PYRAMID

Issue 3/21 July '10

CYBERPUNK

CONSOLE COWBOYS AND CYBERSPACE KUNG FU

by W.A. Frick

DOWN IN THE MALL
by Matt Riggsby

THE TREASURE OF JONI MONORAIL
by J. Edward Tremlett

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by Ken Spencer

KEEPING IT REAL
by Paul Blackwell

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

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Brown: In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.)
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Purple: Other Features

Cover Art
David Schleinkofer

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Greg Hyland

In This Issue

The future marches ever closer. This cyberpunk-themed issue of *Pyramid* – devoted as it is to omnipresent computing and soul-crushing megacorporations – looks at a tomorrow that's sooner than ever!

The chromed dark future demands action – so why let the guys with guns and big muscles get all the fun? *Console Cowboys and Cyberspace Kung Fu* provides fast-paced rules for hackers and netrunners. Using ***GURPS Action*** as its core inspiration, this system allows for cinematic computer action that offers many options *without* slowing down the game. Fight the future – quickly!

Cyberpunk wants you to consume almost as much as it wants to consume you. *Down in the Mall,* by Matt Riggsby, proves that tomorrow's centers of shopping are ideal for adventurers, whether forming the basis for a quiet shopping trip or a loud firefight. Much like Matt's ***GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 8: Treasure Tables,*** this generic article uses random tables to allow for the fast creation of *bazaar* points of interest.

Are the cyberjockies getting too comfortable? Take them out of their cushy cities into the wasteland to find *The Treasure of Joni Monorail.* This nontraditional cyberpunk adventure outline starts with a mystery; how it ends is up to the heroes.

Who couldn't use someone in his head to help manage his life or give him a pep talk? *The Voices in My Head* offers three new ***GURPS Ultra-Tech*** plug-ins for the discriminating dystopian consumer's chip slot.

Cyberpunk often strikes an uneasy balance between the radical and the realistic. *Keeping It Real* looks at many cinematic advantages and disadvantages in ***GURPS,*** and offers insight, options, and variants for incorporating them into realistic campaigns. This is a must-read article for realistic GMs even if they *don't* play cyberpunk!

For the first time, our prop insert provides direct support of an article from the same issue: Build your own simulated hi-tech gear with the *Action Cyberdeck.*

Finally, this issue offers the usual bits that are no doubt crafted by sophisticated AIs: the iridescent insight of *Random Thought Table,* the revolutionary randomness of *Odds and Ends,* and the metallic mirth of *Murphy's Rules.*

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From the Editor

The Future Ain't What it Used to Be

As a genre, cyberpunk is at an odd point in its lifecycle. Many of its "classic" works contain elements that – from a technological point of view – have about as much relation to modern society and technology as Jules Verne's writings contain insight into space travel.

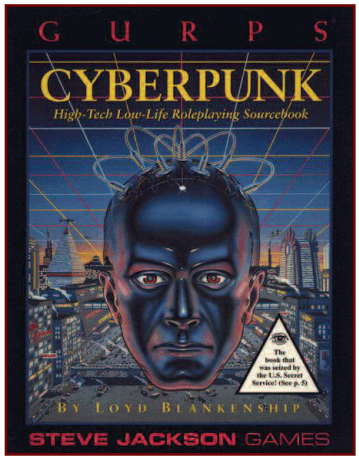
Still, for many, the core elements of cyberpunk are *more* relevant than ever. A world that's constantly connected via computers and information? Soulless corporations that care for themselves more than its workers – or even the planet? Technological and medical advances that bring into question the very definitions of "humanity" and "living"? In some ways, if cyberpunk feels "outdated," it's not because cyberpunk has been proven incorrect but because its elements have become *true*.

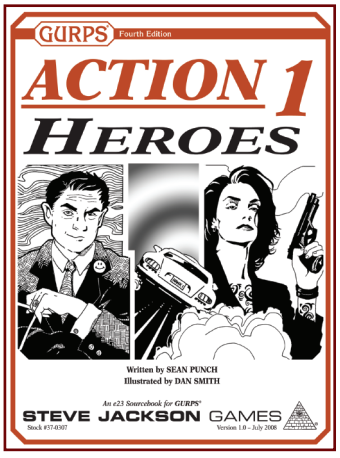
This issue of *Pyramid* takes a look at this near-classic genre from a modern perspective, providing a few new tools, tricks, and insights. Hopefully it'll give you something you can use, both within and outside your cyberpunk games. The future has never been closer.

As a thought exercise to keep in mind while reading this issue, fans of the founding works of cyberpunk who want to stay true to those original visions might want to consider elements that *don't* jive with a modern context. Then, as a group, figure out how to make those bits make sense (or at least come up with a justification that all players can agree to). Why do some poor folks use ATM-like devices to access cyberspace? (Maybe VR requires too much processor power?) Why would folks have metallic implants when we're seemingly so close to vat-grown flesh options? (Maybe moral or religious groups have their way and force society to back off bio-tech for the time being.) Turn on and plug in; there are worlds waiting in your mind.

Comments Welcome

Speaking of turning you on (ew!), is there anything we did this issue that you want us to do more? Did we do anything so awful that you feel we should "plug in" to a light socket with a fork? Regardless, we'd love to hear from you. Send us a note at **pyramid@sjgames.com,** or visit our virtual gathering at **forums.sjgames.com.**





Console Cowboys and Cyberspace Kung Fu

by W.A. Frick

Horizon the color of TV static, wire-thin neon webs pulsing with information transfer, glowing polyhedrons of data protected by shimmering walls of ICE . . . from the beginnings of the genre, cyber*space* has been at the heart of cyber*punk*. The anti-heroes of the virtual world – deckers, netrunners, console cowboys – have become archetypes in their own right, spreading into mainstream fiction as a generation of streetwise computer geeks and tech-savvy criminals. Their online capers, often performed in collaboration with on-site operatives to take care of the more physical aspects of system-intrusion, are a mainstay of the modern techno-thriller. Cinematic to the core, these digital wizards and their exploits can be incorporated easily into the realm of the ***GURPS Action*** series – the netrunner is a futuristic hacker, and whether navigating the matrix by way of laptop or cyberdeck, his skills and goals are the same.

Like other stealth and intrusion specialists, hackers suffer from the problem of the party thief – their primary skills tend to isolate them from the rest of the heroes. Game focus must shift to accommodate this, dividing the GM's attention between the hacker and the other characters. To avoid this, the rules for high-tech challenges in ***Action 2: Exploits*** abstract the details of a hacking mission into a handful of modified skill rolls. However, as hinted later in that volume, hacking can be integrated into an action game by putting the world online – a foregone conclusion in most cyberpunk settings.

These optional rules attempt to provide for such an integration, expanding on the hacking rules from ***Action 2*** with material from ***GURPS Ultra-Tech*** to provide a bit more detail (and dramatic tension) to net-running, while allowing the GM to keep both the hacker and the more physically oriented members of the team in the action. In order to maintain the fast-and-loose feel of a proper ***Action*** game, these mechanics look to the chase rules (***Action 2***, p. 31-35) rather than a millisecond-by-millisecond breakdown of a net-run – but they attempt to honor their roots, with a nod to Lloyd Blankenship's original ideas from the incomparable ***GURPS Cyberpunk***.

> *I shouldn't have written all of those tank programs.*
>
> **– *Tron***

Ultra-Tech (p. 9) defines the Cyberpunk technology path as TL8-10; this article splits the difference and assumes TL9 computing technology, possibly with a few TL10 breakthroughs. Thus, the technology of the netrunner and his world departs considerably from the standard TL8 of ***Action***. Characters are likely to be armed, and *chromed*, to the teeth with futuristic hardware, making ***Ultra-Tech*** of more use than ***High-Tech*** or Chapter 4 of ***Action 1***. (See Phil Masters' article in *Pyramid #3.15 – Transhuman Action!* – for some ideas on bringing ***Action*** into the not-too-distant future, albeit at a higher TL than standard cyberpunk.) GMs preferring higher or lower tech levels will need to adjust things to account for varied Complexity, cost, and availability of hardware and software. To such a degree as possible, these rules seek to be TL agnostic; in theory, they could be used (with some adjustments) in most any cinematic techno-thriller campaign – but they're written at TL9.

It's good for everyone to be on the same page about cyberspace; if there's a representative movie, watch it as a group!

The Netrunner

The *netrunner* is an ultra-tech hacker (the terms are used interchangeably in this article, along with *decker*), and can use the template from ***Action 1*** (pp. 10-11) with few adjustments. If a Neural Interface Implant (9 points for a cable jack, 17 points for short-range wireless – ***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 216) is desired or required for netrunning in the campaign, use discretionary advantage points to purchase it. Signature Gear is also common, in the form of custom, high-performance portable computers or cyberdecks. The GM may or may not allow the inclusion of software as Signature Gear.

Like contemporary hackers, netrunners tend toward criminal backgrounds, but cyberpunk settings often include prominent examples of corporate (security, sometimes intelligence) and government (intelligence, law enforcement, or military) netrunners as well – "white hats" who counter and thwart the criminal "black hats." In many cases, there's little obvious difference between criminal and legitimate deckers, except perhaps who pays for their equipment.

Hardware and Software

In any game that features netrunning, the GM must first determine what computing and networking technologies are prevalent, and what gear is available to a PC netrunner. The computers given in ***Action 1*** cover the stark basics for a contemporary (TL8) game, but don't even scratch the surface for futuristic settings. ***Ultra-Tech*** offers a broader selection of computers and interfaces, but these require the GM to make decisions about how it all works in his campaign.

> *She becomes part of the software. Her brain is the computer.*
>
> *– **Doctor Who** #1.7 (2005)*

Computers

Ultra-tech computers (***Ultra-Tech,*** pp. 21-26) are both smaller and faster than modern systems . . . a *tiny* TL9 computer (wearable, implant, etc.) is as powerful as a contemporary desktop, while cutting-edge *personal* computers can rival TL8 megacomputers. On the other end, the mainframes and larger systems that a hacker is likely to be going up against can reach sufficient Complexity to run full, volitional AI and scores of defensive programs.

Furthermore, with multiple terabytes of drive space available on even the smallest systems, storage capacity should only come up if the hacker needs to hold or transfer large amounts of data. Assume that programs take up negligible space in comparison to the computer's total capacity.

Interfaces

Much of the flavor of a campaign's netrunning will be defined by the choice of computer interfaces. Most classic cyberpunk features a full-sensory VR matrix, often accessed by direct neural interface or induction, leading to vivid netrunning sequences. The most extreme examples of this replace traditional "netrunning" imagery (which resembles the polyhedral, neon-hued video game graphics of the 1980s) with virtual sword fights and high-flying kung-fu melees. Even in a campaign that treats real-world violence with gritty realism, full VR netrunning can allow for as flashy and cinematic hacking or "virtual combat" as the GM wants.

The common interfaces available for TL9 computers are *terminal*, *basic VR*, *full VR*, and *total VR*. Many campaigns will feature several of these technologies coexisting, with users of higher-end interfaces receiving bonuses to their rolls against lower-end users (see below).

A *terminal* (***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 23) is the basic "keyboard-video-mouse" interface, or possibly a touchscreen – *datapads* and *portable terminals* are most common for the hacker on the go, while *workstation terminals* might be available back at base (or home), or in a mobile command center. If the GM allows, a *neural input receiver* ($50, 0.1 lb, ***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 48) can replace keyboard, mouse, and touchpad for input, reducing the penalty for hacking on a small terminal by -1. Even hardcore deckers need to be able to use their computers without jacking in sometimes, and so most computers will include some kind of terminal in addition to any VR interface.

Basic and *full VR* (***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 54) consist of a full-immersion visual, and possibly auditory and limited tactile, environment – the network is coded into a three-dimensional model and displayed using a VR rig. Such a rig requires a visor or *HUD* ($50, negligible weight, ***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 24) for visual display, and *VR gloves* ($20, 0.3 lbs.), a *basic VR suit* ($200, 1 lb.), or a *full VR suit* ($2,000, 5 lbs.; all on p. 54 of ***Ultra-Tech***) for input and additional sensory output. Basic and full VR can also be accessed via direct neural interface.

Total VR (***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 54) is the full-sensory experience of cyberspace, ported directly into the user's brain, often though a cyberdeck (see p. 6). It requires a neural interface implant, or at the GM's option, a nano-wire (TL10) *neural interface helmet* ($10,000, 2 lbs.) or superscience (TL10^) *neural induction helmet* ($5,000, 2 lbs.; both on p. 49 of ***Ultra-Tech***).

*These rules don't need to be limited to diehard cyberpunk campaigns; many of the elements here are perfectly suited for cyber-centric **Action** adventures such as **Swordfish, Hackers,** or even **Independence Day!***

A netrunner using any form of VR is generally oblivious to nondamaging external stimuli – basic VR renders him blind to the outside world (and deaf, or at least hard of hearing, with headphones), while total VR puts him in a state that's effectively the same as deep sleep. Jacking in or out (unplugging cables, removing VR visor, etc.) is normally a single Ready maneuver, requiring no roll. Jacking out of *total* VR leaves the hacker mentally stunned until he can make an IQ roll.

In a campaign with multiple kinds of interfaces, contested rolls are affected by difference in interface types – a hacker on an old-fashioned terminal has a much slower reaction time than a decker (or AI) who experiences the network directly. For each step from *terminal* to *basic VR* to *full VR* to *total VR,* apply a -2 to the skill levels of the lower-end technology's user. Someone using a terminal interface gets a -6 in any contested rolls against one using total VR, or -2 against a basic VR user. Automated defenses ignore this, neither gaining penalties nor imposing them on opponents based on interface type. AIs are always considered to be using total VR, even if it's not available to anyone else in the setting.

Cyberdecks

A cyberdeck is a computer specifically designed and optimized for direct neural (VR) interface with the matrix. Normally, accessing a VR environment over direct neural interface requires a program, which takes up some of the computer's processing power, leaving open fewer "program slots" for other high-Complexity programs to run. The VR interface is hard-coded into a cyberdeck, and controlled by an independent subsystem. As a result, VR does *not* count as a program running on a cyberdeck – so the decker can use his deck's full Complexity to run other programs. The cyberdeck must still be of sufficient Complexity to run the VR in question (Complexity 4 for basic VR, 5 for full, 6 for total). Thus, a TL9 personal-sized cyberdeck must have the Fast or Genius option (***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 23) applied to run total VR, and a small cyberdeck must have its Complexity boosted to run anything but basic VR.

All cyberdecks are capable of cable and secure wireless interface, using neural implants (and helmets, if available), VR equipment, and standard computer networks. The cost of the systems below includes the deck, the VR, and some sort of terminal interface. They'll run for 20 hours on batteries, or indefinitely on external power. Some common models:

Standard Deck. Includes portable terminal (-1 to skill when using the terminal to hack). Complexity 4 with basic VR: $415; Complexity 5 with full VR: $2,300; Complexity 6 with total VR: $28,050; Complexity 7 with total VR: $628,050; 5.5 lbs.

Ultra-Light Deck. Includes datapad terminal (-2 to skill when using the terminal to hack). Complexity 4 with basic VR: $435; Complexity 5 with full VR: $3,510; Complexity 6 with total VR: $65,510; 0.6 lbs.

Wearable or Implant Deck. Wearable cyberdecks include a sleeve display (equivalent to a datapad) at no extra cost, while implants are always controlled via direct neural interface (and count as a 7-point advantage; see ***Ultra-Tech*** p. 215). Complexity 4 with basic VR: $1,600; Complexity 5 with full VR: $32,300; 0.05 lbs. (An implant's weight is negligible.)

Cherried-Out Cowboy's Deck. Hardened (+3 to resist attacks that target electrical gear, -3 to attempts against it by Damage programs, +3 to decker's HT to resist or recover from Damage programs; see p. 8); high-capacity (run 50% more programs simultaneously). Includes portable terminal. Complexity 4 with basic VR: $540; Complexity 5 with full VR: $4,800; Complexity 6 with total VR: $76,050; Complexity 7 with total VR: $1,878,050; 10.5 lbs.

At TL10, all cyberdecks have +2 Complexity. At TL8, all decks have -2 Complexity, and are able to run correspondingly less intensive VR; if a deck's adjusted Complexity is less than 4, it's simply not available at TL8.

The GM can design new cyberdecks using the rules in ***Ultra-Tech*** (pp. 21-24). Because cyberdecks can run VR "for free," their base cost is multiplied by 1.25; this can be combined with High-Capacity. For simplicity, the cyberdecks above assume TL9 costs for VR software – the GM in a TL8 or TL10 game can use the *Software Cost Table* (p. 7) to adjust the cost for extra realism.

