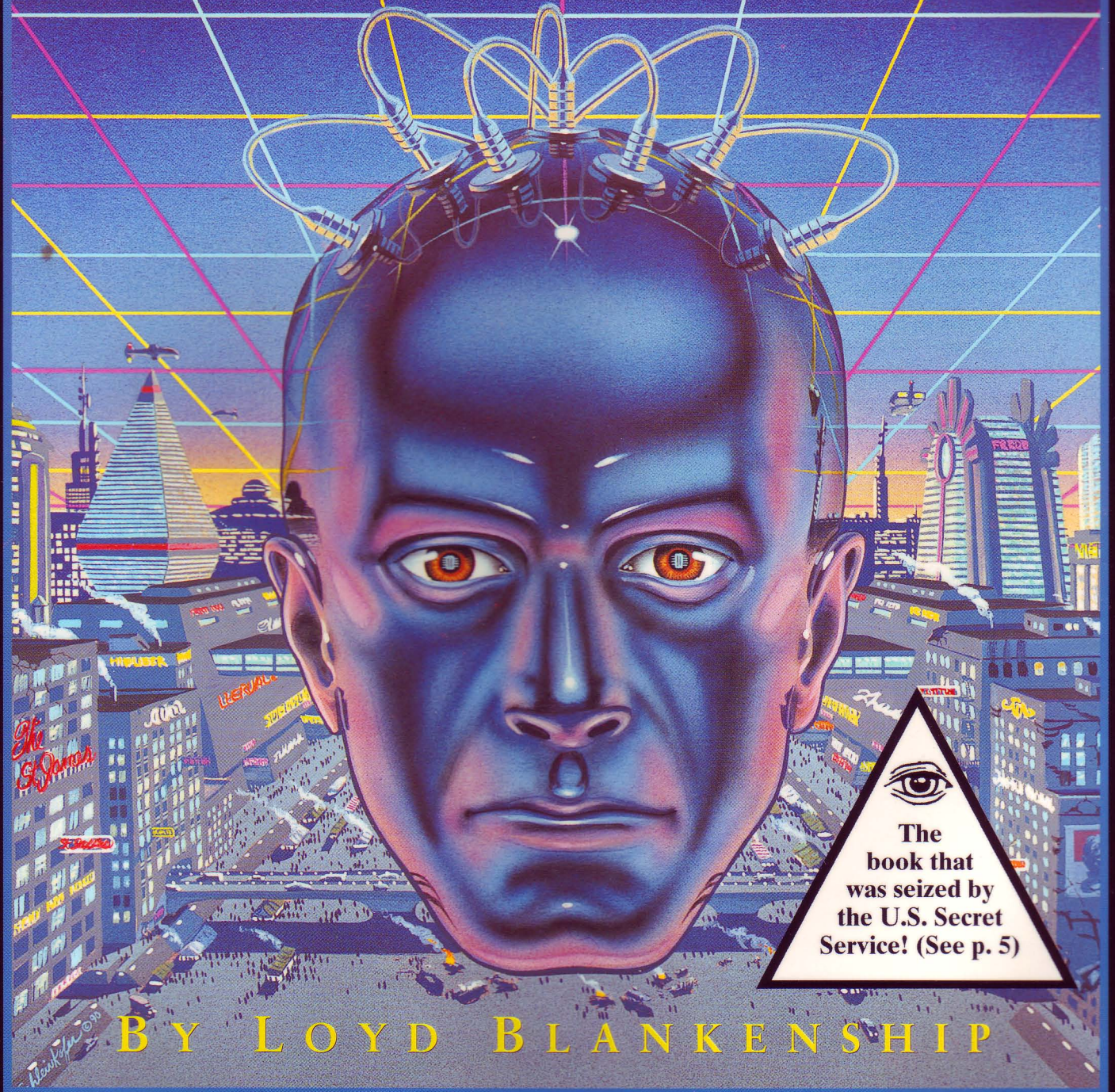# GURPS®

CYBERPUNK

High-Tech Low-Life Roleplaying Sourcebook

The
book that
was seized by
the U.S. Secret
Service! (See p. 5)

BY LOYD BLANKENSHIP

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

LIVING ON THE EDGE

Welcome to a world on the edge. *GURPS Cyberpunk* brings the gritty chrome-and-plastic streets of the cyberpunk future to the world of *GURPS!*

Cyberpunk is the genre of man plus machine – a dystopian fusion of the visions of George Orwell and Timothy Leary. It presents challenges far beyond those of the standard "loot the dungeon" themes – in a cyberpunk world, survival itself can be the ultimate success story!

GURPS Cyberpunk doesn't tie you down to one specific background. Instead it provides rules to simulate any type of environment, from the gutters of New York City to the injection-molded walls of orbital habitats.

