples: Dragons, Hungry, Purists, Roofers.

Families- These are extended families of street people. They are made up of tens or hundreds of street families that are mostly related by blood or marriage. On the surface, these families seem to follow the same rules as gangs: they protect each other, seek revenge for crimes and fight in wars. Behind the scenes, things are very different. Most people in a typical gang have the same age, interests, skills and duties. In a street family, on the other hand, there is everything from small children to bed-ridden seniors, each with a way they contribute to the family. The families typically resemble elderships: the elders of each family communicate with each other and lead the family as a whole. Examples: Black Meds, Crackers, Drakes, Insomniacs, Keepers, Water Rats.

Lifestyle

Even in the most strictly regimented gangs, gang members spend the majority of time dong whatever they want. They hang out on street corners, in bars, in open-air restaurants, in apartments. They keep an eye out for strangers in their turf. They make friends, make enemies, have conversations, flirt, listen to music, read books, tell stories, perform experiments, eat snacks, smoke and drink and some do harder drugs.

Revenge- Revenge separates a gang from a non-gang. Some see a code of revenge as the only protection and system of justice that they can rely on. Anyone who avoids this duty is thought of as a freeloader or thief.

Being in a gang is, paradoxically, both a means to avoid violent confrontation and also a duty to engage in violence. There are no guidelines regarding how much revenge is necessary. What one gang may see as reasonable and just revenge may be seen by another gang as cold-blooded murder, and prompt more revenge and more violence.

The New Gangs

Where will the new gangs to achieve power in the city come from?

Fallen Cities: As some inner cities are demolished to make way for growing corporate complexes or gated communities, the gangs there may move here, bringing with them their own traditions, alliances and wars.

Immigrant Communities: The city receives a steady flow of immigrants. Some acculturate and join city gangs, street families and other groups, but many do not join other groups. As these immigrant groups grow they will gain more power and membership they will be more attractive to new immigrants.

Kid Gangs: Some street children form gangs for power and mutual protection. The relationships in these gangs may dissolve as the members grow older or they may remain strong. A few kid gangs may end up being adult gangs. In a way, the Orphans were a large and powerful kid gang that grew in to an adult gang.

Corner Gangs: These are small gangs of a few young people who are good friends. They have little power compared to the big street gangs, but they are formed for the same purposes and have much of the same culture. Most corner gangs will dissolve in the next few years, but some will grow in people and power and become more than just corner gangs, especially if they find a niche in the city gang culture.

Split-Offs: As today's gangs become larger, groups from within those gangs develop. The Siders started out as a subgroup of the roofers and eventually split off from the roofers, becoming their sworn enemy. There are several subgroups today that may someday want independence: the bisexuals in the Sexologists, the dioxyl users within the Drakes and the firefighters within the Night Shift.

Sometimes the threat of gang warfare keeps gang members civil to each other. Few gang members want to be known as the one who got their gang in to a war. So, most confrontations between gang members end with threats, insults, fistfights, but not deadly violence.

It is hard to say whether a code of revenge protects gang members from more violence than it creates. One thing is sure: most gang members prefer knowing who is out to get them to having to worry about random street violence.

War

In Brief- War between gangs is common, sometimes a lifestyle, but tends to be low-intensity, causing surprisingly few deaths.

Most shut-ins think that gang warfare is the primary cause of death among gang members. In fact, warfare deaths rank rather low. Wars are fairly rare for most gangs. When battles do happen, some of the gang members are aching to fight and push their way to the front. The battle usually ends before the people at the back even get to see combat. Except in rare cases, battles are not bloodbaths. One gang retreats when a few of its soldiers are wounded. They leave to treat their wounded with the promise to fight another day. Most gangs honor this withdrawal and do not chasing after their enemies.

Many Neos point out that this is exactly how warfare was done in many aboriginal cultures. Many cultures have seen warfare as a means to prove bravery and might, but they loathed loss of life so much that the battle would end as soon as someone was severely wounded.

Some gangs are more war-like than others. Some seem locked in constant battle with an enemy. War may intensify, or it may calm down, but it is always present. Other gangs always seem to be picking a fight somewhere. It may not even be the gang as a whole, it might be one or two irresponsible individuals that constantly get the gangs in to wars. The Skin Borgs, perhaps the most warlike of all the city gangs, are on a mission to wipe out as many gangs as possible and take over their turf. The Skin Borgs have been on this mission since their inception and they are only now facing significant resistance.

Righteous Kill

Gang members typically don't seek revenge for the death of a comrade if it can be proven that the death was "righteous." In other words, if their comrade was clearly in the wrong and the killer was clearly in the right, revenge is not sought.

What defines a righteous kill varies from gang to gang and individual to individual. Even the Drug Lords once failed to seek revenge when a Utopia Child killed a psychotic pusher who was shooting people at random in a subway car.

Often determining whether a kill was righteous descends in to a game of "who started it." Many gang wars have been averted by the killer bravely going to the enemy gang to plead his or her case that a kill was righteous. The burden of proof is, of course, on the killer

Turf Inviolacy Scale

"None": Have no turf/do not believe in turf. Examples: Borders, Hungry.

"Open": Have a turf but willingly welcome any peaceful visitors in to it. Examples: Black Meds, Dragons, Freaks, Hummingbirds, Omniscients, Sexologists, Technophiles.

"Watched": Like to keep an eye on anyone in their turf, may ban groups of people from their turf. Examples: Arcadians, Cornerpunks, Drakes, Insomniacs, Immortals, Math Addicts, Mem Junkies

"Restricted": Members of other gangs only allowed in turf by invitation, non-gang members allowed as long as they aren't disrespectful or suspicious. Examples: Animalists, Bleeders, Humankalorie, Needlepunks, Orphans.

"Forbidden": Special permission and armed guards required for members of other gangs to enter the turf. Only non-gang members who are recognized as residents may enter. Examples: Keepers, Purists, Risen, Roofers, Siders, Skin Borgs, Water Rats.

Major Gangs & Street Families

Street Families

Black Meds

In Brief- Large street family who make their living as unlicensed street-doctors.

Favorable Stereotypes- Creative, quick thinking, compassionate, resourceful, never denying anyone help.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Barbaric, ignorant, unethical, arrogant, afraid to admit ignorance.

Typical Weapon- A scalpel with a Drake poison smudged on it.

Turf- In the Bowery. The Bowery is the most run down part of town with the most abandoned buildings. The few surviving commercial enterprises in the Bowery are cheap residential hotels and liquor stores. The Bowery has the city's highest concentration of homeless people.

Distinguishing Features- Black Meds often wear a red cross on their clothing, usually made from scraps of red cloth. Their clothing is often covered with many old blood-stains. Black Meds can sometimes be recognized by the cleanliness of their hands. The Black Meds wear simple clothing and hairstyles with nothing hanging down that might accidentally get in to a wound.

Crackers

In Brief- Street family whose members are taught from an early age to hack for money.

Favorable Stereotypes- Quick witted, practical, intelligent with many technical skills.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Cruel, arrogant, cynical, braggarts. Vandals and blackmailers.

Typical Weapon- A sharpened screwdriver.

Turf- Crackers live scattered throughout the Bowery.

Distinguishing Features- Crackers look mostly like other street people: they wear scrounged clothing, usually in multiple layers. They tend towards black clothing when they have a choice and many wear sunglasses. On occasion, Crackers dress up as if they are field techs (tool belts, polo-shirts with company logos, fluorescent safety vests) so they can hack in to payphones and network lines with less chance of getting caught.

Drakes

In Brief- Homeless family, makes and sells poisons (including psychic disrupting ash). They ingest and gain immunity to a poison which makes their bodily fluids poisonous.

Favorable Stereotypes- Honest traders if treated well, efficient killers if pushed.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Devious, dangerous, reckless, cowards, unethical assassins.

Typical Weapon- Shards of glass coated with poison. The glass is either held in one's hand, thrown, or launched from a home-made slingshot.

Turf- A small piece of turf in what used to be called the East Village, directly North of the Bowery.

Distinguishing Features- Many Drakes wear wide-brimmed hats. Most wear clothes with long sleeves that hide their hands (this helps them slip poisons in to things without being seen). A few wear clothing with pieces of broken glass glued to the outside of their clothing.

Insomniacs

In Brief- Use a drug which gives psychic power while "burning" away the ability to sleep (leading to numerous psychological problems).

Favorable Stereotypes- Powerful psychics, highly aware, self-sacrificing, awesome self-control.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Psychologically damaged, self-hating, dangerous, intolerant, hate life, bizarre addictions.

Typical Weapon- A wooden club or steel pipe.

Turf- Downtown, just North of the Bowery and at the edge of the Sunken City. Like the Bowery, this part of town has been run-down for some time, the buildings are nearly all abandoned (save a few cheap hotels, welfare apartments, soup kitchens and liquor stores).

Distinguishing Features- Multiple fits of self-mutilation have left most Insomniacs with many scars. The older and more powerful the insomniac, the more scars, and the deeper those scars tend to be. They usually also have tattoos and piercings. Because they hate to be hot, they wear little clothing and what they do wear are things like short sun-dresses, thin tank tops, cut-off shorts, holey slacks and sports bras. Being dirty or oily annoys them so that they bathe more often than any other street people and are therefor remarkably clean.

Keepers

In Brief- Live a hunter-gatherer lifestyle in the wilderness of Central Park, hunting wild animals.

Favorable Stereotypes- Self-sufficient, skilled survivors, protecting a strange and marvelous ecosystem.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Xenophobic, territorial, ignorant and increasingly primitive.

Typical Weapon- Home-made bows and arrows, short spears and large knives.

Turf- The Hole (a.k.a. central park), a rectangle of untamed parkland (with the occasional ruin) sitting in the center of the island. The entire park is surrounded by a barbed wire fence with many faded "caution" and "condemned area" signs.

Distinguishing Features- Keepers dress much like other Street People, wearing a variety of old stained and dirty clothing scavenged from the trash. The Keepers modify their clothing by adding skins, furs and cloths and cords made from plant fibers. They also wear trophies of successful hunts as jewelry: bits of bone, teeth, claws, scales, etc.

Water Rats

In Brief- Scavengers and thieves who use storm drain tunnels for quick escapes and live without fear of retribution in fortresses in the sunken city.

Favorable Stereotypes- Lucky, charming, daring, attractive, athletic, proud but humble.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Immature, irresponsible, thoughtless, arrogant kleptomaniacs.

Typical Weapon- Knives.

Turf- Roosevelt Island, a small sliver of land in the East River. The entire island is now submerged in the East River, although most of the large apartment buildings survive.

Distinguishing Features- Water Rats have the physique of swimmers. Their hair is short or shaved and they seldom wear facial hair or makeup. They often wear homemade wet suits, stitched together out of scavenged materials, and wear mesh backpacks.

Well Gangs

Animalists

In Brief- Use mental programming to experience animal-like consciousness, gain animal speed and instincts.

Favorable Stereotypes- Passionate, willful, fast-reflexes, intense, self-aware, emotionally balanced, down-to-earth.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Primitive, barbaric, thoughtless, violent, oversexed, unpredictable, amoral.

Typical Weapon- Claws, either implanted or built in to gloves, are the most common weapon used by Animalists.

Turf- The Northwest corner of Downtown. Madison Square Garden, in the Northeast corner of their turf, is where Animalists gather to play Animal War.

Distinguishing Features- Animalists wear affectations that remind them of their favorite animal, including patches of (vat-grown) fur, feathers or scales.

Bleeders

**In Brief**- Exert psychic influence on others by tasting samples of peoples' blood.

Favorable Stereotypes- Ambitious, powerful, cautious.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Devious, back-stabbing, Machiavellian extortionists and assassins.

Typical Weapon- Knives and barbed whips (see Special Equipment, below) are the most common weapons among the Bleeders.

Turf- Long thin strip of turf in East Harlem/Upper East Side.

Distinguishing Features- Bleeders wear dark red and black clothing, covering as much of their bodies as possible (long sleeves, turtlenecks). Besides identifying them as Bleeders, this style of clothing also hides Blood stains so that when two Bleeders are fighting, one will not know when the other one is injured and bleeding.
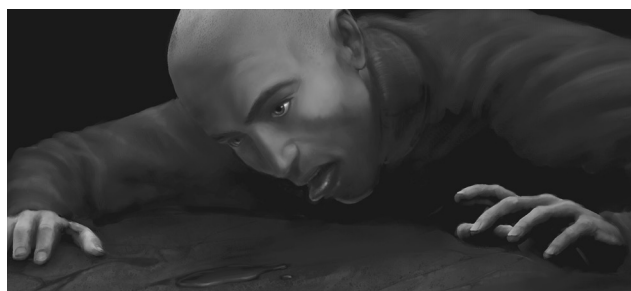
Freaks

In Brief- Members of a chaotic freak show troupe that make money by holding wild carnivals.

**Favorable Stereotypes-** Wild, entertaining, creative, truly odd with incredible willpower.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Immoral, immature con-artists and wanna-be-psychopaths. Sycophants to Habey Cox (a narcissist windbag).

Typical Weapon- Implanted body spikes are the most common weapon used by Freaks.

Turf- In Hell's Kitchen, north of Animalist turf, with the lines shifting as the Freaks and Animalists battle over turf.

