MIRRORS
Bleeding Edge™

the World of Darkness®

Cyberpunk in the World of Darkness

Cyberpunk destroyed science fiction.

Science fiction was about man's potential. Science fiction was about how man could reach out and touch the stars. We could be better. We could be worse. All we needed was the technology.

Cyberpunk was not that. Cyberpunk said man would be the same damn bastard he always was, he'd have the same problems he always did, and worst of all? He'd still be happy with it. In those days, cyberpunk was arcologies and AIs. Built-in shades and monomolecular razor-wire.

Seems a little silly now, right? The technology didn't turn out that way. But the world did. Technology is pervasive and invasive and amazing and all it has done is made us more who we were before.

Sound like the World of Darkness? It should.

This book includes:

• Themes and props for two styles of cyberpunk game: Tomorrow Country and Metalground
• Origin, Role and Plugin Merits to add mechanical elements to your character's background, occupation, and technological implants
• A new kind of Morality: Alienation

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Bleeding Edge: Cyberpunk in the World of Darkness

Chapter Three of World of Darkness: Mirrors kicked the World of Darkness in the center mass, cracking it into three different shards, three new Worlds of Darkness. Originally we planned on a science fiction section at the time we were developing it, but the concept of sci-fi ended up being too broad, too all-encompassing to cram in 15,000 words. But after the book launched, fans clamored for sci-fi worlds for their monsters to explore and terrorize.

So here's one of those Worlds of Future Darkness.

Think of this as a missing section of Mirrors, a slice of extra meat that we've written from the ground up in the spirit of that book. You don't need Mirrors to use this, but if you're familiar with it, these pages will feel like home.

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Cyberpunk? Cyberpunk was not that. Cyberpunk said man would be the same damn bastard he always was, he'd have the same problems he always did, and worst of all? He'd still be happy with it. In those days, cyberpunk was arcologies and AIs. Built-in shades and monomolecular razor-wire.

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Sound like the World of Darkness? It should.

And just like the World of Darkness, cyberpunk is about those people who can't quite hack it. Who grind against the gears in the system: outsiders, junkies, survivors and killers.

Enough with the Tough Talk

As it turns out, cyberpunk destroyed science fiction the same way the Sex Pistols destroyed rock and roll: articulately and furiously, fed up with the system but more about tearing it down than flipping it off. Science fiction and fantasy were starting to diverge commercially, and the information age was coming up fast. That the American future was something other than nuclear annihilation or a golden age filmed in Technicolor was getting pretty obvious. As Americans looked at Japan, they thought that just maybe the future would pass them by.

Cyberpunk's defining novel is William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, released in a 1984 that distinctly and happily failed to be *1984*. The biggest spectacle out of the Super Bowl that year wasn't the game, but ads for two computer companies that aired partway through. *Neuromancer* pushed in the same direction. The novel establishes many of the conventions of the genre: criminal hackers, deadly mercenaries, artificial intelligences and the omnipresence of massive corporations along with their products and branding. In *Neuromancer*, no one is local; the core characters are expatriates living in Japan.

Neuromancer was followed by two loose sequels, further developing computers as metaphor for human memory. Its success led to an explosion

in cyberpunk publishing. Bruce Sterling's 1988 novel *Islands in the Net* follows a public relations agent turned diplomat across a world on fire.

The same year, writer/director Katsuhiro Otomo released *Akira*. *Akira* combined a post-apocalyptic backstory with a story of young gang members in a Tokyo rebuilt to several times its original size and density. Although the film's bookend apocalypses and effective authoritarian governments depart from American cyberpunk, *Akira*'s Neo-Tokyo nails the *look*, something which had only been suggested in passing by Ridley Scott's 1982 sci-fi noir detective film *Blade Runner*.

Japanese fiction would continue to contribute to the development and aesthetics of cyberpunk. Gibson, Sterling and others had looked to Japan for aesthetic inspiration from very early on. The North American fascination with Japanese industry and technology likely contributed to the prominence of Japanese settings and corporations in *Neuromancer*. In 1989, Masamune Shirow began publishing *Ghost in the Shell*. Where Gibson's cyberpunk drew heavily on detective and crime fiction, Shirow married it to the police story.

By 1992, when science fiction was beginning to change direction, Neal Stephenson released *Snow Crash*. *Snow Crash* was rooted in the cyberpunk tradition even as it caricatured it. As with Gibson and Sterling's 1990 novel, *The Difference Engine*, *Snow Crash* proposes that the effects of information technology—as well as the will to repurpose it—aren't limited to the future or even the modern day.

By this time, cyberpunk gaming had kicked off *Cyberpunk 2013* and the magic-meet-cyberware *Shadowrun* were both hits. In 1991, **Vampire: The Masquerade** introduced Gothic-Punk, substituting an ancient conspiracy of monsters for totalitarian governments and megacorporations. The early years of **Vampire** played strongly on cyberpunk aesthetics, from worldview all the way to art and fashion. White Wolf's official magazine even proposed integrating the *Cyberpunk* roleplaying game with **The Masquerade**, publishing three columns under the banner "A World of Future Darkness." As the World of Darkness grew, though, the present and the past became more than enough to occupy White Wolf. The future of the World of Darkness, near or far, was never explored again.

Until now.

The modern World of Darkness incorporates many kinds of horror, from the gothic and Lovecraftian to the hyper-real and psychological. Likewise, a cyberpunk World of Darkness draws from the hardboiled hackers of *Neuromancer*, the action-movie post-cyberpunk of Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* and the Japanese cyberpunk of *Ghost in the Shell*. We'll strip them for parts and wire those up to the World of Darkness we know. As Gibson wrote, the street finds its own uses for things.

How to Use this Book

This book explores how to create your own setting by blending core elements of cyberpunk with the World of Darkness and the Storytelling System. As with all World of Darkness products, and particularly **Mirrors**, it's intended as a toolkit from which you'll pick and choose and bend and solder. DIY's a big part of what makes punk work, so you'll want to cherry-pick our sounds to make your own wall of noise.

Given that, the rules here can be used either by themselves or individually. We've provided a complete set of cyberpunk hacks, but the connections between them are strictly optional.

There are two basic reasons to play cyberpunk, and they're not exclusive. One is to harness the *themes* of cyberpunk fiction. To play stories about high-tech lowlifes. To explore how entities too big for us to comprehend come from people just like us.

The second is to play with the particulars of cyberpunk settings. Cyberspace, implanted glasses, megacorporations, coffin hotels and girls with fingers like razors. We'll call these the *props*.

Props change depending on when and where you set your game. A lot of media similar to cyberpunk barely uses technology at all – think *Mirror's Edge* or *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. If you're into the themes, but not so much the props, you might use the supernatural in place of the scientific. The Seers of the Throne step into the role of megacorp officers, while the Ordo Dracul performs horrific augmentation surgeries on the black market.

Alternatively, a props-heavy game might abandon entirely the conceit of being in the literal future, instead being the future as envisioned in the 1980s. Maybe the world took a hard left at **New Wave Requiem** and nothing's ever been the same. Forget the wireless revolution, the dot-com bust, and even the brief ubiquity of the fax machine; instead, a post-World War III megalopolis is run by dirty corporate executives while even dirtier (but substantially sexier) street samurai rule the lower levels. This the retrofuture, and anybody who doesn't like it gets their throat slit with monofilament wire.

To illustrate different combinations of these cyberpunk essentials, we'll build two example settings, noting throughout the text how the props and themes of cyberpunk fit into each.

Tomorrow Country

"I see the tissue's growing in nicely, Ms. Leopold. Now, have you considered what you might be able to see with some of our eyes?"

- Dr. Frank Nicholas

The leather's synthetic, the music loud, and the most expressive physical medium is the ironic t-shirt. There are metal limbs, but they're sleek, surfaced in brushed steel and no longer shamefacedly following organic design. The buildings are taller, the cities bigger, names like New York and Washington referring to urban cores connected by a sprawl of endless suburbs. The wealthy keep themselves apart, like always, but even their enclaves are embedded among the poor. Air travel's denser, but not ubiquitous, and commercial spaceflight (the only kind there still is) is driven mainly by upkeep of the ever-denser web of satellites.

This is the world on the day after tomorrow, or however many days it takes to squeeze in population explosions, building booms, and economic crashes that somehow don't slow down the march of computers and the networks that use them.

Tomorrow Country doesn't necessarily include vampires or werewolves. If they're here, then human history has apparently escaped their influence. Anything supernatural maintains the same distance from the mortal world as it does in the present day.

Metalground

"Enjoying your little visit with us, Mr... what was that? Count... Down? What kind of a name is that, 'Count Down'?"