Because *GURPS Cyberpunk* is based on the award-winning *GURPS* rules, it's possible to create *any* character type. From gang members and fly-by-night netrunners to black-market software dealers, cyborged bodyguards and bioengineered ninja – they're all there.
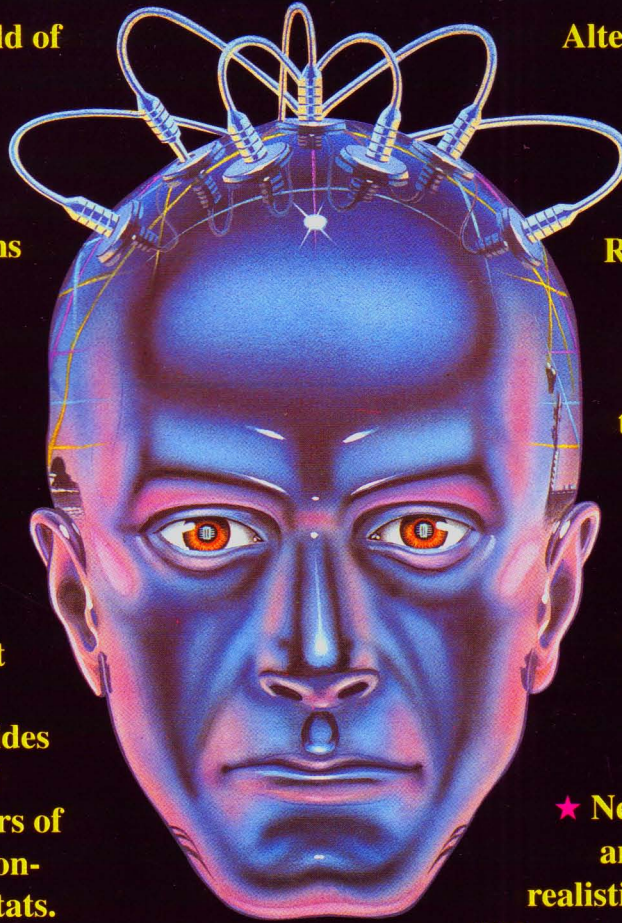
Included in this book are:

★ **New Advantages** – from Alternate Identities and Zeroed to Contacts.

★ **New Disadvantages** – including Cyber Rejection and Terminally Ill.

★ **Cyberwear** – all the equipment needed to turn the man-on-the-street into a cybernetic killing machine.

★ **Brain Implants** – from temporary chipped skills to data plugs to a built-in computer.

★ **Netrunning Rules** – hardware and software to penetrate the realistic computer networks of the 20th century or the artificial reality of cyberspace.

★ **Campaign Advice** – over 30 pages on creating a cyberpunk campaign, both world design and adventure writing.

★ **And much, much more . . .**

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

GURPS CYBERPUNK

High-Tech Low-Life Roleplaying

By Loyd Blankenship

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Dedicated with love to my wife, Whitney, who is my strength when I'm weak and my hope when I despair.

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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LIFEFORM MATR
+ 93% APPE=R
+ 69% DISTORT

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the edge. It takes a special kind of person to thrive here: tough, smart, mean, nasty . . . and just a little bit lucky. It's action and reaction. Sit still, and the world will pass you by – or roll over you – or eat you for breakfast. Trust? Trust is for suckers. Anyone out there will knife you for the price of a six-pack of beer.

You've got to be quick. There are deals to be made and deeds to be done. If you're on top, you can bet there's a pack of wolves at your heels, ready to leave you bleeding in the street without a coin to your name.

Welcome to the edge. See you next week – if we're both still here.

What is Cyberpunk?

"Cyberpunk" is the term applied to a science fiction literary movement of the 1980s. Although there are several authors from the 1960s and 1970s whose work appears cyberpunk in retrospect, the term wasn't coined until the publication in 1984 of William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer,* which won the Hugo, Nebula *and* Philip K. Dick awards – something no novel had ever done.

Neuromancer presented a view of the future that was *different.* Gone were the glass-domed cities and utopias of Golden Age science fiction. The domes are still there in cyberpunk, but they're occupied by the rich and guarded by security forces that shoot first and don't bother to ask questions. Gone were the monotone dystopian nightmares of Orwell and Levin – some cyberpunk worlds make *1984* look like Club Med.

The cyberpunk future is *vibrant* – pulsating with life, from the streets to the high-rises. Paradoxically, however, that life is cheap, perhaps because there's so much of it – there might be twenty million people in Tokyo or New York.

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

Pyramid. Our bimonthly magazine includes new rules and articles for *GURPS,* as well as information on our other lines: *Car Wars, Toon, Ogre Miniatures* and more. It also covers top releases from other companies – *Traveller, Call of Cthulhu, Shadowrun,* and many more.

New supplements and adventures. We're always working on new material, and we'll be happy to let you know what's available. A current catalog is available for an SASE.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are always available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE with your request.

Q&A. We do our best to answer any game question accompanied by an SASE.

Gamer input. We value your comments. We will consider them, not only for new products, but also when we update this book on later printings!

Illuminati Online. For those who have home computers, SJ Games has an online service with discussion areas for many games, including *GURPS.* Here's where we do a lot of our playtesting! It's up 24 hours per day at 512-447-4449, at up to 14.4K baud – or telnet to io.com. Give us a call! We also have conferences on Compuserve, GEnie, and America Online.

Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set,* Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to a page in the *Basic Set* – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *Basic Set,* Third Edition. A UT reference refers to *GURPS Ultra-Tech.*

Meanwhile, Back in the Real World . . .

The Steve Jackson Games staff offers our somewhat bemused thanks to the United States Secret Service for their diligent "reality checking" of *GURPS Cyberpunk.* It happened like this . . .

On March 1, the SJ Games offices, and the home of the *GURPS Cyberpunk* writer, were raided by the U.S. Secret Service as part of a nationwide investigation of data piracy. A large amount of equipment was seized, including four computers, two laser printers, some loose hard disks and a great deal of assorted hardware. One of the computers was the one running the Illuminati BBS.

The only computers taken were those with *GURPS Cyberpunk* files; other systems were left in place. In their diligent search for evidence, the agents also cut off locks, forced open footlockers, tore up dozens of boxes in the warehouse, and bent two of our letter openers attempting to pick the lock on a file cabinet.