> *Yeah, I've got the guts of three Xboxes and four PlayStations daisy-chained. Plus some seriously modded-out code that I* ***swear*** *came to me in a dream.*
>
> ***– Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*** *#1.3*

PROGRAMS

Programs are the specific tools in a hacker's repertoire. Installed and executed on his computer, they function somewhat like techniques, defaulting to various computer skills to accomplish specific tasks. Unlike normal techniques, they aren't tied to a particular skill, but can be used with any skill listed as a default for the program, by anyone using the computer upon which they are installed. They aren't improved with character points but purchased with money (see the *Software Cost Table* below, or on p. 25 of ***Ultra-Tech***), installed on a computer, and used at the listed default. A hacker who writes his own software still has some costs to cover, but with at least a week of development per Complexity level, he can cut the cost of a program by 30% with a successful Computer Programming roll (50% for a critical success). Freeware or pirated versions of various programs may be available at the GM's discretion, many with their own quirks and peculiarities.

Groups who want more cyberdeck possibilities can design their own ahead of time using the information on computers from ***Ultra-Tech*** *(pp. 21-24). This might spark new ideas – imagine a cyberdeck* ***printed*** *on a netrunner's skin!*

Software Cost Table

Complexity	TL8	TL9	TL10
Complexity 1	$100	$10	$1
Complexity 2	$300	$30	$3
Complexity 3	$1,000	$100	$10
Complexity 4	$3,000	$300	$30
Complexity 5	$10,000	$1,000	$100
Complexity 6	$30,000	$3,000	$300
Complexity 7	$100,000	$10,000	$1,000
Complexity 8	$300,000	$30,000	$3,000
Complexity 9	$1,000,000	$100,000	$10,000

Base Complexity

Each program has a *Base Complexity*, the minimum rating for software capable of the task in question. More sophisticated (higher Complexity) versions may be purchased; each level of Complexity above the program's Base Complexity raises the default by 1 . . . so a normal Breach program (Base Complexity 3) defaults to Computer Hacking-2, but an advanced, Complexity 5 Breach program defaults to unmodified Computer Hacking.

A TL8 hacker will be unable to run the more sophisticated programs, unless he purchases a top-of-the-line system; even then, he'll be limited in what he can run concurrently. One at TL10 can easily run higher-Complexity versions of the programs, for improved effective skill with each one – but will face comparably more sophisticated defenses. See p. B472 for details on the relationship between computer/hardware Complexity and program/software Complexity.

Default Use

Normally, a program can only be used if it's installed on the netrunner's computer, or if he can access it on a remote computer via the Control program. At the GM's option, someone with H4xx0r (***Action 1***, p. 18) or the full version of Quick Gadgeteer (p. B57) may attempt default use of a program that he doesn't have. This runs as a program of one Complexity *higher* than the program's Base Complexity rating, and rolls are made at -4 to the normal default, with no bonus from having higher-than-base Complexity.

Adapting one program to function as a similar one (Listen into Search, etc.) only works if the original program has equal or better Complexity than the new one, although the GM may allow a critical success to exceed this limitation by 1 or 2.

Single-Execution vs. Continuous

Some programs cause a specific change or event when executed, and then halt. Others run continuously, providing constant protection, monitoring, or information, or perhaps awaiting certain conditions to be met before executing. Many programs can be set to run either way when invoked. Each of the following programs lists which mode or modes it can be run in; the mode must be selected when the program is invoked, and requires a new invocation of the program to change. A continuously running program, even one inactively waiting for preset conditions, counts as a program "on." Multiple running instances of a single program each count as a separate program "on."

The Programs

Depending on the campaign, each of the following may be available to PC hackers, NPC systems and admins, both, or neither.

Alter (Single-Execution)

Default: Computer Hacking-3 or Computer Programming-3.
Base Complexity: 4.

Change target program or data object in such a way as to serve a different purpose, but still function and appear valid. Use Alter to insert technically consistent records into a database, build a back door into an ICE program (add margin of success on Alter to subsequent rolls to Breach the ICE; see p. 8), or change the way that a program works (e.g., a scheduled money transfer moves the funds into a numbered Swiss account instead of its usual destination). Successfully made, such changes will go unnoticed until their results become apparent (disinformation spread, funds missing, etc.), unless the program or datum is successfully Analyzed (see below) – the Analyze roll must succeed by a greater margin than the original Alter roll.

Analyze (Continuous or Single-Execution)

Default: Computer Programming-3 or Expert (Computer Security)-2.
Base Complexity: 3.

Get information about the target user, computer, program, or data object. A successful roll returns useful information – file or user ID, running programs (and their Complexity), profile, network address, physical access location, or whatever the GM determines is available. If Alter, Spoof, or Stealth programs have been used to obscure or change the target, the Analyze program must win a Quick Contest against the deceptive program in order to detect the forgery and get *accurate* information. A victory on this roll also tells the program user about the presence of the obscuring programs, which can then be investigated further.

Analyze can be invoked as a single-execution program to examine a specific target, or set to run continuously to monitor the status of a particular file, computer, or program. Analyze *can* be run on a target protected by an ICE program, but Analyze will only give information about the ICE and any programs that are running through it (Analyze, Listen, or Search). It can also be set to cyclically scan all programs and data on a single computer, looking for irregularities (Alter, unauthorized instances of Control, etc.), or Triggered (p. 9) to scan users or programs that meet certain criteria. In all cases, it can call a Trigger program when certain results are obtained, or pass information to a sysadmin (or AI) for a more thorough examination.

Of course, any of these programs can have clever or interesting names in the game world.

Breach (Single-Execution)

Default: Computer Hacking-2.
Base Complexity: 3.

Penetrate a target ICE program to gain unauthorized access to the network, computer, program, or data it protects. Breach must win a Quick Contest against the ICE; victory grants the hacker access to the target, allowing him to execute other programs on it. A target protected by multiple layers of ICE (see *Layered ICE*, p. 10) can only be accessed after all instances are defeated.

Control (Single-Execution)

Default: Computer Hacking-2 or Computer Operation-3.
Base Complexity: 4.

Take over function of the target computer. A successful roll allows the netrunner to cause a compromised computer to carry out any function known to him of which it's normally capable – shut down, erase or transfer data, run or halt installed programs, etc. It can also allow remote control of a networked device (security cameras, machine-gun sentries, etc.), in which case the program defaults to the appropriate Electronics Operation specialty. This roll is only contested if another user is trying to Control the same computer to make it do something different. An individual program, device, or database that is protected by its own layer of ICE cannot be Controlled (or otherwise accessed) until the ICE protecting it is defeated. Each instance of internal ICE on a computer (protecting a particular program, database, or system) protects itself from tampering, and cannot be Controlled until it's been individually Breached (see above) or Spoofed (see p. 9).

Damage (Single-Execution)

Default: Computer Hacking-3 or Expert (Computer Security)-3.
Base Complexity: 5.

Create a destructive feedback loop in the target computer, causing physical damage; hardened computers impose a -3 to the program's skill level. Against most computers, a success will cause a crash and disable the system until 1d days and 1d × 10% of the computer's original cost have been put into repairs. (Any permanent data loss is up to the GM; most important systems will have multiple redundant, off-site backups.)

Against a cyberdeck, it forces the decker to make an immediate HT roll (+3 for a hardened cyberdeck); success incurs 1d burning damage to the decker's brain, but allows him to act normally, though any programs are rolled at a penalty equal to the damage taken. (Most deckers opt to jack out at this point.) Failure causes 2d damage, and totally incapacitates the decker; critical success avoids all damage, while critical failure increases damage to 3d.

Successive uses of the Damage program against an incapacitated decker are resisted at -5. This is the phenomenon known as "flatlining" – a flatlined character can do nothing on his turn but attempt to recover with a HT roll, at a penalty for the damage taken that round, but at +3 for a hardened cyberdeck. If he recovers, he can jack out immediately, but if he chooses to remain jacked in, he can't invoke any new programs until the next round.

> *The web would dynamically reconfigure itself to suite an individual. Something you could hold in your hand, read on your own, think about in private – this was considered elitist, immoral, and bad for business.*
>
> **– *The Girl from Monday***

ICE (Continuous)

Default: Computer Hacking-2 or Expert (Computer Security).
Base Complexity: 3.

*I*ntrusion *C*ountermeasure *E*lectronics deny unauthorized access to a network, computer, program, or data object. ICE runs continuously, generally alongside a Listen program to grant access to those with the proper credentials. As long as it's in effect, no program can be executed on the protected object without satisfying the Listen program or successfully Breaching (see above) the ICE, or Spoofing (see p. 9) the gatekeeper Listen program. An ICE program that has been successfully Breached is considered "off" until it's restarted by a sysadmin or automated defense system (or a hacker covering his tracks); ICE that's been Spoofed is still "on," but has granted access to the netrunner for the current session (until he disconnects from that computer). Highly secure systems often run several instances of ICE – one to restrict access to the computer itself, and others to protect critical programs, classified databases, etc. See *Layered ICE* (p. 10).

ICE can allow *some* communication through. For example, a Listen program that's functioning as gatekeeper for the ICE, or an Analyze or Search that's reaching through the computer's ICE to look around the network (or monitor the ICE), can still be Spoofed. ICE doesn't prevent the protected object from being found in a Search, but it does prevent the object's contents from being Altered (p. 7), Controlled (above), Searched (p. 9), or otherwise accessed. For example, a Search executed over a penetrated network can find an individual computer protected by its own ICE, but that ICE would have to be defeated before the computer could be Controlled, or a Search invoked to find a specific program or datum on it.

The quest to retrieve a previously unobtainable program can form an adventure hook. (A netrunner might need to provide incentives to the rest of his teammates to get them to join, since otherwise only he gets rewarded . . .)

Jam (Continuous)

Default: Computer Hacking-2.
Base Complexity: 2.

Overwhelm an Analyze, Listen, or Search program, or a specific mode of communication, with static or meaningless input. If the Jam is successful (no contested roll needed), the target can't receive any input from the jammed source – programs error out, and comm channels buzz with white noise – until the Jam is terminated, or its source is disconnected from the network. This an easy, brute-force way to interrupt communication, but it does nothing to "fool" the target – so if, for example, an Analyze program is set to alert the sysadmin of any errors in an ICE program, jamming it will draw as much attention as allowing it to report a Breach (p. 8).

It's an old trick dressed up in new electronic garb . . .

– Jodie Bernstein

Listen (Continuous)

Default: Computer Hacking-2 or Expert (Computer Security).
Base Complexity: 2.

Passive reception of communications. This program can either listen for specific kinds of messages (login attempts, etc.) or capture all traffic over a specific communication channel. When used for access control, Listen can be set to allow authorized users through a particular instance of an ICE program. In this case, it can be Spoofed (see below); the Spoof program must win a Quick Contest against Listen to allow a user through the ICE.

When used to snoop, Listen only captures data – if it's encrypted, the hacker will have to decrypt it (see *Code-Cracking* on p. 13 of ***Action 2***). Listen must overcome Stealth, winning a Quick Contest, in order to detect a cloaked communication; it has no chance to overcome Jam (see above), and will simply capture any misinformation presented by Spoof. Whatever mode it's used in, Listen can call a Trigger program if received information meets certain criteria (unsuccessful access attempts, etc.).

Search (Continuous or Single-Execution)

Default: Computer Operation-2 or Expert (Computer Security)-1.
Base Complexity: 3.

Actively seek out a particular program or piece of data on a computer, or a particular computer on a network. A success finds the target, allowing further programs to be executed on it (once its ICE is defeated, of course!). Search must win a Quick Contest against Stealth, or Spoof used to mask a target's identity, in order to find targets protected by those programs. Run continuously, Search can scan a computer or network for a certain class of target, such as "unauthorized programs." Search can be set to activate a Trigger program when specified types of targets are found.

Spoof (Continuous or Single-Execution)

Default: Computer Hacking-3.
Base Complexity: 4.

Feed false information to an Analyze, Listen, or Search program. Use Spoof to actively fool a program that's looking for specific information, or to continuously masquerade as a legitimate user. For example, if an Analyze program is set to monitor the status of an ICE program, Spoof can attempt to convince Analyze that the ICE is still up after it's been Breached (see p. 8). Analyze and Search can see through a Spoof if they win a Quick Contest against it; Listen only needs to tie the Contest to deny access through ICE, but gets no roll when simply recording Spoofed information.

Stealth (Continuous)

Default: Computer Hacking-3 or Expert (Computer Security)-3.
Base Complexity: 4.

Mask a user, program, computer, or data object from Analyze, Listen, and Search. While running, Stealth resists any attempt to find or examine the cloaked object – such programs must win a Quick Contest with Stealth in order to get any information at all. Of course, to many sysadmins, inconclusive results on an Analyze attempt are cause for further investigation . . .

Trigger (Continuous)

Default: Computer Operation or Expert (Computer Security).
Base Complexity: 3.

Delayed, conditional execution of one or more other programs. Trigger can function as an automated link between information-gathering programs (Analyze, Listen, and Search), and other programs that are activated in response to certain information. It can also perform normal functions of the computer (shutdown, send alerts to the sysadmin, etc.), and can be set to activate on a schedule rather than in response to other programs. Trigger requires no roll; it's called after Analyze, Listen, or Search have successfully defeated any Spoof or Stealth programs.

The number of programs that a single instance of Trigger can initiate is equal to its Complexity; the programs can be called all once (with the normal penalties for invoking multiple programs; see p. 7), or staggered to execute in stages. A single instance of Trigger can only be set to respond to one instance of a specific info-gathering program, but multiple Triggers can be keyed to multiple programs and instances. Many combinations are possible; some of the more common are Triggers set to run an Analyze on any user attempting to access a given computer, or to shut down a system when unauthorized access is detected.

Adventure idea: Stripped of gear, a netrunner acquires someone else's cyberdeck. He needs to use its limited programs.

Anatomy of a Run

The GM must design a netrun as he would any other aspect of an adventure, creating the environment, the hacker's goals, and obstacles to those goals. This is where an online world begins to show – if virtually every computer is linked to the global matrix, the possibilities become endless.

The Target Network

Here, the term *network* is used to refer to a LAN or intranet – a specific, partially isolated group of computers and online devices, such as the central servers, security systems, and user terminals of a particular building or complex. Such a network will often correspond to a specific physical location, but is also likely to be connected to the global matrix. It may also correspond to a geographically distributed system, such as the traffic controls of a city. Whatever the hacker's target is, he'll find it in a network.

Individual systems and online devices on a network are *computers* – the server that houses a database, the central controller for alarms and security cameras, etc. These computers contain the ultimate goal of any netrun – the precious *data*, to be parsed as useful intelligence or sold to the highest bidder; and the various *programs* that control security, surveillance, or whatever else the team may need in order to complete the mission.

BAD Netrunning

In ***Action 2*** (*High-Tech Challenges*, p. 13), Basic Abstract Difficulty (BAD) is used to penalize hacking rolls, *and* to determine opposing NPC skill levels. However, because the rules presented in this article take a more granular, round-by-round approach, BAD does *not* apply to a netrunner's program rolls. It can still be used to set the skill levels of the sysadmin and automated defenses, although those of important NPCs and systems should be determined individually. A netrunning sequence is likely to have its own BAD, not necessarily the same as the rest of the adventure, reflecting the network's security policies, overall quality of hardware and software, skill and diligence of the sysadmin(s), etc.

It's up to the GM to adjudicate complementary skill rolls (***Action 2***, p. 5), determining which bonuses apply to which tasks and programs. A finagled password might give bonuses to all rolls concerning a specific computer, while a software manual might reveal a weakness that provides bonuses to all rolls against a particular brand of ICE. Computer Complexity and custom-written code don't offer the blanket skill bonuses given in ***Action 2***.

Defenses

Given the nefarious methods and inclinations of hackers, a network protecting anything of value will employ various security measures.

Automated defenses are programs that run continuously – usually some combination of Analyze, ICE, Listen, Search, and Trigger. They attempt to detect and thwart unauthorized access, but they lack initiative and complex decision-making abilities. Most systems use 10 + (absolute value of BAD) to set the base skill for automated programs.

Common automated defenses include:

- *Firewalls* – ICE, plus Analyze (monitoring the ICE), Listen (to allow authorized users through), and/or Trigger (to call defenses or sound alarms when unauthorized access is detected).
- *Security scans* – Search (looking for unauthorized users) or Analyze (cyclically checking programs and files for tampering) plus Trigger (to call defensive programs or sound alarms when anomalies are detected).

Sysadmins are a hacker's nemesis, computer experts who maintain a network's security and fend off intrusion attempts. Like a hacker, a sysadmin can access various systems and execute programs from his computer. Having authorized access, he can generally get around more quickly within his own network. He also isn't limited to portable computers – he can log onto the mainframe and use its full processing power against intruders.

