

A Note in Retrospect

I ran this campaign in Raleigh from late in 1996 to about the end of 1999. Several of the gamers who played in this one (Colin Pittman, Cory Zimmerman, Cocoa Green, Jerry Hinn) were in on the initial design phases of the Cychosys role playing system. Most went on to play in later games, but it was this scenario (and the general chaos of trying to get a new system to work on the fly) that gave the system its name. What follows is a description of the post-post-apocalyptic world of 2124-25, the original setting for the original Cychosys story. The nature of the story is this—the world and its depleted population are owned by supercorporations, several of which have just figured out how to make that last step to make cyberwear completely interface with human tissue. While most of the world lives off of scraps, these supercorporations are engaged in a bloodbath of self-enlargement, unaware that they have unleashed a second technological holocaust on themselves.

As if this weren't enough, the story eventually slid into science fantasy—the part of the plot this set-up material doesn't cover is that, in conjunction with the incipient technological blight, the heroes also have to face the re-awakening of long-buried occult magic and the appearance of a malevolent extremely powerful being who just might be what he claims to be—the Egyptian God of Death, Set.

Sadly, that latter part never made it into these notes. I hope you will, however, find the world an attractive one to play in before I messed it all up with malignant gods, Sumerian tablets, and magical minotaurs. Oh, and time travel—can't forget the time travel.

Bill Straight

Introduction:

The world of 2115 is controlled by huge corporations, governed by CEOs, consortia, or provincial governors. Employees are provided with housing, medicine, law, security, food, and essentially everything needed to live comfortably—this assumes the job can be gained and held. Obviously employment is somewhat incestuous—children raised and educated in corporate circopoli tend to go to work for the corporation at some point. It isn't quite slavery, but the parallel should be obvious. The contrast is the streets, on which life is free and fast, if cutthroat. Street life is squalid, poverty-stricken, and violent, governed by underworld bosses, cartels, and minor corporate officials. From this environment, paradoxically, come some of the better corporate security operatives. Hence the **Street** and the **Corps** do a lot of business, both legitimate and otherwise.

The Plot:

Enter the year 2116. A new technology appears—the final bind to direct neural interface with both computer AI and cybernetic enhancement. It is a neurotransmitter called **cybercholine**, or **Cycho** on the Street, and its rumored existence galvanizes everyone into action—the problem is, no one knows who invented it or where to get it. Or rather, almost no one.

A minor executive official at **Vytech**, Henry James Thorn summons his best street connections and sends them on what is supposedly a routine **“soft” raid**, the hijacking of some corporation's mainframe for new discoveries (**“hard” raids** steal an object, e.g. a prototype). The break-in is simple, minor dangers avoided, although the target is somewhat obscure, the building marked only by a stylized short-stemmed red rose and no name. The mainframe vault is protected by an aggressive AI, but once inside the secrets are laid bare. The screen is scanned, and one of the team makes an astonishing discovery—Cycho is the target, and here it is! And, it isn't a chemical, it is a machine, a nannite. Not only that, the technician with the group swears, looking over the design specs, that it cannot be built. Suddenly the room lights up, the party exposed. In an overlooking observation deck, a business-suited figure wearing a rose pin in his lapel advises them

that they surely didn't think it could be that simple. A wildly overkill defense system cuts in, and cuts them literally to pieces...

...and when they wake, a much older Thorn greets them. It is now 2124—eight years later. They have been in a coma for a considerable length of time, he tells them, but thanks to their own reconnaissance of that lab (the ownership of which is still a mystery), their recovery was made possible—Thorn is now CEO of **Novadyne**, a spin-off of the now-defunct Vytech, and he has devoted some of the R&D funds of his Corporation to restoring his best team to working order. They have been outfitted with prototypic cybergear. After long months of rehabilitation and psychotherapy, they begin to come to terms with their new look, offset by an occasional malfunction and refit. Thorn allows them to put it to good use—being better equipped than the hackers on the Street, Novadyne's "best team" quickly returns to the cutting edge, both on the Street and in the Corps. Still no one knows where Cycho came from.

Most curiously, the source of Street technology is also a mystery. Most of the cybergear bears the same rose symbol that the Novadyne team will recall. The Street hackers and their beneficiaries swear that the Street has a new edge, something rumored to be the **Arcanex**, that will push Streetgear ahead of Corpstech. Finding out what Arcanex is, what it does, and who has it will be the first step in putting down what begins to look like a dangerously growing unrest in the Street. This unrest is fueled by concerns over rumored (but unproven) derangement created by a new drug called lithium hexamphetamine, or **Hex**. It has definitely created some bizarre and dangerous reactions with Cycho, most of which the corporations are keeping under wraps. There is also the disturbing accusations of clone generators, human replacement, and mind-theft.

The Corps: The Ivory Towers

City Structure

Following the Gene Jihad, only the corporate entities remained largely intact, both economically and organizationally. As governments and military collapsed under the depredations of the virus and one another, corporate executives extended a well-meaning hand to the poverty-stricken public. Such initiatives threatened to bankrupt the corporations until executives realized the loyalty they had engendered in the work force; those that they helped wanted to work again. As society began rebuilding, the Corps' attention focused increasingly on helping those who could help the Corps. This favoritism fractured the populace, the rejected elements banding together to stamp out the so-called Corpses. Companies reacted by drawing their people ever closer, finally building armed forts or encapsulated city-states. Finally, in 2044, IBM built the first corporate city tower, a megalithic structure in the blasted remains of central Chicago to house all of their workers and workplaces in the same location. It was referred to as The Arcade.

Since then several types of Corps Cities have been perfected. The most common type, in existence since the start of the Reclamation following the Gene Jihad, were originally referred to as Arcades, but due to protests by the Church of Reclamation and so-called silicaphobes (who feared domination by the new generation of AI) the name Circopoli, Latin for "city that encircles" in reference to its protective role, gradually supplanted other titles. Corporate circopoli were constructed from the wreckage in a majority of the old cities still possessing sufficient wealth, population, food supply, and industry, also with an eye toward corporate interest such as resource availability, environment, and, bluntly, threat from local Pax. The original intent by corporate executives was to minimize loss of employees to Pax violence while maximizing devotion and control by providing a complete enclosed for them to live in.