The next day, accompanied by an attorney, I personally visited the Austin offices of the Secret Service. We had been promised that we could make copies of our files. As it turned out, we were only allowed to copy a few files, and only from one system. Still missing were all the current text files and hard copy for this book, as well as the files for the Illuminati BBS with their extensive playtest comments.

In the course of that visit, it became clear that the investigating agents considered *GURPS Cyberpunk* to be "a handbook for computer crime." They seemed to make no distinction between a discussion of futuristic credit fraud, using equipment that doesn't exist, and modern real-life credit card abuse. A repeated comment by the agents was "This is real." Now, I'll freely admit that this book is the most realistic cyberpunk game yet released. It has a lot of background information to put the genre in context. But it won't make you into a console cowboy in one easy lesson, any more than *GURPS Fantasy* will teach you swordplay. Sadly, the distinction appeared lost on the investigators.

Over the next few weeks, the Secret Service repeatedly assured our attorney that complete copies of our files would be returned "tomorrow." But these promises weren't kept; this book was reconstructed from old backups, playtest copies, notes and memories.

On March 26, almost four weeks after the raid, some (but not all) of the files were returned. It was June 21, nearly four *months* later, when we got most (but not all) of our hardware back. The Secret Service still has one of our hard disks, all Loyd's personal equipment and files, the printouts of *GURPS Cyberpunk,* and several other things.

Why were we raided? We didn't find *that* out until October 21, when we finally received a copy of the Secret Service warrant affidavit – at their request, it had been *sealed.* While reality-checking the book, Loyd Blankenship corresponded with a variety of people, from computer security experts to self-confessed computer crackers. From his home, he ran a *legal* BBS which discussed the "computer

Cyberpunk is a style defined by two elements. The first is *the interaction of man with technology*. Computers are as common as dishwashers in the cyberpunk future, and the dividing line between man and machine is sometimes blurred. Is an artificially intelligent computer (commonly referred to as an AI) alive? If *your* brain were put inside a mechanical body, would you still be human? And if not, when was the line crossed? Characters in cyberpunk campaigns will have to be ready and able to deal with technology at all levels, from a broken beer bottle to a military battlesuit.

The second element found in most cyberpunk work is that of *struggle*. The world is divided into two groups – the haves and the have-nots – with a vast chasm between them. Those with power want to keep it; those without want to get it. This conflict can be military (as in John Shirley's *Eclipse* series), social (Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net*), economic (George Alec Effinger's *When Gravity Fails*) or a personal struggle with the character's internal demons.

Cyberpunk Gaming

Roleplaying in a cyberpunk environment can be very different from traditional genres such as fantasy or superheroics. Cyberpunk, more than any other genre, tries to accurately reflect "real-world" human nature. Traditional ideas such as party loyalty may be questioned or tested. Betrayal and deceit are common in the real world – just read any issue of the *Wall Street Journal* – so why should they be less so in the game?

The conventional gaming morality of good versus evil has a limited role in this genre. What are the reference points? Characters in cyberpunk literature are constantly committing unethical, illegal or immoral acts, but they sometimes do so for purposes we would define as "good." Conversely, a repressive government may define behavior as "good" that stifles the human spirit and grinds individuals into dust. In cyberpunk, there are rarely blacks and whites, but there are many shades of gray.

Finally, cyberpunk gaming (and literature) often stresses *style* above all else. If you're going to go out, do it not with a whimper but with a *bang* – the bigger the bang, the better. After all, once you're gone, who cares what happens to everyone else? Let 'em eat cake, and hope they choke on it.

So welcome to the edge . . . be careful you don't slip!

– *Loyd Blankenship*

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underground," and knew many of its members. That was enough to put him on a federal List of Dangerous Hoodlums! The affidavit on which our offices were raided is unbelievably flimsy . . . Loyd Blankenship was suspect because he ran a technologically literate and politically irreverent BBS, and because he received and re-posted a copy of the PHRACK newsletter. The company was raided simply because Loyd worked for us and used a different BBS here! (The actual affidavit, and much more related information, is now posted on the Illuminati BBS for those who are interested.)

The one bright spot in this whole affair has been the help we have received from the Electronic Frontier Foundation. The EFF was created in mid-1990 in response to this and similar outrages. It is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the Constitutional rights of computer users. (For more information, write them at 1001 G Street, N.W., Suite 950 East, Washington, DC 20001.)

In early 1993, the case finally came to trial. The judge ruled in our favor on two out of the three counts, and awarded us over $50,000 in damages, plus over $250,000 in attorney's fees. We're appealing the count we lost on; the government is appealing, too. So now it goes to a higher court.

To some law-enforcement officers, anybody with any computer knowledge at all is suspect . . . especially if they own a modem. And users of any BBS are doubly suspect, regardless of the Constitutional rights you *thought* you had. Do "freedom of speech" and "freedom of the press" apply to computer users? Some say they don't.

Maybe the cyberpunk future is closer, and darker, than we think.

– *Steve Jackson*

P.S. The Illuminati BBS didn't die when the Secret Service took it away. The next month it was back - though we had to get new software and a new computer. And it's continued to grow. It's now *Illuminati Online*, a Unix system with conference areas, text files, online games, and a text-based virtual reality called the Metaverse . . . as well as full Internet access. To reach it, modem to 512-448-8950, or telnet to io.com.