Network-resident *AIs* combine the best of both worlds – always active like an automated defense, but able to adapt to (possibly even anticipate) a hacker's strategy. Most networks have both sysadmins and automated defenses, although sysadmins may not always be online to actively counter an intruder's efforts. Depending on the setting, AIs may either be commonplace, isolated to the most advanced (and expensive) systems, or nonexistent. See ***Ultra-Tech*** (p. 25) for information on designing AIs.

Layered ICE

Defenses are usually layered, with one layer protecting an entire network from unauthorized connections, another layer over each computer on the network, and yet more protecting specific programs or data on a critical computer. Individual computers usually runs their own defenses, and a network often has one or more dedicated computers running network-wide defenses. Each layer must be defeated separately, by Breaching it, Spoofing the gatekeeper Listen program, or – if the hacker can get Control of the computer that's running it – simply halting the program. Even ICE can be disabled by gaining Control of the computer it's running on, but the program resists unauthorized attempts to tamper with it, so it must be Breached or Spoofed before it can be Controlled; in effect, all ICE programs serve as their own layer of ICE against tampering.

This vulnerability is alleviated by running some defensive programs from separate computers – one computer that monitors a neighbor's ICE, for example – so that if one system is compromised, another can still report the problem. A netrunner's only recourse is to tackle multiple systems at once, e.g. Spoofing one while Breaching the other.

In any game with a hacker who's separate from the rest of the group, switch between scenes quickly, just like the movies!

Black ICE

The infamous "Black ICE" programs are generally Complexity 5+ Trigger sequences that monitor a particular ICE program, and attempt to Analyze, Search for, penetrate the defenses of, and Damage the cyberdeck of anyone attempting to Breach or Spoof it. Analyze fires to identify the unauthorized user; once it has enough information, it Searches for the user's physical access point. That found, Breach (or Spoof) takes down the cyberdeck's onboard firewall, leaving the decker vulnerable to one or more invocations of the Damage program. At each stage, the Trigger retries failed programs (subject to the normal penalties for subsequent attempts) until they succeed, or until it loses the target. The most ruthless repeatedly invoke Damage programs, even after succeeding . . .

Network Access Point

If a network is connected to the global computer matrix, then a prospective hacker merely needs to penetrate that connection from anywhere that he can get online. The connection is likely to be protected by a firewall (dedicated Complexity 3 computer; see p. 10), only allowing authorized traffic between the internal and external networks. A more sophisticated (Complexity 4) firewall generally includes Analyze (to monitor the ICE) and Trigger (to call another instance of Analyze – or simply alert the sysadmin – when unauthorized access attempts are made). The most aggressive and powerful (Complexity 5+) will run Black ICE (see above).

In some cases, the hacker will have to physically break into enemy territory in order to connect to the network, because the internal network isn't connected to the global matrix, or its connection isn't adequate to do what needs to be done. Even the use of a wireless network requires close proximity to the hardware. At the GM's option, working over a substandard network uplink, or at the far end of a wireless connection's range, imposes a -1 or -2 penalty to all hacking rolls.

Running the Net

Now that you've got the right equipment and know what you're up against, it's time to learn how to do some netrunning – ***GURPS Action*** style.

Rounds

As with a chase (***Action 2***, p. 31), netrunning takes place in abstract *rounds* – enough time for the hacker to attempt one task, such as breaching a network's external security, or searching a system for a particular file or program. If the target network's defenders are aware of the intrusion (or are automated to perform certain tasks continuously or periodically), each one may also perform one task each round.

The "outside world" duration of netrunning rounds should be adjusted as appropriate to keep the action flowing for everyone … if the hacker is electronically assisting a team of combat and/or covert operatives, he should be able to accomplish one round's worth of action in the same time it takes them to stealthily navigate one passageway, search one room, or dispatch one guard post. If they get into combat in a place where he can both see (via surveillance) and affect (via remote sentry guns, etc.) the action, he can even act turn-by-turn in a battle. A well-coordinated run, with the netrunner deactivating alarms and looping playback on security monitors just as the physical team passes each guard checkpoint, can run like clockwork – if everything goes according to plan.

> *This is just the beginning, the beginning of understanding that cyberspace has no limits, no boundaries.*
>
> *– Nicholas Negroponte*

Invoking Programs

While a round involves execution of a single task, such a task can encompass the use of several programs – for example, Breaching the ICE, while Spoofing the Analyze program that monitors it. In a given round, a single program can be invoked at no penalty; starting multiple programs is done at -1 to all rolls, per program past the first. Continuous programs that were running at the beginning of a round cause no penalty to programs invoked that round, and can be halted at any time with no penalty. Once started, a single-execution program will run for the duration of that round, and then halt; a continuous program will keep running until terminated. At any given time, the number of running programs is limited by the computer's Complexity.

If timing matters in a round – e.g., the hacker is trying to take control of a system that the sysadmin is attempting to shut down – the computer with the highest Complexity goes first. If the actions are conflicting (both affecting the same system, but at cross-purposes), they're rolled as a Quick Contest of Skills, with ties going to the defender, as described under individual programs.

As noted in ***Action 2***, failed attempts at hacking can be retried at a cumulative -1 per subsequent failure, until a roll is failed by more than 5 (or critically failed, of course). Such failure means that success is not possible, and probably that the attempt was detected. This applies to contested rolls as well. For example, an Analyze program that fails to detect an Altered program can try repeatedly, at a growing penalty, until it either wins the Contest or fails (*not* loses) by 6 or more. After that, it's been completely fooled, and can't try again unless the object is Altered again.

GURPS Action *takes the philosophy that keeping the game moving rapidly is more important than making sure every modifier is absolutely perfect. If it'll take you longer than a few seconds to determine a modifier, wing it!*

Oh, sweet information superhighway. What gems bring you me from the far reaches of cyberspace?

– Mystery Science Theater 3000 #6.12

Getting the Goods

It's up to the GM to decide what the hacker finds "on the inside" – and to design the target network so as to provide for thrilling online escapades, or netrunning in tandem to physical operations. Jumping from computer to computer in a facility's security systems can allow real-time interaction with the rest of the team, all while evading the network defenses. Large data transfers can lead to hair-raising countdowns, and successful defensive trace programs can set up last-second escapes as the authorities (or corporate response teams) come to find out who's hacking their networks.

Example Run

Lenny is a TL9 decker, with Computer Hacking-19, Computer Operation-19, Computer Programming-19, and Expert (Computer Security)-18. He's running an off-the-shelf Ono-Sendai 2300 cyberdeck – a Complexity 6 model outfitted for total VR by way of his neural interface jack. His hacking arsenal includes standard versions of Analyze-16 (Complexity 3), Breach-17 (Complexity 3), Control-17 (Complexity 4), Jam-17 (Complexity 2), and Search-17 (Complexity 3), and advanced Spoof-17 (Complexity 5) and Stealth-17 (Complexity 5) programs. His deck also runs a firewall (ICE-18, Complexity 3) to protect against counterattacks and Black ICE.

Lenny and his team have been hired to break into a corporate research lab in search of a prototype Macguffin chip, along with a copy of the project development notes from the facility's database. The lab's network isn't connected to the global network, so Lenny accompanies the team on their intrusion into the administrative offices. There, he finds an out-of-the-way office with a network access point, hides himself behind a desk, turns on his chameleon cloak, and jacks in as the rest of the team proceeds.

Having connected directly to the facility's network, he doesn't need to worry about breaching any external firewall, as he would if trying to connect through an uplink to the global network. However, he does need to be concerned about automated defenses, and before connecting, he switches on Stealth. He's got plenty of processing power (Complexity 6 deck), and so far is only running his defensive ICE and Stealth (Complexity 3 and 5) programs, along with a Complexity 3 program that maintains an encrypted link to his teammate's comms. He doesn't halt anything just yet.

As it happens, the network does have an automated Search that checks all new connections to see if they're authorized. Using the facility's BAD (-5), the GM assumes that all programs will default from a skill of 15. Lenny and the GM roll a Quick Contest of Stealth-17 vs. Search-14. Lenny wins, and so remains undetected.

Acting quickly to keep up with the team as they make their way to the lab entrance, he uses his first few rounds to Search for the security systems, and Analyze the defenses of the computer that controls them. Finding that it has basic ICE with a gatekeeper Listen program, the status of which is monitored by an advanced Analyze (Complexity 5) program run from a central security node, he decides to try and Spoof it directly, rather than Breach it and worry about Spoofing the monitor. Rolling his Spoof-17 vs. the security computer's Listen-15, he gains access. The computer's internal security scan, another Search-14, immediately tries to detect him, but fails to overcome his Stealth (rolled at no penalty for using multiple programs in one round, because it was already running). A quick Search of the computer's systems locates the alarms and door access, each protected by their own layer of ICE.

Just as the team tells him over comms that they've reached the security checkpoint outside the lab, Lenny Spoofs the password and takes Control of the alarm systems (making each roll at a -1, for invoking two programs at once), disabling them. As his teammates quietly dispatch the security personnel, he uses Spoof and Control again to open the doors to the lab for them.

Leaving them to handle the lab's internal security forces, he turns to Searching for the main database, and Analyzing its defenses – Black ICE, with advanced Listen and Analyze (both Complexity 5) programs checking all access attempts, run on what must be at least a Complexity 7 mainframe. All of it is watched by a monitoring Analyze program from the central security node, this one set to check *all* access attempts. Adrenaline pumping, he decides to try and bluff his way in, Spoofing it all at once. Invoking three instances of Spoof, all at -2, he manages to beat the ICE's Listen-18 and the monitor's Analyze-16, but not the other Analyze-16, run by the Black ICE. Immediately, the ICE begins a sophisticated Search-17 (Complexity 5) for his computer, and if it overcomes Stealth, will attempt to Breach the deck's own ICE and use the neural interface to Damage Lenny's soft, pink brain . . .

About the Author

W. A. Frick (Alex or Lex to his friends) lives in an apartment built on an old graveyard where they moved the headstones but not the bodies (no, seriously). He's been gaming for 20 years, and a hardcore ***GURPS***-o-phile for at least 15. He fondly remembers his very first cyberpunk game, in the bleak dystopia of Paul Hume's ***GURPS Cyberworld***, and often consults that book as a source of prophecy. When not overseeing network security for one of the international megacorporations he contracts with, he likes to write bizarre and self-aggrandizing blurbs about himself, mostly in the third person.

Down in the Mall

by Matt Riggsby

From the arcades of Chiba City in *Neuromancer* to the misty bazaars of Los Angeles in *Blade Runner*, one of the places where cyberpunk characters spend most of their time is the shopping district. Here, they brave dense crowds and seizure-inducing neon signs, eat robot-rolled sushi and synthesized food yeasts, buy the day's latest fashions (perhaps tossing aside yesterday's hot item to those left out in the cold), and stalk one another until they find just the right dark corner for something a little uglier and more primal.

This article presents a list of kinds of shops investigators may encounter in the densely packed retail sectors of the dark, wired future, as well as the infrastructure of shopping centers and suggestions for shady dealings in which adventurers might become involved. These lists may be used as inspiration for the GM filling in the gaps in detailed shopping settings or randomly to quickly answer the question "what does this store sell?"

Shops

In the typical shopping center of a densely populated cyberpunk mega-city, shops are single-purpose, tightly packed with goods from floor to ceiling, and small. The center looks more like a well-organized flea market than a modern suburban shopping mall; think Kowloon Walled City rather than King of Prussia. A parking space is a useful unit of measurement; most shops are likely to have a footprint from two to four parking spaces. With rare exceptions, such as high-end implant clinics which require a sterile field, back rooms are a luxury. Few stock goods that are too large for a person to carry.

If adventurers in a shopping center want to examine an arbitrarily selected store, the GM may pick one from the list or roll 1d, 1d, 1d. Before rolling, designate one as the first die, one as the second, and one as the third. The table entries indicate a value or range for each die. For example, "3-4, 5, 2" means a roll of 3 or 4 on the first die, 5 on the second die, and 2 on the third die.

Clothing

For clothing shops, see the note about clothing style and range (below).

1-2, 1, 1 – Athletic Wear

1-2, 1, 2-3 – Children's Clothing

1-2, 1, 4 – Children's Shoes

1-2, 1, 5-6 – Men's Clothes

1-2, 2, 1 – Men's Shoes

1-2, 2, 2-3 – Women's Clothing

1-2, 2, 4 – Women's Shoes

1-2, 2, 5 – Working Clothes/Uniforms

Clothing Style and Range

Clothing is available in a dazzling array of style and quality. For any given clothing shop, roll 1d on the table below to figure out the general price range. "Conservative" clothing is clothing which is, depending on the garment, suitable for the workplace, everyday religious ceremonies, and other "respectable" contexts. "Exotic" clothing is in some way unusual, daring, or suitable only for particularly limited uses, such as bridal and quinceañera gowns, Halloween costumes, lingerie, or clothing associated with particular cultural movements (the equivalent of punk rock, hip-hop).

Roll	*Price Range*
1	Second-hand
2	Discount
3	Mid-range (conservative)
4	Mid-range (exotic)
5	High end (conservative)
6	High end (exotic)

Consumables

These shops sell items that are eaten, drunk, or otherwise quickly used up.

1-2, 2, 6 – Pastries

Baklava, cookies, Danish pastries, steamed buns filled with sweet bean paste, etc.

1-2, 3, 1 – Breads

If looking for item inspiration, check out ***GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 8: Treasure Tables*** *(also by Matt Riggsby!).*

1-2, 3, 2 – Butcher
Meat or, as appropriate, vat-grown flesh.

1-2, 3, 3-4 – Candy

1-2, 3, 5-6 – Coffee

1-2, 4, 1 – Soup/Stew
Soups or other liquid-heavy food served in a bowl or cup: chili, curry, jook, etc.

1-2, 4, 2 – Fish
Live seafood kept in tanks in the store.

1-2, 4, 3 – Greengrocer
Produce may be brought in daily or grown in on-site hydroponic tanks.

1-2, 4, 4-5 – Grill
Yakatori, kebabs, sausages, or other foods cooked on a grill.

1-2, 4, 6 – Health Food/Special Diets
"Natural" foods, allergen-free, halal/kosher/other religiously or philosophically restricted diet, etc.

1-2, 5, 1 – Frozen Treats
Ice cream, sorbet, gelato, snow cones, milkshakes, etc.

1-2, 5, 2-3 – Intoxicants
Typically alcohol, but possibly cannabis, qat, or designer drugs.

1-2, 5, 4-5 – Noodles

1-2, 5, 6 – Pharmacy

1-2, 6, 1-2 – Sandwich
Hamburgers, tacos, dhosas, or other foods wrapped up in an edible container.

1-2, 6, 3 – Spices

1-2, 6, 4 – Sushi

1-2, 6, 5-6 – Tea
This may be bulk, ready-made, or both.

3-4, 1, 1-2 – Tobacco
Bulk tobacco, cigars, cigarettes, pipes, etc.

Consumer Goods

3-4, 1, 3 – Antiques and Collectables
Baseball cards, compact discs, Hummel figurines, etc.

3-4, 1, 4 – Athletic and Sporting Equipment
Balls, nets, sticks, weights, camping gear, etc.

3-4, 1, 5-6 – Baby Goods
Diapers, strollers, maternity clothes, bottles, etc.

3-4, 2, 1-2 – Basic Kitchen Items
Cooking implements which don't have motors or heating or cooling elements: pots, bowls, utensils, etc.

Show us endless neon vistas,
Castles made of laser light.
Take us to the shopping sector
In the vortex of the night.
– Warren Zevon,
"Transverse City"

3-4, 2, 3-4 – Body Care
Soaps, lotions, perfumes, cosmetics.

3-4, 2, 5 – Domestic Robotics
Automated cleaners, light and climate control, security.

3-4, 2, 6 – Electronic Parts
Chips, circuit boards, sensors, and other components and tools customers can use to buy or modify their own electronic devices.

3-4, 3, 1 – Electronics, Computers
Dedicated computing devices and accessories, such as printers and I/O devices.

3-4, 3, 2-3 – Electronics, Media
Video (flat or hologram projection) and sound systems.

3-4, 3, 4 – Electronics, Other Consumer
Video-enhanced binoculars, home faraday cage kits, weather stations, clocks, etc.

3-4, 3, 5 – Entertainment Chips
With ubiquitous computing and networking, this is a niche business in many settings. The shop sells "collectable" editions (for example, game chips in commemorative packaging) and to people expecting unreliable network coverage.