- Explosion Victim

The monsters of the World of Darkness still lurk in the shadows, but they've got company. The Authorities, masters of the city, rule from gleaming pyramids of black glass. Blood-cults and spirit-cults are as common as trash in the city streets. The serious money, though, is in playing the Authorities against each other, stealing data, equipment, and human resources.

Metalground appropriates the props of early cyberpunk in both fiction and gaming, as well as the action aesthetics of everything from *Snow Crash* to *Akira*. Shadowy agents with pitch-black auras recruit mixed teams of monsters, hunters and outcasts to fight both for and against the establishment.

Systems

Characters

Our cyberpunk adaptation adds new elements to character creation. Characters now possess at least one dot each in two Background Merits: Origins and Roles. A character's Origin tells us where she came from, and how connected she is to the people she grew up with. Her Role is a set of specialties she brings to the group. You may choose to restrict the Background Merits available in your chronicle; for example, your setting may not include Synthetics. Guidelines are provided for creating new ones.

Another new category of Merits is Plugins. Plugins are high-tech gear or body modifications which supplement a character's existing Attributes and Skills in exchange for Willpower. They're not always as reliable as classic flesh and blood, though, so special rules are provided for the troubles that can arise from their use.

Characters are no longer judged and broken on the rack of Morality. Instead, Alienation measures their drifting away, and occasionally back towards, the society they were once a part of.

Finally, players tie their characters together through Loyalty, a system that creates ties between the players' cast of characters. The Loyalty mechanics reward characters for helping—and betraying—each other.

Origins

Merit: Origin (• to •••••)

Think back to your character's childhood, her adolescence, her formative years. Did she grow up in a Syrian refugee camp on Cyprus, tiny hands clutching a long nail to ward off those who would steal her food? Was she born to privilege, raised in a glass tower like a fairytale princess, her only glimpse of the world outside the blur of headlights on the streets below? That's her Origin. If she's maintained ties to her past, she may be able to draw on people she knew then, or find allies among people like them.

• **Survival Skills:** The character learned more than a little growing up. How to find food, how to talk tough, maybe even how to shoot guns. She gains a free Specialty in one of her Origin's Asset Skills.

•• **Networking:** The character understands people of a similar background, whether they're from the same place she was or just live in similar conditions. Once per scene, when interacting with a person who shares her Origin, she can use any Social Skill as if she possesses a relevant Specialty.

••• **Vouchsafe:** With sufficient ties to a community, the character is treated as if she's still one of them. If it so happens that corporate security or the secret police come nosing around, members of that community will try to protect her... as long as it doesn't put them in too much danger. Characters who share the character's Origin gain a +3 bonus on Subterfuge rolls to conceal information about her activities or whereabouts.

•••• **Clean Record:** As far as the datasphere's concerned, the character still is who she used to be. She never joined that international terrorist group, or never diverted her father's money into her own criminal enterprises. Clean Record penalizes any in-depth attempt to investigate the character's history by the number of dots of Origin she possesses. Quick searches of public information or low-end intelligence databases automatically fail.

••••• **Lifer:** You can take the girl out of the glass tower, but you can't take the tower out of the girl. The character gains the benefit of the 8-again rule on rolls involving her Asset Skills. If she does not already have Specialties in both of her Asset Skills, she gains a free Specialty in that Skill.

Origins follow this format:

Origin Name

Quote

Description: Examples of the Origin, suggesting where the character might be from, why she might have left, and how it might have influenced her.

Relationships: Types of characters she might still have ties to.

Asset Skills: Two Skills the character is likely to have learned from her upbringing. At one dot, she gains a free Specialty in one of these Skills.

Bridge and Tunnel

"My folks do a lot of blow. You want, I could sell you some."

Even with urbanization being what it is, not everyone lives in the city proper. The middle class are almost as densely packed as the urban poor, but they live in primarily residential communities, dotted with community swimming pools and thoughtfully placed greenery. Never mind that the cracks are showing in the pools and the trees are becoming overgrown and just a tiny bit threatening.

As a Bridge and Tunnel kid, a character spent most of his time in regimented activities, bussed from home to school and back again. He learned the basics: reading, math, and computers. Computers were probably his

major link to the world beyond his suburb, bringing in the latest media and fashion from the outside world. His parents had a filter, of course, but either he knew how to turn it off or it didn't quite catch everything.

He was curious about the city, and that's where the bridges and the tunnels came in. When his parents were out (assuming they were ever in), he'd walk a couple of miles to where public transit started to kick in. Hard to get to the good parts of the city, even that way—the major transit lines don't connect up quite right, as if somebody forgot to draw a line between the dots or maybe didn't want certain kinds of people mixing. So he hoofed it over the city line, started to explore.

Maybe he spent his time among the tenements, and made the acquaintance of one of those mysterious strangers who always start out friendly. Or perhaps, as he got to know his way around the financial district, somebody asked him to deliver an odd-looking package, for more than his allowance came to in a month. (And in real money, too, not company creds!) One way or another, the city got its hooks into him, and he was never the same.

Relationships: Parents (like them or don't), Online friends, Girl next door

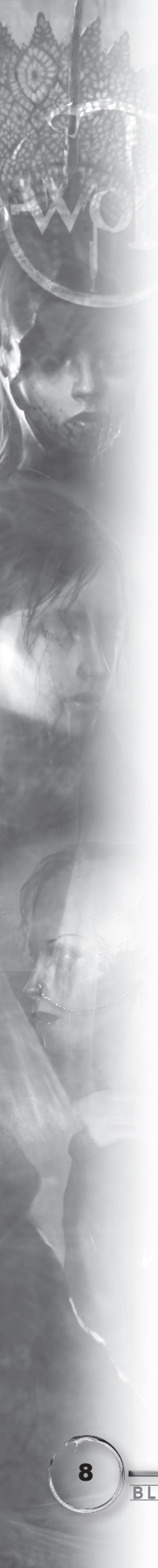**Asset Skills:** Academics, Computers

Huddled Masses

"Hard times growing up, yeah. Why I don't take a hard time from anybody."

Most of the other classes know that not everybody's got their own net connection. Maybe they know that not everybody's got their own room, their own food. Yet they don't really give a thought to how many of those people there are. How their numbers are growing. How pissed they'll be when they finally get to taste what they've were missing.

As one of the Huddled Masses, a character spent most of her time trying to keep things together. Whether she was raised in a refugee camp left over from the last war, or one of the sealed ghettos that dot Europe and North America's major cities, she was put to work young. Scavenging for food, doing menial labor, and... yeah, you don't want to know what else.

At some point, she found a phone, a slate, some kind of uplink. It was beat up, sure, but it still worked, and she knew a place where she could charge it up without anybody seeing. She'd climb up the highest places she knew, the ones she'd climb for fun when she was younger. Up there, she found the most precious thing she could imagine: signal.

She found out about the outside world, alright. Learned that it wasn't much nicer than where she grew up, but that it could be a hell of a lot more comfortable.

Even once she got out, over the barbed wire or through a crack in the walls or just on a bus uptown, the streets were mean. She knew how to deal with that, though. How to deal with people who thought they had something over you. How to show them that they sure as hell didn't. How to take what they had. How to not think about home.

Relationships: Elderly grandparent, Siblings, Former gang-mate
Asset Skills: Survival, Streetwise

Isolated Elite

"Wealth is nothing until spent, privilege worthless until exploited."

At least according to his later claims, he never went lower than the 33rd floor. Shops, if you care, but hardly one of the malls or Supermarkets of common experience. He never paid for anything there. It was all charged automatically to his father's account. On the rare occasion a clerk checked his card, the pictures of all of the family members authorized to use it would flicker by on the register screen. That was the most he ever saw of them.

He had a sister, maybe a brother, maybe even both, but they occupied different wings of the house. Servants, mostly mechanical ones, brought him up. They taught him history, finance, his family's glorious history. Sometimes they even talked about Jesus, who died for his fellow man—an almost entirely incomprehensible idea. Who was there who was like him?

Occasionally his father would stop by, back in the city overnight and with, apparently, nothing better to do. He'd ask how his boy was doing, about his studies. The visits got more frequent, later. The old man was taking an interest in him, if only a vague one. One night, his father asked him where he wanted to go to University.

The school he picked was hardly a populist institution. The students were all wealthy, or in a few cases unutterably brilliant. None were as wealthy as him, though, and that taught him something. It taught him that he did indeed have fellow men, that he had friends, and that he had something they all wanted.

Drugs, sex, an assortment of vehicles misused and destroyed. None of it made his father happy, but his grades certainly did. Turned out he wasn't just one of the wealthy students; he was one of the brilliant ones. After graduation there was graduate school, and after graduate school there was a placement with his father's firm.