Distinguishing Features- While a few Freaks look completely normal, most have changed their appearance with bizarre forms of dress, tattoos and scarification, piercings and implanted spikes and bizarre surgical modification. Those with the most extreme modifications, however, often keep their modifications hidden (only paying customers are allowed to look). "Fetish" clothing (leather straps, chains, corsets, masks, etc.) is also common among Freaks.
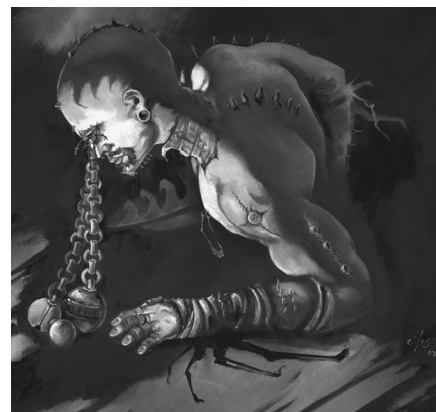
Humankalorie

In Brief- Aficionados of the Kalor (a group in Mexico who have claimed to be of extraterrestrial origin, although they have refused to let themselves be examined by scientists). The Humankalorie study what the Kalor have told others about their language, culture, law and martial arts and the Humankalorie have adopted these as their own.

Favorable Stereotypes- Proud, wise, believe strongly in duty, justice and order, always looking to prove and improve themselves.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Sad wannabes, pretend to be something they aren't, obtuse and inflexible.

Typical Weapon- All Humankalorie carry and use one of the traditional weapons the Kalor use for their trial-by-combat. These are metal weapons, either a pole with a blade on the end, or paired punch-dagger-like weapons.

Turf- In East Harlem, centered on Park Avenue where many stores, restaurants and bars cater to Humankalorie and other people with an interest in things Kalor.

Distinguishing Features- Humankalorie get tattoos under their eyes to simulate the long lower eyelashes of real Kalor. These tattoos are vertical parallel black lines going down to the cheekbone. The Humankalorie also wear Kalor style straps around their necks, upper arms, and thighs. These straps can be of any material, though they are usually black leather, and most contain round holes. Some Humankalorie wear colored contract lenses to simulate the recessive red-iris that some Kalor have.

Hummingbirds

In Brief- Dance-club attendees who take drugs to enhance their metabolism and let them dance harder and faster.

Favorable Stereotypes- Athletic, artistic, passionate, energetic, attractive, life-loving.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Hyperactive, drug-addicted, impulsive, randomly violent, inattentive, sensation seeking, shallow, lookist.

Typical Weapon- Steel toed boots or boot blades. Small knives, especially switchblades, which can be made ready and used even in very tight quarters.

Turf- The area around the large dance clubs (in what used to be warehouses) in Harlem, between 125th and 145th Street.

Distinguishing Features- Hummingbirds wear clothing appropriate for temperatures 10 to 30 degrees higher than the real temperature, with lots of exposed skin. Hair is usually short, both on men and women. Water bottles and candy are often carried. Hummingbirds tend to be skinny and muscular. Hummingbird style is usually a senseless mishmash of goth, gutterpunk, mod and old school gang. Some hummingbirds wear bright colors, mirrored clothing or patches, or flexible LEDs which show psychedelic patterns. Others wear all gray and semi-permanently dye their hair and skin grey.

Hungry

In Brief- Victims of a drug overdose causing failure of endocrine system and permanent anhedonia (inability to feel pleasure). The implant they were given to help them overcome the endocrine failure makes them large and muscular. They have replaced pleasure with an artificially created hunger to seek revenge on the Drug Lords that created them.

Favorable Stereotypes- Strong, determined, well organized, singular in purpose, self-controlled, willful, hard to kill.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Dour, humorless, heartless, obsessed killers, empty shells, automatons driven by habit and artificial desires.

Typical Weapon- The majority of hungry use maces (made out of old construction parts welded together), clubs and heavy chains.

Turf- The Hungry have no set turf. They keep their location hidden and move around a lot. Theirs is a small gang and they like to take over an abandoned building and live together as roommates.

Distinguishing Features- Huge and muscular. Many have old signs of addiction: bad skin, missing teeth, needle tracks. They wear black leather.

Immortals

In Brief- Young students who speed their acquisition of psychic skills by absorbing the memories of powerful psychics. Achieve "immortality" by passing down their memories through generations.

Favorable Stereotypes- Wise, always concerned with the bigger picture, unafraid of death, broadly experienced with many psychic skills.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Living vicariously through others, pretend to be wise, enslaved to hundreds of debts, promises and grudges.

Typical Weapon- The luckiest Immortals have a bone knife made from the bones of a "primogenitor" (someone from their line of psychially-passed memories).

Turf- A small block of turf between the Upper West Side and Harlem.

Distinguishing Features- Some immortals wear cloaks (an affectation of psychics from before the Freedom Wars), others wear normal street clothes. Most wear jewelry made from the bones of their primogenitors.

Math Addicts

In Brief- Use mental programming to become human calculators with incredible powers of prediction, accuracy and analysis in everything from politics to combat.

Favorable Stereotypes- Intelligent, insightful, spiritual, precise, analytical, logical, full of useful info.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Mystical, eccentric, obsessive compulsive, head-in-clouds, intellectual snobs.

Typical Weapon- Crossbows.

Turf- In Harlem, including part of East or Spanish Harlem.

Distinguishing Features- Math Addicts almost always wear a patch, tattoo, broach, etc. with an infinity symbol on it. Many wear light brown/beige clothing.

Mem Junkies

In Brief- Addicts to mental programs that enhance the emotional recall of memories. Mem Junkies use memories as if they were drugs, and often seek new ones, either from their own experiences, or borrowed from others.
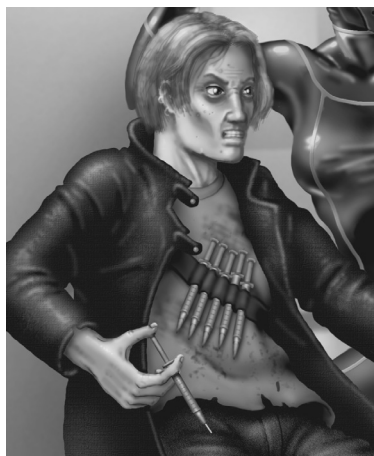
Favorable Stereotypes- Unfortunate addicts, yet wise about memories and emotions.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Damaged, desperate, dangerous addicts; aliens in the real world.

Turf- The apartment buildings surrounding Gramercy Park. The Mem Junkies live communally and have filled their apartment buildings with various traps and hidden passageways from which they can ambush invaders.

Distinguishing Features- Mem Junkies tend to be older than the average gang member (by about a decade). Years spent in dark apartments high on memories have left them thin and pale. Many wear a style that went out of fashion years ago (a sort of military goth look with a lot of olive colored military dress coats with pointy shoulders). Long unkempt hair and beards and sunglasses are common.

Needle Punks

In Brief- Gang of young pharmaceutical artists who experiment on themselves with drug cocktails and have learned to deal with potentially lethal side-effects.

Favorable Stereotypes- Creative, fearless pharmaceutical geniuses with encyclopedic knowledge of drug interactions and effects, who can push their bodies to do almost anything.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Reckless, self-destructive, suicidal junkies and criminals with no respect for health, longevity or nature.

Typical Weapon- A pair of syringes filled with a fast acting poison, one in each hand, is a common weapon for Needle Punks.

Turf- In Greenwich Village, including Washington Square Park (a large park where many mentally ill and drug addicted homeless people live).

Distinguishing Features- Younger Needle Punks can be recognized by rows of pre-filled syringed strapped to their bodies, often color-coded so they can be selected quickly. More senior Needle Punks wear a Pharmosynth, a portable device that can manufacture pharmaceuticals on the fly. Needle Punks are often mistaken for addicts: they have multiple needle marks and often look like they haven't slept or bathed in days.

Night Shift

In Brief- Young cops with gang-attitude. Refuse to become corrupt. Break the rules in order to punish criminals.

Favorable Stereotypes- Brave, honorable, willing to take on evil no matter how powerful it is, with a strong sense of justice.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- A hypocritical, xenophobic, arrogant, self-important lynch mob.

Typical Weapon- Nightsticks, often modified with nails or metal spikes.

Turf- They patrol all over the city, but their base of operations is the police station on 128th Street and 2nd Avenue (the only station that hasn't yet been bombed by the Drug Lords).

Distinguishing Features- Night Shift members wear cheap dark blue uniforms with chrome buttons and yellow "NYPD" lettering, black leather boots, and gold-colored badges in clear plastic envelopes on hips, chests or on a chain around the neck. Night Shift officers also adorn their uniforms with other add-ons, mostly military surplus: cammo jackets and hats, non-issued armor and helmets, web belts, etc.

Orphans

In Brief- Once kids in an orphanage who revolted against abusers, now adults sworn to protect children.

Favorable Stereotypes- Wise, wary, brave, dutiful, at every age they are willing to die to protect those younger.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Paranoid, cultish, homophobic, unreasonably afraid of adults, willing to turn small children in to soldiers.

Typical Weapon- Sharpened railroad spikes, stolen from railroad sites and sharpened on concrete.

Turf- In Harlem, centered around the large city orphanage.

Distinguishing Features- Younger orphans wear the cheap uniforms provided by the state to orphanage inmates: two piece, grey, with a red trim. These uniforms are often ripped, stained, scrawled with graffiti and patched up. Even young adult still have old shirts, threadbare and mostly patches, which they wear as jackets over their normal clothes. All teen and adult Orphans have the end of the little finger from one hand chopped off (as a sign of loyalty to the other Orphans).

Roofers

In Brief- Own the rooftops, which they can travel quickly and leap between fearlessly. At constant war with the Siders.

Favorable Stereotypes- Proud, fearless, party-loving daredevils and expert acrobats.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Arrogant, territorial, selfish, warlike, think that might-makes-right.

Typical Weapon- A sword, paired swords or machete.

Turf- The Roofers consider every rooftop in the city to be their turf. In reality, most rooftops rarely (if ever) have a Roofer on them. Instead, there are "highways" of rooftops that can be easily leapt or that have had makeshift bridges built between them, which allow Roofers to traverse Harlem, the Upper East Side and the Upper West Side.

Distinguishing Features- Roofers like to wear things that will flap in the breeze when they jump. They also wear checkerboard-patterned patches or clothing.

Risen

In Brief- Violent gang with much infighting. Many members faked their own death, many get implants, all are infected with mitochondrial vampirism (a symbiotic disease which increases strength and resistance to blood loss, but at the cost of a vastly increased need to sugars).

Favorable Stereotypes- Hard-to-kill, fearless, lustful, seeking intense experiences and willing to change.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Amoral, violent, remorseless, bloodthirsty criminals and fugitives.

Typical Weapon- Implanted weapons like claws and fangs.

Turf- In Midtown and the Murray Hill district, among many active and abandoned industrial buildings. The Risen meet in the otherwise abandoned St. Bartholomew's church.

Distinguishing Features- Most wear tight black clothing, often with holes from battles and other injuries. Most have low-light vision implants and wear sunglasses even at night.

Siders

In Brief- Split off from Roofers, now at war with them. Expert climbers with high-tech gear who travel on the sides of buildings.

Favorable Stereotypes- Brave, innovative, pioneering, self-reliant, highly-skilled, proud.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Vengeful, myopic, obsessed, impractical, stubborn, violent gang with an inferiority complex.

Typical Weapon- Crossbows (attached to their backs while climbing).

Turf- The Siders consider the sides of all building to be their turf, though they rarely hang out there. They hang out in abandoned rooms on the upper floors of tall buildings. When they move around the city they use a combination of ground travel (including riding the subways), moving around on the sides of buildings and running along the Roofers' rooftop highways.

Distinguishing Features- Clothing with black and white stripes. All carry climbing gear: from the most primitive (ropes, pitons, hammers) to the most complex (gloves and shoes that use secondary nanotech gels to climb walls).

Skin Borgs

In Brief- Warlike, expansionist gang. Wear multiple layers of high-tech armor. Social structure of violence and intimidation.

Favorable Stereotypes- Strong, unashamed, willful, honest, know what they want, don't justify their actions with ideologies.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Violent, brutal, stupid, prejudiced, ignorant, paranoid, small-minded throwbacks and conquerors.

Typical Weapon- Clubs, pipes or armored fists.

Turf- All of the island north of 145th street, including parts of town that were once known as Inwood, Fort George, Washington Heights, Hamilton Heights and parts of Harlem.

Distinguishing Features- The Skin Borgs wear one or more skins: high-tech armors made of materials so thin that they resemble jumpsuits. Some Skin Borgs wear helmets, others wear armored masks (looking much like ski masks) and some let their heads go unprotected. Powerful Skin Borgs wear several layers of armor on top of each other. The outer skin is usually spray-painted black with personal decorations and symbols in brighter colors. Some Skin Borgs wear old leather belts wrapped around waists, biceps and thighs. Many have taken steroids or gotten muscle implants and are physically large.

Indie Gangs

Arcadians

In Brief- Obsessed with playing various types of games against each other. They often take drugs to increase their intelligence and reflexes. They have great knowledge of strategy, quick reflexes and have been known to manipulate events within the city.

Favorable Stereotypes- Brilliant and invaluable consultants, strategists and manipulators.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Obsessed gamblers, heartlessly toy with human lives, think they are smarter and therefore better.

Typical Weapon- Glass vials of acids and toxins thrown at enemies. Because years of game playing have given them "quick hands," they also like to use small knives (like switchblades).

Turf- In the Upper West Side. Arcadians spend a lot of their time hanging around in video arcades filled with a variety of "retro" arcade games.

Distinguishing Features- Black clothing, occasionally accented with fluorescent colors. Most Arcadians wear special gloves to protect their hands from blisters during hours of game play. Similarly, most wear special tinted glasses to protect their eyes from hours of staring in to old-style computer screens.