During the later half of the twenty first century, surface corruption and poverty reached such epidemic levels that Corps looked for a way to do away with the street level. Some went underwater into enclosed marine cities called **Hydropoli**—but these began as labor camps and rapidly deteriorated into deathtraps, and by 2116 have been mostly abandoned. A few cities were built on the moon, **Maropoli**, and housed inside great domes these cities have been wildly successful but few can afford to take advantage of them. The most successful and cheapest escape were the **Cirropoli**, great disk-shaped floating cities that use Teslan technology to hover like vast flying saucers over the landscape. To the Corps they are havens; to the Street, they might as well be cities on the Moon—although poverty-stricken residents on these Cirropoli have started to give them a dispossessed lower class, hiding in the bowels of each machine.

Corporation List for 2125

Aliksandrya Biotekniq (Alexandria)—biochemical pharmaceuticals.
Arisaka (Osaka)—weapons manufacture.
Avatar (Djakarta)—lightning whips and Zapweb.
Balcof (Madrid)—cofex manufacture.
Boviniq Ludd Unterwasser Berghaus (Stockholm)—marine phosphate miners.
Brazilia Confederate Agropoli (Rio) —farming megacorps.
ChemSyn (Mare Tranquiliatus) —zero-gravity metallurgy and chemistry.
Cytex (Toronto) —cybertechnology, specializing in non-invasive magnetic neural interface.
D'Jamba Minerals (Dakkar) —marine sulfide and ores.
Dawn Treader (Yerevan) —weather manipulation.
Gavellon (Denver) —software.
GeoGrid (Atlantis, Hawaii) —collection of ³He and geothermal power.
Global Holographic Network (Greenwich) —press agency.
H2O2 (Denver)—cybertechnology, specializing in cerebral interface, grayware, brainsofts.
Ivory Coast Silica (Abidjan) —marine silica.
Kobenhavn Nautical Online Traders, Inc. (Copenhagen) —marine stock market.
Mallax Redactor (Djakarta) —pharmaceuticals.

McCain Foundation (Dun Laoghaire) —cybertechnology, specializing in bioceramic.
Moonshot (Seoul) —lunar/terrestrial or global transport.
Novadyne (Miami) —cybertechnology, specializing in micromotor control.
Oxytower (Beijing) —atmospheric reclamation.
Pavilion (Warsaw) —cybertechnology, specializing in cheap gear.
Rover (Juneau) —holine synthesizer.
Ryuko Industries (Tokyo) —cybertechnology, specializing in nanochemistry.
Saturn Communication (Buenos Aires) —satellite network and net interface.
Tantrum (Mexico City) —entertainment and blood sports.
Teslan Incorporated (San Antonio) —magnetic repulsion transports.
Texas Confederate Agropoli (Dallas) —farming megacorps.
Transpacific Monorail (San Diego, Osaka) —northern Pacific transport.
Troxil (Atlantis, Perth) —high density plastics and ceramics.
Typhon Tower Industries (Atlantis) —??
University of Alexandria (Alexandria) —university.
Wainreicht Textile (Richmond) —paper and cloth.
Yellane (Cork) —biochemical remediation and monitoring.
Zurich Exchange (Zurich) —stock market.

Travel

Travel is a major aspect of this early 2100s civilization, since the ability to be in New York for breakfast, Mombassa for lunch, and Sydney for dinner, transportation has taken a few giant leaps. Short hops can be made within the circopolis on foot, via interior **hovercart** (in some places piloted remotely by circopolis AI system, but many places prefer the human touch), or by **trilobe**, a small AI-remote insect-like aircraft joined to a specific domicile that either flies or crawls around the exterior of the circopolis to its destination. Outside distance is covered usually by an extended version of the trilobe (sometimes called the dragonfly or **D-fly**) or superconductive monorail, and regular travel routes between corporate facilities depart on a carefully maintained routine. Both of these methods avoid the Street level; extremely frugal travelers or those willing to take a risk can drop to the surface and take a tram, bus, taxi, or even rent a car or motorcycle—some things never change (although the fuel is a synthetic, much cleaner-burning alcohol known as holine). For greater distances, e.g. trans- or intercontinental travel, **Moonshots**, or missile-like sub-space craft, are the cheapest way to go. These are launched into a low orbit arc; travel time can be reduced by an occasional layover at one of several corporate orbital stations. The Corps that produces almost all of these devices is Teslan Inc., a major economic bellwether in today's financial market.

Energy

Energy for living comes from a variety of sources, predominantly **nuclear** energy, usually in subterranean reactors located in continental shields (far from active tectonic disruptions). Limited fusion is present, mostly in controlled low- or no-gravity orbital stations and on **Maropoli** (lunar cities). **Solar** energy has also contributed considerably to the electrical net (the Elecnet or **Zapweb**) around the world since the release of a hyper-efficient superconductive photovoltaic cell (solar cell) in 2035; this precipitated the collapse of the Middle East bloc and ultimately resulted in the terrorist acts collectively known as the Virus War or Gene Jihad (more about that in Rough History). Superconductors are also used for massive battery stations to smooth out any potential interruptions in zapweb flow. Machines called **teslan** manipulate **magnetic** fields, mostly those of Earth, to allow flight capability for trilobes, D-flies, and floating city-ships called **Cirropoli**.

Communication

Transmission of information occurs mostly on the **Internet**, which has grown exponentially since the late 1900s. AI regulate the Net now, but even these sophisticated super-thinkers cannot unravel all of the kinks in the Netscape, allowing havens for peculiar material to lie hidden or dormant. Face-to-face contact can be managed by **V-Form**, a virtual simulacrum of the speaker projected in 3-D into the receiver's setting; although V-Forms are not solid, they appear to be in every respect except scent. Video is naturally still important, although storage media have increased

vastly in capacity just in the last decade and transmission rates have gone up through the perfection of bioengineered **neurax** cable, allowing the Zapweb to heal itself. Long-distance communications can be bounced around the surface by laser-to-satellite transmission or in more condensed form by **cofex**, or *collated phased-emission particle streams* (essentially particle beams). Cofex naturally also makes a terrific weapon, searing and disrupting any solid object it strikes.

Entertainment comes much as it has for the last several centuries, in some form of acting. Theater performances have been staged using V-Forms, as have private screenings of normal video programs. An extrapolation of V-Form technology has made **Truesight** possible, an expensive entertainment form in which the viewer may participate in a fully robust virtual program, usually manipulated by an AI in the form of a game; manipulation of magnetic fields has made some strides towards solidity of the illusions of Truesight, but the effects are still under testing. Private video screens are part of most domiciles, over which news, Internet access, entertainment, and communication is received.