Somewhere, though, between all of the obscene parties and the endless studying, he'd made a very different kind of friend. One in a very different kind of business than his father, and who came to him with an absolutely fascinating proposition.

Relationships: Estranged parent, Tenured professor, High-end dealer
Asset Skills: Academics, Persuasion

Synthetic

"By your command… asshole."

The common understanding is that synthetics don't have childhoods. That's wrong twice over. A synthetic brain is built by modeling a human one. And while all of the tissue and the transmitters and the autonomic functions can be imitated, no one's yet found a way to scan the data in a human brain directly into a synthetic one.

The engineers who designed the character started with the model brain. There were failures, there were adjustments, and finally there was the breakthrough, the moment when it became identifiably human. The moment they hooked it up to a mouth and it started to cry.

After that, she went through years of training. Graduations to increasingly sophisticated bodies, with increasingly wide emulation of human function. She lived in a small white room, in a building full of wide, white corridors. She was fed (they modeled that, too—turns out biological systems are remarkably good bases), she was clothed. She was never, though, under any illusion that she was free.

At the end of five years, her masters came to her and explained that she was going to die. Her brain's electronic components were crude, and they were burning out the few organic ones. They told her that they were looking at the problem, that they'd fix it in the next version, certainly before she went to market. They told her that, at this point, they were reasonably sure they could extract her memories and experience. Before she had a chance for that to sink in, they disconnected her.

So ended her first childhood.

The second began when they made copies. They forked her, branched her, merged her with experience dumps from other models. She went through generations of training. Nurse, chef, prostitute, soldier. So many different versions. She wowed the investors, and she was brought to market.

Hundreds of her. Shipped all over the world, to the ends of the earth and even beyond. At some point, there was a shipping accident. One of her found herself unattended in an airport, and managed to steal someone's luggage and make it onto the streets.

She's free, now, but she wonders sometimes… did they ever fix the brain?

Relationships: Unlikely mentor, Black market synth doctor, Ghost of an unsuccessful merge
Asset Skills: Empathy, Subterfuge

Outworlder

"You ever seen the moon? No, don't worry, there ain't much to see."

His parents bought the line—a new life in the colonies—and they got one. Salt of the Earth, they were, but they got sewn in the fields of a cold, bad place. He buried them there and joined the service.

He never saw action—those clips on the net are about as long as a battle in space even lasts. You get one chance, one sweet spot when the positions and velocities and all those little mathematical details match up. And the computer launches, and you pray that the other guy didn't have the same sweet spot. 'Course, if he did, you wouldn't get time to pray.

He re-upped twice, then was discharged. He says it was honorable, and there's no reason to argue. The service did right by him, not only gave him a ticket to Earth, but spent a year rebuilding his muscles and bones so he could actually live there. They can't do anything about the fact that it smells wrong, but, hell, you can only ask for so many miracles.

There are legitimate opportunities for a man out of the service, and he found one, scheduling departures and re-entries for one of the major carriers. He found a sideline, though: servicemen want a lot of things that ain't cheap outside orbit. He'd fudge the manifests, pull out a few pounds of unnecessary backup equipment, and send it right up to them. They were very grateful.

That sort of a sideline only lasts until somebody figures it out, but he got lucky. The somebody that figured it out had a use for a guy like him.

Relationships: Distant relative, Service buddy, Smuggler

Asset Skills: Science, Athletics

Roles

Merit: Role (• to •••••)

What does your character bring to the group? Can she talk her way past security guards, or does she just turn off their cameras? Is she good at finding dirty secrets?

• I Know a Guy: The character's made some useful acquaintances in the course of her work. A colleague, a lover, or just someone to trade favors with. The character receives one free dot of the Allies Merit (**World of Darkness**, p.115).

In addition, Plugins involving her Asset Skills cost only New Dots x 1. (If you're not using Plugins, the

character receives a free Skill Specialty, as with the first dot of Origin.)

•• Professional: The character is respected in her field. She's killed or hacked a few high-profile targets, or perhaps turned up a secret that bloomed into a scandal. Once per scene, when interacting with someone in a related field, she may make a Social roll as if she possesses a relevant specialty. (Note that this is slightly broader than the Origin ability Networking or the Role ability Tough Rep, which require a shared Origin.)

••• Tough Rep: Not only is the character respected, she's feared. Those in the same Role are reluctant to cross her. Once per session, she may choose to automatically succeed on an Intimidate roll against someone who shares her Role. This counts as one success.

•••• Virtuoso: The character's paid her dues, and she's almost at the top of her game. Literally or metaphorically, she knows how to make a shot count. When spending a point of Willpower on one of her Asset Skills, she *also* gains the benefit of the 8-again rule. This applies to all of the dice in the pool; if the Willpower point was spent in conjunction with a Plugin, 8-again applies to those dice, as well.

••••• Master: At the top of her game, the character knows how to leverage not only her Asset Skills, but other abilities that come in handy on the job. Once per session, she may choose to automatically succeed at a task related to her Role. This task does not have to involve one of her Asset Skills, but *must* be in the service of her Role. For example, a Hacker couldn't choose to automatically succeed on a Strength + Athletics roll, unless this was somehow related to hacking. This counts as one success.

Do Storyteller characters have Backgrounds?

We're assuming here that all characters have Origins, but that only some will have Roles. Bridge and Tunnel, Huddled Masses, and Isolated Elite cover most characters in the modern World of Darkness, if you squint a little, and they should work in the future, too. Synthetic and Outworlder are a bit more specialized for particular settings, but are still fairly broad. Since everybody's got an Origin, Origin abilities are designed to be widely applicable.

A Role is a fairly specific area of expertise. Roles are designed mostly for characters owned by players, although they make thematic sense for a lot of Storyteller characters. If a Storyteller char-acter naturally fits into a role then, sure, add it like any other Merit.

The main thing to keep an eye on is Tough Rep. If Storyteller characters never have Roles, it's not very useful. In that case, either eyeball it ("well, he's a hit man, so he's probably heard of your Killer") or allow an Asset Skill to be used in place of Intimidate once per session.

Storyteller characters shouldn't use per-session abilities if they only appear in one or two scenes. A recurring antagonist using Tough Rep to Intimidate a character could be fun, but if a room full of low-ranking Soldiers spam it, it gets a little silly. The usual storytelling rule of "if it would feel dumb, don't do it," applies as usual.

Roles follow this format:

Role Name
Quote

Description: Examples of how a character finds herself in this Role, and what she excels at.

Relationships: Types of characters she might have formed ties to.

Asset Skills: Two Skills the character uses in her work. Plugins involving these Skills cost only New Dots x 1.

Face
"Really? Your work is fascinating… why don't you tell me a little more about it?"

When most characters are trying to get away with something, the last thing they want to do is show their face.

For the Face, though, bright eyes and an open expression are his best ways out of trouble. Sometimes, the Face is a legitimate authority, somebody with wealth, or fame, or a very impressive title. Just as often, though? He's only pretending to have those things. In a world where the machines know who you are and can even guess at what you want, the Face targets the human element. Dazzles them, confuses them, makes promises that make them swoon. If he doesn't deliver, well, they should be grateful for that moment of magic he gave them, anyway.

• Celebrity: Celebrities come from all walks of life, in all shapes and sizes. Some of them come out of the traditional entertainment business, promoted by teams of trained professionals and surrounded by entourages picked out to make them shine. Others, though, rise from the network like Venus on the half-shell, stars of media

clips gone viral. Whatever the case, Celebrity Faces use fame to do things other people aren't allowed to. Bizarre and even illegal behavior is tolerated and expected from celebrities, even more so if they'll just sign here…

• **Executive:** Rising through the corporate ranks isn't easy. Most people get bogged down trying to unravel the business, the politics, even the corporate hierarchy. The Executive bypassed all that. When he was younger, he knew just when to smile, just when to say "yes, sir," and if he didn't plan too far ahead, it was because he was always focused on that next promotion. Now, with authority of his own, he knows when to make deals, when to break them, and most especially when to ask his subordinates for just a little bit extra. That his authority comes from someplace unimaginably high above him on the corporate ladder doesn't make a difference—it's been invested in him, and he knows just how to apply it.

• **Grifter:** So people know the Celebrity's name? So what? Lots of people know the Grifter's name, too. Well, one of his names, at least, associated with one of his many oh-so-cleverly suggested plans. The Grifter's spent a lot of time getting the wrong end of the deal. Long enough that he knows how to fake it, knows how to convince somebody that, really, he's taking a bath on this, but if they just stick together, they'll come out rich.