3-4, 3, 6 – Furniture, Flat-Pack

3-4, 4, 1 – Furniture, Inflatable/Collapsible

3-4, 4, 2 – Greeting Cards

3-4, 4, 3-4 – Hardware
Paints, sealants, basic tools, and parts for woodworking, plumbing, and home repair.

3-4, 4, 5-6 – Home Décor
Curtains, rugs, lamps, etc. Many shops specialize in a particular type of décor (only curtains, only lighting) or style (industrial chrome, natural wood, ethnic motifs).

3-4, 5, 1-2 – Home Maintenance
Cleaners and cleaning tools, pest control, light bulbs, etc.

3-4, 5, 3 – Hydroponic/gardening supplies

Adventure idea: Rumor has it an enhanced cyberdeck is hidden among mundane versions – how to find it without arousing suspicion?

3-4, 5, 4 – Jewelry

3-4, 5, 5 – Jewelry, Costume

3-4, 5, 6 – Kitchen Appliances
Typically specializes in specific types of appliances, sized to fit into tiny apartments: small refrigerators, cooktops, countertop ovens, and small appliances like toasters, blenders, and food processors.

3-4, 6, 1 – Locksmith
Provides locks, keys, chains, and similar physical security items.

3-4, 6, 2 – Luggage

3-4, 6, 3 – Martial Arts Gear and Street-Legal Weapons

3-4, 6, 4-5 – Novelties
Souvenirs, gag gifts, locally branded merchandise, etc.

3-4, 6, 6 – Office Supplies

5-6, 1, 1 – Old Books

5-6, 1, 2 – Pets
Typically small pets such as birds, fish, rodents (rabbits, ferrets), and insects (crickets, genetically modified fireflies). Though many are sold as genetically engineered to be clean and docile, some may actually be wild or only conventionally domesticated.

5-6, 1, 3-4 – Toys

5-6, 1, 5 – Votive Goods
Candles and rosaries, incense, prayer wheels, or other items for religious practice. Most stores serve a single religion.

Services

5-6, 1, 6 – Dentist

5-6, 2, 1-2 – Doctor
Typically a general practitioner treating minor or chronic ailments and other routine care. Specialists usually require more elaborate facilities and more space than available in a storefront operation.

5-6, 2, 3-4 – Financial Services
Consumer and small-business banking, bail bonds, insurance, access to stock- and bond-trading advice. The shop may specialize in a single category or dabble in everything.

5-6, 2, 5 – Gift Wrapping

5-6, 2, 6 – Hearing Correction
Hearing aids and minor robotic surgery.

5-6, 3, 1-2 – Implants, Cheap
Implants that can be installed with minimally invasive procedures: implanted computers, phones, superficial cosmetic implants, etc.

5-6, 3, 3 – Implants, Expensive
Implants that require invasive procedures such as limb replacement or opening the body cavity.

5-6, 3, 4 – Lawyer

5-6, 3, 5 – Massage

5-6, 3, 6 – Printing
Typically for producing signs and posters, but may also provide versatile liquid crystal displays to display preprogrammed animated messages.

5-6, 4, 1-2 – Salon/Barber

5-6, 4, 3-4 – Tattoo Parlor

5-6, 4, 5 – Traditional Medicine
A practitioner of an "alternative" medical tradition, such as Chinese or Ayurvedic medicine.

5-6, 4, 6 – Vision Correction
Corrective lenses and in-store laser surgery.

I guess I'm just not used to running around a shopping mall in the middle of the night being chased by killer robots.
– Chopping Mall

5-6, 5, 1 – Bureaucratic Services
A facility for government license applications, notary public services, tax payments, etc. This may be government-run or a private firm licensed to provide public services.

5-6, 5, 2 – Fabricator, Heavy Duty
A small machine shop capable of producing metalwork such as custom car or HVAC parts of moderate size.

5-6, 5, 3 – Fabricator, Light Duty
The shop has facilities for rapidly producing plastic items from models to custom gear housings according to the buyer's specifications.

5-6, 5, 4 – Fortune-telling
Crystal-gazing, card-reading, yarrow-stick tossing, and other methods of divination. May also sell good-luck charms.

5-6, 5, 5-6 – Gaming arcade
Depending on the state of cybernetic technology, this may provide high-quality console games, specially licensed games not available for personal purchase, full-sensory games with equipment that doesn't require expensive direct implants, or simply games that need more computing power than the average home-computing platform can provide.

5-6, 6, 1-2 – Pawnbroker

5-6, 6, 3 – Real Estate
Agency for rentals and real estate sales.

Adventure idea: One of the fabricators at this mall is making black-market prototypes, no questions asked.

Other Spaces

Most retail centers provide information, advertising, and various noncommercial conveniences for customers. In addition to crowds of shoppers, here are some other things to clutter up the malls of the future:

- Artistic displays. This often includes decorative fountains, drawings and paintings, sculptures, and video- or hologram-projection installations. They may be created professionally, or perhaps by local amateurs (for example, local schoolchildren) to support a particular theme such as a holiday or official commemoration.
- Cart or stroller rental stands.
- Courtyard. Although real estate is at a premium, some shopping centers (particularly in upscale districts) may have a large open space with seating or green areas.
- Drinking fountains.
- Information kiosks. Depending on the price of labor as opposed to the cost of electronics (and electrical repair), this may be a manned booth or an automated system pointing customers to their desired destination and offering advice on other services.
- Performances. Noisy, mobile crowds make a terrible audience, but shopping centers may arrange dance or musical performances in larger open spaces. Depending on the shopping center's policies, performances could easily be by unsanctioned buskers performing for tips.
- Police kiosks.
- Public restrooms. These range in size from single-person rooms to large areas with multiple stalls and sinks.
- Transportation. Larger and particularly more expensive shopping centers may have internal transportation such as escalators, elevators, and slidewalks.

5-6, 6, 4-5 – Recycler

The shop buys used materials (metals, plastics, paper) to resell to manufacturers.

5-6, 6, 6 – Shipping

A small post office, which may provide both shipping and post office boxes for receiving physical mail. A booth-sized facility can't handle large-scale freight shipping, but can usually refer customers to shipping offices with greater capacity.

Behind the Scenes

The vast majority of the space in a shopping center is devoted to retail. However, there is still a bit of hidden infrastructure keeping the place going. Access to employee-only areas is technically restricted, but since it has to admit scores of mostly lightly skilled employees with a high rate of turnover, such security is rarely very tight. Adventurers who wish to infiltrate those areas may need to steal an access card, observe a security code being typed in, duplicate a simple RFID signal, or fool a cheap biometric scanner. There will also be a semi-public reception area, where interviewees, outside contractors, officials, and other legitimate visitors who haven't come to shop may present themselves. Adventurers who prefer talking to breaking and entering can try to get past the receptionist.

However they get in, the list below contains a number of rooms that adventurers creeping around the back halls might stumble into. Roll 1d, 1d, or simply select from the list as desired.

1-3, 1 – HVAC

The room house air conditioning equipment, a boiler, or other environmental control gear. May also contain central circuit breakers or other power control equipment.

1-3, 2 – Server Room

Central computer bank, typically with additional security far superior to that of the employee area.

1-3, 3 – Office, security

In small shopping centers, a location for monitoring fixed cameras and roving security bots. In larger ones, it may have its own cell for securing unruly customers until the police arrive.

1-3, 4 – Office, management

A relatively well-appointed office for a manager who must regularly interview employees and meet with outsiders. Some shopping centers may handle all management remotely and not have offices of this type.

1-3, 5 – Office, administrative

A largely utilitarian office for support personnel (human resources, IT, accounting, etc.). Some shopping centers may handle administrative functions remotely or be so small as to not require separate administrative personnel and not have offices of this type.

1-3, 6 – Employee lounge/conference room

A space for employee meals, breaks, and occasional meetings and training sessions.

4-6, 1 – Storage room

A small "warehouse" room attached to a larger shop, giving access back into the retail areas.

4-6, 2-3 – Maintenance closet

Mops, buckets, cleaners, trash bags, absorbant powders, charging stations for security bots.

4-6, 4 – Maintenance shop

Mechanical tools and simple electronics and robotics repair.

If you don't want the players knowing you make stuff up on the fly, you can always generate a bazaar or two ahead of time.

4-6, 5 – Locker room
A space for employees to change into uniforms and store personal belongings during their work periods.

4-6, 6 – Private restroom
In larger centers, there may be a separate "executive" or "VIP" washroom with somewhat more exclusive access.

> *The humans . . . the humans have forgotten the gods, destroyed the earth, and for what? Parking lots? Shopping malls? Greed had burned a hole in their hearts that will never be filled! They will never have enough!*
>
> ***– Hellboy II: The Golden Army***

Under the Counter

Naturally, some businesses (particularly those that PCs frequent) are engaged in something shadier, acting as fronts for a criminal enterprise, spreading propaganda or other ideologically oriented material, or just padding out their income by selling contraband. If a shop is involved in something illegal (and, of course, most shops won't be), roll 1d, 1d to determine the type of criminal merchandise or enterprise it is involved in. Reroll if the result is inappropriate – for example, a society might be fine with porn and subversive literature, but very down on guns.

1-3, 1 – Contact, Criminal
The shop isn't necessarily involved in any specific criminal business, but it is a place where criminals pass information to one another, typically as a legitimate front for a gang.

1-3, 2 – Contact, Terrorist/Revolutionary
As above but for a politically or ideologically motivated group.

1-3, 3 – Drugs, Performance-Enhancing
Prohibited drugs that increase strength, intelligence, endurance, etc.

1-3, 4 – Drugs, Recreational

1-3, 5 – Forbidden Texts
Literature which contradicts a ruling ideology, though it may not be overtly polemic. For example, a government strongly promoting eugenics and genetic engineering might prohibit distribution of *The Miracle Worker*, since it presents a physically disabled person in a positive light.

1-3, 6 – Hacking Tools
Intrusion software, specially configured computers and network gear, etc.

4-6, 1 – Military Cyberware
Implanted weapons, cybernetic limbs with excessive strength, etc.

4-6, 2 – Money Laundering
A business used for money laundering is typically in an industry which deals with a high volume of transactions on a cash basis, allowing the business to claim a large, untraceable income. In some cyberpunk settings, physical cash has vanished, making such retail storefront operations difficult, if not impossible.

4-6, 3 – Pornography

4-6, 4 – Propaganda
Literature actively demanding political change or outlining prohibited political or economic schemes.

4-6, 5 – Stolen or Smuggled Goods
The store sells items that are not inherently prohibited, but have been stolen or are being sold without required duties and taxes, appropriate licenses, or other legal clearances.

4-6, 6 – Weapons

Inspirational Locations

Kowloon Walled City: **archidose.org/KWC**. A lawless area of dense city stuck between two great powers, and a perfect location for a cyberpunk campaign if it hadn't been demolished in 1993.

King of Prussia Mall: **kingofprussiamall.com**. One of the largest malls in the United States.

Grand Bazaar of Istanbul: **grandbazaar360.com**. A huge (over 1,200 shops) and ancient shopping center that has kept up with the times.

Chatuchak Weekend Market: **chatuchak.org/photo_gallery**. One of the larger, more densely packed marketplaces in Thailand.

About the Author

Matt Riggsby has contributed to *Pyramid* in all of its incarnations. He holds degrees in anthropology and archaeology and works for a large medical equipment and services company. He lives with his wife, son, and several dogs, and does all of his shopping on line.

The Treasure of Joni Monorail

An Adventure into the Cyberpunk Wasteland

by J. Edward Tremlett

Joni Monorail? Of course I know who she was, chumba. We all do. She was the greatest rockergrrl of our time, come to sing the truth and make us dance. The flame in the dead city, burning bright with a real story to tell, if you knew how to listen. And she burned so bright for so many.

Just not for long enough.

They say she was in the War. She saw things there – terrible things. She swore if she ever got out alive, she'd tell everyone about it, one way or another. When they finally sent her home she was metal and meat, looking at the world through a cheap pair of eyes and touching it with steel fingers. Just another vet, chewed up and spat out by old man War.

But that just made her angry. Angry enough to grab an axe and make it scream. She got a new face and a new name, and went and made that name famous – especially when she refused to sign a contract and let some Euro-Corp own her.

*She told them she wanted to tell the truth **her** way, not theirs.*

But Euro is always watching and listening, chumba. One day, they decided they decided they didn't like what they heard, so they told her to stop. But she didn't, and just got louder and louder, at least until someone ended her song with a bullet. A crazed fan, or so the news said.

But who believes that?

Joni Monorail is dead, but the show goes on. They say there are things hidden in it – places and names, codes and passwords. They even say that she's got some hidden treasure, out in the wasteland between here and Vegas. Something big that'll take down the Euro forever, or at least knock them down a peg or two.

But who believes what they hear, anymore? The only person who ever told the truth was Joni Monorail, and they killed her for it. So you be careful they don't get you, too, chumba. Not every story's worth dying over.

The legend is true. Joni Monorail – rockergrrl extraordinaire – did have something on the Euro-Corp that got America into the War. She was killed on stage during what should have been the greatest concert of her life. But she knew the kill was coming, and made a back-up plan that would lead others to the truth.

Now, years after her shocking demise, the plan is coming around. A "new" single is about to be transmitted – a song encoded with information that will provide clues for those who know what to look for. If they follow those clues out into the harsh, toxic desert between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, and avoid being killed by rivals, trash gangs, outlaw nations, and Euro-Corp soldiers, they may find the vital thing that Joni planned to show the world.

Hopefully they will know what to do with it.

The Treasure of Joni Monorail is a nontraditional cyberpunk adventure, meant for four to six players of moderate experience. Most of the action takes place in a dangerous, nonurban environment, which will test heroes who have never set foot outside of the city. In the wasteland, all the netrunning skills in the world will not help them, ammo will not be available from vending machines, and the trauma team will not appear to save their lives. The PCs will have to adapt to this new environment quickly, or die faster than usual.

This adventure works best as a change of pace for an ongoing cyberpunk campaign. By downplaying the heroes' toys, it can serve as a wakeup call for complacent heroes. It can be easily incorporated into a larger campaign (see footnote, p. 22).

This adventure is written from a generic rules standpoint, and a nonspecific campaign background. So long as the campaign has Los Angeles, a scheming corporation (named "Maison" here) with its hands in North America's military-industrial complex, and a long and terrible war in the past in it, the adventure should slide right in. It could be run with any "normal" cyberpunk campaign and – with minimal adjustment – it can probably be run in cyber settings that contain horror or fantasy elements. It can even work with ***GURPS Autoduel!***

We're All Part of History

A month ago, exciting news flashed across the entertainment networks: a long-lost song by the late Joni Monorail had been found and was going to be released on the anniversary of her death concert. The song "They Got Your Number" was apparently unearthed in a recently discovered cache of her things, and she stipulated that it be made free for all her fans.

Saying this is major news is something of an understatement. The media broadcasts her biography 24/7 for a week leading up to it. Flashcults gather in seconds at the slightest rumor that she's been seen alive somewhere, or that her long-suffering (and long-missing) digital boyfriend, Del, was spotted ghosting across screens downtown. The old debate over her dying words – "Can't love you through eternity" – flares back up, maverick journalists start asking which Euro-Corp may have punched her ticket, and the story about her fabled treasure makes the rounds again.

Joni's new video is broadcast on schedule, and everyone who loved her scoops it up with joy. The song is as good as anything she ever did, and it's wondered why it didn't figure prominently on her last album. It's a clear triumph of post-reconstructionist nu-*kei* – and you can totally dance to it, too.

> *Let's love each other through eternity.*
>
> *– Grateful Dead, "Eternity"*

Deconstructing the Past

If the characters look beyond the visuals, the beat, and the angry but perceptive lyrics, there are three things of interest.

- Del is seen eight times during the video. Each time, he is holding up his hands: palms facing the camera, four fingers up and thumbs in. "Eight."
- There's information encoded in the data stream that doesn't unlock with the rest of the video.
- There's a high-speed flash, almost subliminal, that makes the casual viewer want to not watch it, no matter how good the song is.

Deciphering a Ghost of the Past

The information in the data stream is fairly difficult to unlock, and resolves itself as a long, seemingly random string of characters. Those who have experience with breaking into electronic locks should recognize it as what used to be a very complex password. It's the kind they made for highly secure electronic locks around the time that Joni was singing.

If they take Del's clue, and look at every eighth frame, they see nasty previously unpublished photos from the war: atrocities, dead and dying soldiers and civilians, and horrible weapons being tested out on prisoners. Every 88th frame is one of four things, repeated in sequence: a ruined sign indicating Interstate 15; a tall, ominous tower made of black stones; a run-down, wooden building with "DOC HOO" on what's left of its façade; and a squiggly, orange conglomeration of large metal tubes and slides.