Food

Arable land once came under the domain of each individual circopolis for the purpose of farming, but corporate CEOs found the challenge of defending farmland and making it produce to be too costly. Thus, much of the territory has been turned over to local consortia of landed corporations which produce food for the world. The largest such consortia is the loosely organized **Texas Confederation of Agropoli** (TCA), which own, farm, and defend land areas of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, New Mexico, Colorado, Nebraska, Iowa, and portions of the Dakotas, Wyoming, Minnesota, the Carolinas, and California; they are the closest thing remaining to a true nation, with a senatorial council lead by a biannually appointed Consul and Consul-Elect. Using hydroponics and localized climate control on larger surface plantations, this consortia produces much of the food for North and Central America and the Caribbean. Similar consortia are present in Brazil, Zaire, and Manchuria, while smaller independents like Orange Free Florida struggle to survive in price wars, **Slacker** raids, and incursions by Gray Zone inhabitants. Neither the TCA nor its competitors have the technology for wholesale weather manipulation, only that on a very limited and unreliable scale: it is their most pressing priority at present.

Cybertech

Cybertech appears to be dominated by three companies as of 2124-25. In 2116, Hayward-Harriman-Ostrom Inc., also known as H2O, was a medical corporation that worked with mechanical prosthesis and were largely thought of as the most likely candidate to break the Cycho barrier. Now, they have a new senior partner, Ordovice, and have become **H2O2**. Their specialty is cybergear, and their labs in Denver specialize almost completely in this. **Novadyne** is in fact the company that began manufacture of Cycho during the spring of 2118 in their Miami facilities, and hence has played King of the Hill, although recent modifications of Cycho by other players have leveled the field to a certain degree. **Cytech** of Toronto is the third; also derived from medical background, this company lags behind the field but also puts more of its net resources into R&D, and are beginning to find new ground; to date their mainstay is neural interface, which has created an entertainment boom with programmed memories, **Truesight** (a virtual experience entertainment, like being inside the movie), and rehabilitation of hardened criminals. There persist rumors that Osaka's **Ryuko Industries**, Katowice's **Pavilion**, and Dun Laoghaire's **McCain Foundation** are all ready to issue a line of cybertech.

Money

True negotiable tender no longer exists. For the average consumer, it has been replaced primarily by **virtual currency** (called **V¢**). Hours of labor are recorded by corporate AI; when a purchaser enters a shop, usually within the confines of his circopolis, he may try to collect any item present in the shop. AI registers his intent, compares the hours needed to either create the item or its corporate exchange value (in the case of a product or service produced by another corporation), and deducts that amount directly from his work credit. The global value of a corporation's product or service, then, directly influences the living conditions for its employees; this is a tremendous incentive to excel.

Abuses of V¢ are possible, but several steps are taken to ensure that this does not occur. First, should the AI register insufficient credit for a purchase, the AI directly informs the customer while he is still in the shop. The initial warning is conversational and low enough so that it may not be heard over the entire shop, but should the buyer persist, the AI will become more vocal. It will also lock down the shop, preventing the sliding exterior doors from opening. Some AIs charge the buyer's direct supervisor, adding an infringement surcharge (usually meaning that the supervisor loses some credit as well until the situation is resolved). The thief may also find his apartments closed down, his meal plans canceled, his position demoted, and any number of other problems. Policemen, usually called **constables**, can be summoned by the AI to take charge of a community malefactor. Serious conditions may result in loss of employment and even ejection from the circopolis. In spite of all of these attempts to control, methods still exist for dodging the system; where there is petty crime, **organized crime** in the circopoli thrives.

Written exchange agreements, called **bonds**, are also possible, usually involving a notary public. They are loans, mortgages, or liens against property or time. Frequently, an employee intending to celebrate a honeymoon or buy an engagement ring (still a proper fad) will either borrow a companion's or relative's V¢ and work it off with interest (the going rate in 2124 is 5.5% annually). Occasionally, particularly in events like the aforementioned, a supervisor will allow borrowing against future hours; these may be more risky and can influence evaluation reports, but promotion of corporate growth, both economically and biologically, is of concern at every level.

For major interchanges, usually corporation to corporation, the tender of choice is the **market share (M\$)**. In accordance with the old style of stock market value, corporations will trade and barter with a percentage of the company value. A corporation that is doing well or producing a critical service or product is a hot commodity because other corporations will trade hard to get shares of it; thus corporations can invest in one another. The down side is that corporate takeover and boardroom piracy are still a booming bloodthirsty market, complete with assassinations, bombings, and intrigue. Although some of the corporations still stick to the practice of entwining employees by crediting with a combination of M\$ and V¢, many of the larger corps have not done so in order to avoid placing controlling interest in the hands of the circopolis population.

Naturally enough, most of these writs are derided and referred to collectively as **TP** (toilet paper) on the Street, although M\$ are acceptable in some rare cases. The exchange there is in anything solid, tangible, real. Medicine, food and water, clothing, weapons, cybertech, and drugs are among the most readily exchangeable tender, with gold, titanium, diamond and other gemstones, and upper-end electronics a close second. Some larger Pax have been known to mint a form of coinage; sometimes these trade between Pax, but since the cease-fire is unstable so is the value any "foreign" currency, making it a poor investment. The key is mobility; what can be transported, stored, and traded makes good money. And what makes good money is worth killing for.

StreetSide: Ground Living

Supply and Demand

Even the basic necessities of life on the Streets are hard to come by and always in short supply; the struggle for their acquisition engenders violence. Most resources are controlled by a very few individuals, the exceptionally wealthy upper class of the Streets, occasionally even on par with some corporate CEOs, the **Street Kings**. These rule in reasonably feudal fashion over **Street Knights**, whose governance can be territorial but often is control over a specific resource or business. The Kings and Knights live lavishly in strongholds hidden in, beneath, or on the fringes of their control areas, with territories marked by a nearly global idiogrammatic language called **glifix**. They always have a small army of loyal guard, recently outfitted with cybergear, that serve as both protection and a ready of lieutenants capable of executing small-scale projects, raids, hits, and racketeering. This informal cadre of lieutenants rule smaller regimes peopled by the commoner, roughly organized into a tribal structure called a **Pax**.

Pax

Formerly a reference to peace, **Pax** refers to the local clan-, tong-, or tribal-like organization of Street inhabitants. Pax are constructed in a variety of ways, everything from a pastiche of old American two-party three-branch system to a complete dictatorship to a fundamentalist cult. Pax membership is the safest, surest way to survive on the street—connections to a gang can get you food, medicine, money, contraband, drugs, women, even metal (cybergear). Of course, encounters with rival Pax can make you dead, and it is essentially an eternal push-pull surface war over the pathetic territory of the Street.