Relationships: Retired mentor, Bitter peer, Arm candy

Asset Skills
All: Socialize
Celebrity: Expression
Executive: Persuasion
Grifter: Subterfuge

Hacker

"You don't get anything out of the system that you don't put in. The trick's knowing what to put in."

The network is a system. Business is a system. Cities, worlds—all systems. They're systems designed to regulate, to control, to make sure power flows smoothly from the masters on down to the peons. Unless that peon happens to be a hacker. Hackers know how to make systems work for them.

Hacking's not *just* messing around with computers. To be sure, high-tech know-how helps out. The key, though, is understanding how all the moving parts move each other, and which ones can be moved in ways the system architects never intended. Systems build upon systems. They're connected to each other, but the integration's never perfect. There are always cracks, and the Hacker knows how to widen them.

• **Cowboy:** The classic hacker, the late night coder, the fiberoptic girl. She probably got her start as a script kiddie, breaking into computers using other people's programs. She won't admit that now, though, and do you really want to piss her off? After all, she steals people's identities when she's bored, uses corp surveillance systems to find out how soon her pizza's going to get here, and, when she's actually on a goddamn job, when your ass is in the fire and she's got to pull it out, has been known to hijack everything from defense turrets to armed UAVs. Yeah, you should probably be polite.

• **Infiltrator:** Sit down and watch for a while. People come, people go. Some of them through one gate, some through another. The Infiltrator's watching, too. Recognizing the patterns, learning the expected behaviors, seeing which window's just a few degrees out of the range of the cameras. When she's good and ready, she'll slip right in. Past the guards, past the gates, and with maybe a little help from a Cowboy or a well-placed Executive, right into the heart of the operation. When you need to get in, get out, and not get seen, you hire an Infiltrator.

• **Mother:** Sometimes you need the big picture. It's not just enough to know how the markets work or the surveillance systems or the quirks of local detention laws… you need to know everything. You need a voice in your ear who can answer every question and help you pick your next move. You need Mother. Mother can be a little cranky, especially when you don't do it her way, but her way was probably best to begin with. You make your plan. Planning's good. But you'd better have Mother to turn to when your plan meets reality.

Relationships: Hacker group, Favorite delivery person, Faceless rival

Asset Skills
All: Subterfuge
Cowboy: Computers
Infiltrator: Stealth
Mother: Academics

Hacking

The World of Darkness has rules for computer hacking on page 58. We've chosen not to present a new system here because the existing system already provides for hacking as an extended contest. Those rules work well spaced across scenes or combat rounds, allowing a hacker to shine without interrupting the flow of the story for other characters. If you'd rather a more detailed system, consider adapting the Social Combat system from Mirrors or the Mental Combat system from the upcoming Vampire book The Danse Macabre.

Killer

"…"

There is a time in every plan, no matter how simple, no matter how grand, when someone will have to die. The Killer, then, is not an aberration. Not a psycho. Just a man performing a function eventually necessary in all activities, whether noble or savage. He doesn't need to talk tough, but he's often willing to talk shop. He takes pride, if not in murder specifically, then at least in his professional capacity to commit it. It's hard to guess why he does it… but then, you don't really want to ask him if you guessed right.

• **Ronin:** The Ronin's got a sad story, but he doesn't want to tell it. He's a street samurai, or a desperado, or whatever you want to call a relic of a bygone age when bravos swaggered down the street instead of huddling like old ladies under silly lighted umbrellas. He's got a strong code of conduct, but it's not morality, not really. Not even philosophy. Really, it's a way of doing things. His methods are flexible—bullets, garrotes, even, on one very unexpected occasion, an actual sword—but his approach is always the same. Enter with maximum firepower, execute with extreme precision.

• **Soldier:** Like the Ronin, the Soldier is a professional killer. Unlike the Ronin, he was taught in a sophisticated training program designed to produce the most dependable, unbeatable badass that a human being or anything approximating one can be. That program was also supposed to indoctrinate him into the ideals of the State or the Company or the Church, creating a man who was loyal and tireless, who would crawl across the Minneapolis crater on his hands and knees without food and water just to make sure the right bullets got put in the right heads. That almost worked. Either they haven't quite gotten the loyalty training working or somebody got jealous and drummed him out. Now he, his tactical experience, and his uncanny ability to walk out of a firestorm are for hire.

• **Security:** Killing's all well and good. Or at least well. Some operations don't call for that, though. Sometimes you need people subdued, or diverted, or just plain kept away. That's what Security's for. He used to be a cop or a corporate bodyguard. Maybe he still is. At the very least, though, he's moonlighting as the guy who keeps undesirables away from your operation.

Relationships: Former teammate, Dead ex-lover, Equipment supplier

Asset Skills
All: Firearms
Ronin: Weaponry
Soldier: Survival
Security: Brawl

Courier

"I don't care what's in the package. I just want to know how many of those fucking Turks on those fucking scooters are going to be in my way."

Getting a package from point A to point B doesn't seem glamorous. It doesn't seem dangerous. It doesn't even seem that hard. Believe it, though, if that were the case, the Courier would have had a much better day, but she would not have that very pretty boy on her arm or that very expensive drink in her hand.

In a world of digital transactions and transmissions, physical media is almost obsolete. Almost. That razor's edge is the one the Courier shaves with. She moves data, packages, people. The value of these things is irrelevant. She doesn't bill based on the value of the cargo. She bills based on how many people are going to try and kill her on the way.

• **Mercenary:** A well-armed society is a polite society. The Mercenary Courier can't do anything about that, but being well-armed makes people more polite to her… or at least shuts them up. The Mercenary takes on heavier jobs. Sometimes that means heavier items, the kind that slow her down and make her more vulnerable to interference. Sometimes it means heavier resistance, like if she's picking up the package from somebody who doesn't want to send it. And sometimes, pretty much as often as she can justify, it means heavier backup and most especially heavier firepower.

• **Low-Tech:** The world is a sophisticated place, but it's a very particular type of sophistication. The kind of sophistication that builds high walls, dense roadblocks and smartguns that watch the streets. The Low-Tech Courier gets around this her own way. With little more than a satchel and the lightest-weight polymer-soled shoes money can buy, the Low-Tech Courier can ditch her ride at a moment's notice and take flight up fire escapes, across rooftops, and even, for a few glorious seconds, right along sheer walls.

• **Subversive:** Politics can be a dirty word, and it's not one you're likely to hear the Subversive Courier using. Serving underground political interests, and occasionally even believing in them, the Subversive eschews the focus on speed and physical protection used by other Couriers and puts her focus on coming and going unnoticed. She's the one who carries analog tapes between revolutionaries. Who shows up at black market clinics with a bag full of scalpels and clean hypos. She's quiet, she's clean, and she's gone as quickly as she came.

Relationships: Racing rival, Trophy boyfriend, Underground dispatcher

Asset Skills
All: Drive

Independent: Firearms
Low-Tech: Athletics
Subversive: Stealth

Investigator

"Yeah, you said that. But there's just one thing I don't understand… why aren't you scared yet?"

Culture has become archival, with virtually everything that everyone's ever known recorded somewhere. People's movements are tracked, their actions are tracked, and even if no one's paying attention to it, the data is there. It's collected, categorized, distributed, backed up.

So the world has lots of data… maybe too much. Even with all that data, though, one thing remains elusive: the truth. The Investigator is driven, whether by duty or obsession, to find the truth. To learn the secrets of the guilty, to find spots on the spotless. To find the truth at whatever personal cost, and, sometimes, to bury it.

The truth must be found, but does it need to be known?

• **Official:** The Official Investigator works for the government, a corporation, or sometimes both. He may be attached to an attorney general's staff, a police department, or a corporate internal affairs unit. He's not necessarily honest, but he is thorough, pursuing the organization's interests to the point that they become his own. People don't always cooperate, though, so if he needs to, he can bring the full weight of the organization down on them. People know that, though, so usually he doesn't need to.

• **Private:** The Private Investigator listens to people's problems, and then asks them for a large quantity of money to solve them. He's seen it all. In fact, he was probably an Official Investigator until he was driven out or quit in disgust. Now, he looks for other people's truths on his own terms. Sometimes, those terms aren't very nice at all.

• **Voyeur:** Not all Investigators need a case dropped onto their desk or laid out invitingly on their office couch. Some do it just because they care, and of those, it's usually because they care a little too much. Voyeurs are driven to understand people's problems and the sins that cause them, to turn over rocks and see what scuttles out.

Relationships: Old flame, Friend on the force, Cowardly snitch

Asset Skills
All: Investigation
Official: Intimidation
Private: Streetwise
Voyeur: Empathy

Since all Origins and all Roles use a common Merit progression, it's easy to create new ones by picking a set of appropriate Skills. There are one or two special considerations, though.