Related GURPS Material

Several *GURPS* products already in print will be useful to the GM planning a cyberpunk campaign. These include:

GURPS Ultra-Tech. This book covers futuristic devices, from tomorrow's hardware to space-opera miracles. The first half of *Ultra-Tech* – Tech Levels 8 to 10 – is practically a cyberpunk gadget list. Any device of TL10 or below, at the GM's discretion, can be included in a cyberpunk campaign. Note that much of the "bionics" information in *GURPS Cyberpunk* is repeated from *Ultra-Tech* so that nobody will *have* to buy that book – but many prices are lower, to reflect a background where such modifications are very common.

GURPS Humanx. This is the authorized roleplaying worldbook for Alan Dean Foster's "Humanx Commonwealth" series. This is not a traditional cyberpunk background – body modifications aren't everyday sights, and the tone of the stories is upbeat – but many of the devices described, and their social consequences, will fit right in.

GURPS Supers. This book can be used as an idea-mine for special abilities. A sufficiently advanced technology might be able to duplicate almost any super-ability . . . including some that you haven't (yet) seen in any cyberpunk story.

GURPS Autoduel. Set 50 years in the future, this book focuses mainly on the "bread-and-circuses" aspect of tomorrow's society. But the world that it describes is definitely cyberpunk in both technology and attitude, and the Abandoned Areas, cycle gangs and savage "dregs" will fit right into any "sprawl" scenario.

About the Author

Loyd Blankenship is the Managing Editor at Steve Jackson Games, and is the author of the popular *GURPS Supers* and the *Supers* adventure *Deathwish.* He lives in Austin with his wife, Whitney, three cybercats (Daryl, Bert and Pippen), and enough computer equipment to put a man on the moon. He can be reached electronically at mentor@io.com.

Cyberlimbs

Hand
varies

A bionic hand adds +1 to DX for manual tasks using that hand, and gives ST 12 for gripping and hand-to-hand damage (grappling, strangling or crushing only) purposes. It costs $12,000. For ten times the cost, either DX+2 or ST 13 is available; for 50 times the cost, both are available. The cost increases by 50% for each additional plus to DX or ST (e.g. DX+3 costs 75 times normal). The DX bonuses only apply to actions with that hand. Point cost is equal to ⅛ the normal cost for the DX or ST increase.

Arm
varies

As for a hand, except that ST of a bionic arm, and the hand on the arm, is 14 and the cost is $25,000. For ten times the cost, either DX+2 or ST 15 is available; for 50 times the cost, both are available. Each additional +1 to DX or ST *doubles* the cost! Two-handed feats require two bionic arms to gain any increased ST or DX bonus; DX bonuses do not apply to actions involving the entire body, such as Dodge or Move. The purchase of a bionic arm includes the hand, so you don't have to pay for them separately. (You can, however, upgrade the hand separately by paying the cost to increase it from the arm's ST or DX.) Point cost is equal to ¼ the normal cost for the DX or ST increase.

Leg
varies

For $25,000 (10 points), you can buy a bionic leg which increases your Move and Jumping distance by 25%, rounded down. (Kickoff must be from the bionic leg to get the bonus.) It also adds +2 to the kicking damage for that leg. A leg with a 50% bonus costs $50,000 (20 points); each successive 25% increase to your *original* Move and Jumping distance costs *double* the amount of the previous increase, plus 10 points.

You must buy two legs if Dodge is to be increased along with Move. If the two legs do not have an equal Move bonus, your Dodge is modified by the lower of the two bonuses.

Full Cyborg Body
$250,000
120 points

All limbs, eyes and ears must be bionic, and the entire torso and much of the head is now replaced with artificial parts. The person is a total cyborg, only his brain human, without need to eat, drink, excrete or breathe, and lacking the capability to bear or sire children (though if the full cost is paid for a body that does not look artificial, sexual characteristics are retained). He cannot heal hits without repairs, but is immune to poison and disease, and can survive in a vacuum. Bionic arms gain a 50% increase in ST (or Move, etc. increases by 50% per leg) since they are no longer limited by human frailties. The cyborg has 15 hit points instead of his normal HT (hits to limbs do not reduce these hit points, only those of the limbs), and a torso DR of 3.

The modification costs $250,000 (and optionally, 120 character points), *plus* the cost of the limbs, eyes and ears chosen. This is a very advanced operation, and would likely be rare even in a world where single bionic limbs were common.

Cyberlimb Armor
$10,000 per point
1 point

Cyberlimb armor, whether reinforced steel or advanced composites, is easy to obtain and not terribly expensive. It costs $10,000 (1 point) per point of DR per limb; three points of DR adds one to PD in that area, up to a maximum of PD 6 (DR may still be increased above that point, but PD remains fixed). A full cyborg can armor his head for the same price, and his torso for twice the price. This is intrinsic armor which protects it against all attacks. Note that regular armor is often much less expensive, but some people like to have their advantages "built in."

Hidden Compartments
$1,000
1 point

A bionic arm or leg may have a compartment large enough for any small object of reasonable shape and not over 2 lbs. weight. There is no discount for looking artificial — it's hidden!

Special Limbs
varies
varies

The GM may design special cyberlimbs to give special abilities, or permit the players to suggest designs. For ideas on abilities and appropriate point values, see *GURPS Supers*. For example, a character in an arctic environment might want to be able to move normally on ice. *GURPS Supers* describes this advantage (Ice Skates, 5 points). It would be up to the GM to set a reasonable dollar cost and to describe the physical appearance of the cybermod.