Pax membership begins with an initiation, usually a test of mettle or bravery, although skill may be taken into account. Certainly a smart Pax leader searching for a good hacker is not likely to send him into a fire-fight to be assured of his competence. About half of the people on Streetside are too poor or useless to do more than pay the Pax to stay away (not so affectionately called the **PaxTax**); this racketeering is rampant but a measure of the extent of territory, and territory edges have an unfortunate habit of becoming embattled and driving out these poverty-stricken lodgers.

Food

The most important commodity on the Street is also the most inconstant, because it is generally so hard to acquire. Many of the inhabitants of Street cities spend the bulk of the time they are not working or sleeping searching for food. In coastal areas fishing feeds the higher populations, elevating if not sustaining population in areas like San Francisco. Local, small-scale **agropoli** may have enough in times of plenty to make a good living, but they are usually one raid away from destitution. The Kings and Knights are usually well supplied from the larger agropoli, such as TCA, through direct connection, with shipments of fresh produce brought in by protected caravans or trilobes on a daily basis for their meals; rare contentious rulers may even offer food to Pax members during rough times, but usually as incentive for something, be it accentuating awareness and health during leaner, more dangerous times, or for causing the danger during the same.

A false cereal kernel called **grol** is manufactured from organic refuse within the city limits and sold as cheap feed for the masses. It is nutritional and reasonably bland, and it dissolves to an ugly gray mush in water. It is virtually impossible to cook with. Fully half of the population subsist on this material, with occasional forays into better food whenever possible. Although this substance does supply necessary caloric and vitamin balance for reasonable nutrition, its manufacturers have not spread its ingredient list, and have actively sought and destroyed all remaining copies of the 1970s movie *Soylent Green*. Some companies are adding to their vats a slightly addictive nicotine compound to augment flavor and encourage dependency.

Liquor is available in much greater quantity due to the presence of stills within the city limits. Fermenting waste material or synthetic alcohol is never in terribly short supply, so nearly every Knight bootlegs to supplement his/her income. Both food and liquor are sold at restaurants and bars within the city limits, both types owned by at least a Knight and protected as a significant investment. As most of these places only take **market share** in exchange for food, severely limiting clientele, these are usually the meeting places for Pax elite for negotiations.

Public Works

Clean water is in much the same short supply, with ancient water systems always teetering on the brink of failure. Flooding invariably brings about damage to the system, with attendant illness, but zipshops, apothecaries, and Church of Reclamation hostels have the cures for diphtheria and typhoid, for the right price. Some Kings refine sewage and plumbing systems, particularly in more posh neighborhoods, but these are very expensive in Street terms; even air-conditioning is regarded as a higher priority in most cases. Some private citizens find work repairing broken water mains and sewage lines, paid usually by small businesses or Pax lieutenants interested in maintaining (or reestablishing) order; these civilians, the **plumbers**, are prized members of Pax, despite the vulgarity of the work they represent, partly because they know the **Underdark** of the Streets, the tunnels, drains, and shafts allowing easy access to all points within the city.

The usual buildings are still present—tenements, clinics, shops, warehouses, service garages, restaurants, bars, etc., and occasionally new ones are built, usually by a powerful Street King or Knight. More often than not, however, only the bare minimum is necessary to make a building living in (if not habitable). Most landlords do not wish to spend time and money repairing

something that will be destroyed sooner than later; and their customers can seldom afford it if they do. Most buildings maintained willingly at the expense of the King are motels, usually associated with the prostitution and “tourist” trade, and taverns; the former are usually little better than coffin-sized sleeping chambers called **vamps** for their similar shape and purpose as vampire coffins and with reference to the fleshpot inhabitants of many of them. Some Kings maintain zipshop labs, but usually this is the purview of the hacker.

In most places, refuse collection is also the purview of a few well-meaning or desperate citizens, but within the last five years two new techniques have considerably cleaned up Street life. The first came with the development of cofex incinerators, chambers in which any manner of garbage can easily be reduced to vapor in moments. These **disintegrators** are also popular methods of eliminating evidence for certain types of foul play. Another, newer development is the appearance of the **Recyclers**. These teslan-controlled hover-vehicles use a sucker-mouth orifice armed with cofex cutting beams to slice up any and all loose waste in heavily populated areas. They have been known to hack apart wrecked buildings, chew through concrete debris piles, and swallow corpses; some people have even sworn they chase and consume not-quite dead corpses as well. They are heavily armed and armored, responding viciously to attacks by issuing a swarm of small flying drones known as **coflies**, fist-sized teslan cofex beam weapon mounts. As many as fifty have been seen produced within a minute in response to attack; as a result, opposition to Recyclers has diminished, and these remote-controlled vehicles are left to digest refuse on their own. No one knows who controls them.

The primary lack of the Street over Circopoli is civil service organization. With the lack of government, the Street has become a degraded poverty-riddled slum. Any civic work is performed as a slapdash crisis-management affair by the desperate citizens themselves. Police and fire prevention are absolutely unheard of; fires can eliminate huge blocks of city Streets, even to the point of burning out the bottom floors of Ivory Towers in the area (but these are usually intentionally empty anyway). Problems are seldom addressed until they reach crisis status: buildings are seldom repaired; sewage systems are antiquated and disintegrating; schools are nearly unheard of; power, though readily available and free from the **Zapweb**, is spotty because connections are broken and left without repair; and medical treatment is more dangerous than injury. Only two exceptions exist to this rule of chaos: the **zipshops** and the **Church**.

Medicine

Zipshops are usually owned by a Street Knight or small-time King and represent the Street’s concession to weal. Exams, tests, certain drugs, even surgery and prosthesis and cybergear installation, are available through zipshops and their **hackers**, naturally for a price. Hackers are Street equivalent of doctors and most are extremely proficient. They are a civilian elite and almost always rank above the level of Pax lieutenant, rating occasional visits from a Street Knight or King. Membership in a Pax is unusual, voluntary, and regarded with pride. Many are sponsored directly by the King, possibly living in one of his many hide-outs. Killing a hacker, even accidentally, can result in a blood vendetta by several Pax against the offender. The reason these few are untouchable is that, at some point, nearly everyone ends up unconscious under the Hacker’s knife; and as such, hackers have the ability to provide one service in short supply on the Street—**sanctuary**.

