

**GURPS**

Fourth Edition

# TRANSHUMAN SPACE

## CITIES ON THE EDGE™



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*There is no human reason  
to be here, except for the sheer  
ecstasy of being crowded together.*

– *Jean Baudrillard,  
America*

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# INTRODUCTION

*Cities on the Edge* is about the Fifth Wave city and city life in 2100, in the world of *Transhuman Space*.

In the last century, some cities have died, but many more have been born, and yet the future of the city remains uncertain. Like their inhabitants, cities are evolving into something new – but no one yet knows what!

Is the future a wilderness dotted by giant arcologies . . . or a sprawl of meme-tailored metavillages? Will sapient cities be the next step in evolution? Or will messy, inefficient, and creative cities adapt to house whatever clades emerge in the transhuman future? Adventurers in *Transhuman Space* have the chance to explore these developing communities, and to watch the process, perhaps even intervening – as the ground on which they walk evolves beneath their feet.

## About *Transhuman Space*

The *Transhuman Space* series presents a unique hard-science and high-biotech universe for roleplaying. Set in the Solar System in the year 2100, it is a setting rich in adventure, mystery, and ideological conflict. The core book is *Transhuman Space*, which presents an overview of the setting with game mechanics for *GURPS Third Edition*; other books in the line expand on specific aspects of the setting. *Changing Times* is the GM's guide and *Fourth Edition* update for the line.

## About GURPS

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*Bibliographies.* Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we're putting them online – with links to let you buy the resources that interest you! Go to each book's web page and look for the "Bibliography" link.

*Errata.* Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

*Cities are . . . distinguished by the catastrophic forms they presuppose and which are a vital part of their essential charm. New York is King Kong, or the blackout, or vertical bombardment: Towering Inferno. Los Angeles is the horizontal fault, California breaking off and sliding into the Pacific: Earthquake.*

– Jean Baudrillard,  
*Fatal Strategies*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Anders Sandberg is an academic jack-of-all-trades from Sweden with a background in computer science, neuroscience, and medical engineering. He has also been debating transhumanism since the early 1990s, and he is currently researching the ethics and social impact of human enhancement at the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University. He has also been interested in cities and infrastructure ever since he dreamed he was Amsterdam.

Waldemar Ingdahl is a Swedish science journalist and writer, and has published several books in his native language. He has a keen interest in sociology, politics, and the societal transformation brought on by technological innovation. He currently lives in Stockholm.

## The Baltic Eco-Restoration Issue

Stabilizing the Baltic ecosystem is high on everybody's agenda, so there is much debate about what to do. The Hagstrom-Zalitis Program may be the official E.U. project, but several groups dislike it on political, economical, or practical grounds. There have been rumors that some radicals may even want to sabotage it to "give the archipelago elite a taste of the world they have created" as one anonymous poster to an eco-activist site wrote.

A few transhumanists and moderate Delugists (*Toxic Memes*, p. 106) are proposing to turn the Baltic into a new country inhabited by water-adapted beings. This plan, "Baltic Nation," has recently gained memetic momentum – it is so unlikely that it almost makes sense – to the surprise of most traditional environmental agencies. If implemented, it would call for a rapid restoration of the core ecosystem and then a gradual planting of different underwater biomes in different parts of the sea. A new amphibious capital would be located near Gotska Sandön. The Baltic Nation would support itself by selling ecological and climate maintenance as well as mining deep sediments for sulfur-organics.

## Dangerous Technology and Memes

There is a worrying amount of *interesting* biotechnology floating around Stockholm. There are countless established "ways east" for people with money and connections to get upgrades or designer engineering done, so while there *might* not be any black clinics in the city, their products are there – and the authorities are beginning to worry that the amount is rising year by year. Some think that there is a "biotech mafia" with connections to triads, Duncanites, and who-knows-what else, but there is not a trace of evidence. A few suggest that the Kabal might be behind it.

The local clustering of xox and infomorph activists, replication researchers, and the enormous SHP servers is another nightmare possibility. Overall, there are many tinkerers around with access to both legitimate technology and imported black market devices – who knows what is being cooked up in the attics of Östermalm or labs of Campustown?