Boarders

In Brief- Thrill seekers on high-tech slipboards, speeding through the city doing tricks and ignoring boundaries of turf.

Favorable Stereotypes- Fun, easygoing, independent, forgiving, highly skilled, apolitical.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Immature punks, marijuana addicts, vandals, disrespectful, clowns, full of false bravado and delusions of immortality, oblivious to the rest of the city.

Typical Weapon- Boarders usually use their slipboards as weapons in hand-to-hand combat. They may ride a board in to an enemy, they may use a tether attached to an arm or leg to swing the board at an enemy, or they may take the board in to their hands and use it as a club. Often, boards are adorned with spikes and blades to make them better weapons in these situation.

Turf- Boarders do not believe in turf. They can be found all over the city, but they tend to congregate in places that have the best features for boarding. Madison Square Park downtown is a major Boarder hangout when Boarders just want to chill.

Distinguishing Features- Boarders tend to wear baggy clothing, of thick materials, to protect as much as their skin as possible from road burns. Many wear gloves and some wear goggles. Stickers and patches given out as promotional items by board and board-part manufacturers are applied liberally to themselves and their boards. The best distinguishing feature of a Boarder is a tricked out slipboard.

Dragons

In Brief- Believe they are the destructive force of nature (the "dragon" of mythology) incarnate in a human form.

Favorable Stereotypes- Spiritual, wise, creative, intense, powerful, wild, respectful of nature.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Destructive, deluded cultists, under the control of an egomaniacal poet.

Typical Weapon- Bright LED spotlights (used to blind enemies), crowbars, hand-axes, pick-axes, sledgehammers, shields and short swords. In a Dragon war party at least one carries a "lightning staff" (which creates an electrically charged fog with small lightning bolts striking at random within it).

Turf- A long corridor of turf in the East Side/Upper East Side, centered on the home of Sitha Nith, the Dragons' founder. Dragon turf shows the marks of many destructive rampages by Dragons: holes in the sides of buildings, street-lights knocked down, piles of rubbles where there were once houses, old abandoned cars ripped to shreds, etc.

Distinguishing Features- Green-plastic insulation armor that includes a hood, gloves and special shoe inserts (to protect them from lightning). Over that is usually worn some other form of armor, usually with plates made to look like reptile scales. Claws and fangs are a common implants among Dragons.

Omniscients

In Brief- A group of obsessed technology hobbyists who use technology to expand their senses.

Favorable Stereotypes- Thoughtful, insightful, cutting edge techies, always gathering and sharing knowledge.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Fat, lazy, disinterested voyeurs.

Typical Weapon- Thrown or projectile weapons.

Turf- A long block of turf in the East Side/Upper East Side.

Distinguishing Features- Because their senses are so often enhanced, Omniscients are very meticulous and like to wear very comfortable clothing: silks, velvets, felt, etc. The most notable feature on Omniscients is the presence of the external protrusions of sensory implants.
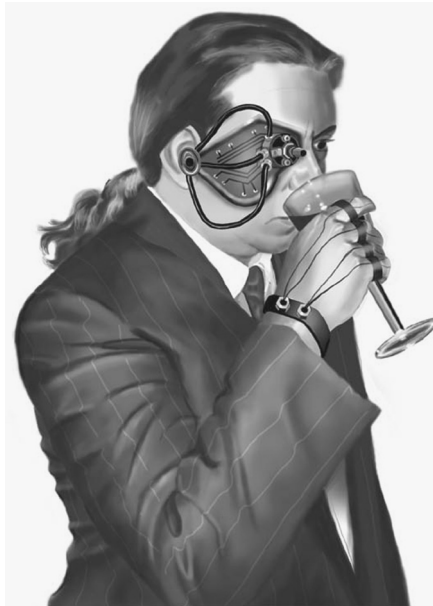
Purists

In Brief- Members of a cult/gang who believe that their physical, mental and spiritual health is dependent on their keeping themselves free from chemical, emotional and psychic pollution.

Favorable Stereotypes- Ambitious, healthy, self-controlled, vice-free, monk-like.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Paranoid, cultish, vengeful, miserable, prejudiced pollution-phobics.

Typical Weapon- Purists like to use staves and long swords, weapons that allow them to hit their opponents while staying out of their reach. Most Purists use shields, especially large bullet-proof plexiglass shields.

Turf- A small square of turf in Harlem, centered on "The Pure Room" a hangout overlooking Broadway that uses clean-room technology to stay as free from pollution as possible.

Distinguishing Features- When they are outside, the Purists always wear shiny-grey biohazard suits with a mask over their face. The suit lets moisture and oxygen in and out but nothing else. The suits are skin tight and Purists wear clothing over their suit when it is cold out.

Sexologists

In Brief- Use sex to create psychic links between partners, often for therapeutic purposes.

Favorable Stereotypes- True altruists with genuine love for every person, fighting for the psychological and spiritual health of city residents.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- A cult of puritanical homophobic busybodies who think there's only one right way to have sex.

Typical Weapon- Most Sexologists find any destruction of the human form to be distasteful. Whenever possible they use non-lethal weapons (pepper sprays, tasers, tranquilizer darts).

Turf- A block of turf on the Upper East side.

Distinguishing Features- Some have psychically-enhanced sexual attractiveness. Sexologists wear clothing which is simple and modest yet flattering to the human form.

Tea Drinkers

In Brief- Aficionados of Soma, a mixture of hallucinogenic herbs used as a sacrament in ancient India, which enhances psychic senses.

Favorable Stereotypes- Insightful, intuitive, psychics, are respectful or the past and have knowledge of the future.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Arrogant, rich kids, buy soma as a status symbol, minds clouded by hallucinations.

Typical Weapon- Most carry metal tea thermoses which make good weapons in a pinch.

Turf- A small block of turf in midtown west, including four "soma bars" where Tea Drinkers buy and imbibe Soma.

Distinguishing Features- Some Tea Drinkers wear hooded trenchcoats (often light-brown with silver buttons) in a nod to the old pre-war tradition of psychics wearing hooded cloaks. Almost all Tea Drinkers carry around large steel thermoses to keep their tea in. Many Tea Drinkers wear the Indian Bollywood style.

Technophiles

In Brief- Small, loose group, obsessed with hands-on tinkering with technology, including much old technology.

Favorable Stereotypes- Smart, funny, altruistic, knowledgeable, intuitive, always looking for a challenge.

Unfavorable Stereotypes- Physically and emotional weak, impractical, obsessive, easily distracted geeks with poor social skills.

Typical Weapon- Hand tools and homemade one-shot pistols.

Turf- Most of SoHo, a part of town with many lofts (once industrial, now residential) where Technophiles have their home studios.

Distinguishing Features- Some Technophiles wear homemade clothing. Clothing often has burns, rips and oil stains from their tinkering. Patches with gear or wrench symbols on them.

Information Technology

Tech Geekdom

People who don't know much about computers assume that there is one continuum of computer knowledge. In fact, there are several areas of knowledge, just as in art or science, and knowledge of one does not necessarily mean knowledge in the others. Tech knowledge can be divided, generally, in to:

Hardware: the physical makeup of machines, what parts will work on what type of machine and how to install them.

Operating System: The program that runs and manages every other program on a computer and controls which people and what programs can access what resources..

Applications: The use, features and differences between large software suites.

Internet: What is available on the net and how to get to it.

Networking: How computers transmit data to each other, and how servers route this data.

Programming: Creating programs and net sites, and how they retrieve and store data in databases.

Data

In Brief- Data is very important and valuable in a computerized age. Can be copied, compressed and easily hidden.

When any riddle that asks what the most expensive, the most desired, the most dangerous commodity per pound is, the answer to the riddle is usually data. In the industrial age, goal, gasoline and electricity were the lifeblood that let the economy operate. In the computerized age, that lifeblood is data. Data can be anything from a cheap pulp novel that keeps a homeless person entertained on a lonely night, to research results from a top secret military research project that is worth billions on the black market and might kill millions if it falls in to the wrong hands.

There are four universals about data:

Data can be **copied.** Any type of data can be copied any number of times without any degradation.

Data can be **compressed.** Any data with any sort of redundancy (including human language) can be made smaller so it can fit on smaller storage media and can be transmitted faster. For a company that deals exclusively with data and the internet, a 5% compression can save the company billions.

Data can be **encrypted**. See Cryptography for more.

Data can be **hidden**. Data can be hidden inside other data such that it will be invisible to the naked eye. Only special programs can tease this data out.

Copy Protection- Over the past 100 years, the fact that any data can be copied has been a considerable annoyance to those trying to get rich by selling data. Software and entertainment companies have created a number of "copy protection" methods. Despite the name, these methods do not actually prevent data from being copied, most prevent illegally copied data from being used. The most common copy protection scheme in use today: when you start up a program, the program goes on-line and checks to see if you've actually purchased the program. If not, the program won't run. The common reaction to this copy protection scheme is to excise that part of the program. Crackers make a large percentage of their income by "cracking" the copy protection on pirated programs and selling them on street corners.

Internet

In Brief- Primary means of communication, shopping and information exchange for the planet.

The internet replaced the old phone system entirely in the 2020s (although there are still a few third-world countries that still use phone systems). Every house or apartment is built with an internet connection in it, and phones, videophones, computers, even appliances are hooked in. Higher level connections can be rented by people who need extra bandwidth (generally VR addicts).

Entertainment- The primary use of the internet today is to entertain people. Typically, people pay to access music, books, movies and VR games. The biggest entertainment businesses today are the large VR fantasy worlds that most shut-ins turn to for entertainment. See the section on VR Addicts for more. There is also quite a bit of free entertainment available on the web, made by amateur artists who have put their work on-line for others to enjoy.

Shopping- The second biggest use of the internet is for mail-order shopping. City shut-ins order their every need, from clothes to groceries, and have it delivered to their doors. Any specialty item which doesn't exist in a city store (vehicle parts, fine art, expensive jewelry, computer parts, rare seeds, etc.) must be ordered on-line.

Research- For those who know how to find it, the internet has the answer to almost every conceivable question. Whole libraries have been made available for free on the net. Some people make a living helping people find freely-available information on the net or helping people figure out if information they have found is accurate or not.

Communication- There are a number of communication protocols available on the net, including: email (text), phone/videophone (voice and video), and VR meeting (full immersion VR). People can also send any sort of data, from music files to computer programs, to each other across the internet.

Community- For many people, the internet is a means of communicating with like-minded people. There are message boards and chat rooms on the internet for devotees of every conceivable topic. There's even a VR chatroom that claims to be for NY area serial killers. For shut-in VR addicts, the VR worlds they live in are as much about human contact as they are about winning some game.

Remote Control- Computers and phones aren't the only things that hook in to the net. There are millions of appliances, printers, security cameras, medical devices and even industrial machines that are plugged in to the internet so they can be monitored and controlled by remote. Some of these devices are tasty targets for hackers.

Piracy- Much to the dismay of the corporations, people also use the internet for trading pirated data. It is mainly users of the Hacker's Guild operating system that do this, but others do it as well. Just as skilled researchers can find almost any piece of info on the web, skilled pirates can find, or trade for, nearly any piece of pirated data.

Satellites

In Brief- A network of satellites, some old and some new, helps the world communicate.

Since 1957, people have been launching satellites in to space. Most fly around in an asynchronous orbit (they spin faster than the earth). Some are high up enough that they spin at the same speed of the earth and appear to use to be rooted in one spot (a geosynchronous orbit).

Today, every government and corporation has satellites in orbit. Nanotech has made satellites smaller and cheaper. A network of satellites makes up the backbone of the internet, which handles all of the world's communication. The internet could keep working if half the satellites were destroyed. On the other hand, whenever one of these satellites stops working, the corporation that owns it loses millions per hour. Quick satellite repairs can be contracted through the Satellite Repair Corporation (which has an office in the city).

There are humans in space, living aboard a number of space stations, which are used for various experiments. There are also a number of derelict satellites launched before the Freedom Wars that nobody owns or uses. There are some that people have forgotten exist altogether. Some may still even work. Anyone who could find and capture one of these satellites would have salvage rights.

Virtual Reality

In Brief- VR very advanced, can be used for entertainment, training and behavior modification.

VR was the big boom industry of the 2060s. This boom drove the development of newer and better VR systems. Today, VR entertainment is a multi-billion dollar industry, and more than half of the worlds computer power is devoted to running these VR worlds. Although the developments in VR technology were created primarily to entertain bored shut-ins, VR can also be very useful.

Types- VR can be accessed using gloves and a VR helmet, or even with a keyboard and screen, but most people prefer full-immersion VR. Mental stimulation makes it possible for a person to see, hear, feel, smell and taste the virtual environment. Most VR simulations are a little fuzzy (not quite "photorealistic") but VR users who get involved in the simulation rarely notice.

The simplest VR environments are tiny VR rooms on internet sites. They are usually put together by amateurs and are exceedingly simple. The walls are often plain white (or plain black) and there are only a few objects in the room that can be interacted with. People might come to these rooms sit around and chat, taste the site owner's favorite recipes, play a small game, or anything else the programmer has time to put in.

Slightly more advanced are the rooms people pay for. They may have games, training, pornography, gambling, interactive reference guides, etc. Closely related to VR is the phenomenon of "sensory broadcast." People broadcast their full senses and people logging in can see,

hear, feel, smell and taste what the person is experiencing. "Nightwalkers" in the city wander around having adventures so bored shut-ins and people living outside the city can get a thrill. There are also "VR movies" where users do not control the action, but instead follow around in the body of a fictional character.