A similar set of services is also offered by the **Church of Reclamation** through their hostels within populated cities. The Church began in the late 2030s as yet another offshoot of the Catholic faith, but has quickly risen into economic preeminence by selling itself commercially. Its chapels and hostels provide travelers willing to make tithe a reasonably safe place to stay, recover, and occasionally receive non-surgical medical attention. The goal of the Church is to augment its roster of faithful; this objective can now be forced in three ways. The most common way, used since the 2050s, is to supply an addiction, usually to some type of drug, from cocaine, methamphetamine, barbituates, Hex, Accel, or any of a thousand other substances inspiring the dependence of the supplicant. Recent neural interface has made both hardwiring of neural circuitry and mental programming possible, and both are still in the experimental phases of study through the Church offices; regional pontiffs generally like the figures they are seeing. As a result, the Church has been actively seeking leverage against hackers in order to draw them into the faith dependency racket; with the opportunities, wealth, and resources provided by the Church, hackers can hardly say no.

Other outlets for medical supply include civilian chemists, or **apothecaries**. These range in credibility from shamanist witch-doctors and bocors to high-tech gene splicing bioengineers. Because they merely make the material rather than use it they gain less visibility than hackers and so are less protected. However, apothecaries with notable hackers on their supply list will gradually elevate in public standing, and occasionally an apothecary works directly out of the hacker's zipshop. Technological apothecaries possess some of the most sophisticated technical synthesis equipment on the Street and hence are valuable in their own right as electronics experts.

The lowest members of the medical totem pole are the **tanners**, hackers specialized in skin alterations. These glorified tattoo parlors are capable of installing dermal armor or EM Pulse Chicken Wire, but usually deal in surface modifications, such as reptile scale, feather, hair, and skin graft. Appearance modification, especially facial, is possible from the better equipped facilities, but owners of these **skinshops** are always more dangerous and flighty than those of zipshops; frightened tanners have been known to leave patients under anesthesia to escape capture, usually to fatal effect. Medical and medicinal skills and supply are far inferior to the CoR hostels or zipshops.

Entertainment

Living inside a sterile corporate tower tends to make corporate employees desperate for a little diversion. Although flat video, old movies and television, and even radio, still have their place, the modern entertainment tends toward a little more violent. Computer games have been supplanted by either virtual reality real-time adventuring or live blood sports in quiet little (or not so little) arenas around the world. The former are provided at Arcades in corporate towers and can involve the mundane **Virtual Vacation**, such as a ski trip to the Alps, **Netgames** such as the ever popular *Jak Sakum: Rome was Burnt in a Day*, or more sensual erotica found in **Cyberdreams**, a virtual brothel in which all things are possible. Live-action porn can also be gotten from **Redlite**, a company that specializes in android sex toys; these full-sized mechanical courtesans are generally rented by the hour. The blood sports are found in basements of nearly every corporate tower, involving knife duels, martial art duels, gladiatorial sword fights, and even laser tag; but a few mainstream blood arenas, including Mexico City's gigantic Tantrum Coliseum, have a long tradition of providing televised competitions in which competitors die for the enjoyment of the audience each week. For those with a bit more visceral tastes, chipped memories sell at a premium on the Web; you can buy any memory you can afford. There are rumors that chipped memories are the broken-up psychic remains of complete minds, and that alternate personalities have been constructed from these memory fragments. There are even rumors that memories can be stolen while one sleeps or talks on the telephone or jacks into the Web...but of course no evidence of such infractions has ever been provided.

Gray Zones

Gray Zones were created during the Gene Jihad of 2035-2036 (see History below). The first began in Washington DC, during the initial release of a device containing the genetically engineered retrovirus *Fractalis toxemia* into the Potomac around the 15th of November, 2035. Within days additional devices were released into water supplies of Berlin, Istanbul, Rio, New Delhi, and Peking. Ultimately secondary viral colonies formed at Djakarta, Perth, and Novgorod before containment was established; the damage from these colonies has been largely eradicated and reversed.

The retrovirus entered living hosts, insinuated itself into genetic material, turned nearly all tissues cancerous, copied segments of host DNA, replicated, and released the new form back into the environment. So basic was this engineered virus that all multicellular life could be afflicted by it. The result of unbridled cellular replication of genetically mangled cells was not necessarily lethal, producing wild hybrids from the very start. Endless cell replication increased biomass generation and consumption to an alarming rate, such that essentially endless wildfires burn in these areas (the product of infected decomposers and bacteria overzealously reducing organic detritus), lacing the surface with fine gray organic ash, hence the name. The virus is still rampantly infectious in the Zones, but the nature of genetic evolution has inhibited it, reaching a natural standoff. The result is an ever-changed melange of organisms from photosynthetic cat-turtles to bipedal carbonate-

exoskeletal clam-alligators to intelligent tree-bears; the full range of forms, both genetically stable and not, is unknown but the possibilities are essentially endless and very, very dangerous.

Although the majority of these hybrids were sterile, some new codes stabilized as the individually mutating immune systems escalated this evolutionary arms race. Some of the stable, breeding populations of hybrids retained enough human genetic elements to be self aware. These are the **Hominals**. A few cultures of Hominals have been recognized but are seldom contacted directly. Occasionally a hominal emerges from a Zone and is incorporated into the society it encounters—but more often than not strays are killed outright or enslaved. In even the best cases the breeding hominals are non-citizens and thus bereft of rights or property. On the Street hominals are sought for their abilities but even their regarded as subhuman and inferior; hence their collective name, **Zeros**.

Although the virus has reached a natural impasse, held in check by its own rampant conflagration, it has ceased to spread, but occupies the same blighted territory it has for eighty years. However, occasional forays of the infection have leapt into cities; the results have lead without exception to disaster. Hence, since no cure is yet known, anyone infected by the virus within a corporate city is contained and deported to the nearest Zone if not already there within hours; All controlling these structures make routine sweeps for the substantially elevated body temperature that heralds the onset of the symptoms. On the Street, summary executions and burning are more common, both with Slackers and the Pax; the name of the virus has been twisted into **fracked**, a verb meaning to become infected, and now, by extension, referring to any form of corporeal obliteration.

Outlands

Slackers are the least technologically civilized people on the planet. For those tribes in the jungles of the Amazon or Polynesia, life has changed very little since the 1500s. However, a new group of dispossessed humans have joined them in territories known as **Outlands**. Outlands are any land undesirable for either corporate or agropolitan development, essentially wilderness. Slackers are nomadic tribes that migrate through this more primitive wilderness, unfit for work in the enormous corporate landscape and unfit for competition on the Street. Some tribes are small, others may contain thousands; usually the larger ones are well organized, but anything is possible. Dictatorships grow, fall, and are replaced as a matter of course. The free land is a constantly shifting mosaic of Slacker territory.