This risk has attracted several agencies to keep an eye on things, as well as people who want to "be there" when whatever happens. There are also groups going out of their way to make life hard for the regulators just on general principle.

## Current Events, Scandals, and Plots

Some potential plot hooks in and around Stockholm:

- Someone hacked the official city New Year's Eve fireworks AR layer to display embarrassing imagery of the public health and environment inspector Leon Gustafson. The City Council wants to find out who did it and how. Rumor has it that the city brand development manager Sven Kelbergh isn't unhappy with the situation – he thinks it helps strengthen the image of Stockholm as a wild, fun place, and he doesn't like the environment inspector. Could it be an inside job?

- There are rumors that some infomorphs have begun to play "xox ultimate challenge" online or using cybershells. Participants supposedly xox themselves and then play death match games against themselves – the survivor is the winner. It is said that this ultimate challenge is bringing in a lot of money to a group of Stockholm-based xoxers who are also selling slightly edited snuff recordings from the losing minds. The closest thing to the rumor anybody has *yet* found in reality was "Club Auto," where rich kids were playing games against low-grade emulations of themselves.

- A massive corruption scandal in China has implicated a Swedish citizen as a key go-between. The Chinese authorities and media are doing their best to find this person, but E.U. privacy laws and slow responses are holding them back. Some of the managers at Wuhan MetaNets might have very good reason to silence "Mr. Svensson."

- A group of Stockholm entrepreneurs are promoting a "clean city initiative," using biotechnology and cyberswarms to reduce littering and vandalism. Opponents think their plan is both intrusive and expensive.

- A diplomatic crisis has developed between Sweden and Saudi Arabia after a Scheherazade bioroid (*Broken Dreams*, p. 122) escaped from the ownership of some of the embassy's staff. The ambassador claims to know nothing

about this, since bioroid ownership is illegal (and widely condemned) in Sweden. It is an open secret that the Scheherazade is currently at the Skanstull Bioroid Rehabilitation Center (p. 79); the embassy has made (muted) demands for her return. The Swedish government has refused this, but is still perhaps somewhat hopeful that something might make this problem go away soon. The Wahhabite Islam propagated in Saudi Arabia is generally not very well regarded by Sweden's more tolerant Muslim community, and in this sordid matter especially the embassy has received no assistance or sympathy from them whatsoever.

- Several people have fallen ill with a variant of the common cold with parts of a text message encoded in its DNA: "I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die." The virus doesn't seem to have any other effects.

- There are hints that the feared Swedish intellectual-property crime syndicate Gula Brigaderna are on the move. However, some have suggested that the syndicate does not exist at all, and the whole thing is just memetic trickery. Or is that a smokescreen?

- Someone is killing Rusalki – and draining them of blood. Is it revenge for spurned passion, or has someone decided that they want the addiction without the person? Or does it have something to do with the new Rusalki? If someone wanted to sample – or hide – a new retrovirus, the blood would be the thing to go for.

- A woman claiming to be possessed by the (supernatural!) ghosts of erased AIs is wandering the streets, prophesying surreal events, and apparently telling people things only their kindercomps might have known. Now, some of the strange events she predicts are starting to happen. Is it an elaborate practical joke, a con game, real AI speaking from beyond the trash can, or just plain insanity?

## HEALTH CENTERS

Local health centers are the most common places for medical treatment, each serving a metavillage or a few city blocks. A few nurses and doctors (possibly telecommuting from somewhere else) and a small treatment facility are enough for most problems. Other health centers are leased by network hospitals for treatment of their patients or are actually on hospital campuses.

In many cases, patients can recuperate at home – the center monitors medical signals, giving advice and telepresence help, or (in emergencies) sending paramedics.

### Example Arcology Hospitals

These are two examples of comprehensive medical centers.

#### *New Brunswick Regenerative Medicine Center (New Jersey, USA)*

NBRMC specializes in regenerative medicine: regrowing lost limbs, organ cloning and transplants, restorative surgery, and extreme trauma medicine. It is particularly renowned for its work on neural regeneration and rehabilitation. While such activities go on at any major hospital, NBRMC is the first choice for hard problems due to unusual genotypes, serious trauma, or exotic tissue damage.