Weapons and Gadgets

Any built-in weaponry will include its own troubleshooting circuits the user can monitor. For instance, a laser indicates a low charge by a faint warning tone, audible to nobody else. An exhausted charge, or weapon damage, would give different tones. A character with an Optic Readout (p. 35) could get more specific information about the weapon just by wishing for it.

Claws
$4,000/$8,000
15/40 points

These are razored claws on the user's hands. They can be completely retracted or extended at will. The claws are also useful for climbing, adding +1 to Climbing skill.

The less expensive version is fairly short and does an extra +2 points of damage in any form of "unarmed" combat.

The more expensive claws are 6'' to 8'' long, and emerge from the knuckles rather than the fingertips. They change the wearer's damage to thrust/impaling or swing/cutting damage. Karate bonuses, if any, add to final damage. Armorplast versions are not detectable by metal detectors.

Halve cash and point cost if only one hand is fitted with claws. Toe claws are available for the same cost, with the same effect — a (barefoot) kick is -2 to hit but does the damage listed above +1; if a character has both finger talons and toe claws he adds +2 to Climbing when climbing barefoot and without gloves. Claws normally take one round to deploy, unless the cyborg has Fast-Draw (Claws) skill.

If they are not retractable, cut the cost by 25%. If they are hardened plastic (invisible to many sensors), increase cost by 50%. Talons can also be added to a bionic hand or foot; cost is halved. These carry no discount for artificial appearance. Fake claws cost $20 and are glued on — a strictly cosmetic modification popular with cyberpreps (see p. 13) and teenagers.
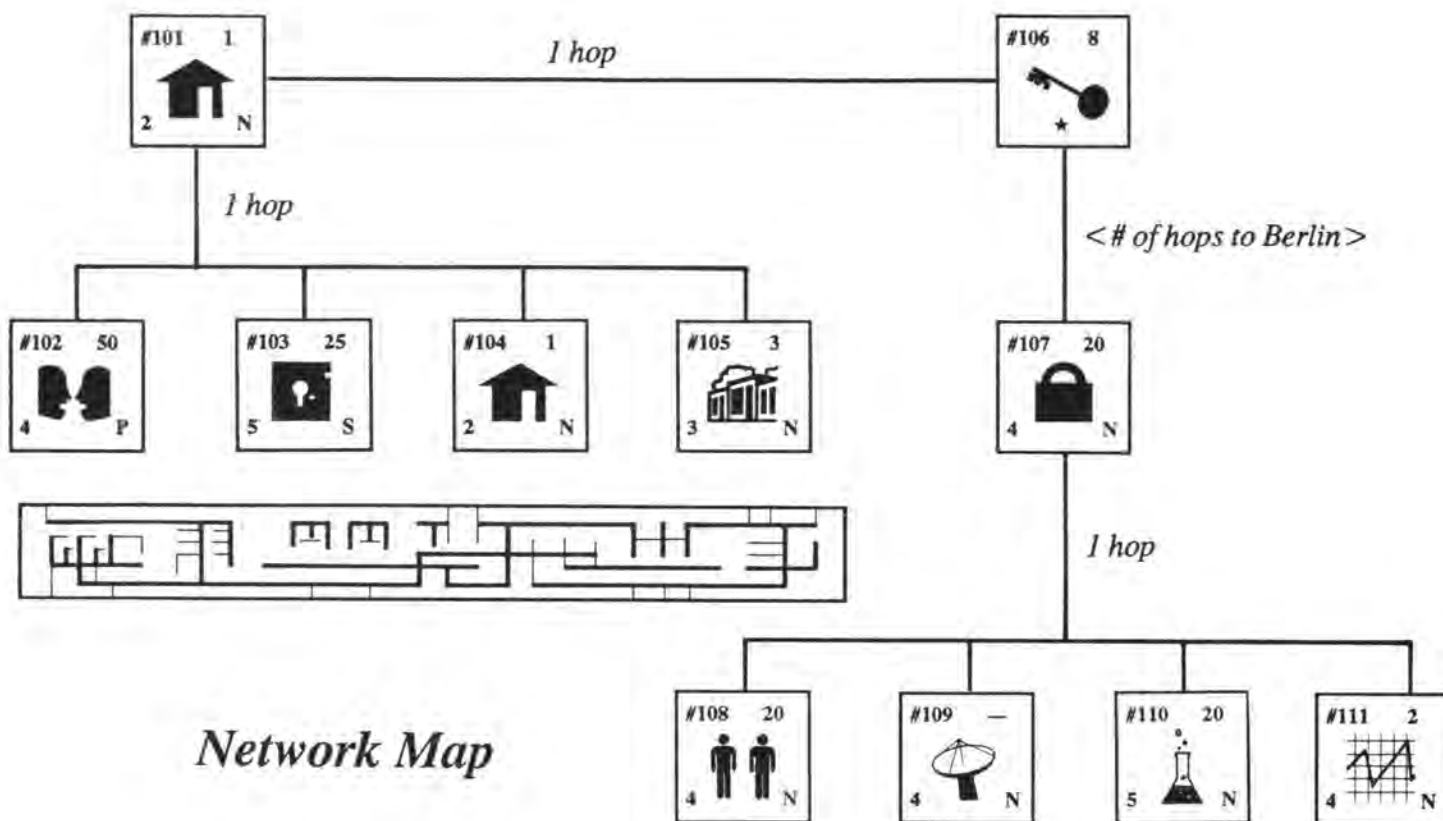
Network Map

Network Map

System Descriptions

Below is a description of a small area of the net. It could be located anywhere in the world — but the number of hops between #106 and KarNet will have to be adjusted for the true distance to Berlin.