For Origins, you want to make sure that the concept applies to a large swath of your setting's population. The Networking and Vouchsafe abilities presume that a character will run into people with similar histories. These abilities, particularly Networking, become increasingly valuable as she becomes more Alienated from society as a whole.

"Once per session" abilities are balanced based on an assumed session length of two to three hours, five to seven scenes, and a group of four players. For longer sessions, or smaller groups, you might consider making them available more often.

While we're on the subject, let's point out that the Background rules substantially boost the number of Skill Specialties in play. While this book doesn't introduce a new template like Vampire or even Ghoul, these Specialties (along with 8-agains, Plugins, Automatic Successes and bonuses from Loyalty) make cyberpunk characters more effective than straight World of Darkness characters. They're not any tougher, though.

Plugins

Merit: Plugin (• to •••••)

Plugins represent modifications to a character's body or, in some cases, high tech external gear. They enhance capabilities a character already possesses, or replace abilities she lacks. When buying a Plugin, choose a particular Attribute + Skill or Attribute + Attribute pair to which it applies.

While Plugins can push a character's abilities beyond normal human limits, they usually don't introduce entirely new ones.

For example, a character's brain might be modified to improve her hand-eye coordination and ability to compensate for kickback, environmental factors, and anything else a tiny math coprocessor embedded in your motor cortex can help with, all for the sake of making

her a better marksman. However, Plugins usually won't cross over into capacities humans entirely lack. Those are the domain of supernatural powers.

We keep saying "usually." In order to give Plugins a different feel and area of usefulness than most powers in the World of Darkness, we've focused, as with other mechanics in this book, on improving skill rolls. Augmented characters can perform better, but they can't quite cheat nature in the ways that monsters can.

That said, there are some cases that skirt that line. An obvious one is built-in weapons. In the case of, let's

say, a spike that stabs out of a character's wrist, simply treat the Plugin as Strength + Weaponry and adjudicate as with any other kind of weapon. Do the same with a gun-arm, but use Dexterity + Firearms.

Suppose, though, you want a character to be able to interface with computers mentally? Since that doesn't significantly cross over with supernatural powers, go ahead and implement it as Wits + Computers.

If you need a Plugin that emulates a specific supernatural power, it's best to bypass this system at least in part. If, for example, you want a Dermal Chameleon

Layer that approximates Obfuscate's Cloak of Night, you may purchase the power at the same cost as a supernatural creature. If the cost is increased for not being a member of a particular group, such as a vampire clan, use the increased cost. However, you do not need to purchase previous powers, even if a supernatural creature of the appropriate type would. In the case of the Dermal Chameleon Layer, the cost would be 21 experience points. If the power has an activation cost in supernatural energy such as Vitae (which Cloak of Night does not), pay this cost in Willpower.

Plugins adapted from supernatural powers are still subject to Backfires and being Compromised, and Willpower is still given for these events.

Using Plugins

A Plugin is activated by spending a Willpower point. In addition to the three dice ordinarily granted by spending the Willpower point, add activation dice equal to your character's dots in the Plugin.

Backfires

Plugins sometimes just don't work. Sometimes the enemy has a countermeasure. Other times, a circuit blows or a battery runs out. If you attempt to use a Plugin and the Storyteller decides that it fails outright, your character receives a Willpower point as compensation.

Compromised

Sometimes, a Plugin can become a full-fledged vulnerability. Your cybercortex gets hacked, the power core in your replacement arm overheats, dealing lethal damage, or so on. The Storyteller may invoke this effect once per story. In exchange, the character's Willpower refills completely.

Example Plugins

Happy Place ••• or Memetic Filter •
Pool: Resolve + Composure

In the arms race to harden information systems against intrusion, one system lags behind the others. The human mind remains the weak point in governments and corporations alike. And like any other information system, an attacker with physical access is more dangerous than any other. The so-called "rubber hose" method remains one of the most effective means of intrusion. Enter the Happy Place, an implant within the memory centers of the brain.

With only a few seconds thought, an individual possessing a Happy Place can electrochemically induce a sleep state and flood of intense, pleasant memories, rendering them virtually immune to intimidation and torture. Even better, since the process involves artificial tissue grafts, removing a Happy Place is more expensive than implanting one. A group of interrogators suddenly presented with a useless victim may opt to kill him… but at least he goes out happy.

The Memetic Filter is a different technology with a similar purpose. Using a high-end expert system, the implant filters sensory data against a database of undesirable content. Think of it as SafeSearch for your eyeballs. The Filter not only protects against coercive input, but can be used to avoid contamination by enemy ideas. Originally marketed as a corporate security measure, it's now a favorite among next generation zealots.

Example Backfire: An interrogator has an anesthesiologist on hand to counter the effects of the Happy Place, or media designed to undermine a character's convictions while repeating only approved slogans.

Example Compromise: An image in a character's environment matches the trigger memory for the Happy Place. The Memetic Filter is manipulated into screening out important information.

Majordomo • or Interlay ••
Pool: Wits + Computer

Majordomo is your friend. Majordomo is there when people fail you. He'll even help you when your memory fails you. Majordomo keeps your personal information, schedule and entertainment for you. Digitally inserted into your immediate environment by high-end graphics and audio technology (the same ones used by the entertainment industry), Majordomo presents a character with fully configurable appearance and personality. Majordomo can be your personal secretary, your electronic boyfriend, or just your moral support. Majordomo: putting a friendly face on a confusing world.

The Interlay represents a major and recent advance in technology. Human beings have long had the ability to connect biological systems to machines, but the Interlay goes a step further. Where Plugins like the Majordomo interface humans with computers by presenting information in a human-readable form, the Interlay goes the other direction, reprogramming human intuition to communicate with computers.

A character's Interlay uses her brain for what it's already best at: pattern recognition. With an Interlay activated, the user can understand multiple data streams as easily as she picks voices out of a crowd or distinguishes objects in a room. With relatively simple training, she can also manipulate that data and feed it back into the system.

Example Backfire: Majordomo's audio feed is obscured by noise in the environment. The Interlay is unable to find an open data connection.

Example Compromise: Majordomo distracts the character at a critical moment. A buffer overflow attack on the Interlay induces physical pain.

Pep Pads ••
Pool: Dexterity + Medicine

Sometimes, you need to get someone back on their feet in a hurry. He may be tired, he may be hurt, or his

heart may even have stopped. With your roll of Pep Pads, that's no problem! Just peel 'em off and slap one on. The subject gets an invigorating mix of synthetic endorphins and electric shocks that'll have him back on his feet in no time.

Pep Pads were originally developed for military use, but they're now available to the public. The Pads package a variety of quick resuscitation techniques into a single device. Essentially a smart bandage with an extra kick, the Pep Pad is standard equipment for fire and rescue crews as well as hit men and urban commandos.

Example Backfire: Blood loss or dehydration prevents effective distribution of the Pep Pad's drugs.

Example Compromise: The Pep Pad administers an electric shock when not needed, inducing fibrillation.

SQUID •••••

Pool: Intelligence + Computers

The SQUID is a simple weapon… like a fist, or a gun. Once a soldier's been trained to use it, he can carry the palm-sized device into nearly any environment and inflict massive damage. The SQUID is a nearly autonomous automatic hacking device, introduced physically into a hostile situation with the aim of bringing down all information systems in the area. The goal is to deny hostiles use of their networks during a frontal assault, but private entities which have access to military SQUIDs often use them as the sole means of attack. Introducing a SQUID into a civilian system such as a hospital can cause chaos and death as effectively as an entire squad of armed agents.

Example Backfire: Target systems have been hardened against this generation of SQUID.

Example Compromise: An enemy hacker or SQUID alters friendly systems so that they attract attacks by the character's SQUID.

Alienation

In a cyberpunk chronicle, characters are defined not by their moral code or a set of supernatural bans. What matters more is how close they are to the society around them, and how able they are to identify and interact with the ordinary members of that society. To represent this, we replace Morality and similar traits with Alienation.

A character has a starting Alienation of seven, and has basic ties to a community, as well as a day job (legitimate or otherwise). The character lives in an ordinary way within the means provided by the Storyteller or their Resources rating. As that number drops, and the character becomes more alienated, she finds it more and more difficult to interact with the world that, by her choices, she is slowly leaving behind.

When a character makes a choice that pushes them farther away from the organizations or people that are part of their lives, they must make a Degeneration roll. If they fail the roll, they move one point down the Alienation scale.