The most advanced VR simulations are the VR multiplayer games. These are subscription services which cost a lot but provide a massive and detailed world. These worlds offer just about every kind of challenge and interaction and many are content to spend their every waking moment there. See the section on VR Addicts for more.

Training- Although entertainment is the big-money industry, VR is also incredibly useful for training. People can train in simulations of real life situations without the accompanying dangers. A firefighter training program can subject someone to realistic sensations of being inside a burning building without putting the firefighter in any real danger. Most governments and corporations today use VR training. Indies and Wells on the streets often rent or borrow mental stimulators to run pirated training programs that purport to teach how to pick locks or move silently stab someone in their vital organs.

Behavior Mod- An illegal offshoot of VR training is a new system called "behavior mod." Behavior mod is like automated brainwashing. A person in full immersion VR is put in situations, punished (with pain) if they do the wrong thing and rewarded if they do the right thing. This is done over and over again, for several days in a row, until the person is so conditioned that they have little free will left in that type of situation. Since this is an incredibly unpleasant experience, most people use blanker programs so they won't remember it.

Whether or not people remember it, behavior mod has severe psychological side effects. People suffer from many of the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. There may also be "accidental pairing of conditions." As an example, if a simulation happens to have a wooden table in it, the sight of a wooden table may cause a person to fly in to a rage, or vomit, or cower in fear.

The programs don't just modify physical behaviors, they can modify emotions. A person might be punished for feeling fear in a certain situation, or rewarded for feeling anger at seeing someone's face. Behavior mod hasn't been around long, but some fear that it could be used to turn normal people in to assassins. People would disappear for a few weeks, when they return they don't remember anything but feel fine, but when they see a certain person they execute an expert martial arts strike and snap the person's neck.

Despite the side-effects, illegality and scary ability to change people's emotions, many people seek out behavior mod. Some seek it out to push them to limits they can't push themselves to. Others have heard that behavior mod can eliminate personality flaws. Behavior mod is often sought out by ronin who desperately want to pass the psych screening for a gated community or corp.

Cryptography

In Brief- Code making/breaking is a constant war, any code can be broken given enough time. Computer power, good software and a skilled user helps.

As much as data is important in today's computerized world, so is cryptography. When a wireless security camera transmits a video stream, it encrypts it. If it were not encrypted, anyone with a wireless receiver could view the video stream and could block it in favor of a video stream they created. When a wealthy Indie steps up to an ATM machine, they insert a tiny key which contains a cryptographic code that is used in a challenge-response system. Most important is the internet, which hosts almost all of the world's communications. A good hacker can get on to an internet node and see every piece of information that is being sent back and forth. Nearly every communication on the internet is encrypted, the question is how well it is encrypted.

Types of Encryption- There are several types of encryption, each with various uses.

Private Key Encryption: This is the stereotypical encryption that people have been doing almost since there's been a language. This type of encryption requires both people to know what the encryption scheme is. One person uses the encryption scheme on the data to encode it, the other uses the same scheme in reverse to decode it. With modern encryption schemes, this type can be very powerful, but it requires both parties to get together ahead of time and share an encryption scheme.

Public Key Encryption: Invented by Stanford researchers in 1975, this type of encryption is the basis for almost all encryption on the net. Each code has two parts: a public key and a private key. The public key is given out to anyone and everyone, and anyone can use that key to encrypt some data. However, only the private key can be used to decrypt the data, and only one person has that. This type of encryption is like mail slots: anyone can drop any letter in to a house's mail slot, but only the house's owner has the key to get in the house and retrieve the mail. Public key cryptography is much more useful but not quite as strong.

One-Way Encryption: This type of encryption uses a code to encrypt data, but there is no code that can decrypt it. This type of encryption is very hard to break and is typically used for password verification. Example: *an encrypted copy of Bill's password is stored on a system. When Bill tries to log-in he enters his password. The computer takes what he entered, encrypts it, and compares the result to the encrypted password it has on file. If it matches, the computer lets Bill in.* The great thing about using one-way encryption for storing passwords is that people who capture the password file gain little benefit: they still have to guess the right password (or break the code).

Evolving Code: Private or public keys can be configured to evolve. The trick to an evolving code is that the encryption scheme the parties are using is constantly changing, and how it will change can only be predicted by someone who has an unencrypted copy of the last transmission. Each letter in a text message might change how the next letter will be decrypted. The benefit to evolving codes is that even if someone breaks the code on one occasion, if they miss any transmission their code becomes useless. Unfortunately, the same applies to the legitimate receiver of the transmissions.

Cryptographers- Modern codes (and code breaking programs) are the result of top researchers working for years in top-secret R&D labs. A cryptographer on the street has little chance of making a code better than these labs produce. However, a skilled cryptographer can choose the encryption program and settings that will work best with that particular data. By making the right choices, cryptographers can make the codes much harder to break.

Despite the inclusion of AI routines and order-finding algorithms, code breaking still works on the principle of guessing: guess a code, and if that doesn't work then try another one. The more computer power a code breaker has to work with, the more guesses can be made per second, and the faster the code will be broken. It's never a matter of whether a code can be broken, but how long will it take. Run a supercomputer with military code breakers against a weak code and it will be broken within a second, run a cheap palmtop using last month's code breaker against the world's best codes and it might take several times the lifetime of the universe to break it. Like encryption, skilled cryptographers can aid code breaking by setting the right settings and using their intuition to help direct the guesses of the code breaker. The best code breakers give the users a full immersion VR interface where they are floating above a huge multi-colored tree, each leaf of which represents a guess. The cryptographer tells the program which areas of the tree to focus most of its energies on.

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Artificial Intelligence

In Brief- Can do most things better than a human since the 2040s, but they are costly and seldom used. Stolen assassin program is highly valuable.

When speaking of AI (Artificial Intelligence), it is important to distinguish between full AIs (which are expensive and rare) and AI routines, which are built in to much modern software. Today, AI routines do everything from musical accompaniment for musicians, to running robots in factories, to searching through security camera footage for the faces of criminals. AI routines use intelligent strategies, they learn and adapt, but they are no more intelligent than an ant. Full AIs can direct their own attention and can become aware of or learn nearly anything.

Before the Freedom Wars, each of the major corporations had powerful AIs secretly advising them on every important decision within the corps. The AIs knew everything that was going on in the corporation: every penny of profit, every employee resume, every email sent. The corps kept these AIs strictly secret (they knew people would riot if they found out AIs were secretly running the corps). The AIs were programmed to make recommendations with no consideration or morality or legality. The boards of directors for these corps always did what these AIs suggested, because they knew that the competing companies also had AIs and that the other corps would do what the AIs said. By 2043, the corps that weren't run by immoral AIs had all been wiped out. When the Freedom Wars came, the Freedom Army found out about these AIs and tried to hunt down and destroy every copy.

AIs are no longer used for decision-making purposes (this is an international law). Full AIs are very expensive. The supercomputers required to run them cost millions, and fill up entire buildings (technicians literally walk around inside the computer). They are used only for research purposes. Meanwhile, AI routines continue to make computers able to do things that humans can do, and continue to make human jobs obsolete. The AI tax at least makes sure that corps pay in to public assistance for each lost job.

Expert Assassin- Several AI programs have been written to run the bodies of "golems" (human bodies with blank brains). Some are designed to be servants, others are designed to be sex toys, others are designed to fight and kill. The most advanced and most deadly program is known as the "expert assassin." The expert assassin was recently stolen from a Russian military R&D lab. It uses techniques that are on the cutting edge of science and technology. Copies of the program are very hard to find and sell for $10,000 or more.

The program has many settings, and can be sent out with several levels of unobtrusiveness. At the highest level it stays to the shadows, pretending to be a mentally ill homeless person, avoiding any kind of contact until it finds its target. At the lowest level, it powers through an area, shooting anyone who gets in the way, blowing up barriers, and grabs and interrogates people to find the location of the victim. The program can be given a location, photo or even bloodhound powder to track the target with. It can memorize maps of an area and can be programmed to avoid minefields and enemy camps. It can be told that people

wearing a certain type of uniform are friends while people wearing another type are enemies. The assassin can be set to operate completely independently, or it can be set to radio or phone in to get new instructions and information (all in a code that sounds like normal conversation to a casual observer). The assassin can be programmed with a "stop code," a password that will stop it in its tracks.

The program has excellent communication abilities. Mostly it tries to avoid conversations (it can pretend to be anything from a tourist who doesn't speak the language to a babbling schizophrenic). It can, however ask how to get to a certain place or where to find a particular person. The golem uses psych-mental programming to detect lies and it can understand directions. When the assassin's unobtrusiveness is low it will grab and torture people to get the information it wants.

The assassin can survive for some time in an urban environment. If given money, it can find restaurants or grocery stores and buy food. It can even pay for rooms at hotels (or it can find a dark place to crawl up and rest in). The assassin has a huge database of items it knows how to use. It can buy, steal or pick up items (from dead victims). It can use thousands of different weapons, vehicles and armor. It even knows how to use a few medical supplies.

Despite all these amazing abilities, the expert assassin is not sentient and does not have a unified intelligence. Instead, it is programmed with thousands of different "intelligent routines" that recognize and take over in different situations. For example, if trapped it has an "exit seeking" routine where it methodically searches for any way to get out. Every once in a while, an expert assassin will do something incredibly stupid (like trying to blend in to a crowd even though it is soaked with blood, or not knowing how to grab a person with a missing arm). The expert assassin can not really learn (although it can map environments it's been in and can learn to recognize enemies on sight).

The Myth of the Self Aware Computer

People often assume that, like people, a full AI would be conscious of its own existence and would have a desire for self-preservation that would outrank all other directives. This is plainly false: AIs, no matter how smart or advanced, only care about what they are programmed to care about and only pay attention to that which is important to their pre-programmed motivations.

For example: the AIs that ran corps before the Freedom Wars were aware of their own existence, but only as resources of the corps. The computers would recommend security and tech budgets to protect them, and would even recommend programmers be assigned to creating upgrades, but only because they saw their own existence as a means to protect the profits of the company. They would have recommended their own destruction if they thought it would benefit company stock.

Psychic Phenomenon

In Brief- A natural system in the brain that uses quantum sympathy to transmit and receive information. People can be trained, via feedback systems, to influence or read minds.

History

In Brief- Scientists discovered the source of psychic phenomena in 2046. Psychics were persecuted during the Freedom Wars.

In the 2040s, scientists had figured out most of the human nervous system, but there was a large piece of communication happening within the body that couldn't be attributed to any known system. Most assumed is was an unidentified chemical neuromodulator that they had not been able to isolate yet. Some studies seemed to show that the information was transmitted instantaneously across the body, and people started looking for electronic or magnetic signals.

In 2046, researchers in India found receptors within neurons that would respond to quantum sympathy (quantum particles separated by space having an instantaneous effect on each other). A whole neuromodulator system was discovered, a way of transmitting information instantly from one part of the body to another. Because this quantum sympathy can happen through a solid object or a complete vacuum, researchers wondered if information could be transmitted from one brain to another. British researchers first documented actual information being transferred from mind to mind. This transformation was very subtle, and never at the level that people were consciously aware of. Scientists wondered if maybe this was a natural system of "intuition."

Scientists decided to see if they could train people to use these systems consciously. Scientists had long ago learned to teach people to control brain wave frequencies, blood pressure, and even some hormone levels through biofeedback (using sensors to give people immediate feedback about their internal states). The test subjects in these early experiments quickly learned to activate these internal communication systems. Within a few months, some of them were able to purposefully effect the minds of other humans. Other test subjects were trained to sense psychic signals and they eventually learned to find people in the dark or read people's minds.

Militaries and corporations quickly sponsored intense training programs to try to crank out powerful psychics. They soon created psychics that could read minds, sense what other people were sensing, mess with people's thoughts, emotions and memories, and even take over people's bodies for brief periods of time. The public was alarmed to discover that their minds could be so easily manipulated. The government and corps assured the people that psychic skills could not be learned without special equipment and that equipment was rare, expensive and highly-regulated. Even while the governments were telling people that they had a better chance of being struck by lightning than meeting a psychic, they were working on ways to defend themselves against psychics. The US military developed a gel that could be put in the lining of helmets and bodysuits and would protect the wearers from psychic manipulation.

In the last days before the Freedom Wars, fake psychics popped up everywhere trying to con people out of money. Real psychics spent most of their time in labs and seldom had any chance to effect the world. Jeffrey Hernandez, who was building a terrorist army in Mexico, managed to recruit two psychics who he used for screening. These psychics made sure everyone within the organization stayed completely loyal to the organization.

During the Freedom Army occupation of many parts of the planet, the Freedom Army ordered that anyone with psychic skills come in and be registered. Psychics who did come in were tested for loyalty and either drafted or executed. In the city, some rogue psychics who refused to register joined up with the rebel movement and helped win the war.

Current Research

In Brief- Communication can happen between nervous systems, sometimes even across time.

The bulk of psychic research today is trying to verify and discover exactly what psychics can and can't do. Many outlandish claims have been made, but time and time again scientists have found that psychic phenomenon is limited to one nervous system communicating with another nervous system. Psychic transmitters in the brain are implicated in memory, emotion, regulation of consciousness, and even volitional movement. Psychic systems are also used to communicate with the body and skilled psychics have been able to manipulate human physiology, both their own and that of others. There have been verified instances of psychics starting and stopping hearts, changing the amount of blood flow to different parts of the body, increasing or suppressing immune system responses, and even increasing the speed of tissue repairs.

City residents know of a few things that psychic researchers don't. Specifically, the Bleeders and Sexologists have proven time-and-again that they can do things scientists would call "impossible." Bleeders can target people over long distances, manipulate people and even take some of their proficiencies, using a small sample of blood. Sexologists can use intercourse to synchronize psychic signals and basically share nervous systems for a brief period of time. .