#101 The "home node" for distance determination. It is a Complexity 2 cyberdeck with one comm-line. It isn't left online when not in use, so no intrusion attempt is possible.

#102 This is GloCom, a medium-sized Commercial Computing service. GloCom is run off of a Complexity 4 microframe with a Phase of 2,000 msec. GloCom is set up with several demonstration accounts, so their security is not very advanced. It has four standard slots running Password-15, Datalock-14, Regenerate-13 and Safety Net-13.

Any time a connection is established, the Password program is invoked. The Datalock is used to secure the userfiles with the encrypted (see p. 63) password list. Anyone obtaining access to this database could conceivably decrypt it and would then have a list of all the accounts. There is also a disk-based version of Alarm-12 running. Any time that the Regenerate program detects tampering with the system, it will launch the Alarm. The Alarm merely sounds a loud bell on the main system console, which is manned around the clock.

#103 This is DataLok, a low-profile Data Haven. It is running on a Complexity 5 mainframe that has been modified to have 10 slots instead of the standard 5, and has had its processing speed increased by 25%, giving it a Phase length of 750 milliseconds. The following programs are slotted: Alarm-13, Bailout-12, Camouflage-13, Datalock-18, Mask-13, Password-17, Regenerate-13, Sever-13, Trace-14 and Watchdog-15.

System defenses: The incoming links are all Camouflaged — the people that use DataLok *know* how to find them; casual browsing is discouraged. The system also runs Mask to obscure its defenses. The Watchdog observes all connections and watches the login attempt. If, within the first 10 seconds of connection, a successful login hasn't been made, it launches Sever and cuts the line. If Sever isn't successful, it sounds an Alarm that alerts a human operator and launches Trace.

The Password program notifies the Watchdog if a successful login is made — if the Password is Corroded or otherwise taken out, it will *not* send a successful login sequence to Watchdog, which causes the Sever to be launched.

All of the databases are protected by the Datalock, and are stored in an encrypted format (see p. 63). If the Regenerate program notices a Datalock being subverted, it immediately launches Sever and Alarm. If the Sever is unsuccessful, it launches Trace and begins throwing disk-based (not on ROM deck, so Execution Time is 4) Codewalls up in front of the intruder. It will continue to launch a Codewall and a Sever each Phase until the connection is broken (or something happens to the Watchdog . . .)

If the Regenerate notices someone tampering with the Watchdog, it immediately begins the same Codewall and Sever routine, but won't stop until the human operator tells it to.

In addition to the front-end password, each data area is protected by a secondary Password program that will also have to be defeated. The information stored on this system is left to the whim of the GM, but will probably be good.

#104 This is a public BBS system run by the Society for Creative Anarchy. It only has one incoming line (which is busy on a roll of 13 or less on 3d), and has no security except a standard Password-12. In addition to the numerous discussions going on, it is a popular point for netrunners to check their mail. Of course, no one in their right mind leaves anything *sensitive* here, but it's a good place to arrange further meetings. It has a Phase of 8,000 msec.

#105 This is the minicomputer that runs the operations at Cap, Inc. (a company that manufactures caps for toothpaste tubes.) The company employs 23 people, and had revenues last year of $1.8 million. The system has a Phase of 4,000 msec, and has the following slotted: Password-15, Alarm-12, and Bluff-12 (appears to be Black Ice).

The Alarm is set to trigger after three unsuccessful attempts to defeat the Password program, or one attempt to knock out the Bluff that is posing as Black Ice (all the *legitimate* users know to ignore the ice . . .). The Alarm sounds at the operator console, but it is only manned during business hours.

KarNet

This part of the net is its own mini-network. #107 cannot be "seen" except from #106, and maybe not then if the pathway to Berlin is long. The rest of the net cannot be seen except by someone in #107 and in possession of a valid password for one of the outdial lines.

Except for the gateway, #106, no KarNet system is supposed accept any call from outside the system. There is one exception to that: see #109.

#106 This is the network gateway to KarNet (the internal network of a large German car manufacturer). It can support up to 8 users at once, and is running Password-16.

#107 This link allows KarNet engineers and distributors to link into the main office to use the computing facilities there, and ensures that transmissions are secure. The Padlock system is a Complexity 4 microframe with processing speed increased by 25% for a Phase of 1,500 milliseconds. In addition, it has 8 slots instead of the regular 4.

Slotted programs include Password-18, Trace-15, Bloodhound-14, Disinformation-16, Watchdog-15, Snare-13, Regenerate-13 and Alarm-14.

The system is set up with two levels of Password security. The first Password is launched when a connection is made. If successfully dealt with (via a good password or a successful Webster) the user is confronted with the Sysop-in-a-Box (see p. 80) that asks questions from a database (which is protected by a disk-based Datalock-13). Then, before an outgoing connection can be established to the network, *another* Password must be dealt with.

The Watchdog observes all connections, and the Disinformation program is constantly active. If either of the Passwords is muffed (whether through an unsuccessful Webster or a bad Computer Hacking roll) it simultaneously attempts to Snare the intruder while sounding an Alarm on the main system console (which is manned 24 hours a day). After the Snare has been launched, the Watchdog will execute a Trace (using Bloodhound as needed).

The Regenerate program will execute the Snare and Alarm if it spots any attempt to subvert the system programs.

#108 This system handles the 5,000+ personnel that work for

Karwerks. The system administrators rely on the Padlock (#107) to protect the network from unauthorized users — the only programs slotted are Password-14 and Regenerate-12. The system has a Phase length of 2,000 msec.