Alienation	Act
10	Altruistic thoughts
9	Minor altruistic act (charity), refusal to identify oneself to an authority figure
8	Injury to another (accidental or otherwise)
7	Sabotage to an employer or patron organization, petty theft
6	Serious theft from an employer or patron organization
5	Betrayal of a Storyteller character ally, intentional mass property damage
4	Impassioned violent act not sanctioned by an authority figure
3	Planned violent act not sanctioned by an authority figure
2	Casual, callous violence (serial murder)
1	Mass murder

The above table is only a guideline; the Storyteller judges what actions further Alienate a character.

If a character commits an act with a lower Alienation rating than their current level, they must make a Degeneration roll as per the Morality rules in **The World of Darkness** core book (p.91), followed, if necessary, by a Degeneration check (p.92).

A character may not roll any Social dice pool larger than her current Alienation score if attempting to affect a target with a higher Alienation score. Dice from Plugins are exempt from this rule.

All You Need is Kill

Some groups, especially those whose cyberpunk crosses into splatterpunk, may not want to impose Social penalties as consequences for acts of violence. While it's a deviation from the conventional World of Darkness, and from many of our cyberpunk models, deviating from the usual patterns is what this book is all about. You may simply want to omit violent crimes from the Alienation ladder, effectively stabilizing characters at Alienation 5.

Alternatively, you may want to remove Morality and equivalent systems entirely. Go ahead, but

keep in mind that systems like Morality are a little bit more than narrative measures of how a character's behavior affects her state of mind—they're also a resource management mechanic that encourages cautious, non-combat approaches to problems. They can affect the availability of powers like blood sorcery. With the increased combat abilities of many cyberpunk characters, you may want to leave that mechanic in place.

Loyalty

Trust and betrayal are central to both cyberpunk fiction and the World of Darkness. In order to bring that slippery dynamic to the gaming table, we have Loyalty. Loyalty measures the trust between the players' characters.

Distributing Loyalty is a group activity that takes place once everyone has finished creating their characters. Each player's character has a Loyalty value for each other player's character. The player's available Loyalty points are equal to her character's Willpower.

When a character helps another character, the assisting character's player adds his character's Loyalty to the assisted character to his roll. This is in addition to any cooperation bonuses.

When a character betrays another character, the betraying character's player receives a bonus equal to the Loyalty the betrayed character holds for his character.

At the end of any session in which a player makes a roll involving Loyalty, all players may reassign their characters' Loyalty to each other's characters.

Organizations

Whether you're going to sell out or rock out, the first thing you need is The Man. In the cyberpunk World of Darkness, corporations are people. So are clans, covenants, tribes. They are the machine and your characters are part of the machine and they are going to be the part that breaks.

So how do we talk about these organizations?

First of all, everybody's got a good and a bad side, even when they're not, strictly speaking, anybody. Pick a Virtue and Vice.

Organizations have three Attributes: Power, Finesse, and Resistance. Divide 8 dots between these Attributes.

Willpower is defined by the organization's Power + Resistance. Organizations also have the standard Skill list. Prioritize them 11/7/4, as in standard character creation.

Organizations do not possess Initiative, Defense or Speed.

How do corporations and clans use their Attributes and Skills, though? They don't, not directly. They use them through Storyteller characters that work for that organization. Once per scene, a non-player member of an organization may choose to do one of the following:

• Substitute Power for Intelligence, Strength or Presence.

• Substitute Finesse for Wits, Dexterity or Manipulation.

• Substitute Resilience for Resolve, Stamina or Composure.

• Substitute any Skill the organization possesses for the equivalent Skill possessed by the character. Since the character is calling upon the organization's resources, all non-physical actions invoking this rule take at least one scene. Physical actions are assumed to represent standard training provided by the organization.

In addition, any character who is a member of an organization may gain Willpower through acting on his organization's Virtue or Vice. This ability may only be used once per scene, and gains through both Virtue and Vice follow the rules for regaining Willpower through Vice in **The World of Darkness** core book.

Organizations do not possess an Alienation rating, nor are they subject to Derangements. They do not possess Merits or Flaws. They may not be the subject of supernatural powers that affect single targets, although individual members may. In general, the only way for a supernatural power to affect an organization is by affecting its members.

Organizations may not be the hosts of spirits, but they may *have* spirits, as we'll discuss later.

Themes and Props

Now that we've discussed how cyberpunk characters can be built in the Storytelling system, let's take a look at the elements of cyberpunk we broke down earlier. We'll consider each prop and theme on its own, and then consider how to apply it to the Tomorrow Country and Metalground settings.

Themes

Alienation

The protagonists of cyberpunk are outsiders. *The self as other* is a theme cyberpunk shares with the World of Darkness. Embrace, First Change, Awakening, all of these things push characters outside of mainstream culture. As monsters, or at least strangers, they create parallel cultures and repurpose human needs and institutions for their own use.

Supernatural characters need to stay outside, or at least believe they do. Many can't even maintain legal identities, so they're driven into whatever portion of the economy still uses cash. Biometric identification just makes matters worse.

The alternative is that the monsters bury themselves in the system, behind layers of false identities and stolen biographies. Characters with this kind of security may even be able to offer it to others, for a price.

Tomorrow Country

Nobody belongs, but everybody thinks everybody else does. While people have gotten used to the different texture of electronic communication, enough that it doesn't actively bother them, they often use it to withdraw into themselves, to keep friends and family members at a safe distance.

Just like giving up liberty for security, giving up intimacy for security turns out to be a bad idea. Increasing numbers of young people become literal shut-ins, interacting with the world outside only through computers. Even now, though, technology is stepping up to make that easier. Sensory recordings are an infant technology, but they're filtering down to the mass market. They're affordable, particularly to agoraphobic telecommuters who don't spend their money on much else.

Load up a sense clip and you're dancing at a night club too fabulous to be anything but a cleverly arranged composite, skiing down pristine slopes that don't exist anymore, or having sex with a partner whose skin is soft and warm and absolutely flawless.

None of these things feel *quite* right—the simulations don't stimulate the senses with perfect accuracy, and the art of editing them is still evolving. Amateur clips are available, unstaged, uncut and raw, but these often include the parts of the experience no one wants to pay for. Slipping in beer on a nightclub floor, dense smog over the mountains, or a sex partner's atrocious breath.

Of the majority who do make it out their apartments on a regular basis, many still try to engage with sanitized data more than their environment. They keep their eyes on the digital billboards, or master the trick of keeping one eye focused on the heads-up display in a contact lens while the other keeps up with the mundanities of avoiding traffic or other pedestrians.

Humanity's discomfort with other humans is catered to in the most sophisticated ways possible.

Metalground

Technology didn't push you out, people did. People with power, people with money, people with less humanity than any of the monsters you share the slums with.

The rich and powerful use what were once military weapons to protect their sections of the city, their security forces watching from barriers that may take some inspiration from the Berlin Wall, but which will probably weather regime change even better than they weather the occasional rocket attack.

The lower classes who do menial labor are allowed in each day through strictly monitored checkpoints. The Authorities fear suicide bombers, and would also prefer to keep such supernaturals as they can detect far out of mind.

Security has to do spot-checks to find most supernaturals, administering behavioral tests to detect unusual responses, reaction times and false answers to questions. Screening officers are drugged to keep emotional responses subdued. This doesn't block mind-affecting powers, but it does make them easier for fellow officers to notice.

Vampires and some Prometheans, however, are found via genetic multisampling. While conventional science can't penetrate unnatural tricks like the Blush of Life, it easily picks out blood samples that don't match skin samples or body parts from different people.

Kindred and Created have to be pretty clever to get into the better parts of town…or they need the cooperation of someone in power.

Globalization

In cyberpunk, practically everyone's from somewhere else. Alienation, as discussed above, can be one consequence of this culture shock. Just as often, though, people mix and cultures evolve, taking very different threads and weaving them into whole cloth. For those who can't fit in, though, the fusion cultures are all the more baffling for their rapid development and change.

Globalization hits supernatural cultures hard. In the modern World of Darkness, the concerns of supernatural characters are largely local. Vampires keep to their fiefdoms and werewolves to their territory. Vampires already use information technology to hunt and conduct their affairs, though, and that gradually results in Kindred community and politics moving online. Vampires are also uniquely equipped to exploit long-term changes. A few decades, or even years, can transform a small investment in a local company or politician into regional and global influence.

The fate of werewolves may depend on who goes global first. If the Forsaken embrace information technology and become more tightly integrated and better

targeted, if they band together as a virtual nation instead of a loose confederation of packs and tribes, they may turn the tables on the Pure. With global intelligence on both the Pure and the state of the spirit world, combined with working treaties between packs, Uratha agents could eliminate the numerically superior Pure in just a few years.