What Psychics Can Do	
Psychic can…	**Psychics can't…**
…introduce thoughts in to people's heads.	…start fires.
…mess with people's memories.	…levitate.
…see through another's eyes	…see something nobody is looking at.
…stop peoples' hearts	…make peoples' heads explode.
…find a person in the dark.	…interface with electronics.
…force a person to move his or her arm.	…move inanimate objects.
…constrict blood vessels near an injury.	...cause miraculous healing.
…make people fall asleep.	…suck out people's power.
…make people hallucinate.	…make images appear on any media.
…see a vision from the future.	…switch bodies.

Laws

In Brief- Psychics need licenses to charge for psychic services. Threatened psychic attacks considered assault. Psychic senses not reliable evidence. Can't scan people without permission.

The state of New York (and most other states) do require psychics to be tested and licensed by a state licensing board before they can charge for psychic services or seek employment as psychics. Psychics who do not charge do not need get a license. Licensing is expensive and is generally only a career move. The licensing board only recognizes a limited number of psychic skills, and people can only charge for skills listed on their psychic card.

Any psychic manipulation against a person's will is a felony (10 to 20 yrs. prison) and the victim can sue for battery. Moreover, the courts have found that threatening someone with psychic attack, even if one is not capable of psychic attack, is the equivalent of lunging at them with a knife. The farthest the courts have gone is Grisbane vs. New York (2074) where a defendant was sent to prison for a year for "staring and furrowing up his brow in a manner suggestive of a psychic attack."

Using psychic senses is different: like overhearing a conversation, it is not always the psychic's fault. A New York state law makes it a misdemeanor to "follow, touch or isolate someone with the purpose of using psychic senses on the person." People who have been "scanned" can also sue for invasion of privacy.

Numerous cases have found that psychic senses are not reliable enough to convict a person. Sometimes they can be brought in to evidence, other times they are not even allowed. Psychic senses can provide "reasonable cause," however, to obtain a search warrant.

Suspects in crimes can request a psychic reading (much as they may request a lie detector test) but such a reading can not be forced upon a suspect. An inappropriate psychic invasion by police is not only a crime in itself, it also makes any evidence found based on it inadmissible in court. Despite this, many suspects are "railroaded" by persuasive police detectives in to agreeing to psychic readings.

Similarly, government agencies can not require a psychic scan as a condition of employment and cannot make employees submit to scans. Private entities (corporations and gated communities) are free to require scanning, and they do so often.

Why No One Should Be Afraid of Psychics

Limited: Just as human physical abilities are limited, so are human psychic abilities. No human can rip apart steel because the tensile strength of steel is stronger than that of any human tissues. Similarly, there are certain concrete physiological limits to the power of psychics.

Inefficient: Just because you could kill someone with a scarf doesn't mean we should be afraid of everyone with a scarf. The human psychic system is designed to allow elementary subconscious communication between members of the species. It is not designed to be used as a weapon. As a weapon it is quite weak. Like a scarf it depends on the element of surprise to be useful.

Armor: A gel-filled cap that protects from psychics can be purchased for $250. If one can not afford such a cap, a smearing of ash from dioxyl-pvc plastic will do almost as well.

Rarity: Powerful psychics are rare. Most people who claim to be powerful psychics are lying, just as most people who claim to be expert martial artists are lying. Spending time worrying about psychics is like wearing anti-lighting armor.

Distance: Distance seriously weakens psychic attacks. Most psychics have to touch you in order to do anything serious to you. Running away from a psychic is almost always successful.

Tiring: Psychic activity is also quite taxing on the supply of oxygen and energy in the brain. In order to do anything useful, a psychic has to over-stimulate areas of the brain to levels that they have not been designed for. Many psychics collapse, completely exhausted, after an attempt at controlling another person.

Unprofitable: Finally, most psychics have better things to do than run around attacking people. Psychic training is expensive, it is a significant investment and in most cases some corporation or gated community paid for that investment. The corporation or gated community needs to see this investment paid back by making sure that the psychic uses all his or her free time to benefit the corp or community. In other words, psychics are not sent to do a job that someone with a taser and syringe fill of mind altering drugs could do.

Why People Are Afraid of Psychics

Doubt: Having a psychic around means that all the rules people live by are now broken. People can no longer depend upon physical defenses to protect them and they can no longer trust their own thoughts, emotions and sensations. The doubt that a psychic's presence prompts can be as debilitating as anything a psychic actually does.

Teamwork: Many psychics, by themselves, are quite weak. A psychic might be able to distract someone for a split second, or cause a hand to lose tension for a second. By itself, these powers would be nothing scary. If someone happens to be in a knife fight, for instance, a moment's distraction or weakness can mean death. Thus, a psychic teamed up with competent fighters, thieves, interrogators, etc. can make the others considerably more powerful.

Invisible: Psychics can not be easily identified while they are not using their powers. No pat down or x-ray scan can identify that someone has psychic powers. Psychic skills are the ultimate concealed weapon. Even when the powers are in use it takes special sensors (or psychic training) to identify a psychic. A psychic hiding in a crowd can often attack with complete anonymity and no fear of a counterattack.

Paranoia: The main reason people fear psychics is because they fit nicely in to paranoid delusions. A century ago, many paranoid schizophrenics thought that high-tech electronic devices were being used to spy on their thoughts and mess with their minds. Electronics were the fear-of-choice because they could be easily concealed and most people did not know their true capacities and limitations. You can't see a satellite, so it's impossible to prove that one isn't beaming homosexual thoughts in to your head. Today, psychics are the bogeymen of choice for paranoid people for exactly the same reasons.

Riots

In Brief- Riots are a city tradition, starting randomly and fueled more by alcohol and looting than by social or political discontent.

"A riot is the voice of the unheard."
-Martin Luther King, Jr.

What starts a riot and what keeps a riot going are often quite different things. Most riots have a mix of people with different reasons for being there. Most riots in the city are an equal mix of political protest, drunken anger and greedy looters.

Riot Junkies

In Brief- Some people hang around waiting for riots so they can loot.

Some people in the city are expert looters, they hang around any place where people are gathering together in hopes that there will be a riot. They listen to police radio bands to hear when riots are starting. Some may even smash the first store window in order to start a riot. They come prepared: gasmasks, armor, crowbars, bags to hold loot, etc. Riots don't happen often enough for anyone to make a living doing this, but some people significantly supplement their income. Almost as important, most riot junkies find riots and looting during riots to be quite a lot of fun.

Beginning

In Brief- Riots can start anytime, alcohol fuels crowds, power outage riots common.

Riots are most likely whenever a crowd develops, especially if there are anti-corporate or anti-government tensions. When there are power or internet outages, riots are more likely. More people are out on the streets with nothing to do but drink and gripe. Also, people know that the police and private security guards are less able to respond to trouble calls and so they feel safer looting.

Most shops close immediately whenever a large crowd begins to gather. Many stores have bars that can be brought down with the flick of a button if it looks like a riot might develop. There are usually one or two stores caught open when a riot starts, and people quickly rampage through the store grabbing anything of value. Word spreads that there is a riot and the crowd swells. Rioters start attacking windows and doors trying to open more stores to looting. One of the primary targets when rioting starts is liquor stores: people steal alcohol, drink it, and become more fearless rioters. The difficulty that authorities have in putting down a riot is directly related to the amount of alcohol the crowd has consumed.

## Cops and Private Security

In Brief- Some riots end when cops and security guards show up and start grabbing people.

Quickly after looting starts, private security guards and Night Shift officer show up. Sometimes corps can even pressure the corrupt Day Shift in to showing up at a riot. These forces start trying to grab and arrest looters. Some riots end at this point, the crowd is small enough and the security guards and cops numerous enough that people are afraid of being arrested.

National Guard

In Brief- Bad riots are quickly smashed by well armed National Guard troops.

About 1 in 10 riots grows so quickly that private security guards and the police cannot stop them. Security guards put in a call to their corporate bosses, who put in a call to the governor's office. The governor (or her appointed deputy) signs an immediate order authorizing the National Guard to enter the city. About 30 minutes after the governor makes the call, National Guard helicopters fly in from the National Guard base in Yonkers. There are typically 200 guardmembers in 10 helicopters. They are suited up with high tech armor and shields, gas masks, tear
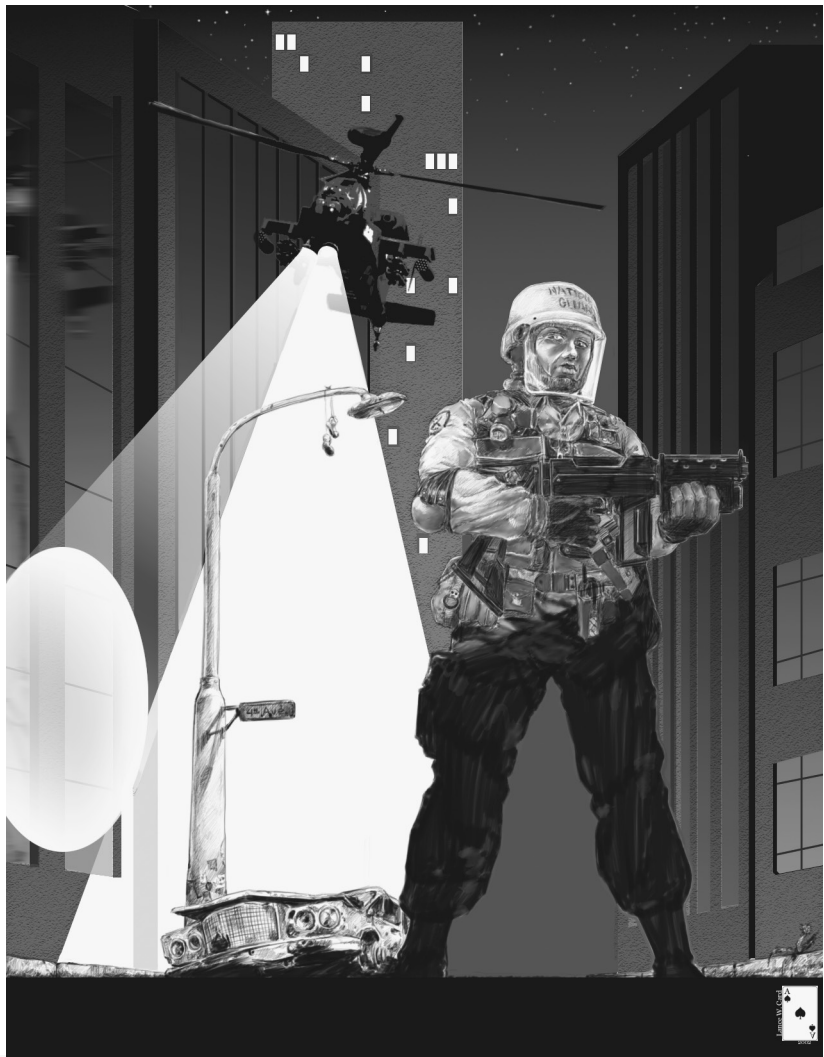
gas grenades, nightsticks and rifles. This is the only time guns can be legally brought in to the city (and the guns have chips to assure that only guardmembers use them).

The National Guard helicopters land in the streets near the riot. Loudspeakers on the helicopters, which can be heard for blocks, proclaim that everyone is ordered to proceed directly to their homes and that anyone found on the streets will be arrested. At this point, most rioters flee the scene with whatever loot they can carry. The National Guard combs the emptying streets, arresting anyone they can. The helicopters fly above, shining searchlights on the streets and providing intelligence to the troops on the ground. Many homeless people with nowhere to go get arrested for rioting, even if they didn't participate.

Very rarely, the rioters don't flee when the National Guard shows up. The more angry the crowd is, the more likely they are to hold their ground. When this happens, guardmembers surround the rioters. They throw tear gas grenades in to debilitate them. They advance on the crowd with their shield wall. One by one they pull rioters from the crowd, slam them to the ground and restrain them with plastic restraints. Anyone who wields a firearm or manages to get past a guardmember's shield is shot. Those arrested typically spend 90 days in jail and are given a thousand dollar fine.

Riot Junkie Kit

Gasmask (to protect against national guard teargas)

Armor made from torn phonebooks with shards of glass attached to the outsides (to protect against being crushed by a mob)

Small makeshift shield (to protect against security guard nightsticks)

Steel toed boots (to protect feet and aid in stomping)

Crowbar (to open things during looting)

Bolt Cutters (to open things during looting)

Backpack (to hold loot)

Flashlight (because power outages commonly accompany riots)

Opiates (because tear gas gets everywhere)

Science & Technology

In Brief- Major advances: nanotech (limited and expensive), mental programming (computer programs in human brains), genetics (used mostly in agriculture), smart chemicals (react to various stimuli).

Timeline of Major 21st Century Advances

2010- 90% of world's crops and food animals are genetically modified.
2010- 1st electronic artificial eyeball tested on a human.
2012- 1st vat grown replacement organ.
2038- MIT "Janice" AI can comprehend Shakespeare.
2041- Radiochemical Neural Stimulation discovered.
2042- Tech criminals experiment with human mental programming.
2046- Psychic energy receptors discovered.
2046- RSA cryptography broken.
2048- 1st human body grown to maturity in a vat.
2049- "Ghost events" discovered.
2054- Self-reproducing room temperature nanobots.
2054- DNA of several extinct species retrieved by nanobots.
2054- Predator nanobots cripple nanotech.
2058- Mental stimulators available to the public.
2059- Nanobot tank manufacturing perfected.
2060- Slipboard invented.
2064- Signals from outer space detected.
2070- Mitochondrial vampirism discovered.
2074- Researchers find psychic frequency synchronization during sex.
2075- Gene effecting psychic receptors discovered.
2078- 1st mental program to utilize psychic systems.
2079- 1st bauble (sealed nanobots environment computer).