This handles all of the payroll and vacation functions — it doesn't write the checks, but reports the hours worked to system #111, which handles all the accounting. It also keeps track of personnel records — including applications, interview results, work history, salary histories, etc.

#109 This is KarNet's private satellite uplink. It allows fast access to other KarNet systems throughout the world. It is primarily used by the R&D department from system #110. It is running a Trace-12 and an Alarm-13. All connections are Traced. Any connection made from a machine other than #110 is checked against a small database of superusers on other machines. If the account isn't a valid superuser, the Alarm is sounded at the system console. The fact that this system will accept incoming calls is a huge back door into KarNet.

#110 All of Karwerks' research and development computations are processed by this mainframe. It has a Phase of 1,000 milliseconds. Like #108, it doesn't rely much on its own security — the sysops place great trust in the Padlock.

This system is running Password-13, two Regenerate-13 programs (watching each other as well as the system) and an Alarm-14. In addition, it has a disk-based Datalock-14 used to protect all data. If either of the Regenerate programs detect system tampering, they sound the Alarm on the system console.

#111 This is the main financial computer for Karwerks. It contains all accounts payable and receivable, plus invoice information, paycheck data and anything else relating to accounting. Connections from outside are rare — thus, it has only two comm lines. The system has a Phase of 2,000 msec.

System security is based around detecting unauthorized users and calling in humans. It is running Password-14, Trace-13, Bloodhound-13 and Alarm-13. Each connection is automatically traced — anyone not originating from a superuser account on machine #108 sets off the Alarm.

Sample Netrun

Evil Stevie, our intrepid hacker, has been hired to make a run on KarNet — his goal is to obtain the name of the chief researcher on KarNet's new Boxon 2000 project.

He is equipped with a Maxis-3 cyberdeck (Complexity 3, SI 4, Phase of 1,000 msec., two extra slots) with Promote-14, Recon-15, Corrode-13 and Silence-13. His applicable skills are Computer Hacking-14, Computer Programming-13 and Cyberdeck Operation-13. The fixer who hired Stevie told him the node number (#106) of the KarNet gateway — and warned him that there's a Padlock on the other side. No one has ever gotten any further than that!

Stevie jacks in at node #101 and looks around. He can see #102, #104, and #105. (Since he isn't looking for it, #103 (Datalok) will be invisible, thanks to its Camouflage.) He also sees the gateway system, #106, one hop away, and send his Recon program to check it out. The GM secretly rolls versus Recon-15 for the system ice (only a Password program) — the Recon is successful. He tells the player that all he saw was a Password program. Since there are no Watchdogs, a Disguise program is useless (it doesn't affect Password). He can either try a default on Webster, or try to Corrode the Password program. He chooses the latter.

A Quick Contest is rolled between the GM (Password-16) and Stevie (Corrode-13). The GM rolls a 14, making it by 2; Stevie rolls a 10, beating his skill by 3. The Password breaks up into nothingness, leaving the system unguarded, and Stevie wanders through the portal.

Since this system is merely a data conduit, Stevie can't do much here except pass through. He tries a Promote program to get better access, but there's nothing to accomplish here. At this point, he isn't close enough to Berlin (probably) to see anything — just a narrow, featureless section of cyberspace stretching into the distance. As he moves closer to #107 (the Padlock), he will begin to make out details. He sends the Recon up to scout.

The Recon has a chance to detect the Password, Watchdog, Regenerate, Disinformation and Alarm. It detects all of them but the Disinformation. The GM then successfully rolls versus Disinformation-16, and decides that Stevie's Recon program *told* him that there was Black Ice ahead. Stevie hops closer and the GM begins keeping track of time, noting that the Regenerate checks the

programs in the following order, 1 per phase: Watchdog, Bloodhound, Disinformation, Password, Trace, Snare and Alarm. It is currently checking Trace.

At this point, the GM should let Stevie know that he has a faster Phase than the Padlock — but he doesn't have to tell him *how* fast!

0.0 sec: Stevie encounters the first Password, and attempts to decoy it with a default Webster. He rolls a 7, and succeeds. The Regenerate program starts checking Trace.

1.0 sec: The sysop-in-a-box begins to question Stevie. Rather than mess with it, he launches a Corrode at the SIAB while sending a Silence at the Alarm (roll versus Cyberdeck Operation -3 for the second action in one Phase. It is successful. The Corrode wins its Quick Contest versus the SIAB, knocking it out. It is ineffective versus the Alarm, however — and the Regenerate may soon notice that it has been tampered with!

1.5 sec: The Regenerate finishes with Trace and starts checking Snare.

2.0 sec: Stevie realizes that he probably doesn't have long in the system before things start happening. He tries an adlibbed Promote (Computer Programming-2 minus the system's Complexity for an effective skill of 7). It will take 2 phases.

3.0 sec: Stevie is still executing his Promote. Regenerate finishes checking the Trace and starts checking Alarm.

4.0 sec: Stevie rolls a 9 on his Promote attempt — a failure. Cursing, he attempts another Silence, which fails.

4.5 sec: The Regenerate program makes its roll, and detects that Alarm was assaulted. It launches Snare and sounds the Alarm. It then starts to load a replacement copy of Alarm, as per its own programming. Stevie sees the Snare attempt begin.

5.0 sec: The Snare won't hit until second 6.0. Stevie decides that discretion is the better part of valor and jacks out — leaving him stunned for 3d seconds.