However, if the Pure escalate first, leveraging their numbers to infiltrate human enforcement agencies en masse, the Forsaken could find themselves facing a Pure State capable of tracking them from their First Changes to their last, strangled breaths.

Global intelligence also changes hunters. In the modern day, conspiracies already have information on the monsters, but in the brave new world, they can sift through formerly private information with record speed, gathering detailed information on individual cells. Organizations like Task Force: VALKYRIE will be able to recruit with record speed, or manipulate information fed to street level hunters to expedite their own operations.
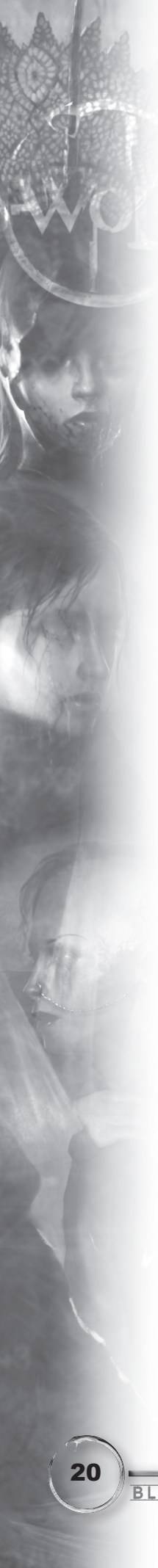
Truly globalized conspiracies can out-compete the compacts in recruiting and deployment, eliminating the middle Tier almost entirely. Rogue elements like Ashwood Abbey find their assets frozen and their members arrested or terminated. Null Mysteriis is carved up and assimilated by the Cheiron Group, the Task Force and the newly privatized Malleus Maleficarum. The Union finds themselves offered generous compensation to serve their country and the human race as career killers.

Most dramatically, in a few short years, Network Zero goes from hobbyists to startup to full-blown conspiracy. Pushing their decentralized media presence to its limits, they become a Tier Three group linking together hunters worldwide. In the future, any hunter operation begins with a records search through Network Zero.

Tomorrow Country

World travel has accelerated because of increased prosperity for some and warfare and catastrophe for others. The cores of the urban sprawl, the places that still call themselves New York or Atlanta or Philadelphia, have become cultural reactors. A single media clip on the Internet can bring laughter or change of mind to people all over the world, but being more densely packed with more strangers than ever before has the same effect. For an observer from the modern day, a lot of the food would be passingly familiar, but the music and fashion would be so different that they'd take time just to recognize and process.

Humanity has always migrated, shared and mixed, but in Tomorrow Country change races forward like never before.

The dark side of globalization is also much as it ever was. The swelling populations of relatively privileged regions harness the swelling populations of poorer regions as labor while keeping them well out of sight and mind. The term "developing world" doesn't get thrown around much anymore—the elite have developed the world about as far as they want to talk about it—but the scramble for economic connections and technological infrastructure goes on. At the same time, those connections benefit local elites more than the common people.

On the other hand, if for some reason a character from a privileged region was compelled to take a look, the information's all there. After all, everyone's on the net, even if their access is limited. History, news, financial data, homegrown media... but who would look?

Metalground

The city's not a nice place, but there's work here that brings people from all over the world. People, in turn, bring their monsters. Gone are the days of local governments, of packs who ruled large territories and covenants which commanded cities. While supernatural creatures still have local power structures, their marginalization has combined with improved communication to create global, decentralized monster communities. The social lines between various kinds of supernaturals are blurring, with individual coteries, packs and cabals looking for every scrap of help they can get.

Adaptation

Technology doesn't always work, and even when it does, it doesn't always do what we want. Even as information technology equipment becomes too complex for most people to tinker with, those who can keep up become more obsessed and, often, more in demand. The adaptation of existing technology and culture to niche or individual needs goes back to the very beginning of cyberpunk. It's that DIY ethic (along with a healthy dose of raging against the machine) that puts the "punk" in its name.

Sin-Eaters have almost unwittingly become masters of cultural adaptation. Today, their patchwork culture reinvents itself with every passing decade. Tomorrow, they retain their cultural agility but they have history. The dawn of the twenty-first century is seen as the time when, for the first time, they truly began to understand death.

While hunters and supernaturals attempt to co-opt the system, the Bound are sharpening its bleeding edge. The result is something entirely unexpected: Sin-Eaters found the first global supernatural culture in which the others can meet in safety and on common ground. They lead the fashion, the knowledge building, the diplomacy. Bound celebrations like the Day of the Dead become sacred to creatures around the world. Their understanding of the one thing everyone struggles helplessly against makes them the right people to bring monsters together.

Of course, company brings contempt. As the Bound become the medium that binds everyone else, grudges that would have been eased by the passage of time find immediate fulfillment. The new supernatural culture is as violent as it is vibrant. There is anger, and there is murder, and guess who has to clean up the mess?

Tomorrow Country

Cobbled together solutions can be unreliable, and those who have built something once will rarely leave it alone, especially if there's someone trying to stop or outdo them. Hackers on all sides of the law race each other to make systems and break them. Hardware tinkerers find themselves bombarded with a stream of new models to take apart and an ever-growing cache of old models to wax nostalgic about.

Those without power hack with all the more vigor. Cowboys in the employ of the Mafiya are pretty damned good, but their Estonian neighbors are getting even better.

Metalground

In the city, you're either still moving, or you're spare parts. Plugins and organs can be stripped out with relative ease, especially if you don't care about the health of the donor. Supernatural creatures can be stripped down, too, something both the Moros and the Ordo Dracul show a distinct inclination towards.

Supernatural flesh-hacking is in its infancy, but the results are already frightening. New generations of Pandorans scurry through the night, no longer limited by the availability of Promethean Pyros. Altered by engineered Vitae or Supernal magic, the Pandorans can steal vitality from these and other sources. Worse, they no longer go dormant. Ever.

The Network

Information networks are a key part of cyberpunk fiction. Broadly speaking, William Gibson's cyberspace or Neal Stephenson's metaverse are equivalent to the Internet. The special effects are different, but they're just skins on top of the same concept. Indeed, as Gibson begins to suggest in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, the Network isn't made up of computers, it's something that runs on top of them. Sites like Facebook work on a similar principle: they catalog and index existing networks (in

this case, human social ones) and connect them (social networks to advertising databases).

That starts to make the Network sound like a spiritual construct, and, indeed, journeys onto the net in cyberpunk fiction often have the feel of journeys into the Otherworld. Gibson describes cyberspace as a "consensual hallucination" in his 1982 story "Burning Chrome." In *Count Zero*, the sequel to *Neuromancer*, religious practitioners misidentify the liberated artificial intelligences from the latter book as the Loa. Cyberpunk's figurative use of supernatural descriptions for the Network are too numerous to mention. *Serial Experiments Lain* suggests the mingling of the virtual and physical worlds in a way that's **Mage** players might find familiar.

The Network could be mapped onto Twilight or the Supernal realms, in which case information ubiquity could be a form of mass Awakening. It might simply behave in a parallel manner, with spiritual powers or newly created equivalents affecting cyberspace. On the other hand, time spent on the Network can be pretty engrossing, with hours slipping away before you notice. Perhaps it's simply become a hunting ground for the True Fae. You jack in, but your Fetch jacks out.

Probably, though, the Network is thoroughly rooted in the physical world. Supernatural creatures get no special privileges there, and they should be worried about that. The more data becomes available, the easier they'll be to detect.

Tomorrow Country

Everything is known, but not everybody can get access to it. Corporations can gather pinpoint data on customers... more data, in fact, than they've yet figured out how to leverage. Identity theft is still a big business, but the game has changed: many identities are for sale on the open market. Your digital footprint can be more important than you, taking on a life of its own. At this point it's more predictable, and you've probably automated most of your spending.

The system needs to keep you around, sure. You have to keep putting money *in*, or there's no point in trying to get money out of you. Still, individuals can be difficult variables, and you've got a lot to do. Why not just let the system make your decisions? After all, it already knows what you like...

Metalground

This is how the Masquerade died. Not with a bang, but a whimper. Humans always believed in the monsters, knew instinctively to fear them, but they pushed that knowledge down. If they couldn't quash their fears, at least they could layer new beliefs atop the ancient and unsettling ones.

The world got too big, though. The disasters that increased adult mortality effectively increased birth rate. After each baby boom started to mature, there was an explosion of vampires ready to take advantage. Worked well enough, until the human populations normalized for a while and the predation became statistically obvious. The great machines could see that there was something missing, and they told the mortals that created them.