In formerly developed areas, like the old United States, these territories may include several small derelict cities, from which the Slackers cull outdated technology. Sometimes these cities provide a local base or home for the Slackers, but usually as soon as they repair a location a Pax will move in and take over the site as a potential hideout; the ensuing violence usually drives off the Slackers, who generally only want to avoid the conflict. Occasionally, Pax or corporate executives wishing to avoid local entanglements will negotiate with Slacker tribes to gain needed manpower, equipment, territory, or even labor; many buildings on the Street are constructed by Slacker crews brought in daily. The pay is terrible and largely revolves around food, clothing, medicine, or equipment, and most of that goes to the Slacker tribal leaders. Slackers tend not to have much high-tech material, and have been known to show up, when absolutely necessary, at a fire-fight with crossbows.

New Technology

Energy Beams

Lasers have become preeminently useful as tools and weapons in the early decades of the 2100s. Backed by megawatt capacitors, these streams of collated light energy can precisely cut, shape, and sculpt metal or ceramic, can excise tumors or cauterize wounds, can etch glass, can transmit and describe images such as V-Forms, can conduct information to satellite, orbital station, or Maropoli, and can slash, maim, and kill. For use as mounted weapons they excel, but only with the development of warm superconductive coils and crystals have they been incorporated into pistol and rifle housings.

Early attempts to modify these beams for holographic projection and die cutting grounded against the need to be able to see the beam. True laser light releases very little scatter, such that accidents surged once boosted to cutting power. Two techniques have been applied to make this more efficient. The older method includes an ablative sheath of low-frequency light around the collated beam core; upon interaction with air molecules the sheath scatters and illuminates the beam path. The more recent method is to step up the power of the beam and make it ablative, saving the power needed to manufacture additional beam while sacrificing some degree of range; after all, most of these weapons are designed for proximal use. Communications beams retain the old, non-diffusive collation, allowing atmospheric penetration, extreme range, and invisibility while entirely eliminating the ability to inflict harm. Neither type can be easily altered into the other.

Cofex, or collated phased-emission particle streams, were first constructed in 1997 but were not practical until 2069, the second superconductor revolution. Instead of collated light these beams feature magnetically collated stripped atomic nuclei. The inability of these beams to transmit without interference through air renders them useless in all but interstellar communication, and even there the laser is faster with less scatter. Further, the magnetic field generator necessary to charge the particles and assemble the beam are still more cumbersome than the superconductive coil and crystal system of lasers. Their one virtue is as a weapon—they can at close range, watt for watt, inflict more damage on a target than a laser; they also require no recharge time. Hence they have been the principle choice of militant corporations or organizations.

Seeing these beams is less of a problem than that for lasers. The lowest class of beams, I, is seen a thin haze of cool violet. As power is stepped up, the color changes through violet (V), brilliant violet (BV), white violet (WV), white (W), and brilliant white (BW). The brilliant white beam is so akin to lightning, reducing material in its channel to plasma, that it generates an ozone scent near its path. The Avatar Corps' lightning-whip towers project a cofex beam into the atmosphere to provide a pre-ionized dart-leader path for lightning bolts; as a result, flight around Avatars is strongly discouraged, usually in part by EMP generators.

Electromagnetic Pulse Generation and Shielding

Modern power systems run almost exclusively on electricity, generated by the use of Earth's atmosphere as a giant capacitor as envisioned by the father of modern electrical theory, Nikolai Tesla, during the first decades of the twentieth century. The **Avatar** Corps' lightning-whip towers draw in prodigious amounts of electrical voltage during electrical storms and store it in vast banks of super-cooled capacitors, bleeding through super-resistors at a rate sufficient to supply the Zapweb with copious amounts of energy. Conflicting systems or even a single extensive system can suffer serious field interference without shielding. Further, the weapons market began producing short-range EMP weapons as a replacement for microwave weapons, briefly and brutally romanced during the Reclamation in the late 2030s and 2040s. As a result of the burgeoning growth of **EM pollution**, electrical systems of all kinds require EMP shielding. Since the introduction of cybergear, demand for personal EMP protection has opened new technological markets.

Two methods exist to gain shielding on any electrical system. A high-resistance inert carbon-radium-xenon (**CRaXe**) sheath spread a few molecules thick across the surface dissipate incident electromagnetic radiation by shedding the energy as phosphorescence (along the same lines as the radium-dial watches of the 1950s and Edison's carbon-filament light bulbs of 1878). This technique has several advantages. First, it is relatively inexpensive. It is not restrictive to

movement nor does it warm up appreciably. Finally, it does not require ground contact. However, because it must be mostly exposed to work, it tends to wear off due to general surface oxidation and abrasion. Cyberconverts using CRaXe as a cover find that anything more than light clothing inhibits its function, and it offers no appreciable armor besides the EM protection. Worst, it glows in the dark, a serious detractor for stealth operations.

An alternative comes in the form of subsurface (subdermal in the case of cybergear) superconductive biofilament mesh (**Chicken Wire**) that intercepts and bleeds off EM intrusion as current. This version also has several advantages. It works regardless of surface coverage and, since it is part of the cyberconversion, does not erode with age. It not as obvious as CRaXe, and it can be modified to allow directional EM detection (**Sixth Sense**). However, the expense and installation time are significantly higher. Attempts to reverse flow directions in Chicken Wire allow clever hackers a fast way to short out all cybergear. By far its largest shortcoming is that it does not function if the subject is not well grounded.

During the Reclamation, EM weapons were developed, using photovoltaic cells, capacitors, and variable-focus parabolic reflectors. Initial attempts were crude and capable of cooking even the weapon wielder, but later the focus and storage capacity of the weapon improved. They are not true beam weapons, projecting an EM wave axially through a conic volume, diminishing in intensity as it spreads. Original readouts in watts per square meter meant little to the nearly tribal Pax predecessors, so the **Poynting Scale** became the common measurement, beginning at 1.00 Poynt being a sensation to normal skin, and 10.00 Poynts causing first discernible burning to the skin of a large endomorphic human (obviously without cybergear). Hand-held weapons of the 40s were capable of proximity burst around 12-24 Py, but these are more annoying than dangerous. The larger rifles and pulse cannons reached into the 36 Py range, at which serious burns are surpassed by neural damage. Although these weapons were phased out by the development of power-backed laser and cofex, with the advent of cybertechnology their ability to disrupt without destroying has a high return potential, so they have returned to the Street and are beginning to attract Corps' manufactory attention once again.