The NBRMC arcology is closely tied to the Rutgers University medical faculty and especially the Center for Regenerative Biotechnology Medicine. As the center grew to prominence, it helped shift the hospitals in the area toward regenerative medicine. In 2077, several hospitals formed the NBRMC consortium and construction began.

The arcology itself is a series of glass-enclosed, wave-like buildings stretching from land to sea, complete with an indoor harbor. Patients waiting for regeneration often amuse themselves teleoperating sailboat cybershells or miniature surfing bodies.

#### *Arcologie Hôpitalier “L. Pasteur” (AP-HP) (Paris, France)*

This massive arcology hospital serves the Greater Paris metropolitan area with 33,000 “hospital beds” and 20,000 physicians. The total number of employees is over a quarter of a million, and the number of consultations is around 30 million each year.

The building itself is an impressive arcology in classic geometric style. It consists of two white, pyramidal towers leaning toward each other. Each tower is 1,000 feet wide and 500 floors high. Between them stretches a multi-story bridge with an elevated park on top and a railway and subway station beneath, turning the arcology into a kind of triumphal arch. Within the towers, there are large open spaces with restaurants, gymnasiums, indoor parks, and terraced apartments. Extensible landing pads receive airborne emergency transports. While not truly self-sufficient, AP-HP does have impressive energy, manufacturing, and food production facilities and acts as a city-within-the-city. The complex is its own municipal area (the 22nd arrondissement), with its own local council and mayor.

## HOSPITAL CAMPUSES

A hospital campus contains many semi-independent health centers, consultancies, biotech companies, and other health-related services. A patient arriving at a health center may, say, receive specialist care from a nearby medical consultancy, using cloned organs from the tissue factory next door.

## ARCOLOGY HOSPITALS

The opposite of the loose hospital campus is the centralized arcology hospital, where *everything* is nearby. Some arcologies are entirely devoted to medicine, with a “tourist trade” consisting entirely of patients. The residents are typically staff, or extended-stay patients suffering from chronic diseases, hypochondria, or old age. (Many of the earliest arcology hospitals were basically extended service apartment complexes for the old and infirm.) Arcology hospital styles range from the semi-mythical atmosphere of alpine sanatoriums to efficient “health factories.” Most such hospital structures must either serve a large population center, or attract a certain type of patient on a worldwide basis.

Arcology hospitals are among the most controlled environments in the world. They hold to the watchwords of safety, efficiency, and timeliness. Ubiquitous monitoring and AIs ensure that things happen automatically. This extreme level of safety appeals to some people, though following the elaborate safety procedures can be tiresome.

## NETWORK HOSPITALS

Some hospitals exist only online. Patients meet with their doctors virtually, and receive any necessary equipment (possibly including a nurse cybershell) in their homes. Surgery still requires rented local hospital space.

Network hospitals have proven popular among both wide-ranging travelers and those living very localized lives. They also fit in well with medical homes (see below) which report everything relevant to the hospital and can implement treatment if needed.

### *Certifications Boards*

Network hospitals are certified by various medical boards, such as the American Medical Association, the European Medical Certification Board, or the International Union of Online Care. Some independent, for-profit boards also exist, such as Evaluación Diaz-Cela del Hospital, Cui Hao Testing, and Herodicus Validation. Independent boards must walk a tightrope between being paid by hospitals and retaining a reputation for strictness. Most are monitored in turn by other organizations such as the Online Certification and Review Agency, a major NGO. The world of medical certification combines huge sums of money with detail-oriented bureaucracy and the occasional discreet attempt to catch competitors in a mistake.

Nearby St. Petersburg, a biotech sanctuary, generates a lot of smuggling. The Estonian border guards (assisted by GRA agents) employ some of the best E.U. surveillance technologies, with chem- and bio-sniffers, drones, and microbot hunter swarms, but the snakeheads grow ever more cunning

in their pursuit of the lucrative trade. While the Russian government officially supports the tight border and helps fund the GRA, local authorities are less helpful. Rumors say that this is one of the standard entry points for TSA exiles into Europe.

# FRIENDS AND ENEMIES OF CITIES

Some people see cities as sources of strikes, riots, and rebellions. Others see them as sources of pollution, resource consumption, and ugliness. They have psychological dangers, too: anonymity, social chaos, and dangerous ideas. They are also vulnerable to war, disease, fire, and crime.