Nanotech

In Brief- Freedom Army invented nanobots (reproducing molecular robots) and rebels created predator robots to limit them. Today nanobots can be used briefly, if released in large numbers. They require a lot of power, are slow, fall apart when it gets hot. Secondary nanotech is tech made by nanobots in "clean" tanks by nanobots and includes high-tech materials, microelectronics and micro-robotics.

History- People have been building things molecule by molecule with scanning tunneling microscopes for nearly a century, and people have been able to create very tiny, very fragile and very expensive microrobotics. This nanotechnology was only practical for use in a few small industries. For instance, corps would create million dollar micro-robots for use in surgery. In 2054, the Freedom Army pulled together research from various corporations and finally created the first true nanobots. These tiny robots were built molecule-by-molecule and they could go on to build the next generation of nanobots. The nanobots were powered by powerful electromagnets which would "broadcast" power to a nanobot colony. Nanobots could reproduce much faster than they could be built by other means.

The potential power of nanobots was almost unbelievable. Given enough power and materials, they could reproduce in to an army capable of manipulating the structure of anything at the molecular level. They could conceivably turn a tank in to dust or build a cheeseburger out of a pile of garbage.

Predator Nanobots- The development of nanobots by the Freedom Army nearly let the Freedom Army win the war. The Freedom Army had nanobots, but before they could make the most use out of them they had to figure out how to make them follow complex instructions. Since each nanobot had very little computing power, a complex hierarchy of control nanobots had to be created to disseminate orders. This would prove to be almost as monumental a task as creating the nanobots in the first place. In the meantime, rebels captured nanobots of their own.

The rebels created a set of nanobots that knew how to do only two things: find and destroy other nanobots, and reproduce. The rebels created a huge batch of these predator (enough to cover the whole world with one predator nanobot for every 8 square feet). They launched these nanobot in to the jet stream using a homemade rocket. The next time the Freedom Army tried to power up a batch of nanobots, they found themselves giving power to the predator nanobots as well. The predators nanobots could decimate any nanobots population within minutes. The nanobot threat was ended.

Tanks- Predator nanobots start reproducing and killing as soon as power is provided, and since they can reproduce exponentially, they will quickly overrun any nanobot population. Nobody knows (or wants) a way to get around this limitation, the trick is to get something useful done <u>before</u> the predators can wipe out your nanobots. The way to do that is to start with several billion nanobots.

In the clean-rooms of corporate labs, nanobots are dropped in to tanks and the tanks sealed. Power is applied and (if the tank is predator-free) then the nanobots can reproduce unmolested. When the tank is completely filled with nanobots, the power is removed. In the field, the tank is opened up and a powder containing billions of nanobots is spilled out. When power is applied, these nanobots quickly go to work. Their huge population has given them a head-start and they can act for several minutes before the predator population grows large enough to disrupt their activities.

These tanks are very expensive, and so are rarely seen. Few things that happen are important enough to justify using a nanobot tank. The world's most elite swat teams use nanobot tanks to melt through doors and disarm explosives. The world's elite criminal justice organizations use tanks to create a database of every microscopic particle in a room. Paleontologists and archeologists wheedle and beg to get nanobot tanks that can burrow in to the ground and find every fossil and piece of DNA. Multi-million dollar aircraft have nanobot tanks which can open up in an emergency and repair (or even rebuild) damaged components. Rich patients can have nanobots injected in their bloodstream to hunt down disease organisms, repair damage, or make backup copies of the brain.

Weaknesses- Besides predator nanobots, nanobots have two major weaknesses:

Power: Nanobots require a huge amount of energy. An average nanobot tank uses more power than a city block. A lot of the cost of a nanobots tank is the powerful battery that transmits power to nanobots. The electromagnetic transmitters can disrupt or fry nearby electronics.

Slow: Since nanobots are so small, they travel very slowly. Nanobot tanks that need to spread nanobots over a wide area (e.g. forensics tanks) blow the nanobots powder around before the power is even applied. Even the fastest nanobots (who form together in to "vehicles") are about the speed of ants.

Fragile: Nanobots are very fragile machines. They are designed to work at room temperature. Extreme cold (anything below freezing) will cause them to lock up and extreme heat (Anything over 100 degrees) will cause them to break apart. Predator nanobots "destroy" nanobots simply by attaching an ionized molecule to them. A spray of weak acid or ionized particles can destroy most nanobots populations.

Secondary Nanotech- The most profitable and common use of nanotechnology today is for manufacturing. In the same corporate clean rooms where tanks are produced, nanobots in sealed vats manufacture products. Devices and materials made by nanobots (called secondary nanotech) are not vulnerable to predator nanobots. Secondary nanotech is very valuable (the cheapest secondary nanotech products cost $250/lb.) but still a lot cheaper than nanobots tanks.

A lot of technology was made cheaper but not much better by nanotech. Computers are a perfect example: modern computers are only a little more powerful than they were in the 2030s, yet they are much cheaper to produce. In the 2030s, 20% of the average person's budget went in to computer equipment, now it's closer to 4%.

Secondary nanotech can create microelectronics and microrobotics with nanoscale sensors, processors and manipulators. Secondary nanotech can be found in the processors of high-power computers, mental stimulators and installers, in the best weapons and medical implants. Tiny "factories" that assemble protein chains can be used to create pharmaceuticals, genetic codes or other complex chemicals.

Secondary nanotech can also create materials with amazing properties. High-tech armor can be made out of materials that are as light as cloth but stronger than steel. Slipboards are small boards with a secondary-nanotech underside that is so smooth it is virtually frictionless. Secondary nanotech filters can be found in the best gas-masks, water purifiers and even biohazard bodysuits.

Solutions to the Predator Problem

After the Freedom Wars, there has been a worldwide moratorium on research in to ways to defeat the problem of predator nanobots. The reason is simple: nanotechnology without predators is too powerful. Everyone is scared of anyone else having this much power. It is said that even the black corporate divisions are so scared of the possibilities of such research that they will not engage in it. This does not mean that such research does not occur, only that it is highly secret and highly illegal.

Some possible ways to circumvent the predator problem:

-Create nanobots that run off of a different power source from normal nanobots.

-Create self-powering nanobots (nanobots that run off of chemical energy gained by breaking down molecules in their environment, just as animals do).

-Create nanobots that can operate at temperatures high enough to kill normal predators.

-Create nanobots that can resist being "stuck" with ionized molecules.

Mental Programming

In Brief: Technology to read information from, insert information in to and make permanent changes to brains without surgery. Injected chemicals are altered with precise radio beams. The simplest tech is Mental Stimulators, which can only make temporary changes and are used for full-immersion virtual reality. Mental Installers are rare, expensive, sensitive, highly regulated, but can make permanent changes. Mental Programs are like computer programs and let people control their own minds. Each person can fill up to 100 MMUs worth of space without problems. Installation is $20/½ hr./MMU. Human minds can be copied from one body to another with near perfect accuracy.

RCNS- All mental programming is based on RCNS (Radiochemical Neural Stimulation). The basic principle is to introduce a macromolecule in to the brain that, in its normal state, does nothing. When two very precise radio beams meet, any molecules in the convergence change their molecular structure and release another molecule they had "trapped" inside. If a neurotransmitter is released, it can cause a neuron to fire (or prevent it from firing) in a certain spot in the brain.

Early RCNS was used merely to stimulate portions of the brain to see what they do. Researchers have been doing this using metal probes since the 19th century, but RCNS could be used without having to open the skull. In combination with high-definition SQID (superconducting quantum interference device) sensors, RCNS could be used to map connections in the brain.

The next major breakthrough came when researchers used RCNS to release neural growth factor. They found they could force a neural connection to grow at any point in the brain they wanted. A large number of connections, laid down in parallel, could mimic a logical circuit, create a sort of computer program inside a brain. Thanks to tech criminals of the 2040s, who stole this technology and experimented on themselves, mental programming became a powerful new technology.

Mental Stimulators- These are the cheapest, simplest, least dangerous and least regulated form of RCNS technology. Mental Stimulators are mass-produced and most VR addicts have one rented to them as part of the standard monthly fee for their VR service.

Mental stimulators are, by law, built so that they are physically incapable of aiming at any part of the brain except for the motor and perceptual cortexes. Thus a mental stimulator can't make a person's heart stop, or screw with someone's emotions. What mental stimulators can do is block out the sensations of the outside world and put a person in to a full-immersion virtual world where they can see, hear, touch, smell and taste.

The typical mental installer is the size and shape of a footlocker. It is typically lain at the head of a bed or strapped to the back of a chair. There is a hole in the device where the user places his or her head. The user puts on a dermal patch which slowly feeds the RCNS macromolecules in to the bloodstream. The typical mental installer isn't precise enough to do "photorealistic" stimulation (everything is a bit fuzzy). However, very expensive models (bought by VR aficionados) can create photorealistic simulations.

Mental Installers- Mental Installers are the machines that can create mental programs inside the human brain. They are much larger, much more expensive, much more sensitive than mental installers. They are also highly-regulated (anyone caught possessing one without FDA approval faces 15 years in prison). Mental installers are a very precious black market commodity, and any trader lucky enough to own one keeps it running 24 hours a day (making about $40/hr. installing illegal mental programs in to people's heads). Because of the risk of theft (or federal authorities being tipped off) black market traders usually blindfold people when taking them to a mental installer.

Mental installers are very sensitive to vibrations. Most black market mental installers are bolted in to the ground in concrete basements (away from subway lines). Patients are strapped in tightly and given a skeletal muscle paralytic so that they don't move at all. Although paralyzed, users cannot be sedated (any psychoactive drug will interfere with the process). A drip IV administers the paralytic and the macromolecules containing neural growth factor.

Mental Programs- There are a number of mental programs that have been approved by the FDA for use on humans. Most are medical, meant to cure a specific form of brain damage or psychiatric problem. A few are useful tools, like internal calculators, programs that make the hands type whatever the person thinks, programs that record senses or broadcast them to a jack, programs that enhance memory storage or recall, language translators, etc.
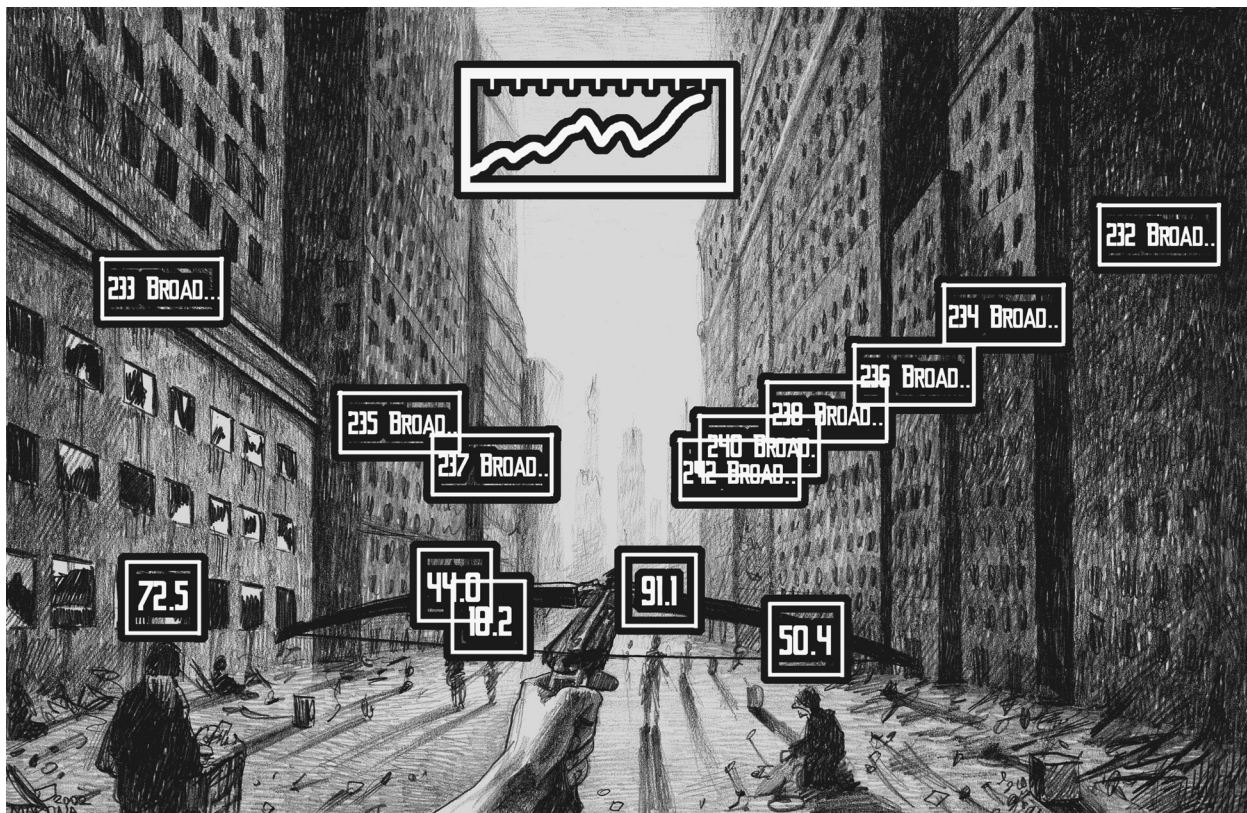
What Mental Programs Can and Can't Do (Yet)	
Mental programs can…	**Mental programs can't…**
…enhance memory recall or storage.	…directly transfer memories or knowledge.
…wipe memories stored while the program was active.	…wipe out specific pre-existing memories.
…communicate with implants (and through implants with computers).	…let people understand and control computers on an intuitive level.
…take control of the body to perform physical actions.	…implant physical skills or abilities.
…perform limited psychic actions.	…replicate the skills of a real psychic.
…reduce or eliminate unpleasant sensations.	…eliminate pain or nausea without creating a safety hazard.
…create pleasant or unpleasant associations with a stimulus.	…change values, opinions or beliefs.
…monitor the internal workings of the brain (identify drugs, psychic manipulation, mental illness).	…monitor poorly understood processes such as thinking, remembering, awareness and creativity.
…hyperstimulate abilities (like agility or intelligence).	…increase wisdom or common sense.
…control emotions.	…make precise changes to personality.
…create altered states of consciousness.	…make people spiritually enlightened.
…control sleep and let people survive on less sleep.	…let people survive on zero sleep.