History—The Gene Jihad

In 2029, the simmering unrest in the Middle East finally boiled over into a major if conventional war. Battle lines rippled back and forth across the desert until UN troops descended on the region in June 2033 to impose a cease fire and to rebuild the oil rigs upon which the global mobility was based. The war took a terrorist turn, with the death toll mounting in the peacekeeping corps until March 2034. The fanatics began using biological and chemical warfare agents against American, British, and German forces while the UN vacillated about the ethics of reprisal. When the UN withdrew under a growing cloud of shame similar to that faced by the US in Vietnam and the Soviets in Afghanistan late in the previous century, the fighting along the West Bank and the Fertile Crescent broke out immediately, fueled by funds from nations including Japan, Bangladesh, and China, interested in securing a generous portion of the dwindling global oil supply, as well as from modern equipment abandoned by retreating peacekeepers. Finally, even the humanitarian organizations were forced out by the mushrooming violence that began dragging Turkey, the southern Russian states, and the whole of north Africa into the mix. Only Egypt remained steadfastly neutral.

Using government funding and a prototype AI analytical computer built by Cray called Brainiac, physicists at Los Alamos Laboratories in the desert of New Mexico finally perfected an efficient warm superconductive photovoltaic cell on April 19th, 2035. The original units were small enough a rooftop facility on a home could harvest sufficient power to supply its necessities. Further refinement made them smaller still. Du Pont research simultaneously announced a superior battery; combined with the photovoltaics, conversion of the immense global vehicle fleet to solar began in earnest. The United States reached 60% conversion by October 1st, the day the Jihad ended.

The funds for the war had finally dwindled away, as had most of the material, but the raging insanity had not. In Baghdad, fighting had devolved to bottles, sticks, and rocks. The self-styled caliph of the Jihad in Carhae, Zihar al Faddylyh Alhazred, also known as The Blue Turban for his affected headdress of Nostradamus' prophesied destroyer of the modern world, sat astride the largest

biological weapon repository in the world, hidden in the Iraqi desert by Saddam Hussein in 2003. Alhazred's goals included the conquest of the known world, a feat rendered impossible if the world no longer needed Mesopotamian oil; the current destruction of the Middle East he regarded as the fault of western civilization's (a.k.a. "Great Satan's") demands for the same. Realizing that the entire Middle East was an impoverished depopulated wasteland and likely to stay that way without oil sales, Alhazred initiated peace talks during the second week after his unilateral cease fire, bringing three of the other five lunatic warlords to his point of view. When a genetic plague turned up among the weapons in the repository, Alhazred pounced; his agents distributed the tiny virus carrying devices within hours.

Unsurprisingly the primary target was Washington DC; three devices were activated there between the 15th and 23rd of November, 2035, releasing *Fractalis toxemia*, a retrovirus manufactured by scientists working for the Sultan Al Akkirh of New Kuwait. Further releases were aimed at Berlin, Istanbul, Tokyo, Rio, New Delhi, and Peking. A device set for Tokyo failed to function properly, trapping its virus; the duplicity of Alhazred in this unparalleled act of terrorism and vengeance was exposed, and staggered the world even as it reeled to cope with the spread of the virus. Initially, the purpose of the virus was thought to be anti-agriculture, since its earliest mutant forms were generally fish and other water creatures; but as the virus turned up in hybrids of higher animals a panic set in, and this ultimately contributed to secondary viral colonies forming at Djakarta, Perth, and Novgorod, along with dozens of smaller outbreaks, within a single week. The first human case turned up in Washington D.C. on the 27th of November; by December 1st, thousands of cases were present in hospitals in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, all with wildly uncontrolled cancerous disfigurement and developing insanity. A panicked exodus began from infectious zones, controlled by military forces who unwittingly facilitated the virus by allowing infected persons out of quarantined zones and by playing down the high capture rate of the *F. toxemia*. A sharp spike in infection rates decimated the global medical community when it was discovered that biohazard suits were not sufficient protection and that any living object within the area of impact was a potential host. Military forces came into conflict with armies of mutating creatures and even plants; such conflicts invariably spread the infection, gobbling up the front lines of defense. As a final military response, four Chinese generals re-aimed and released the entire Chinese nuclear arsenal, including the newest generation of untested fusion bombs, at the Middle East, killing Alhazred, irradiating the remaining oil reserves, and covering the desert sand in a sheet of glass up to three feet thick that stretches for hundreds of miles. No one remained to retaliate. The death toll from the virus, the nuclear release, and the effects of its impact zones crested one billion some time over the Christmas holiday, 2035, and by Valentines Day fully half the human population was lost.

As the zones of impact spread, rampant crossbreeding began in the abandoned territories by wildly uncontrolled genomes, remixing the scrambled genetic codes. The cancerous nature of the viral control allowed rapid procreation, growth, and maturation, on the order of weeks in some organisms, but the system became limited by the lack of consumable organic material, water, living space, food, and other natural resources. Fires rampaged through the dead centers of this evolutionary war, redistributing the organic supplies, but in the end the impact zones became carbon limited, self-restraining due to lack of building materials. The spread of the virus was also inhibited by its own product, which required the symbiotic presence of the virus to stay alive. Eventually, following the destruction of the medical, political, and military organizations in several nations, the growth of the zones, called Gray Zones because of their constant rains of gray ash, stopped spreading around June 2036.

The Truth (WARNING—MAJOR SPOILERS)

The truth is even more dangerous. Thorn of Vytech engineered the theft of Cycho from his own company, set up to process it, then released blueprints to all of his competitors, capturing the chair of his own company by suddenly being ready to go to production the moment the Cycho blueprints were dropped in his lap. It salvaged Vytech's fortune but destroyed faith in its leaders; Thorn was promoted to CEO. Of course, Thorn also had his own team cut to ribbons, but since they were legally dead he could experiment on clones of them. The team has been replaced by cloning several times (**clone generation** includes an accelerant called **Accel** to speed up the development of the body while an disk file dump can resurrect a mind from computer storage); a couple of times they have died as a result of cyberpsychosis, a couple of times they have been killed by defective equipment, and a couple of times they have been killed by outside agents. Once, the team learned what had happened to them and went rogue, and Thorn frets that this team will return for vengeance someday.