6.0 sec: The Snare hits the now-empty spot in the matrix where Stevie was just a moment ago. The human operator responds to the Alarm, but doesn't find anything out of the ordinary other than a corrupted SIAB program.

GLOSSARY

The cyberpunk genre is rich with its own language. Some of the most common terms are listed below. An asterisk indicates a term first coined by William Gibson in *Neuromancer*, the novel that essentially created the genre. (It could be argued that the act of creating this evocative vocabulary was one of the most significant acts in defining the concept of cyberpunk.)

Bionics — High-tech prosthetic parts. See *cyberwear.*

Biz* — business. Usually, illegal business.

Black clinic* — an unlicensed medical facility. Offerings may include illegal transplants, stolen or illegal cyberwear, experimental treatments (e.g., longevity), or cloning services.

Black ice* — a counterintrusion program that can do actual damage to an intruder; some can even kill. See *ice.*

Bomb — also known as a *logic bomb*, this is a computer program set to activate whenever a certain condition is met on the system it's installed on. Effects can range from trivial (a message appears on the screens of all users) to destructive (the backup disks erase themselves and the machine melts).

Chip — a small integrated circuit that contains a program or data. Cyberwear chips are accessed directly by the brain through a socket on the body.

Console cowboy* — slang for hacker, especially a hacker who works with an interface.

Corp or Corporate* — anyone employed in mainstream business, especially anyone working for a mainstream corporation. It implies a "company man" and faceless conformity.

Cyberdeck* — the hardware used to access a computer network through a neural interface (see p. 72).

Cyberspace* — slang term for the global computer network.

Cyberpunk — the "high-tech low-life" genre of science fiction; also used to indicate a computer hacker.

Cyberstealth — any equipment or modification that allows the user to move silently and without detection.

Cybertech — see *cyberwear.*

Cyberwear — any equipment or technology that links bionics with the human body and mind.

Cyborg — someone who has had parts of their body replaced with bionic parts.

Daemon — a program that runs in the background of a computer operating system. It doesn't require a user to monitor it — it talks directly to the operating system.

Deck* — slang term for cyberdeck.

Decker* — someone who uses a cyberdeck.

Face — slang for interface.

Flatline* — from "flat EEG line." A decker who has had his brain turned off by hostile "ice" has been flatlined.

Flip — A reflex chip. See p. 40.

Go-to* — A dossier, usually illegally compiled.

Hack — to penetrate (or at least attempt to penetrate) the security of a computer system.

Hacker — one who hacks, whether for personal gain or just the thrill of it.

Ice* — Intrusion Countermeasure Electronics. Shorthand for any computer security programs.

Icebreaker* — any program designed to penetrate or foil ice.

Implant — a term for cyberwear (usually internal).

Interface — the software/hardware link that allows a person to communicated directly with a cyberdeck and the network.

Interface jockey — a hacker.

Jack in/out* — to enter or leave cyberspace, usually by unplugging the interface from your head.

Matrix* — another term for the global computer network.

Megacorp* — a giant, multi-national corporation; often larger (and more powerful) than governments.

Merc — slang for a mercenary.

Microsoft* — A temporary implant; a skip, entertainment chip or other computer chip designed to be plugged in to a user.

Mod — modification. Any sort of cyberwear.

Net* — slang for the global computer network.

Netrunner* — slang for a hacker.

Neural interface — a direct connection between a computer and a living human brain (see pp. 41, 71-72).

New Yen* — a hypothetical Japanese currency.

Night City* — The "bad part of town," with nightlife, neon, crime and danger.

O-ROM — Occupational ROM Chip (see p. 40).

RAM — Random Access Memory. A memory device that has a certain amount of memory space that can be erased and written over at will.

Razorgirl* (or razorboy) — A street samurai with combat cyberwear. The classic "razorgirl" has blade implants.

Rogue program — any program designed to harm the host computer, steal or modify data, or otherwise work against the interests of the computer's legitimate owner and users.

ROM — Read Only Memory. A memory device that has only one, unmodifiable program or set of data on it.

ROM deck — a cartridge containing a program burned into a ROM chip. Plugs into a cyberdeck.

RPV — Remotely Piloted Vehicle (see p. 52). Any vehicle that can be radio-controlled. In a cyberpunk world, most RPVs are controlled directly by a neural interface.

Skip — Skill chip. A ROM chip with a certain skill burned into it (see p. 40). The user of the skip acquires the skill.

Softhead* — Short for software-head. Someone who habitually uses skips, personality implants or other microsofts.

Sprawl* — a huge urban area created when cities flow together and combine.

Street op — anyone who makes his living "on the streets," usually, but not always, by illegal means.

Street samurai* — a street op who specializes in strongarm tactics. Most samurai are significantly cyborged.

Suit — slang term for a corporate.

Tempest — a device that can detect and read computer output from a distance. See p. 62.

Time bomb — a rogue program that executes itself at a specified time. See *Bomb.*

Trip — A microsoft containing a preprogrammed adventure.

Trojan — a rogue program that disguises itself as a legitimate program, or attaches itself to a legitimate program.

Virus — a rogue program that can be transmitted from machine to machine through shared software or hardware.

Yak* — Short for *yakuza*, a Japanese mobster.

Wirehead — An individual who is "wired" for direct electric stimulation of the pleasure centers; a "current addict."

Worm — a rogue program that actively seeks to propogate itself from computer to computer via the netowrk.

Zaibatsu* — A megacorporation. The term originally referred to the pre-WWII Japanese industrial combines.

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