One solution is to build an ideal city. Sir Ebenezer Howard founded the garden city movement in 1898 to plan cities as self-contained communities separated by greenbelts. (In practice, the result was sprawling suburbs connected by highways to crowded city centers.) This eventually led to the modern post-urban culture and metavillages. Similarly, the modernists of the early 1900s, who wanted to replace the whole sprawl with a few megabuildings surrounded by parks, led to the arcology movement.

In 2100, global movements seek both to rid the Earth of cities and to preserve the cities of Earth.

Messody Simtob, an influential environmentalist, developed the first decivilization plan in 2053 to deal with the economic and environmental blight of southern Louisiana. Although never implemented, it inspired many local movements; the most common type, "Parking Into Parks," involved buying the worst land in the city and donating it as a park.

In the '80s, the Decivilization movement grew with the implosion of many major cities. An entire generation grew up unattached to cities, and tax-paying voters in arcologies and suburbs saw little reason to keep unnecessary buildings in cities they never visited. Meanwhile, preservationists, arcologists, and demolition and ecorestoration companies all found reasons to lobby together.

Today, Decivilization is a broad, faceless movement. Local, charismatic individuals lead particular groups, but there are no global leaders – a successful "Decivilizer" leader more often moves into Preservationist politics than tries to unite the fractious members of his own movement.

Many Decivilizers only want to restore the land to parkland, suburbs, and wilderness. Decivilizers that are more orthodox also denounce arcologies and *any* high-density dwelling. Meanwhile, the Gaia Restoration Project (*Toxic Memes*, p. 35) promotes the decivilization of the entire planetary surface.

Decivilization works best in areas where city memes are weak, particularly in America and Australia. By contrast, Old World city memes tend to be strong. Tearing down parts of Old London because they are not useful is simply preposterous!

*Passive* Decivilizers see the process as inevitable: people *will* end up in arcologies, space, or digital space in the long run. *Active* Decivilizers see the process as a struggle: there are forces trying to keep the inefficient, dirty, and dangerous cities around, and they have to be circumvented or defeated.

## E-Weapons

Microwave disruptors (*GURPS Ultra-Tech*, p. 121) are "non-lethal" weapons that disrupt electronics and communications. These *Ultra-Tech* weapons can be assumed to exist in the *Transhuman Space* setting, although they may not be widespread; military cybershells and equipment will generally be sealed and shielded, making these things less than useful on the battlefield, and their only "civilian" uses would be for crime and sabotage. Getting hold of such a device may be an adventure in itself unless one happens to have contacts in the right kind of organization, a skilled technician-armorer for a friend, or some possibly illegal minifac templates. Nonetheless, they are practical weapons for striking against enemy infrastructure and communications, and China and the TSA used "E-weapons" in the Pacific War, causing high economic costs but few fatalities. Unfortunately, terrorists *can* also acquire them, and they tend to damage advanced nations more than poor nations.

Hardening is easy for important equipment, but the *real* damage is the effect on the myriad ubiquitous, small civilian systems: doors, cybershells, clothing, virtual interfaces, v-tags, implants, cameras, lamps . . . Problems can easily cascade out of control. In a city, the effect on nearby traffic, businesses, tourists, and infrastructure can easily climb into stratospheric costs. Even optical systems typically have enough vital electronic parts to cause problems.

## DECIVILIZATION

The meme that cities are unhealthy for both humans and nature has existed almost as long as cities themselves, but the Decivilization movement came into its own in the '50s, amidst fears of biotech violence, posthuman terrorists, and emergent threats (such as self-replicating machines). A city is an easy target for such things, and the countryside seemed a prudent alternative.

## Archaeologists

Unexpected allies for the Decivilizers are professional archaeologists. When the traces of modern civilization are removed, new archaeological finds are often discovered. Entire Stone Age villages have been found underneath parking lots; evidence for a previously unknown native tribe was found when reducing Oxnard, California. Modern methods of sampling, NFUN ("Near-Field Ultrasound Nodes"), and ISH ("In Situ HyMRI") produce 3D reconstructions of what lies underneath the ground without having to dig it up.

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*I have never  
 felt salvation in  
 nature. I love  
 cities above all.*  
 — Michelangelo