Anyone who's been by the city's westernmost outskirts knows the sign is at the Devore Checkpoint, where I-215 meets up with I-15, and the wasteland between LA and Las Vegas officially begins. Those fairly familiar with the wasteland would probably know that the black tower is about 60 miles from the checkpoint, where I-15 and I-40 diverge near Barstow. It is the Aqua Verde Euro-Corp's warning to *not* take I-40 any further if you value your health.

The pile of metal tubes is what's left of the Rock-A-Hoola water park at Lake Dolores, about 20 miles past the warning. The water park is due north of what was once the small town of Newberry Springs, between I-15 and I-40, but is now the Aqua Verde So-Cal Waste Containment Facility – one of the most notorious industrial dumps in North America. It's crawling with corporate soldiers and – if the stories are true – mutants created by the toxic waste there.

The wooden building is only known to those who are intimately familiar with the wastelands, students of American history, or knowledgeable in violent cults. It is Doc Hooper's Saloon in the ghost town of Calico: about eight miles northwest of Barstow, and a short jump off I-15. It's a historical site that turned into a tourist trap in the 20th century, and it's been held by a particularly nasty – but thankfully nonmobile – trash gang for the last five years.

The landmarks make a somewhat-roundabout map from LA to Lake Dolores. Rumor has it that Joni Monorail grew up near Newberry Springs, though she did such a good job of hiding the truth about her past that it's hard to be certain. Could this be the location of her treasure, and could the key be the way to unlock it? If so, why are they supposed to make a detour into the ghost town? And how can they get into the water park without being zapped by Aqua Verde's soldiers?

All questions aside, if the heroes want a piece of the action they should get going, as other (perhaps) less scrupulous types are probably already on the move. If the party wouldn't normally be interested in unlocking the secrets of the song, they might be approached by an outsider, given the clues, and promised cash or a cut of what's found. Alternatively, they could hear that one of their rivals is out looking for it, and decide to deny the treasure (if it exists) to the enemy.

If you search YouTube, you might be able to find a real video you can attribute to Joni Monorail. Simply change the name of the song to reflect the discovered song's title, and reveal what PC hackers "discover" encoded inside.

Trash Gangs

Spinning out of the philosophies of a somewhat-cracked, late 20th-century "retroneer," trash gang s are anarchic chaos made flesh.

Dr. Norman G. Spagnolio – better known as Norm-X – preached that all social structures, even "sensible" ones, were a deception placed upon humanity by an "exo-mind" that sought to limit development. Human bodies and the things made by them were mere distractions – "trash and trinkets," as he put it – and "good behavior" was meant to keep everyone in place. Only by giving up all material goods, breaking all societal taboos and bonds, and giving into animal instincts could humanity rise above that limit. Those who did would defeat the exo-mind, ascend into the greater chaos of the universe, and become like gods.

Norm-X wrote three books on the subject, took his money, and lived the rest of his life in Southeast Asia, doing highly amoral things until he was executed for them. His followers left the cities and tried to return to simpler lives of foraging, contemplation, and chaos. Despite their efforts, they couldn't get the "no possessions" part right, and it all went downhill from there.

Now, trash gang s are hostile, badly inbred bands of cannibalistic scavengers that plague the American wastelands. Their religion forbids them to create, fix, or grow things, so they steal them, instead – destroying what they can't take. Some of their communities have "settled down" into secure places, and they spend most of their time trying to ascend (with the occasional bout of violence, especially against outsiders). Others are mobile packs, preying on small towns, outlaw nations, caravans, and folks just passing through on the ground.

Trash gangs are best fought or fled. They only deal with outsiders by killing or converting them, and captives faking the latter will require excellent acting skills to be convincing!

Chipping In for Going Out

The heroes now know where they're going, but do they really know *how* to get there? Have any of them ever been in the wastelands, much less outside Los Angeles? If not, this could be a very short trip. Even if it seems like less than a day's ride, anything could go wrong, and then they'd be stuck in a place that even cops won't go.

If one or more of the adventurers is familiar with survival between cities (nomad, caravan member, survivalist, or soldier), the others can follow his lead. If they don't have anyone on hand, it might be wise for them to hire someone who knows the lay of the land. They should decide how much to tell that person, though – their friendly guide might turn on them.

If he's competent, the guide will insist on ground travel – preferably motorcycles – rather than hovercraft or aircraft. The latter two will invariably attract undue attention from checkpoint cops, corporate soldiers, and outlaws. Ground cars will be all right if they have at least some armor, good treads, and a four-wheel drive, but sports cars aren't going to cut it.

The heroes should wear sturdy clothes with good circulation, dust goggles, and something to cover their mouths and heads. They should bring water (lots of it), sunscreen, guns, ammunition (lots of it), knives, extra fuel, first aid supplies, water purifiers, anti-radiation pills and creams, and physical money. (Forgetting or omitting one or more of these items is cause for the GM to invent a situation where they would have come in very handy.)

Communications devices and electronics that use the Net won't be much use past Devore. Signal towers are a favorite target of outlaw nations and trash gangs, who then wait for someone to come and repair them so they can shoot at them, too. Those who are fortunate enough to have a satellite uplink can get past this problem, but the GM is within his right to make the connection spotty in places – especially when the investigators might want to call for backup.

Now Exiting Dead City

As the PCs prepare for their trip, they may notice that they're being shadowed. Anonymous, well-dressed types are following their every move on the streets, keeping a respectable distance. If they'd meant to kill the heroes, they'd have probably tried it by now, but that's no comfort.

Physically confronting their lightly armed, barely armored stalkers leads to nasty and inconclusive firefights. The enemy would rather flee than fight too long, and they die rather than talk – turning into genetically inert piles of organic slop moments after expiration. Unfortunately, such "anonymized" oath-bound corporate samurai are endemic of all Euro-Corps these days, so that gives no clue as to their employers.

Did the Euro-Corp that killed Joni Monorail discover the adventurers are off to find her treasure? If so, how? The heroes could waste time trying to figure it out, but if they don't move now, they'll have wave after wave of equally disposable hitmen peering at them from behind every corner of Los Angeles. Any rivals or colleagues they have who are on a similar trail run into the same problem.

The trip out of town can be easy or hectic, depending on the GM's tastes. The corporate stalkers will keep following the party at a distance, firing only if fired upon. However, it's a long 55 miles out to Devore, and anything could happen on the way there to waste water, money, and precious ammunition.

For ideas of encounters and additional complications that can arise from the heroes' overland trek, check out ***Pyramid #3/3: Venturing Into the Badlands – Post-Apocalypse.*** *(****Deathball,*** *in particular, might ensnare the adventurers.) In many ways, "cyberpunk outside the city" and "post-apocalyptic wastelands" have a lot in common.*

Going from west to east, Los Angeles seems to go backward in time. The tall, neon-encrusted spires and techno-towers give way to smaller and smaller buildings, and the dark smog of the city center is replaced by the brown, sand-laden air that comes from living too close to the wasteland. Single-story, flat-roofed houses and businesses lie below the elevated highways, and the streets below are "free fire zones" – areas contested between rival gangs, where sane police refuse to go. It's usually a good idea to drive over them as quickly as possible, stopping for nothing.

Once the heroes get to the checkpoint, they see the sign they were looking for – lit up like a beacon before the dusty sky. The cops stationed there are well-armed and armored, and very bored, as they have nothing to do but watch for "dangerous" persons trying to come in from the wasteland. They aren't supposed to care about those going out, but may give the adventurers a hard time just because they can. Hopefully the heroes brought physical money for bribes.

"Enjoy the beach!" one of the cops yells after the group. "Watch out for crabs!"

But I'm still waitin' for the second comin'
Of Ophelia
– The Band, "Ophelia"

Out into the Wasteland

The wasteland is accurately named. Nothing is here but the road, dust, hills, ruined cities, and waves of sand. What little vegetation and animal life there is has been twisted by radiation and toxins, and the ground water is heavily polluted. Humorous signs on the way out declare *LAST CHANCE TO TURN BACK, HELL: 666 MILES, STOP FOR NOTHING,* and *KEEP ONE BULLET TO END IT*. The last one may be good advice if a trash gang (see p. 20) gets them.

What the investigators encounter between the checkpoint and the black tower is entirely up to the GM. They will have major problems waiting in Calico and Lake Dolores, but if the ride needs to be livened up with encounters or firefights, there are many choices.

- *Rivals:* The heroes can't be the only people who figured out the clues hidden in the video. Maybe they get tailed from landmark to landmark by another gang, or maybe they get violently overtaken. They might also find the pitiful, picked-over remains of their enemies' vehicles up ahead – riddled with bullets and stripped of almost everything. There will be blood, but the bodies are ominously missing.
- *Outlaw Nations:* Large caravans travel the areas between the cities, making a life for themselves any way they can, and just wanting to be left alone. Many are fairly reasonable, and may trade or help travelers. Others are predatory and hostile, either forcing the heroes to join them or just killing them and taking their stuff. Friendly ones might warn of dangers ahead in exchange for supplies. Unfriendly ones often send scouts ahead to scope out things to steal, snipe at passersby, or set up traps.
- *Trash Gangs:* A mobile gang may be nearby. They charge after the heroes if they see them, trying to run them either off the road or toward traps and ambushes they've set up ahead. Those they overpower are taken back to camp, to be indoctrinated into the cult (or used as "supplies" if they'd prefer not to convert).
- *Maniac Cops:* The highway patrol is out here, but they're insane. Battle-scarred police, more metal than meat, can be "reassigned" to the wasteland if they develop cyberpsychosis, so they can go crazy far from the public view. They're supposed to be stopping wasteland gangs, but have a hard time telling the innocent from the guilty. Sometimes they just don't care, and blow up whole caravans for "driving too fast." They travel in armed and armored cars, and are almost impossible to reason with (in ***GURPS*** terms, -4 to Influence and reaction rolls).
- *Euro-Corps:* They're out here, too, and up to no good. Aqua Verde has the facility at Newberry Springs, and others have small holdings, here and there. If the PCs get too close to some big Euro experiment, a fancy aircraft may dip out of the sky, and either strafe the characters, or offload a small team of lightly armored corporate samurai. Maybe both.
- *Runaway Tech:* People dump all kinds of things out here, like rogue robots ("crabs"), dangerous nano-swarms, and canisters full of bio-engineered plague. There are also virus mines: Yoshimitsu Industries planted solar-powered emitters that send out steady streams of high-grade bad signal, in order to destroy surveillance drones and spotters. Did the adventurers turn their electronics off?

Once the party goes past the black tower by what's left of Barstow, any pursuit and long-range attacks by outlaws, trash gangs, and maniac cops cease. Their harriers turn around and head back the way they came, not looking back. It's as if the tower demarked a safe zone of sorts – even mobile trash gangs are terrified of anyone who'd actually go past it. The truth is that they're terrified of the gang that lives beyond.

Looking Like a Ghost Town

The first sign that the group may have made a mistake going this direction is that the road gets choppy and broken not long thereafter, necessitating slowing down. Then there's the long line of the dead, just two miles past the black tower.

Human skeletons have been periodically tied to posts on both sides of the highway, along with burned-out, scavenged hulks of cars, trucks, and motorcycles. The skeletons have been blended with scrap and rearranged in grotesque but eerily artistic parodies of the human form. These metal-studded, alien angels are the honored dead of the trash gang; this is both their graveyard and warning to outsiders.

Unlike many cyberpunk scenarios, it's good to keep good track of inventory in this adventure. Part of its challenge is resource management; you can't know how close you are to running out of ammo if you don't know what you started with.

A destroyed overpass five miles later marks both the end of the graveyard and the way to the ghost town. A creepy, highly exposed 3.5-mile-long road goes north and then curves east before turning left, and going alongside the mountain for a tenth of a mile. It ends in the parking lot of a horribly run-down Western-themed tourist attraction that features ruined wooden stores and saloons, and the sad remnants of a mine. The gang has done a lot of creative redecorating, using the bodies of their victims.

If the adventurers were foolish enough to just drive up the front doors, they are dead men walking. There are 55 trash gangers living here currently, and they all can hear the sound of vehicles coming up their road. In this situation, half of them hide in holes they've dug in the ground of the parking lot, and the other half secure themselves in the front buildings. Once the heroes are between them, their snipers shoot the ones who look like they can put up the best fight. Then the hole-hiding gangers swarm up and out, taking the remaining members alive, if they can. Only one in five has a working firearm, but they are all armed with nasty bladed weapons, lightly armored, and unafraid of death.

A smarter tactic – one that isn't as likely to get the adventurers dissected and used as "parts," anyway – would be to park their vehicles back at the overpass, make their way into the ghost town on foot, through the mountains, and catch the gang unaware as they go through their daily rituals of cruelty, recycling, and zoning out. Sustaining heavy losses won't sap the gang's will to fight on, nor will losing their huge, scarred, and terribly ugly leader. However, the firefight will go a lot better if the heroes are the ones doing the sniping and ambushing, rather than the other way around.

Once the town is secured, they can find Doc Hooper's saloon and search it, top to bottom. Along with whatever grotesque things the gang had going on in there, the party finds that there are eight posts holding up the ceiling, and someone has carved a large "JM" on one of them. Busting the floor around the base of the post reveals a beat-up metal box, and inside the box is a small, battery-operated transmitter. There's no way to be sure what it does, but there's a note on it that says "Use this *before* the key – JM."

Big Money Makes Mistakes

Not many people know that Maison shot Joni Monorail, but anyone who knows anything knows they got America into the War. Still, euro talks louder than the law, so the news, courts, and government still act as though it's a big mystery, and anyone who says otherwise is a paranoid crank.

What did Maison do, exactly, and why? That's up to the GM, but possibilities include:

- *Hostile takeover:* They had America knock over the government that owned their chief competitor so they could take its technologies for their own legally, as spoils of war. Pity about the massive body count.
- *Weapons testing:* It was just supposed to be a cakewalk to test some new munitions. Who imagined they'd fight back that hard? Maison's biochemical programs advanced quite a bit, though.
- *The theft of the century:* Its rival took something really big of Maison's – something incredible that could change everything. So Maison got America to invade so they could steal it back, and silence its rivals with guns and bombs. But what was it?

Rock-A-Hoola

The way to Lake Dolores takes another 14 miles – thankfully free of more nasty trash gang "art" – and has the party practically crawling down a shattered highway. If they didn't bring motorbikes or a four-wheel drive, this is where they'll start feeling the pain, and they may have to follow the rest of the map on foot. That might be just as well; the control towers of Aqua Verde's dump facility are tall, and would doubtlessly detect the dust trails the travelers' vehicles left behind. Large cargo craft zoom in and out of the massive facility, but thankfully, they're coming up from the south, and do not see the heroes.

What's left of Lake Dolores is a large trapezoidal pool of bubbling, green sludge. Past the pool are the remnants of a large water park, whose trashed sign still reads "Rock-A-Hoola." The waterslides, stores, and other amusements have been allowed to quietly crumble over the years of disuse. The only structure still standing is the largest water slide – The Octopus – which gleams like a pagan idol in the hot sun. It would seem obvious that Joni Monorail's treasure would be on, under, or near it.

Anonymous corporate samurai on the payroll of the Euro megacorporation Maison are already here, in hiding, and have the party in their sights. They'll attempt to wound and capture rather than kill, as they'll want someone alive to tell them what the group was looking for, but they will be ruthless. If the GM's feeling sympathetic, the bullet-ridden bodies of the heroes' rivals could be a warning that this is a trap. Also, a previously unfinished battle – maybe with a "crab" or maniac cop – can intrude in on the firefight, distracting Maison just enough to give the investigators a chance.

However it goes down, the PCs must be quick and quiet to survive this encounter. If they kill the Maison samurai too slowly, the survivors will send a distress signal, which brings a stealth aircraft with another squad within five minutes. If they make too much noise (say, by using rocket launchers), Aqua Verde may send a phalanx of well-armored samurai of its own to investigate.

If there are any other famous deceased musicians in your cyberpunk universe, you can substitute that artist for Joni Monorail. If there are any famous ***non****-deceased musicians, it might be interesting to have the heroes involved in that musician's life – as prelude to knocking him off. Little gets adventurers' hackles raised like learning that an NPC they've formed a bond with in the past has died. And, of course, that death can serve as prelude to this adventure . . .*

The goal of the treasure hunt would seem to be a large, very thick metal container right under the Octopus. It has a door that will fuse shut if it's forced open, and a keypad to type in the keycode from the song. The bad news is that most of the box is filled with explosives: If the transmitter isn't used before the code is typed in, the resulting detonation atomizes everything within a quarter of a mile. Intrepid heroes may figure a way to jury-rig things so as to deal with the Maison's kill team's approaching backup.