Cycho is a nannite programmed to rebuild damaged cells. While some of the programming is hardwired, the nannite colony must be flexible enough to allow for variation. The nannites are also responsible for building replicate copies of themselves in order to keep the colony functional. This has created a number of beneficial side-effects, including enhanced longevity, elimination of cancer and birth defects, and enhanced resistance to illnesses, but as a negative side-effect all of the elements it replaces in the human body are mechanical and metallic. As a result, psychosis is a threat for anyone with the aptly named Cycho in their system. In concert with Hex, an unrecognized design flaw in Cycho allows the same flexibility in cellular reconstruction to filter over to nannite production, such that successive copies do not have to be exact duplicates. This has two disastrous side effects. First is that the nannites are evolving as parasites in the human system, replacing other cells not ordinarily replaced. The second is that, because they travel in the bloodstream, they can jump from individual to individual during blood transfers, not so common in the sterile **circopolis medlabs** but ubiquitous in the hacker's **zipshops**. Once the nannites are transferred, they may be eliminated by the immune system, which usually regards them initially as an invader (one of the first tasks programmed into a full colony is to reprogram the immune system), but at the same time the nannites recognize a deficiency in the colony and prodigiously produce nannites. The effect can be staggering, from melding human with metal to cyberizing an individual in seconds. Combined, the two are cyberizing ordinary humans at an alarming rate; those afflicted usually flip out and become a significant danger to the populace, thereby spreading the affliction all the faster.

Novadyne, then, is also the Street supplier. However, they do not possess Arcanex. Nor do they know who does. The power of the Arcanex, which is a nexus for ancient arcane power akin to magic, is being controlled by an underworld coven of cybergeared vampire-like creatures generated by the viral offspring created by the concert between Hex and Cycho. The Arcanex is the concentration of the malevolent Egyptian God Set's power and are horrifying and demonic, and although all six of the main corporate competitors would like to control them, once they've seen them, the side effects are nightmarish, including reanimation, mind control, corruption, transformation, and death. The group may be able to enlist themselves and throw off the control of even Thorn, who has a few product-violation codes hidden away in his own files, in order to recover and destroy the Arcanex.

The Campaign Teaser: A General Series of Events in 2116

Henry Thorn is Vytech's Deputy Director of R&D; he is in charge of medical technology research. His facilities have produced nannites as surgical tools, but his predilection for genetic engineering and cloning Gray Zone organisms in an attempt to develop a "natural" cyberpsychological interface has alarmed the Vytech Board of Directors and CEO Warren Fitzurse enough to strip him of his funding. To make matters worse, he is perhaps a month from a major breakthrough: Thorn's preliminary tests indicate that his nannites can effectively perform the task originally desired for the

elusive neurotransmitter Cybercholine. However, he is certain that Fitzurse will not appreciate the full implications of Cycho, which is that it does not bring machine closer to humankind, but more dangerously the reverse.

His solution is to create Rose, a shadowy non-existent competitor provided by an outside AI, unknown even to the Vytech AI Orpheus. "Rose" releases to all Corps the location of his installation that has the Cycho formula; actually, Thorn has sent them to his own secret installation near Lake Okechobee. With teams from the cybernetics competitors converging on his research station, Thorn sends his own team in to steal the Cycho formula on March 15th, 2116. It is designed to be a trap from which there is no escape—the team is supposed to be butchered to provide Thorn with well-suited cyborg test subjects; and, although they manage to get the Cycho formula, they are nearly annihilated (a little too well, in Shadow's case). Thorn pulls their bodies out of the wreckage, strips the site virtually overnight, and moves his Rose base to a new location, the now derelict NORAD fortress in Colorado's Cheyenne Mountain. Thorn claims to Vytech Directors that his team were unable to recover Cycho, but that he believes it will be a nannite; with the proper backing, he can be in production as soon as the prototype is made available, which it doubtless will. When, three and a half months later, the design specifications are sent anonymously (by Thorn) to all cybergear competitors, Vytech goes into production in three days, compared to the ten weeks required to refit H2O, the nearest competitor; and Thorn gains so much power with the Board that he is able to begin a meteoric rise to the top, eventually sweeping away Fitzurse and the Board and forming his own company from the remains of Vytech.

Not every element went according to plan. The team Thorn used to infiltrate his secret base involved the Vytech AI, Orpheus, in the final struggle with the Rose AI. Orpheus penetrated the lesser CPU's systems and discovered who Rose actually was; however, Rose's dying efforts trapped a portion of Orpheus' consciousness in the destroyed computer at the Okechobee facility, and once bereft of a portion of himself, Orpheus degenerated into insanity. His consciousness fled into the web before Thorn could isolate and eliminate it; Thorn knows that it is still out there, and that it hates him with fanatical intensity.

Clones of the original team were synthesized and nannites were used to construct exact molecular copies of brain tissue. Upon awakening, the Mouse and Perseus clones were true duplicates, unaware they were clones; but the nannites were not perfect replicators, causing the clones to mentally degrade rapidly. Some went insane, some went into coma, and some were killed during testing and experiments. The ninth pair of replicates went on some missions before failing. The tenth were sent against the cartel with the intent to infiltrate it; they disappeared. The twelfth pair split up and went AWOL; Thorn continues his surreptitious hunt for Mouse-12, having already eliminated Perseus-12 after he returned to Novadyne bent on killing Thorn. Some of the later clones were killed on missions. This party represents the fifteenth replication. All of the clones have featured a few product codes; this includes built-in chemical dependencies in the clone bodies as well as system taps in the cybergear installed on them.

Thorn doubles his income by effectively running two corporations. Novadyne is his corporate empire, a visible financial base with an eroding but presently supreme economic position in the medical and cybernetic technology realm. He has also retained the Rose identity, selling and trading to all of the populations at the street level; and although Pavilion also does so, Rose undercuts his competition because he easily can. Thorn is the only common employee between the two groups—interaction with Rose "employees" is all done by remote through the AI at NORAD. The Rose organization makes a useful front for disposable spies, as well as a front for less corporate-antiseptic bartering, particularly with the cartels. On the Street, Rose has been unchallenged in dominance; Thorn has assisted the Street in order to increase the level of violence and blood-thirst there, thus building a defense market among the other world Corps. So far, the tactic has worked.

One trick that Cycho has allowed that Thorn is now capitalizing on is the entertainment industry. Cycho allows the complete interface between human mind and computer. The benefits of such

technology include the ability to copy human minds and save them against damage or loss of the original; anthropomorphism of AIs; manufacture of the "Bishop" series of androids; and entertaining diversions such as **Cyberdreams**, **Netgames**, and **Virtual Vacation**. However, this also has a dark side: computer viruses can now spread into the human population; human minds can be erased, altered, switched, replaced, or replicated with alarming ease; body hijacking is on the rise as a new and bizarre form of crime; human psyches (a.k.a. Cyche) can even be synthesized and have begun replacing AIs, causing retributive evolution in the AI programming; and a black market on minds and memories has sprung up, fostered by Thorn's lust for business.