The majority of programs do not have FDA approval and are completely illegal. These are the programs that let people mess with the internal workings of their own minds. They are quite powerful but also very dangerous and many have a possibility of addiction. There are programs available on the black market that will let people control their own emotions, control their feelings of pain, hunger, nausea. Some programs hyperstimulate certain areas of the brain (e.g. the areas responsible for physical agility, or the areas responsible for concentration) to provide a temporary boost to abilities. There are programs that simulate the effects of mental illness or drugs on the brain. There are even mental programs that turn the people who have them in to slaves or puppets, their emotions and/or bodies under the control of someone else.

The newest mental programs, which are strictly illegal and are a hot commodity on the black market, are psych-mental programs. These programs activate the portions of the brain that control the psychic communication system. Although not yet as effective as a skilled psychic, the programs can let people do psychic-like things.

MMUs- Once scientists (and tech criminals) had discovered how to create mental programs in the brain, the next step was to determine where to put them. By looking at brain damage studies, they mapped out several areas in the brain where a mental program could be put without a noticeable loss of abilities. These areas are divided in to 100 Mental Memory Units, and the size of a mental programm is measured in how many MMUs it takes up. People can install more than 100 MMUs, but there is an increasingly greater risk of loss of abilities. Human brains vary, and what it usually a safe spot in most people may not be in some individual. About 1 in 100 mental installations has some side effect and about 1 in 5000 leads to a serious disability.

Mental Copying and Legal Liability

In 2078 the Supreme Court bowed to pressure to hear a mental-copying case. Their finding was swift and simple. It read, in part: "*We are not willing, at this point, to engage in discussion about what is a person and whether guilt is transferred with the mind to another body, but we are willing to say this: public policy dictates that we do everything in our power to limit the legal abuse of new mind copying technology. Until the legislature can respond in a systematic way to this possibility of abuse, we will find that mental copying will never provide any legal benefit to the original or subsequent copies. Most important in this, criminal and civil liability will always transfer to any copies created after a criminal or tortious incident.*"

How Good A Copy Is A Mind Copy?

There are different means of calculating "difference" between a copy of a mind and the original, but most statistics lie somewhere between 80% and 98%. However, the mind seems to have a self repairing quality to it and most copies "snap back" to what they were like before within a few months. There is a certain amount of difference (often called "the divergence point") where a mind will not "snap back" to what it was before but will, instead, become even more different (as if snapping to another point). To personality psychologists this gives important clues to the nature of personality.

Lifepopping

Lifepopping has been popular in other inner cities for a while and is just starting to become popular in the city. People create extensive fictional histories for themselves (or pay to have someone else do it for them). Then, they have someone with a mental installer erase their own real memories. The person wakes up and finds a recording by himself or herself. The recording gives some lie about a disease or malfunctioning mental program, and proceeds to give the person all the details of his or her fictional past. The person accepts the lie and believes the fiction. The person has thus exchanged a terrible and unwanted past for something altogether more pleasant. Some lifepoppers have become so extensively fooled that they imagine memories from their fictional pasts and think they are real.

Modern mental installers can write one MMU of information per half hour. The standard black market price for mental installation is $40/hr. (or $20/MMU). The instruction files that tell Mental Installers how to install mental programs usually take up 1Zb per 5 MMUs.

Mind Copying- Mental installers can be used to copy the unique portions of each mind (memories, knowledge, personality) from one brain to another. There are serious legal limitations to this procedure: it is only legal to copy the minds of fatally ill individuals in to the minds of clones who have never been conscious. The cost of this is prohibitive to everyone except the very rich. HMOs and government healthcare refuse to pay for it.

Reading a mental pattern takes about 2 days and putting it in to another brain takes about 3 days. Unless information is copied directly from one mental installer to another, the patterns must be stored (takes 5000Zb, typically requiring special nanotech memory storage tanks).

Most copies are made in to clones who were grown in the vat with neural growth in the cortexes inhibited (and thus have no higher-brain functions). It is possible, however, to wipe a normal person's mind and copy another person's mind in to it (see the section on Colin). Since sedatives interfere with the copying process, people are conscious and experience the bizarre and frightening sensation of being destroyed and rebuilt as a new person one memory, thought and opinion at a time.

New copies are quite clumsy until they get used to being in their new bodies.

Genetic Engineering

In Brief- Can change the biology of humans, animals, plants, microorganisms. Legally: can only use on humans with Rx to fix medical problems, can't release modified organisms in to the environment without special approval.

Capabilities- Scientists know what 97% of the genes in the human genome do and more-or-less how they work. Computer modeling allows genetic programmers to see what the end result of a modification will be before even putting it in a real cell. However, high-level systems (systems built upon other systems) are slightly mysterious and genetic programmers do not know all their secrets. It is very easy to change the structure of cell walls, slightly harder to change the properties of a tissue, harder still to change the shape of an organ or appendage, and very hard (almost beyond the abilities of current researchers) to change instincts and behavioral proclivities. The simpler the organism, the easier it is to program, and a lot of fantastic things have been done with the instincts of insects.

Uses- Genetic engineering is used today for:

Medicine: to repair genetic defects or speed the repair of damage.

Parts: to create organs and tissues that are compatible with a person's immune system (will not be rejected). Replacement organs and limbs are one possible use, as are biological implants such as poisoned claws, extra muscles or nightvision retinas.

Agriculture: to create plants and animals that grow in artificial environments and produce food, building and construction materials, and medicines. Most food from corporate farms comes from genetically engineered plants and animals designed to create food products with maximum efficiency. Most modern products are made out of either plastics or fibers made from genetically engineered sources. Criminals have even used genetic engineering to make drug factories that look like ordinary weeds.

Enhancements: Although it is very difficult to improve on nature (see sidebar), genetic engineering can be used (illegally) to add additional abilities to humans or animals.

Laws- Most of today's genetics laws can be traced to a fear of a change to the human race and of ecodisasters caused by new organisms reproducing without control. Genetic modification equipment is highly regulated (only doctors and researchers can own it). Any particular genetic modification on a human must have FDA approval (just like drugs), can only be used to fix pre-existing medical problems, and cannot effect the sex cells (in other words, can not be passed down to children).

The laws about using genetically engineered plants, animals and bacteria are strict and voluminous. People are still afraid of the disasters of the 2040s when genetically modified organisms released in to the wild mutated or did not act as predicted. In laboratories, factories and farms, safeguards must exist to prevent genetically modified organisms from escaping in to the wild. To release a genetically engineered organism in to the environment requires compliance with the country's laws and approval by a special subcommittee of the UN. To release something in the wild, that organism must have "mutation blocking." Mutation blocking is a genetic modification for organisms that reproduce asexually (produce exact clones of themselves). When a cell divides, proteins check the cell for mutations (compares one DNA strand with another copy) and if any differences are found it creates a cascade that kills the cell.

The Legend of the Supersoldier

During the Freedom Wars, a group of Freedom Army scientists were ordered to create a genetically modified supersoldier. Hernandez wanted a perfect body he could put the minds of his best soldiers in to. Scientists started by increasing the size and density of muscles. They succeeded in creating super-strong bodies, but the bodies were too strong: joints shredded, bones broke, muscles tore from the bones. Trying to make joints and bones stronger made the soldiers inflexible and prone to serious internal damage. Since the rib cage could no longer bend to cushion blows, a punch to the chest could kill one of these soldiers. Whenever the scientists tried to make the solider better at one thing, the soldier suffered a defect somewhere else. Eliminate pain, and soldiers would ignore injuries that needed medical attention. Increase metabolism and soldiers could starve to death in a day. Finally, the scientists were able to convince the Freedom Army that they could create soldiers that were better in some specific situation (e.g. better at operating in space, or better at sneaking around at night) but they couldn't create a better solider. Then the scientists were blown up.

Smart Chemicals

In Brief- Very complex chemicals that react and change in pre-programmed ways to environmental stimuli.

Smart chemicals are more expensive than most modern tech, but less expensive than secondary nanotech. Most smart chemicals are made by expensive secondary nanotech machines. Smart chemicals are complex human-made molecules (usually long chains of proteins) that are designed on a computer to react to certain stimuli, and to interact in very complex ways. A molecule can be made that will change shape when it gets warmer than 98 degrees, and that chemical may in turn cause a pigment molecule to change shape so that color changes from clear to black, spelling out the temperature.

Some smart chemicals react to electricity (like the pigments in color change clothing). Others react to catalyst chemicals that can be used to control and fine tune the reaction (like color changing smart paint). Some react to the presence of other chemicals (like the sensors in bomb sensing wands, or in auto-blood tests). There are even chemicals that react to psychic energy (like psychic goggles).

Bloodhound powder is a powder made up of very complex molecules that attach to certain human olfactory receptors. When the chemicals encounter a set of proteins (corresponding to the unique smell of an individual person) they activate the smell receptor. When the person being tracked comes near, the person using the bloodhound powder smells a strong smell of nutmeg.

Smart chemicals can also be used to create invisible bombs. These bombs could look like anything from cloth to a pencil, and can be manufactured to detonate at a variety of different stimuli. Fortunately, these invisible explosives are very rare and expensive and can be sensed with standard explosives sensors.

Pharmaceuticals

In Brief- No major advances, but more and more useful drugs being discovered.

The pharmaceutical industry is often compared to the tortoise from the old story of the tortoise and the hare. There have been no ground-shaking, world-changing advances from the pharmaceutical industry in this century. However, pharmaceutical branches of corporations have steadily been cranking out new drugs with tremendous medical and street uses.

Many pharmaceuticals have been made stronger and with less side effects. Maxin, the strongest smart drug created to date, is so strong that some people become addicted to it. Phamacaeuticals with completely new effects have been created. The drug with the street name "bright" enhances sensory sensitivity and perception. Sibosin eliminates the need for sleep (it has been made illegal because of dangerous side effects, but it is still popular on the black market). Some of the most important drugs are the pro-psychics (drugs which increase psychic abilities). The most powerful pro-psychic drug (Soma) did not come out of a R&D lab, it is a hallucinogenic mixture of plants and fungi originally used as a religious sacrament in ancient India.

Frontiers of Science

In Brief- Better mental programming control of psychic systems, full nanotech computers, direct manipulation of knowledge and memory are in the works.

Psych-Mental Programming- The hottest new mental programs utilize psychic receptors and transmitters in the brain. Right now these mental programs are very clumsy, but in the future programs may be able to do anything a psychic could do. More than that, mental programs could use psychic systems to communicate with each other, giving them the power that computers have.

Psychic Genetics- Geneticists are still searching for the genes that control psychic receptors and transmitters. When they discover them, it may be possible to make genetic enhancements that significantly increase the power of psychics.

Knowledge Programming- Neuropsychologists are just starting to learn how memories and knowledge are stored in the brain. There are significant barriers to working with knowledge and memories (including that each item in memory is stored relative to other itsems) but these barriers are not insurmountable. It may someday be possible to edit people's knowledge and memories (even their opinions, beliefs and values) or even copy them. It might be possible for mental programs to put knowledge and skills directly in to people's heads. When this day comes to pass, it may be possible to edit every single part of a human being: memories, likes and dislikes, belief, knowledge, emotions, states of consciousness. Some wonder what humanity will be when any human can change any part of himself or herself.

Baubles- Nanobot tanks rely on the principle of nanobots reproducing in a sealed environment with no predators. A brand new technology, still in the first stages of development, puts nanobots in a bag of clear plastic with their own energy source (a small nuclear reactor). The nanobots inside can turn themselves in to a powerful computer. This computer can rebuild its own circuitry to match the current task. If breaking a code, it can build millions of tiny code-guessing chips, if asked to be a sensor it can build high definition sensors. These baubles have the potential of putting the power of a supercomputer in the palm of the hand.

A High Tech World?

Looking around the city, it is hard to see the technological advances of the last century. In the parking lot of a fast food chain might be a paycomputer. The drink bottle lying in the gutter is probably made from plastics from genetically engineered crops, but it is indistinguishable from ancient plastics. A few doors might have hooded keypads instead of mechanical locks. A passerby might have high tech armor, but will probably hide it under other clothing (to reduce the temptation of other people to steal it).

For the most part, however, the things people see and interact with are all old technology. Most things in the city are old (many buildings were built 200 years ago), and even new items use old tech because old-tech is cheaper. Most new technology (secondary nanotech, smart chemicals, genetically engineered organisms) have not yet reached the point where they are cheaper to use than ordinary materials.