What's inside the box? An old, yellowed note on a small table, along with a small, bright red electronic key that's stamped "Circus^2" – the gaudiest hotel in Las Vegas.

The note reads: "Well done, chumbas, but you've got just a little further to go. Take the key, head to Vegas and ask for secure box 88. It should still be there. Please use what you find there wisely. Big Euro needs a lesson, but some lessons teach too much."

They got your number, they got your name.

You are the one they will blame.

Accused of being the leader of the pack,

You are the one who wouldn't turn his back.

– Hawkwind, "They've Got Your Number"

Get Yours in Sin City

The final clue takes them further up I-15, to the gleaming neon nightmare of Las Vegas. The highway improves about 10 miles past Lake Dolores, so the party can get back up to speed. Whether they're harried on the way is up to the GM, depending on how explosive things were back at Rock-A-Hoola.

Vegas' tawdry spectacle is visible from 20 miles away. It's a slithering, breathing mass of light and motion, over the hills, and it only gets crazier-looking with each mile. Holograms shift, buildings seem to move, and nothing looks exactly the same way twice.

Circus^2 is a giant, inflated carnival tent that houses roller coasters, floating stages, and zero-gravity acrobatic acts. If the GM thinks the adventurers need one last, apocalyptic gunfight to make the story complete, then a rip-roaring, running battle all over the outrageous interior and exterior of the casino should do nicely. Hopefully the heroes can shoot it out *after* getting the treasure, as they won't be coming back to that place anytime soon if clown security has anything to say about it.

The treasure is just where Joni's note said it would be; secure box 88, rented out for 100 years, can be opened by using the key from the container. Inside is a disc that was top of the line around the time that Joni played her last show. On the disc is that treasure.

What is the treasure? Whatever the GM *wants* it to be, which, ideally, should be something the party *needs* it to be: something that they can readily use, or that fulfills their goals and hopes. Maybe it's vast amounts of money, secret plans, or the rights to all Joni's songs. Or maybe it's one of the cyberpunk mainstays: a truly unlimited AI, the universal passkey, the means to upload consciousness into the Net, or the black virus that will permanently shut the Net down.

As for Maison, itself: almost everyone could use the truth about how it used Americas during the War. Media types could report on it, musicians could sing about it, and hackers could upload it for everyone to see. Heroes with a more martial or economic viewpoint could use the plans for Maison's nastier weapons prototypes, especially if some of them have already been developed and sold. Assassins and corps could use Maison's security protocols – especially the backdoors that its elusive owner, Giscard LeMarchand, built into his own systems to control them directly.

But do they dare use that treasure to take revenge on Maison?

If they bankrupt, implicate, or destroy the corporation, the global market will take a tumble it might not recover from for the next decade. A new War might break out between other, rival corps as they fight over its holdings. The politico-economic map will have to be redrawn several times before it's all over, and there's a good chance that what the PCs hold near and dear might not survive.

Using the information to evade or subvert the company might be a better choice than tearing it down. However, the information won't be good for long, as the company's hackers will discover their intrusions sooner or later, and change it as soon as they can. Blackmailing them for money – or improved behavior – might be a better thing, but Maison *will* find out who the heroes are, and the consequences will be truly devastating.

There's always the open market; just because information wants to be free doesn't mean the group can't profit off of its sale. Why not take some cash now, and leave some other person – or corporation – with the hot potato? If Maison's going to come gunning for anyone, it'll go for the buyer first, and that will hopefully give the adventurers time to run for it.

Joni liked to sing about big choices. Now the heroes get to make a few of their own.

About the Author

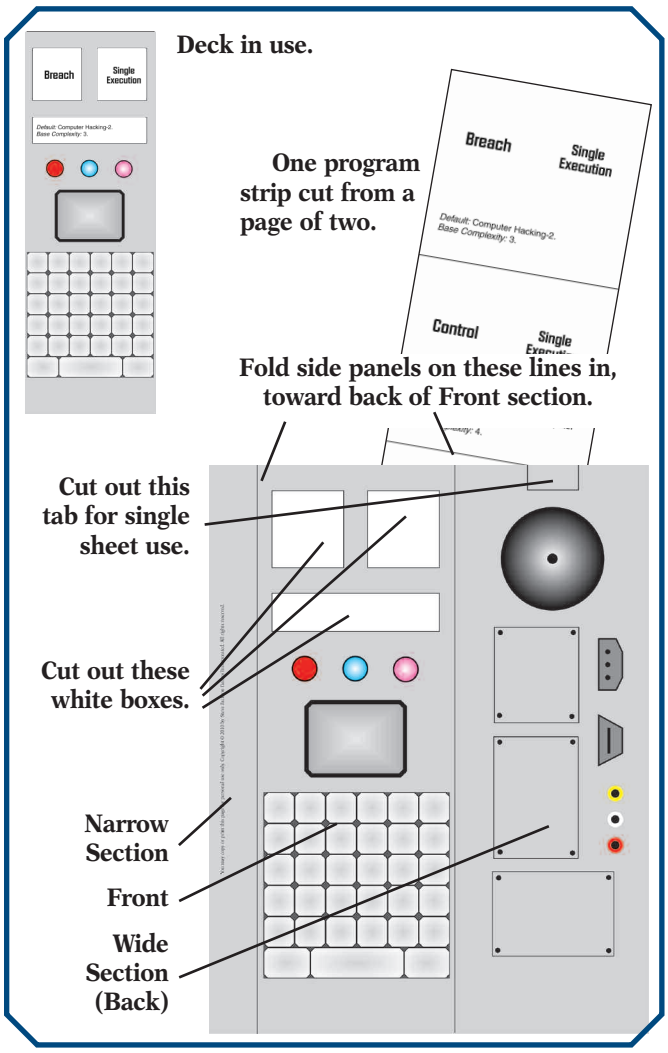
By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He is a frequent contributor to *Pyramid,* has been the editor of *The Wraith Project,* and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu.* He's also part of the *Echoes of Terror* anthology. Currently, he writes for Op-Ed News, and lives in Lansing, Michigan, with his wife and three cats.

Action Cyberdeck

The cyberdeck – used to hack into various computers – is one of the most iconic elements of many kinds of cyberpunk. This very issue presents new rules for building and using these devices (p. 4-12), working off the ideas presented in ***GURPS Action.*** These new rules present "programs" designed for use with cyberdecks; this prop allows you to keep track of those programs.

The *Action Cyberdeck* is a possible representation of what a portable hacking device might look like. (Given its size and shape, it's probably an *ultra-light deck;* see p. 6.) Print out one or more of the main units on p. 25 on cardstock (for durability); each netrunner who will be using the *Console Cowboys and Cyberspace Kung Fu* rules will need his own. It looks good held and moved around (as if it were a handheld deck), lying flat on a surface (where it more resembles a desk-bound computer system), or attached to one's arm (for that implanted cyberware look). A player can even attach wires to it and tuck the other ends to pockets or sleeves to enhance the jacked-in look. The other pages in this section can be printed on cheap regular paper or more durable cardstock.

When you print all pages in this section, make certain that the "fit to page" option is turned off! (This option might be called something else in your preferred PDF program.)



Assembly and Variations

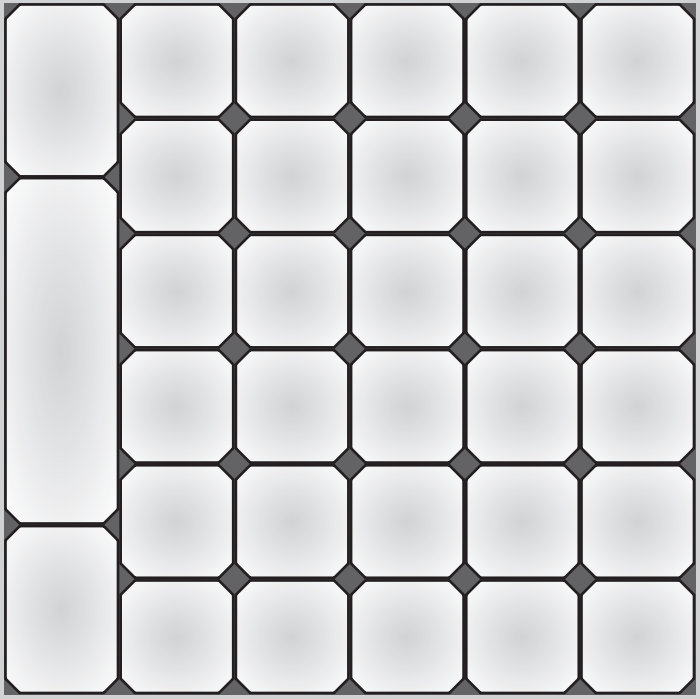
Cut the three white boxes in the top left-hand side of the device, to form its "windows." You can also cut out the gray box at the top edge of the sheet, although – depending on how it will be used – you don't have to; it forms an optional thumb notch. Fold the sides in toward the back of the "front" (center) panel of the Cyberdeck. The narrow side section should be under the wide side section (which is the back of the device). The Cyberdeck can be further assembled in a few different ways.

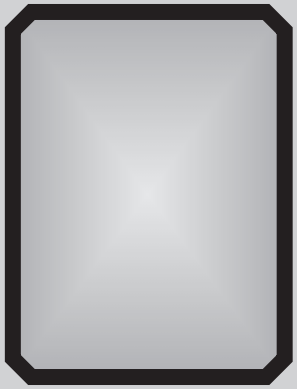
Slider: Glue the narrow side section under the wide side section to form a thin tube. Cut the program sheets as strips. Individual strips can then be inserted and slid up and down as needed. This is most useful when players have all (or nearly all) of the programs available on their Cyberdeck.

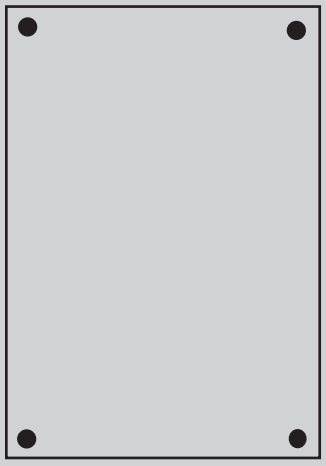
Slider, Continuous Loop: Cut the cards into individual pieces, and cull out the programs that the Cyberdeck has. If there are a large enough number – or if you want to make a Cyberdeck with *every* program – tape the chosen programs together into a single continuous strip. Slide the strip into the cardboard Cyberdeck, then tape th bottom of the last program to the top of the first one, forming a continuous loop; make sure the loop closes *behind* the Cyberdeck. (The strips of tape holding individual cards together should form the "hinges.") By sliding the loop, this should enable you to position the Cyberdeck to your current program.

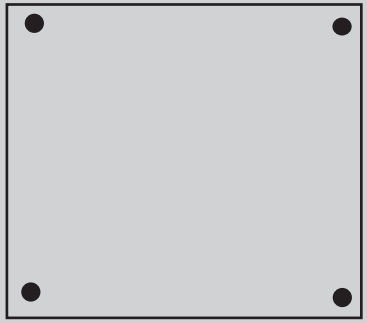
Single Card: Assemble as above, but put a staple (or a thin layer of glue inside the Cyberdeck) 3.5 inches from the top of the device page (just below the row of colored boxes). Then cut the sheets into their constituent rectangles. The cards can be inserted into the top. (The glue/staple keeps the card from sliding down the bottom.) This is most useful if the players only have a subset of the programs, and need to keep track of which program they're using.

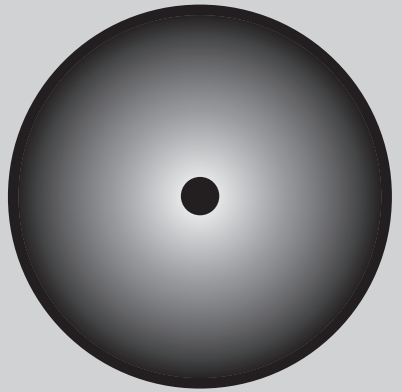
For an additional idea about the Cyberdeck, see *Through a Scanner, Darkly* (p. 38).

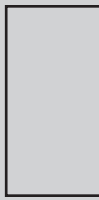












Alter — Single Execution

Default: Computer Hacking-3 or Computer Programming-3.
Base Complexity: 4.

Breach — Single Execution

Default: Computer Hacking-2.
Base Complexity: 3.

Analyze — Single Execution

Default: Computer Programming-3 or Expert (Computer Security)-2.
Base Complexity: 3.

Control — Single Execution

Default: Computer Hacking-2 or Computer Operation-3.
Base Complexity: 4.

Analyze — Continuous

Default: Computer Programming-3 or Expert (Computer Security)-2.
Base Complexity: 3.

Damage — Single Execution

Default: Computer Hacking-3 or Expert (Computer Security)-3.
Base Complexity: 5.

ICE

Continuous

Default: Computer Hacking-2 or Expert (Computer Security).
Base Complexity: 3.

Search

Single Execution

Default: Computer Operation-2 or Expert (Computer Security)-1.
Base Complexity: 3.

Jam

Continuous

Default: Computer Hacking-2.
Base Complexity: 2.

Search

Continuous

Default: Computer Operation-2 or Expert (Computer Security)-1.
Base Complexity: 3.

Listen

Continuous

Default: Computer Hacking-2 or Expert (Computer Security).
Base Complexity: 2.

Stealth

Continuous

Default: Computer Hacking-3 or Expert (Computer Security)-3.
Base Complexity: 4.

Spoof

Single Execution

Default: Computer Hacking-3.
Base Complexity: 4.

Spoof

Continuous

Default: Computer Hacking-3.
Base Complexity: 4.

Trigger

Continuous

Default: Computer Operation or Expert (Computer Security).
Base Complexity: 3.

The Voices in My Head

by Ken Spencer

"You can do this, man, there's like, what, 10 guards and three cybered-up dogs?"

"Maybe, but how?"

"No how, man, you got this. You are all over this. You are the best in the biz, man. Now stop worrying, lock 'n' load, rock 'n' roll baby."

"All right! I am all over this!"

Alex stood up and charged into a hail of gunfire, his last thought was that maybe buying a cheap Ego Boost chip wasn't the best idea.

GURPS Ultra-Tech (p. 216) describes chip slots and skill chips, but there are other applications of the technology. A chip slot offers direct access to the subject's brain, opening up a wealth of possibilities for the discriminating consumer of the dystopian near-future. People could purchase and install Performing Encoded Personality (PEP) chips, utilichips to help manage their daily lives, and even Spiritual Augmentation Chips (SPACs) designed to assist people in their religious life.

Performing Encoded Personality Chips (TL9)

Why be alone when you can have a permanent buddy along for the ride? With PEP chips, you can have your favorite movie star, historical personality, or even a synthetically created friend as a constant companion. PEP chips are not artificial intelligences. They are sophisticated programs that emulate the personality and knowledge of a subject, and then act to integrate that subject with the user's daily life. With a PEP chip, you can walk around all day with sim star Rico Torrent inside your head, making comments, carrying on conversations, or even providing friendly encouragement. It doesn't have to stop there, as the same programming matrix can be applied to any person, living or dead.

The PEP chip technology can be used with therapeutic processes as well. If you have trouble kicking a nasty habit, slot in a chip containing the personality of someone who you admire, but modified to deal with your addiction or other mild mental illness. Every time you reach for that pack of cigarettes, you hear the gravely voice of John Wayne reminding you that smoking kills, and he would know. Students needing to buckle down and study for finals get a chip of Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, or even Gandalf the White to provide encouragement and help keep them on track. The popular Ego Boost chip provides a running commentary on the user's life to help them view themselves in a better light. These chips are notorious for being overenthusiastic about the user's abilities, but are helpful for those with self-esteem or body-image issues.

The chips are the size and shape of a standard modular brain implant and weigh 0.05 lbs. PEP chips cost $1,000 for mass produced PEP based on a living celebrity, with the price increasing for deceased figures or for special purpose PEPs. Customization is normally included in the price for PEPs purchased from a vendor (customization gives the PEP program your name and basic information) and takes two to three hours to encode the data. PEPs without customization refer to the user by a neutral term (dude, buddy, Mack, etc.). A PEP chip must be in use for 72 hours (56 for uncustomized PEPs) before its effects become apparent, as the program needs time adjust its settings to match the end user's lifestyle and brain patterns. Most are LC3, though unauthorized (and faulty) PEPs appear on the black market.

The chips contain a small amount of knowledge that the subject would have, as encoded by the programmer. Secret information and abstract reasoning are beyond the personality emulation program's limitations. For example, Rio Torrent's PEP would know his filmography and likely his opinions on film, starlets, guns, and booze. Unless his addiction to hyper-steroids is well known and admitted to, it won't be on his PEP (unless some programmer decides to put it there against Torrent's wishes).