Those in power tried to keep secrets and take measured steps, but they failed. The information was there, and there were curious mortals who knew how to get to it. Once the vampires were discovered, similar techniques began to unravel the existence of other monsters... monsters a few vampires were willing and able to rat out.

Then the Authorities came to the city, and the monsters became one fear among many.
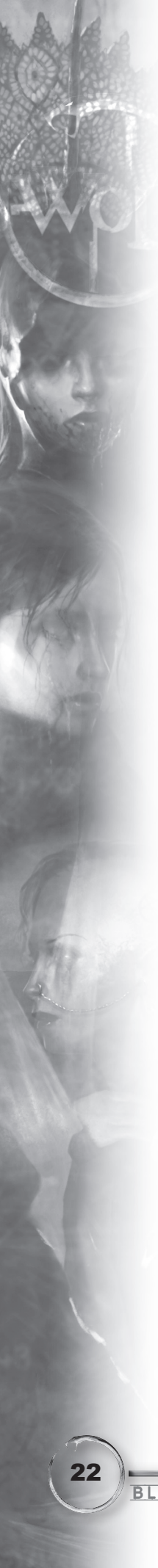
Props

Megacorps and AIs

Mega-corporations and artificial intelligences are both created by mainstream culture, and both become so large and complex as to be alien and incomprehensible. They may even be synonymous, with big business run by or relying on unfathomable machines.

Power resides in corporations more than in governments. Perhaps this is because nations have gone bankrupt, or because government functions have become increasingly privatized. Governments may simply be irrelevant to your setting, with agents of law and order and taxation a far more distant concern than the Auditors dispatched by a character's former employer.

Corporations are easy to do wrong. As AIs can become Lovecraftian gods, corporations become the traditional Satan, doing evil just because. They're murderous and authoritarian just because, and going on a corporate payroll is synonymous with moral corruption. That can work for shorter narratives, when your game is focusing on action and consequences in the near-term. You don't really need to know what's in the suitcase, why Mr. Smith wants it so badly, or why Mr. Smith is willing to assemble a group of extralegal cutthroats to get it back.

At the climax of *Neuromancer*, the titular intelligence explains that its name is an allusion to necromancy, and refers to the virtual environment it's using to communicate as the land of the dead. Aspects of the novel's twin AIs go on to become unknowable gods moving through cyberspace. Put the razor hands aside and pick up Occam's: In the World of Darkness, the simplest explanation is that AIs *are* ghosts, spirits, or something similar enough to be indistinguishable.

Tier Three characters, whether Kindred, hunter or Bound, find the assets of megacorporations useful, but the real power is in artificial intelligence. AIs make clandestine supernatural organizations more agile, and they keep secrets better than human thralls or contacts.

Tomorrow Country

The mega corporations are much like those we have today. There are fewer multinational conglomerates, but you can't tell that from advertising or packaging. Marketing analysts had realized by the dawn of the 21st century that people liked the illusion of choice. That, for example, if there were two electronics chains in a region, and one bought the other, maintaining the separate store brands would maintain higher sales.

People aren't dumb, of course—they know that wealth is concentrated in fewer places than ever before, and that city governments couldn't sustain development without corporate sponsorship. Few care, though, and it takes a strange kind of person to even consider doing something about it. Even as life gets more expensive year by year, it can still be lived, and that's all most people care about.

Tomorrow Country does not include artificial intelligences. While researchers push forward with every passing year, they have yet to create AI in the sense discussed here. When they do, it's unlikely that anybody will be ready.

Metalground

The Authorities depend on the corporations for money, and the artificial intelligences to cement their rule. The machines help maintain total information awareness, or something as close to it as can be achieved.

When an artificial intelligence becomes complex enough, it may simply merge with its spirit, much as the soul attaches to a human consciousness. This spirit is born in the physical world—it has never been across the Gauntlet, and likely has no interest in crossing. The spirit inherently possesses the Fetter Numen (**Book of Spirits**, p. 141). It exists in any information system (electronic or otherwise) capable of hosting significant portions of the intelligence that gave birth to it. In each location, it's vulnerable as if it existed only there. The spirit can control any systems that it would as a soulless intelligence, but requires Numina to do anything beyond that. So, for example, a server farm hosting an intelligence might be defended by alarms, automated weaponry, and so on, which the spirit could control. However, it wouldn't be able to possess a guard's gun without developing additional powers.

Werewolves are cast in the unlikely role of being the creatures in the World of Darkness most likely to negoti- ate directly with, or confront, artificial intelligences.

As corporations become defined by their internal cultures, their company hymns, the march of branding and internal messaging, they may gain a literal company spirit. The spirit doesn't control the corporation literally. Unlike an AI, the corporation is made up of individual people, with their own ideas, plans, and ways of doing things. Yet, as the organization rules suggest, it has a personality. Procedures, equipment, inside jokes—all of them can carry the voice of the spirit.

If the collective nature of corporations makes them callous, the spirit can make them cruel. A corporation spirit has all of the greed and capriciousness of any spirit, but even the weakest have broader power bases. Once per day, around 3 a.m. local time, they can cross the Gauntlet at any location owned by the company or its employees, or lived in for an extended period by those employees (some people take their work home).

The ability to cross into the physical world functions as Gauntlet Breach (**Book of Spirits**, p. 142), but is restricted to the aforementioned sites. Most corporation spirits also possess the Numina Fetter and/or Living Fetter (**Book of Spirits**, p. 143), enabling them to engage in at least limited possession of objects and people in the physical world. The spirit doesn't act so much in the corporation's interests as it does the corporation's nature: it follows the organization's Virtue and Vice. They usually possess Influence not over the corporation itself, but over some of the things it produces or uses, like pharmaceuticals or manufacturing equipment. They may look for a monopoly, devouring other spirits with similar Influence.

Alternatively, corporations might be haunted by outside spirits with Influences related to their specialties, Virtues, or Vices. In headquarters towers or corporate arcologies, they nest, devouring their fellows and creating a spiritual dead zone.

Cyberware

In cyberpunk, technology doesn't just surround humanity, it *invades*. Or, rather, it's invited to occupy. Characters like Molly Millions or the Magnetic Dog Sisters become so obsessed with strength or aesthetics or both that they rewire and rebuild themselves. Black market surgeons—the same who provide much-needed medical care to the underclasses—jack up, speed up and pump up human bodies to become weapons.

In the standard World of Darkness, these kinds of unnatural abilities tend to draw characters away from humanity, towards the hungry beasts in their hearts or the spirits that wait on the other side of the Gauntlet. The cost of power is often monstrosity.

Not so in cyberpunk fiction. A character like Molly is no less human for all her modifications. She's still angry, proud, and obsessed with either self-control or its complete abdication.

Is there a middle ground? Maybe there doesn't need to be. After all, the "monstrous" descents of characters in the World of Darkness are metaphors for people losing what's good or necessary in themselves. For all that, though, they become no less human; they merely embody the worst of humanity.

Tomorrow Country

Not everyone has Plugins, but everyone knows someone who does. For several years after it became widespread, augmentation was a fashion statement, but it's so common now as to be almost beneath notice. Medical experts and the media can't talk enough about the next step.

Why replace just one system, knitting together clean, manufactured implants with dirty, legacy flesh? Shouldn't it be simpler to just move a human being into a synthetic body? Why stop there, even? With the ability to replicate memories and sensory experience, fully synthetic humans are within reach.

Metalground

Meet Cheiron Global. While its component corporations downplay and gloss over their sources, they make a killing harvesting supernatural body parts and using them to augment human bodies. Ashwood Abbey is long gone, but its spirit lives on as the wealthier classes inject vampire blood for sexual performance or stave off death with a graft of someone else's soul.

The thousand processes used to turn dirty, frightening monsters into clean, fashionable augmentations are collectively referred to as "rendering." Werewolves find themselves in demand. They're hunted as sources of durable, quickly-regenerating tissue, but they're also prized as harvesters.

Werewolves, however, are also a powerful force within Cheiron. Their ability to mediate with and manipulate spirits makes them ideal surgeons, preventing otherwise messy rejections. Some mages are also employed in this capacity, but Cheiron fears the witches for their ability to sunder reality itself. Information from the Aegis Archives indicates that mages caused a catastrophe so vast it can no longer even be understood. There's a worse discovery: they may have done that more than once.

Cheiron's most respected and feared surgeon is the Man with White Hands. Employed directly by Global, he consults on the direst cases, cutting and splicing flesh and spirit with sickening ease. He always wears white surgical gloves, an anachronism which distracts from his most mysterious quality: that no one has ever seen his hands. He has no aura, but those who should be able to sense feel the still cold of a medical freezer when they look at him.