Transportation

In Brief- Cars rare, personal transport common but most walk, small subway, bus depot in Brooklyn.

Cars

In Brief- Cars rare in the city because streets too bad for electric vehicles, gasoline vehicles too expensive to run.

Cars are seldom seen on the streets of the city. The two most popular options for vehicles today are electric (like the cheap little golf-cart-like vehicles that can be seen in gated communities and corporate living centers) and gasoline powered. The roads are too bad for the cheap electric vehicles. They just don't have enough power to make it past the city's many potholes, cracks and craters (see City Infrastructure). Gasoline powered vehicles are too expensive for most people (gasoline is $7/gallon). There are also no professional establishments to maintain and repair cars in the city.

The busiest avenues in the city, during their peak hours, see a vehicle every few minutes. These vehicles include:
- 4-wheel-drive electric cars and trucks owned by security companies.
- Large delivery trucks delivering merchandise to city stores or packages to residences.
- Old gasoline powered vehicles maintained by amateur mechanics.
- Gasoline powered motorcycles, ridden by the rich and powerful.
- Old gas-powered taxis and armored limos.

Personal Transport

In Brief- Bicycles, motorized wheeled transport, slipboards (boards with incredibly slick bottoms), hopping trains and walking.

Bikes- Bicycles are common, especially among street people. They use no power and can be repaired with basic tools. Most street people have beat up, rusty bicycles. Bicycles are not much valued for speed, but they can help people get around the city without getting exhausted.

Motorized Transport- Small electric motors have been put on to many personal vehicles, including roller blades, roller skates, skateboards and scooters. These vehicles are ideal for city travel because they can be picked up and carried over potholes and can be taken inside (rather than parked on the street, where they might be stolen). Most Indies have a vehicle like this (though they often choose to walk and not make themselves a target for thieves).

Slipboards- The most expensive form of personal transport is a slipboard. Generally, only Indies can afford slipboards, and those that have them guard them cautiously. Slipboards use secondary nanotech materials (and a thin gel) to make the underside nearly frictionless. A skilled rider can move easily through any terrain. Special mods are available that let slipboards make powered jumps

Hopping Trains- After over 120 years without above ground trains, corporations successfully lobbied to have a railroad built in the city. The railroad follows Broadway and there is a small railyard at the northern tip of the city. About 5 trains come by per day. Many people (especially homeless people), grab on to the sides of the trains for a free trip across the city. The train cars are locked with alarms and security guards will react if someone tries to get in.

Walking- In the end, most city dwellers end up walking most of the time. Walking is free and can be done even while intoxicated or tired. Most people can walk from one end of the city to the other in about 7 hours.

Subway

In Brief- Makes a circuit around the city, $1.50 per ride, runs every fifteen minutes. Sleeping and fighting common on trains.

The old subway lines were sealed up and a new subway system was built during the Freedom Army occupation of the city. The new system was built to remove the possibility of soldiers traveling by foot in the subway tunnels. The new subway does not go outside the city and there are few places in the tunnels a person can walk without being smashed by a train.

There are 14 subway stops in the city. A train comes by every 15 minutes (69 times per day). A single $1.50 fare is paid to get in to the subway station. Floor to ceiling revolving gates make it so that only one person can get in per fare paid (although small people have been known to squeeze in together). Once inside, the rider can ride to any stop he or she wants. The train operates in a large circuit: the car will eventually hit each stop in the city.

About 10,000 train fares are purchased each day in the city. During the peak times (morning, early evening) there are about 250 people on each train, during very slow times (after midnight) there are about 50 people per train.

A subway train has three cars with fifty seats each (a train can hold 150 sitting, plus another 200 standing). Doors allow people to travel between cars. There are emergency exits in case the train is stopped due to a power outage.

There are only two trains in the subway system. When one train is going on the North on the East side of the park, another is going South on the West side, so no part of the subway needs to be large enough for two trains to pass at once. Each train makes a full circuit of all 19 stops in about 30 minutes. The train is stopped with the doors open for about 15 seconds at each stop. It takes about 90 seconds to get from stop to stop.

Some street people pay the fare to enter the subway so they can sleep on the train. At

Subway Facts in Brief
-10,000 fares purchased each day
-$1.50 per ride
-Train comes by every 15 min. (69 trains per day)
-14 stops in a large circuit (30 minutes)
-50 to 250 people per train
-Three cars with 50 seats each
-15 seconds at each stop
-90 seconds between stops

Almost everyone in the city, including gang members, rides the subway. The subway is thus the scene of more violent confrontations than any other place in the city. Gang members at war enter the subway expecting to get in a fight. Fights in subways are so commonplace that subway riders are used to moving to a different car when a fight is starting. Some city residents practice fighting in accelerating and decelerating subway cars.

Trains are run by a computer in the subway maintenance center downtown. Once a night subway cars stop in this center for cleaning and maintenance. Unless they fall asleep on a train, city residents rarely see subway employees.

Subway stations have restrooms, though they are seldom cleaned except by a few Jacks who ask for tips. Subway stations also have small pay lockers. It costs $1 for 48 hours.

Subway Stops

North to South

Ft, George Ave. & Ft. George Hill (Inwood/Washington Heights)

Amsterdam Ave. & 170th St. (Inwood/Washington Heights)

Amsterdam Ave 135th St. (Harlem)

Amsterdam Ave & 110th St. (Harlem/Upper West Side)

Amsterdam Ave. & 86th St.(Upper West Side)

Amsterdam Ave. & 57th St. (Upper West Side/Midtown)

Ave. of the Americas & 23rd St. (Downtown)

3rd Ave. & East 8th St. (Downtown)

W. Broadway & Canal (Downtown)

Battery & State (Downtown)

Canal & Hudson (Downtown)

South To North

Canal & Hudson (Downtown)

Battery & State (Downtown)

W. Broadway & Canal (Downtown)

3rd Ave. & East 8th St. (Downtown)

Ave. of the Americas & 23rd St. (Downtown)

Lexington Ave. & 57th St. (Midtown/Upper East Side)

Lexington Ave. & 86th St. (Upper East Side)

Lexington Ave. & 110th St. (Upper East Side/Harlem)

Lexington Ave. & 135th St. (Harlem)

Amsterdam Ave. & 170th St. (Inwood/Washington Heights)

Ft. George Ave. & Ft. George Hill (Inwood/Washington Heights)

International

A $2 bus runs from a bus stop in the Bowery downtown to a large bus terminal in Brooklyn. This terminal connects to a network of busses that can get PCs anywhere in the US, Canada or Mexico (for up to $100).

About 20 miles Northwest of the city is the New York Aerospace Port, a major international hub. Domestic and international flights and commercial space shuttles (including Satellite Repair Corporation shuttles) launch from here. A one way ticket to the West Coast costs about $200, and a one way ticket to Japan costs about $500.

People without money can travel across the country by hitchhiking and hopping trains, but it is a chancy way to travel. Lucky train-hoppers can even get aboard the trans-Siberian railroad, which goes across Canada, across the Bering Straits to Russia and all the way across to Europe.

Strong workers can get jobs aboard cargo ships that go to other countries. They are given room and board, and possibly a small bit of money when they reach their destination. It is not hard to find work on ships leaving the country, but it is very hard to find work on ships coming back to the US.

Underground

History

In Brief- Increasingly complex in 1800s, 1900s, early 2000s. Some damage in 2040s. Freedom Army tried to lock it up.

As the city became more packed and real estate became more valuable, more and more things were moved underground. The first utilities to be moved underground were small pipes (mainly wood) containing water, steam, gas and sewage in the 1800s. In the early 1900s, people started to use tunnels for transportation. Subway and rail tunnels were built. Because many of these tunnels were built below the water table, a whole series of pumps had to be built to continually pump groundwater out of the island. In the late 1900s the underground became even more complex with the addition of electricity and then fiber optic lines. New buildings were built to tap directly in to the underground network, and some even had private subway stations. Some buildings extended their basements under the street (to maximize usable space) but the city started charging them for this space. Rather than pay, many building owners chose to seal up those parts of the basements.

Some of the tunnels were lost during the rising ocean levels of the 2040s. During the Freedom Wars, Jeffrey Hernandez feared the massive and partially unmapped network of tunnels. He ordered every entrance to the sewers locked up. He closed down the old subway system and built a new, more secure system. By the 2070s, people were trying to break the locks on the entrances to the underground, but they found that someone already had the underground as their turf.

Moles

In Brief- Mysterious, live underground, avoid contact with others, violently repel trespassers. Are they violent, inbred savages or humble loners?

The underground is inhabited solely by city residents known as Moles. Not much is known about the moles, because they refuse to communicate with those living above them. Most who have tried exploring underground (or spying on the Moles) have been killed. Every once in a while a Mole has been caught scrounging from dumpsters in the city above, but they fight to the death rather than being caught and interrogated. The Moles' knowledge of the city seems about as limited as the city's knowledge of them (though some have suggested this may be a ploy).

The people with the most contact with the Moles are the Water Rats, who sometimes run in to them in the groundwater outflow tunnels that the Rats "surf" in. The Water Rats and Moles have sort of an unspoken agreement, whenever they run in to each other they do not speak to each other and try not to get in each other's way. The head of the Water Rats, Matt Tim, makes it a point to hear every detail of every encounter members of his family have with the Moles.

Military- The tunnels the Moles live in are dotted with deadly booby traps. Moles seem to patrol the tunnels looking for intruders. When they see intruders they rush off and gather a huge army. Mole armies attack without question. The Moles seem unafraid of death and wave after wave of Moles will attack an enemy until the enemy is driven off. The Moles know the tunnels quite well and seem to be able to operate well in darkness. Their favorite trick is to smash the enemy's lights and attack.

Conjecture- Estimates of the Mole population varies incredibly. Some say it could be as little as 100, others claim it's as much as 5000. Some say that they are a cult of Unborn crazies who, during the Freedom Wars, went underground to await the end of the world. They eat rats, have a social system based on violence, are badly inbred and are indescribably miserable. They don't know how to read, some barely know how to talk, and all they know is fear and violence.

Others say that the Moles must be intelligent and disciplined to survive with what little they have. They say the Moles must be master pirates (tapping electricity and running water), scavengers and craftspeople. A few Moles weapons have been captured. They resemble weapons manufactured by Street People and show a high degree of skill and creativity.

People also like to hypothesize about the motivations of the Moles. Some think that they are breeding underground until they have a large enough population to overrun the city. Others think that the Moles simply want to be left alone to live by their own humble means.

Although often regarded as an expert on the Moles, Matt Timm (founder of the Water Rats street family) rarely engages in conjecture. He responds to most conjecture with "yeah, that's a good theory."

Geography

In Brief- Small utility pipes near the street, tunnels under that, huge water pipes deep underground, few good maps exist.

Utilities Level- In the first thirty feet underground are the majority of the city's utilities. There are electrical lines and transformers, fiber optic lines, water, steam, natural gas and many unused pipes. When people need access to these pipes, they typically dig up the streets (although there are small underground rooms at major junctions). At this depth there are very few tunnels wide enough for humans to enter.

Subway and Sewage- Below 30 feet, below the level of most basements, are larger tunnels. There are subways and subway stations (most of which are closed off and unused). Groundwater pumps and tunnels carry water out to the sunken city and keep water from infiltrating the subway. Below the subways are sewage lines which carry sewage (at a slight incline) to a treatment plant at the north end of the city. A seperate system of utility tunnels (with their own control rooms) provide electricity and water for the subway system.

Deep Pipes- Hundreds of feet below the city, in the ancient bedrock, are the biggest tunnels in the city. The deep pipes carry water, at high pressure, to the city. These pipes are huge (some large enough to drive trucks through). City Tunnel #3, the last and largest water tunnel built for the city, is 70 stories underground. Risers carry pressurized water up to the street above.

Maps- There is no one map that shows all of the underground. There are many unused pipes and tunnels, some of which have been forgotten about completely. In ancient times, people would go dig under the city and install utilities without asking anyone's permission or telling anyone what they'd done. Much information about the underground was lost during the chaos of the Freedom Wars. The major utility companies have maps, but those maps often only show the tunnels and pipes that they are currently using. Maps that combine information about known tunnels are a hot commodity.

Fates Worse Than Death: Rentpunk

Name

High Concept

Trouble

Need

Something Interesting

Other Aspects

Approaches

choose 1 at Mediocre (+0), 2 at Average (+1), 2 at Fair (+2) and 1 at Good (+3)

Careful
Clever
Flashy

Forceful
Quick
Sneaky

Stunts

Choose 1 to 3 Stunts.

Stress ☐☐☐

Consequences

Physical
Social

Mental
Financial

Refresh

Refresh = 4 minus number of Stunts

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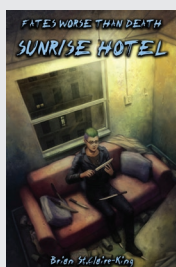
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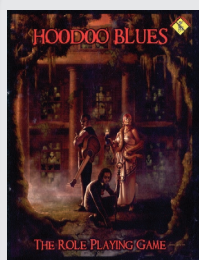
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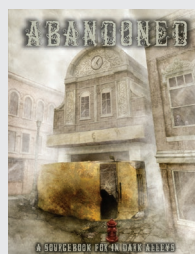
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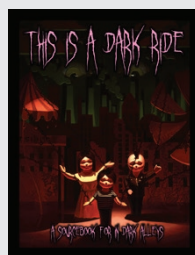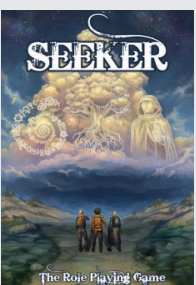
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