Statistics: Most PEPs are simply a perk, which occasionally gives +1 to a skill, if the chip's knowledge would make a difference. For example, a user might get +1 to Professional Skill (Bartender) when mixing Rio Torrent's favorite drink. Ego Boost and psychological treatment PEPs are more serious, providing Will+1 (Temporary Disadvantage, Electrical, -20%) [4], though faulty Ego Boost PEPs instead give Overconfidence (12) (Temporary Disadvantage, Electrical, -20%) [-4].

Adventure idea: A dead NPC's vital secret was actually stored in his PEP. The heroes discover they can't simply pop it into a computer; it requires a bio-feedback loop to complete the neural connection and access the information. Do the heroes dare plug into unknown tech?

Utility Chips (TL9)

Modern life can be very taxing, just trying to keep everything straight and remember important data. Instead of wasting brainpower on the minutia of daily life, why not slot in an utilichip? The basic utilichip contains a clock, calculator, calendar, address book, music player (programmable to provide an appropriate soundtrack based on your mood), and facial recognition software (never forget a name again). More expensive models add additional features – such as a PEP personal assistant (see p. 29) – or dictionaries and other reference material. A utilichip can even be set up to monitor a user's other cyberware and report problems to the user or another entity. With the addition of a wireless connection, the utilichip can download news or other information the user wants to follow.

Utilichips can be purchased for $800 for the base model, with additional features adding at least $100 each to the price. If combining a PEP personal assistant with an utilichip, add the cost of the PEP to the price of the utilichip.

Make your busy life look effortless.

Statistics: The base model provides Absolute Timing (Temporary Disadvantage, Electrical, -20%) [2]; Accessories (PDA and 5 TB of data storage) [2]; *and* Lightning Calculator (Temporary Disadvantage, Electrical, -20%) [2]. Reference works and dictionaries are each perks that add +1 to Research or rolls involving a language, respectively.

A PEP personal assistant is much more useful than a normal PEP chip, granting Assistant Talent 1 (Temporary Disadvantage, Electrical, -20%) [4]. This adds +1 to Accounting, Administration, and *four* of Area Knowledge (any), Connoisseur (any), Current Affairs (any), Expert Skill (any), Finance, Games (any), Savioir-Faire (any), or Survival (any). The skills must be chosen when the chip is purchased, and cannot be changed. Utilichips with a personal assistant have less data storage capacity (1 TB) than basic models.

Religious Chips

A variation of the PEP chip is the religiously themed spiritual augmentation chip (SPAC). Generally these chips aren't encoded personalities of religious figures (though some televangelists have created such in recent years), but are instead a neutral personality that relays religious instruction to the user. For example, the popular Zen Master will provide Zen kōans selected to help aid the user making the right choices. Followers of a religion can find their moral compass easier to set when there is a constant stream of advice, quotations, and admonishments running through their heads. One bizarre variation on this theme is the Shoulder Angels. Two linked PEP chips are installed, one that encourages the user to follow a moral and ethical path, and the other urges the user to break it.

The cost of a SPAC ranges from $1,000 for a common religion to $1,500 for a less popular one; a smaller market for the product drives up the price. However, some religious institutions, and most cults, offer SPACs at reduced cost (or for free) to their members.

Statistics: Most SPACs give the user +1 on Will or self-control rolls to avoid violating his religious or moral precepts; this is Will+1 (Accessibility, Only for religious tenets, -60%; Also applies to self-control rolls, +100%; Temporary Disadvantage, Electrical, -20%) [6]. Some also grant +1 to Theology (your religion) (Temporary Disadvantage, Electrical, -20%) [2].

About the Author

Ken Spencer is a freelance writer and stay-at-home dad. He greatly enjoys writing for *Pyramid,* as well as for Chaosium and Alephtar Games. Somehow, he also finds time for a monthly column, "A Bit of History," on **rpg.net.** Ken lives near the Wabash River in southern Indiana, with his wife, their son, her dog, his cat, and everybody's fish.

Keeping It Real

by Paul Blackwell

Some traits that are available by default in ***GURPS*** are at least arguably unrealistic: Danger Sense, Empathy, Luck, etc. Many gamers want access to such traits, since they are widespread in fiction; others will want to restrict them, to give a game that is wholly realistic or in which the unrealistic elements arise coherently from specific powers. This is often true in near-realistic settings such as cyberpunk, where the GM may want to emphasize the gritty nature of the setting or emphasize how similar humanity is to today – even if the *world* is different.

For a "realistic" GM, the obvious solution is simply to forbid these traits . . . but players who are used to them may well be disappointed. This article looks at some ways in which the "realistic" GM can respond more positively. ***GURPS Powers*** takes the approach of building such traits into a coherent structure of superhuman powers; this article, on the other hand, looks at more realistic options. In addition, a few traits which are *not* available to normal humans by default (Exotic or Supernatural; p. B32) are examined, to see how realistic replacements can be constructed. Costs are generally the same as in the ***Basic Set;*** where the suggested replacement has a different or variable cost, this is indicated by an asterisk next to the ability name, with the actual new cost(s) in the text.

Emphasizing the grittier side.

Advantages

Players often want their heroes to have every edge they can get; for borderline advantages, it can be helpful for the GM to determine *what,* exactly, is unrealistic about an advantage, and then see how it can be mitigated or ignored.

Animal Empathy

see p. B40

As written, this includes unrealistic abilities, but it can simply be replaced with a level of the Animal Friend Talent (p. B89). For more flexibility, or if the would-be Dr. Doolittle already has the maximum 4 levels of Animal Friend, extra points could be spent on skills instead – Biology (Zoology) or any of those listed under Animal Friend.

*Catfall**

see p. B41

A realistic alternative is the Breakfall technique (***GURPS Martial Arts,*** p. 68). This is an Average technique, defaulting to Acrobatics, Judo, or Wrestling, with a maximum of skill+5. It can substitute for Acrobatics to reduce effective falling distance (pp. B41, B174, B431); it also provides other benefits (again, see p. 68 of ***Martial Arts***). Heroes without any points in Acrobatics, Judo, or Wrestling need to spend at least a point on one of them, to meet the prerequisite. A maximum of 5 points can be spent on Breakfall. Other points can be spent on prerequisite skills, or perhaps on extra HP (2 points per HP; limited to 30% of ST) to deal with the damage from long falls. For a dextrous daredevil starting with none of the prerequisite skills, a 6-point default package is: Acrobatics (H) DX-2 [1] *and* Breakfall (A) Acrobatics+5 [5]. Also, see ***Martial Arts*** for other realistic perks and techniques that would augment this ability.

Danger Sense

see p. B47

The essence of Danger Sense is that the hero is better at perceiving threats to himself than at perceiving other aspects of their environment. This suggests taking advantages to improve perception, with the limitation "Only for identifiable personal danger." What is "identifiable" depends on the character and his skills; for realism, the advantage is relevant only to danger that can be recognized as such by the hero from information they have, albeit peripherally or unconsciously. "Only for identifiable personal danger" is more of a limitation on the widely applicable traits of Perception and Acute Senses (-40% in most campaigns) than on the more specialized Peripheral Vision (-20%). Danger Sense can therefore be replaced by Perception +5 (Only for identifiable personal danger, -40%) [15] or by Peripheral Vision (Only for identifiable personal danger, -20%) [12] plus Perception +1 (Only for identifiable personal danger, -40%) [3].

Even limited forms of these traits can be impressive. Look at what Cirque du Soleil shows do within human limits!

For more flexibility, some of the points can be spent on any Acute Sense (Only for identifiable personal danger, -40%), with +1/+2/+3/+4/+5 costing 2/3/4/5/6 points respectively; or on any of the skills Animal Handling, Body Language, Naturalist, Observation, Streetwise, Survival, Tactics, Traps, and Urban Survival, as appropriate for the setting.

> *I lured that cyber-spawn into the cable satellite network. A place where it can spew evil 'til the end of time and it won't make a damn bit of difference.*
>
> – ***Weird Science*** *#4.13*

Daredevil

see p. B47

This combines a bonus to skill rolls with an immunity to critical failures, in certain circumstances. The former is effectively +1 to DX, IQ, and HT, all with the limitation "Only for skill rolls, only while knowingly taking unnecessary risks." The immunity to critical failures is probably unrealistic as it stands. It is certainly permissible to allow effective skill to be raised to 16; the level that minimizes the chance of critical failures. Pricing the components separately is difficult, since it involves increased attributes being bought for very restricted purposes at less that 20% of normal cost, just as in the example of Rapid Healing on p. B118. The easiest solution is to make it a package deal:

Daredevil: +1 to all skill rolls, and critical failures only on a roll of 18, only while knowingly taking unnecessary risks. *15 points.*

An alternative approach, mechanically very different but with some overlap in character concept, would be to spend points on techniques or even skills that are inherently risky. The scope for this in the ***Basic Set*** is limited – Jump Kick (p. B231) is the only clear candidate that is realistic – but ***Martial Arts*** offers more, armed and unarmed.

Empathy

see p. B51

It is a relatively small change to treat this as a Talent: Empath, affecting Body Language, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Fortune Telling, and Psychology. This is a small group of skills, so each level of Talent costs 5 points. The advantage Sensitive (5 points) becomes Empath 1, and full-blown Empathy (15 points) becomes Empath 3. If appropriate, the level of Talent could be reduced, and the points spent on the listed skills themselves instead.

*Enhanced Defenses**

see p. B51

Officially, these are "definitely cinematic," but they are also subsumed in Combat Reflexes, which is realistic. Thus there is no reason not to allow the purchase of one level by those without Combat Reflexes. The most conservative option is to allow one level at stated cost; this can be regarded as "partial Combat Reflexes," with upgrade to full Combat Reflexes available on paying the extra points.

Of course, there is no point in taking Enhanced Dodge this way, since it costs the same as Combat Reflexes. This is not the place to attempt a complete breakdown of the costs of the many components of Combat Reflexes, but some reduction in the costs of Enhanced Dodge or of Enhanced Block plus Enhanced Parry would not be unreasonable for heroes without Combat Reflexes. Alternatively, certain aspects of Combat Reflexes can be bundled in for free if enough points are spent on Enhanced Defenses. For example, spending 5 points (e.g., on Enhanced Block 1) could give +2 to recover from mental stun and such, while spending 10 points could give +4 to recover from mental stun, etc., and +1 to Fright Checks.

None of the above applies to those who *already* have Combat Reflexes. Their realistic options are more limited; points can be spent on increasing Basic Speed (for Dodge), Shield/Buckler (for Block), or weapon skills (for Parry).

*Gadgeteer**

see p. B56

This is straightforward to convert: Replace it with realistic traits and skills that will help the invention process. The points should be spent on advantages like Artificer or Versatile, perks that give bonuses to use equipment or skills, and skills such as Engineer.

Gizmo

see p. B57

As written, "this ability is not realistic!" (p. B57). However, it is certainly possible to construct a realistic version – although it is hard to analyze it in terms of standard traits or modifiers. It could be regarded as an advantageous version of Absent-Mindedness: compare a hero who sensibly takes spare ammunition along, but forgets about it until needed, with the example given under Absent-Mindedness (p. B122). It also has some relation to Common Sense; the adventurer has the habit of taking along minor useful equipment, even if the player doesn't say so.

For realism, a gizmo must be an object that the hero owns, or that is in keeping with the character background, or that is widely available (as in the numbered cases in the rules as written, p. B57). However, it must also be plausible that the object could have remained out of sight, safe, and functional between when it *could* have been acquired (the last time the person was at home, in a city, or whatever) and when it is needed.

It might be worthwhile for players using restricted Gizmos to write a list of likely or expected items ahead of time; if the hero has never expressed an interest in weapons, he shouldn't be able to "remember" he packed one.

Also, there are possible negative effects – the police might find the adventurer's gun on him, even though he didn't consciously bring it! Realistically, this ability should require a roll instead of being limited to a fixed number of uses. Roll against IQ-2, IQ, or IQ+2 for the 5/10/15 point versions respectively, with a penalty of -1 for each success since the last opportunity to "restock"; the GM should impose appropriate penalties for unlikely objects. A similar philosophy can be applied to the cinematic perk Doodad (***GURPS Power Ups 2,*** p. 9) and cinematic versions of the perk Standard Operating Procedure (***Power Ups 2,*** p. 15).

*Gunslinger**

see p. B58

As written, this is "intended for cinematic games" (p. B58). In a strictly realistic game, it could of course be replaced by spending the points on DX or on appropriate specialities of Guns (or similar) or Fast-Draw; depending on the weapon(s) involved, this may even be more efficient, at least for the shooter's chosen specialities. However, if part of the motivation is to define a specialist gunfighter, there are some relevant perks and techniques available in ***GURPS Power Ups 2*** and in ***GURPS High-Tech*** (and also in ***GURPS Martial Arts,*** despite the emphasis there on unarmed and low-tech combat).

*Hard to Kill**

see p. B58

This is realistic only at low levels (***GURPS Basic Set*** suggests +1 or +2). Rather than buy multiple levels, a player might spend the points on other traits that relate to either staying alive or appearing dead: Hit Points [2/level] (limited to +30% of ST score); Fit [5]; Resistant to Poison +3 [5]; or Acting skill, perhaps with the optional specialization "Playing Dead" – 1 point for a skill equal to IQ.

Indomitable

see p. B60

The only difficulty here is that success against conventional influence rolls is automatic. Realistically, this can be replaced by Will +5 (Only against influence rolls, -40%).

Intuition

see p. B63

A realistic version of this advantage uses information that an adventurer has at a subconscious level. The hero is better than most at either acquiring or accessing subconscious information. This can be represented as a bonus to IQ in circumstances where the PC may have such information, and sometimes an IQ roll (perhaps at a penalty) where others would have none. Nominally this could be written as IQ+3 (only when using subconscious information, -75%); the actual bonus might vary between +1 and +3, and occasionally +4, depending on just how much information was available.

Luck/Serendipity

See pp. B66, 83

The essence of these advantages is that good things happen to the hero, inconsistently and without any reason that is based on his actions. In a realistic setting, this implies deliberate action on someone's part, though his interests need not coincide exactly with the PC's. This lends itself very naturally to a secret Patron, with the point values of levels of Luck or Serendipity totalled and spent instead on the Patron. The calculations here are suggestions, based on keeping the frequency of appearance high for the best match with Luck and Serendipity; other combinations of enhancements and limitations are possible.

Using an organization as the Patron, rather than an individual, generally gives the most flexibility. In a cyberpunk setting, the most likely candidate is a corporation – almost inevitably having interests very different from those of the hero – but there are many other possibilities: government bodies, criminal groups, eco-guerrillas, protest groups, etc. The Secret modifier doesn't mean that the organization is itself secret – only its actions as Patron – but of course it could be. In a campaign where much of the time is spent netrunning, the Patron could easily be a powerful individual instead; access to virtual worlds would still allow the Patron to retain plenty of flexibility.

15 points: Patron (Fairly powerful organization; 15 or less; Secret, -50%).

30 points: Patron (Fairly powerful organization; 15 or less; Secret, -50%; Special Abilities, +50%).

45 points: Patron (Powerful organization; 15 or less; Secret, -50%; Special Abilities, +50%).

60 points: Patron (Very powerful organization; 15 or less; Secret, -50%; Special Abilities, +50%).

75 points: Patron (Extremely powerful organization; 15 or less; Secret, -50%; Special Abilities, +50%).

Objective is to retrieve the synthoid in functioning condition. He's an expensive piece of machinery, remember that!

*– **The Zeta Project** #1.1*

*Perfect Balance**

see p. B74

This gives a range of bonuses to DX or DX-based rolls. There is an arguable lack of realism in the absence of any die roll at all for keeping one's footing under normal conditions. However, the GM is free to interpret that as a +10 bonus – not inherently impossible, but enough to justify waiving such die rolls.

Players and GMs shouldn't think of these suggestions as a way to "cheat" to get around realism guidelines. It's entirely possible that some of these abilities (such as the limited "Danger Sense" on p. 31) don't fit the GM's idea of what is realistic; in that case, he should say that no, there isn't be any form of [ability X] in this game.

For the GM who regards this "perfection" as unrealistic, a lesser version would be Excellent Balance [10] giving +6 for walking a narrow surface in normal conditions, and +4 in bad conditions; +3 in combat to avoid falling/being knocked down; and +1 to Acrobatics, Climbing, and Piloting.

Plant Empathy

see p. B75

This is unlikely to be seen as desirable in a wholly realistic setting; the points are probably better spent on a level of the Green Thumb or Outdoorsman talents, or spent directly on relevant skills.

In a setting where sentient plants do exist (unlikely in most cyberpunk games, but possible in other realistic settings), specialized Psychology skills for each sapient species may have been developed as well, or Biology (Botany) and Naturalist will be very different from their real world versions. In either case, a new talent – some combination of Animal Friend, Green Thumb, and/or Empath – will also exist; the details will be setting-specific.

*Special Rapport**

see p. B88

As written, this clearly *is* supernatural. However, detailed knowledge of just one individual could be thought of as a logical extension of Area Knowledge. Just as that skill overlaps with Current Affairs, Geography, etc., as appropriate, "Individual Knowledge" (IQ/Easy) might stand in for some of Body Language, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Psychology, or perhaps even Interrogation, Sex Appeal, or Tactics, depending on the relationship between the individuals. A default (IQ-4) would apply only between individuals spending a great deal of time together: close family, lovers, or friends and foes with a high frequency of appearance. Special Rapport with an Enemy is possible; it fits with the cyberpunk idea of keeping one's enemies close, or it might represent the enemy being a former ally who betrayed the hero.

Unfazeable

see p. B95

The difficulty here is the automatic success against Fright Checks and the like. Realistically, this can be replaced by 7 or 8 levels of Fearlessness [2/level], and either the perk Never Appears Fazed, the quirk-level Code of Honor "Treat well-behaved strangers with courtesy, however strange they are," or something similar. In a cyberpunk setting, someone with this advantage is likely to come across as jaded and having seen it all, instead of ultra-civilized.

Disadvantages

It's a bit more unusual for heroes to want to pick unrealistic disadvantages in a realistic game, but it's not impossible. Here are a couple of the most likely possibilities.

Unluckiness

see p. B160

As with Luck, a realistic explanation requires someone to be deliberately working against you. If such a foe is built on 50% of the PC's points, Enemy (9 or less; Unknown; Hunter) [-10] or Enemy (12 or less; Unknown; Rival) [-10] gives the same value as a disadvantage.

If the player is willing to limit the type of effects even more (and the PC has a DX of less than 14), then Klutz would be a possible replacement. Klutz is worth only -5 points; it could be enhanced with the Minor Delusion "I'm not clumsy, I'm unlucky," provided that the delusion merited its points value by making it genuinely harder for the PC to cope with the effects.

Weirdness Magnet

see p. B161

As with Unluckiness, this is likely to be the consequence of enemy action – again, an Unknown Rival. The points cost suggests either one built on 50% of the PC's points, with a 15-or-less frequency of appearance; or one built on 100% of the PC's points – perhaps an Evil Twin – with a 12-or-less frequency of appearance. The point value of the Enemy could be reduced if the negative Reputation that results is important.

Alternatively, the real explanation for the hero's frequent close encounters with the weird might be internal. Perhaps the opportunities for such encounters are no more common than they are for others, but the adventurer has some level of Compulsive Behavior (or Xenophilia) leading him to pursue their opportunities. Some level of Delusion – effectively, "I am a Weirdness Magnet" – would make it harder for him to address the problem.

About the Author

Paul Blackwell lives in Sheffield, England, where he works as a university professor. His academic research involves developing and applying new statistical models and methods, motivated by real problems in ecology, environmental science and other areas. He has been playing pencil-and-paper roleplaying games since the late 1970s, and ***GURPS*** since 1989; he also plays a wide range of board games, slowly and not too well. He has published extensively in academic journals; this is his first publication for Steve Jackson Games.

Joining her in this struggle, Oracle, once Batman's protégé, Batgirl, she was caught in the crossfire of the war between Batman and Joker. Now she fights crime a different way, a master of the cyber-realms and trainer to heroes.

*– **Birds of Prey** #1.1*

Random Thought Table

A Spoonful of Cyber Helps the Megacorp Go Down

by Steven Marsh, *Pyramid* Editor

In some ways, "cyberpunk" can be a lens as much as a genre unto itself. In my mind, a lens is something that you can add freely to another genre, setting, or time period to produce a campaign that's new and interesting.

Perhaps the quintessential lens is "magic." Magic isn't a genre unto itself; it's something added to an existing infrastructure. So adding magic to a historical/medieval setting turns it into a standard fantasy campaign, inserting magic into a conspiracy setting can get you something like White Wolf's old ***Mage: The Ascension,*** and magic in space produces something like Holistic Design's ***Fading Suns.***

Similarly, horror can be viewed as a lens. Add it to the Old West and you end up with something like Pinnacle Entertainment Group's ***Deadlands.*** Mixing it with modern conspiracy results in Pagan Publishing's ***Delta Green.***

On the surface, cyberpunk feels like many other topics – a standalone genre that *can* be mixed with other genres if desired, but works fine on its own. Yet as I look at some of my favorite cyberpunk and near-cyberpunk games, movies, and books, I wonder if it's possible to think of cyberpunk as being similar to a lens. Certainly this was the tack taken by ***Shadowrun*** – the most successful cyberpunk-flavored RPG ever. ***Shadowrun*** isn't a pure cyberpunk game, but looks at cyberpunk through the magic lens to produce its unique flavor.

That's an extreme example, but pondering other cyberpunk tales has me thinking that cyberpunk really likes to be added to other genres. Mixed with something like ***GURPS Action*** – as the article on pp. 4-12 does – you can end up with the high-octane computer-related *Matrix* (a rare Hollywood blockbuster that, amazingly, has never had any sequels! Heh.). Turn up the conspiracy aspect of cyberpunk and you end up with something like *Minority Report*. Combine cyberpunk with kid-vid and you might get *Tron*.

In addition, the "lens" analogy works well if you realize that many lenses allow for the intensity to be dialed up or ramped down. Turn up the cyberpunk mixed with action and you might get *Total Recall.* Turn down the cyberpunk a lot, and you may end up with *Paycheck*.

"Kid-Vid"?

Yeah, we're coining a new lens type here. "Kid-vid" draws on the flavor of children's programming, presenting something that is the flavor of its parent genre, but often without many (but not all!) of the darker elements. Kid-vid military is *G.I. Joe*. Kid-vid post-apocalyptic fantasy leads you to *He-Man* or *Thundercats*. Kid-vid espionage is something like *James Bond Jr.* I'll let my readers figure out all the key elements of kid-vid, but offhand, I'd say some major features are: "No needless blood or deaths. Gumption and friends will save the day eventually. Speed is more important than logic – both for the participants and the plot."

Lens Is More

So now that our thesis statement is firmly in place, what can we do with it? Well, by assuming that cyberpunk is a lens or dial, we can use that information to help plan our cyberpunk-flavored setting.

Campaign idea: Start the campaign well ***before*** *the time period of the final cyberpunk campaign. Have one-shot adventures in each year leading up to the campaign – perhaps with younger versions of the PCs – "turning up the dial" on the cyberpunk as years advance.*

Even a "straight" cyberpunk setting requires some sort of combination element, either with the whole campaign or on a per-adventure basis. Most cyberpunk settings combine with conspiracy and/or action. Adding space elements enables the protagonists to explore earth-bound or inner-solar-system scenarios (perhaps more shades of *Total Recall?*). Mixing cyberpunk with something like robots, mecha, and/or anime can produce familiar results – which can be augmented when you realize exactly *what* you're mixing. A cyberpunk adventure with a dash of mecha might revolve around a prototype battle-suit developed by some unscrupulous corp; a mecha campaign with a dash of cyberpunk might revolve around battle-bots duking it out in strange parts of the world, with shadowy cyberpunk subplots providing background flavor.

Sometimes, in order to see the light, you have to risk the dark.

*– **Minority Report***

"It's Like *Neuromancer* Meets . . ."

By looking at other genres through a cyberpunk lens, we can discover new or lesser-traveled ideas. The obvious one is "steampunk" – cyberpunk mixed with Victorian-era adventure. (In reality, most steampunk tends to inherit Victorian-era optimism more than cyberpunky pessimism, but there's nothing that says this *has* to be the case.) In return, elements of steampunk have filtered "backward" in time, often combining with fantasy; today the gnome tinkerer making steam-powered contraptions is perhaps as much of a gaming stereotype as the archer elf.

So looking at the ol' ***GURPS*** shelf, what can we combine with cyberpunk that we haven't thought of before?

Well, limiting myself to just the "A" section of the ***GURPS*** alphabet (and because I'd run out of space if I didn't), I added cyberpunk to each of the following.

- ***Aliens:*** Cyberpunk-style hacking/cyberware/etc. are all real, but they've been introduced to the planet by shadowy aliens, who are the only ones who fully understand the tech they're selling. (Sure, they claim they just want to help, but they're just so darn *alien* – and why do they demand payment in water/helium/bones/Something Else Odd?) In a lot of ways, a "mysterious corporate CEO with globe-threatening schemes" isn't too different if you toss in "extraterrestrial" to the adjectival list. Finding out the secret behind the aliens' motivations and doing something about them – all against a future-tech backdrop of near-future computers and cyberware – should make for good adventuring. Watch *V* for inspiration.
- ***Alternate Earths:*** Crossworld travel is possible, but only through usage of implanted cyberware – which also permits access to cyberspace. Alternative idea: What are called "alternate worlds" are really virtual-reality constructs, fully realized and able to be visited. What we think of as "Centrum" or "Reich-5" might really be powerful AIs able to intersect and interact with these other virtual worlds. Of course, this should immediately raise the question of how do we know our world is "real"? This might resemble the *Matrix* turned up to 11, or it might look like something else entirely.
- ***Arabian Nights:*** In a modern setting, imagine all the standard cyberpunk tropes, only assume the Arabic world is the base assumption instead of Europe. If it's a fantasy-cyberpunk setting, then – again – try assuming Middle Eastern-inspired magic and myths instead of European dragons.
- ***Atlantis:*** Scientists have finally discovered the crucial link that makes all of cyberpunk's gizmos and gadgets possible – from the fabled lost city! Modern-day corporations compete to uncover more orichalcum that powers these devices, and adventurers make odd aquatic missions to Atlantis and nearby locations . . . made more dangerous by all the *other* adventurers who have the same thing on their mind.
- ***Atomic Horror:*** Really, many classic – with or without air quotes – works of 1950s-era horror are fairly close to cyberpunk as it is; keeping a human head alive in a pan isn't too far from full-fledged cyberware. Perhaps a shadowy corporation (one with profits of over one *million* dollars a year) is making cybernetic implants available to wealthy individuals . . . or unwitting victims. Although it's possible to concoct campaign ideas where the PCs also have access to cyber-tech, it might be best to assume – in the tradition of most ***Atomic Horror***-era inspiration – that the heroes are entirely reactionary to dealing with cyber-fueled adversaries. (As a further thought exercise, try wrapping your mind around the idea of a teletype-fueled cyberspace.)
- ***Autoduel:*** It doesn't take much at all to imagine cyberpunk-flavored ***Autoduel;*** you've already got the near-future dystopian tech utilized by roving bands of adventurers. (The adventure on pp. 18-23 could easily be incorporated into an ***Autoduel*** scenario.) As a slight twist, perhaps cyberspace enables combatants to compete in glittering chrome-fueled duels – either as practice for the real deal of meatspace competitions, or as alternative venues where the "impossible" is governed by the laws of computers instead of the laws of physics.

Again we note that all of those can have additional ideas mined from them by inverting the assumption of which genre is primary, or what the ratio is of cyberpunk and that Something Else. (Returning to the ***Autoduel*** example, maybe super-cool cybernetics requires too much power to keep charged for more than a few minutes at a time – but the gear can be recharged easily with a mobile generator that could fit in, say, a car. Oh, and maybe the same man/machine interface allows for better driving and gunning from behind the wheel. Voila! You now have the emphasis on cars rather than the cybernetics; the heroes can use their shiny bits outside of a vehicle, but only for a few minutes at a time.)

By treating cyberpunk as a lens or a dial, we can free ourselves from preconceived notions of what cyberpunk is – and in so doing open up new possibilities of what can be done with the underlying themes, ideas, tropes, and high-powered goodies.

Now if you'll excuse me, I've got a ***Cyberbunnies & Burrowcorp*** campaign to hash together . . .

About the Editor

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

Odds and Ends

Lesser Cybernetic Implants

Not all cybernetic implants are likely to be widely embraced in the future. Here are some possibilities that are likely to be rejected . . . but which might otherwise provide inspiration.

Sign-ber Ware: Do you want to reduce the cost of your cybernetic gear by 50%? Simply agree to allow it to broadcast somewhat-obtrusive unstoppable advertisements related to your activities. Sure, it may be problematic when you're jacking into a computer and your implanted cyberdeck loudly exclaims, "SAVE TIME AND MONEY FOR ALL YOUR HACKING NEEDS WITH THE NEW ELECFINE-4000 CYBERDECK!" . . . but it's worth the savings, right?

Eight-Track Player: Forget memory cards; this is the cool way to get music piped into your subconscious.

Ennui Sensor: This implant can detect a vague dissatisfaction with life. In a cyberpunk world, the near-constant buzzing it generates can produce ennui of its own, although walking by a coffee-shop poetry reading can cause crippling migraines.

Lip-Sync Lips: This combination of sound-dampening and vocal-capturing technology cause the speaker's lips to be out of sync with his words. The amount of disharmony can be programmed, ranging from slightly out-of-phase to a near-random low-budget kung-fu dub job.

Thermal Printer: For folks who prefer physical records – especially for IOUs, tiny contracts, and other pieces of paper ephemera – this printer uses near-silent thermal technology to generate receipt-sized printouts. The canister containing blank thermal paper is stored in a tubular canister that is worn around the area where the printer is (usually the arm).

Cyber-cutlery: Sure, you can have a subdermal knife, but without a retractable fork and spoon, you might have a hard time looking chrome-classy at that diner. (For a good fake-out, there's a model that extends two cylinders from the wrist with a "snikt" – which are articulated enough to be used as chopsticks.)

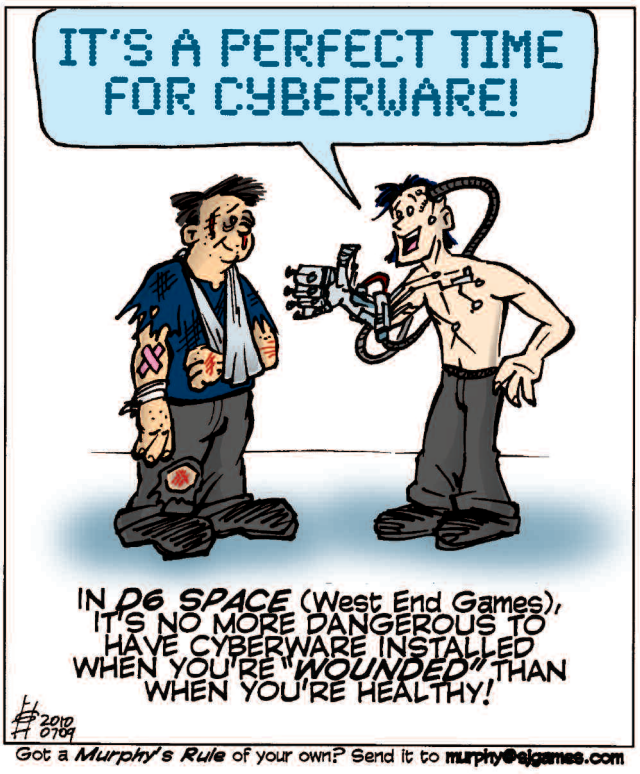
Eight-Bit FX Chip: Not recommended for professional sneaks, this combination sensory AI and speaker detects the user's actions and creates appropriate video-game sound effects from early in the history of video games. Picking up money (or increasing account credits) generates a pleasing "pa-CHING!" noise; jumping results in a "boING!" sound effect; running creates a "DOINK doink DOINK doink" staccato; and so on. Upon detecting a flatline on vital stats, this chip will play a brief eight-bit dirge.

Through a Scanner, Darkly

Longtime *Pyramid* readers may recognize the *Action Cyberdeck* (p. 25) as being closely related to the *Space-Opera Scanner* from *Pyramid #3/9: Space Opera.* This is intentional; part of our desire is to enable would-be GMs to accumulate a stockpile of props that are (hopefully) designed to be used well together. If you have both issues, feel free to mix and match; the *Space-Opera Scanner* works well as a retro-kitsch mod for a cyberpunk computer, and the scanner cards from the *Space-Opera Scanner* can be used in the *Action Cyberdeck* – perhaps to represent a more general-purpose cyberpunk computer.

Murphy's Rules

by Greg Hyland



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GURPS rules and statistics in this magazine are specifically for the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition.* Page references that begin with B refer to that book.