



DARK STATES

PLAYER'S BACKGROUND

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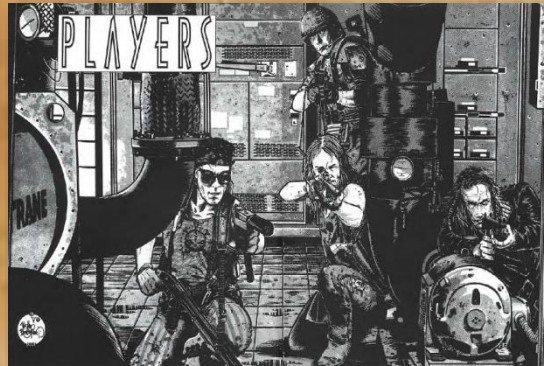
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WELCOME!

The year is 2032 and civilisation on Earth is dying a slow and painful death.

Avarice and fear rules the masses whilst the political establishment crumbles around them.

Wars rage over dwindling resources but Mother Nature wants her revenge.



Somewhere beyond human reckoning the eyes in the darkness have opened.

Welcome to dark times. Welcome to DARK STATES.

This is a setting that is one part near-future dystopia, two parts conspiratorial mystery solving and three parts saving the world from abominations. It is NOT for the faint hearted or those of a nervous disposition. It IS for those who want to unravel deep secrets that underlie human history and begin to write their own.

OVERVIEW

Civilisation is dying. It's not obvious, but the signs are there and getting clearer by the day. Those in power say everything is fine and not to worry but inequality is more pronounced than ever, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, wars over ever scarcer resources are abundant, and the dominion of the political state is on the decline. In 2032 money is power, and the corporations have more than anyone else, with

those in political sphere more and more beholden to the will of the corporate elite, after all profit comes above all. The major political powers still exist, but they spend too much time and energy facing off against one another, mostly through cyber and proxy wars, with the corporations only profiting from every exchange.

Earth's climate continues to degrade and wars over land and resources have intensified, fuelled by political and corporate greed, unchecked now by morality. Vast swathes of land have been made too extreme to live, either through climate change or other anthropogenic activities. Some corporations still uphold ethical practice, but these are in the minority now, Pandora's Box has been opened and the greedy are taking their fill while they can. Those few scientists who have made it to the moon base look back on Earth and watch with mounting despair as weather patterns mutate and grow monstrous, engulfing the planet in a gaiaic fury.

But still humanity continues to endure. In the US, borders are now closed and travel is less frequent than it has ever been, virtual existence has become a major way to both commute and communicate for those that can afford it, and most people now huddle under the skyscrapers of the major cities, seeking refuge from the increasing chaos around them. In rural areas farms are generally automated, and those that do venture out into the wilderness are at risk from bandits and the wild itself, there are frequent stories on news feeds of people being killed out in the wilderness, although there are far more people killed within the city limits. It seems that Mother Nature wants her revenge.

Stories of the supernatural are also increasing in their numbers and potency, tales of horrors in the darkness, of dark arts being practised, and of a spreading dominion of something 'else' out in the wilderness. Of course, media organisations and the establishment put this down to the twisted imagination of humanity, of stories made up to reproject the real horrors that are being carried out by real people into another light so that they can disassociate themselves from the reality of the crisis that is unfolding on Earth.

But there's something about those stories, something genuine that is keeping people awake at night, watching the darkness for terror to unfold itself.

TIMELINE

2018	Scientists drill into Earth's Mantle China overtakes US economy Tokamak ST40 fusion reactor goes online, fails		30,000 commercial UAVs now registered in US NASA Mars Rover Expedition Lasers used by US military for first time to combat drones 5G mobile data services launched
2019	Big One hits California, 8.1 Magnitude Earthquake First commercial space flights for super rich UK leaves European Union Larson B ice shelf collapses Stratobus drone / satellites first launch Computers break exaflop barrier Jordan opens first nuclear power plant Bionic eye matches human equivalent China lands on dark side of moon NASA completes the Unmanned Aerial System Traffic Management (UTM)	2021	Chinese Launch Space Station Tianwe Streamed shows becomes more prevalent than broadcast shows Water crisis in southwest US Wireless Electricity becomes commonplace
		2022	India becomes most populous country on Earth ITER experimental fusion reactor switched on Antimony begins to run out (batteries and bullets) Water crisis in Middle East, North Africa and South Asia ESA and NASA diverts comet 73P (Schwassmann-Wachmann) from its path
2020	First Chinese Moon Landing Glacier National Park becoming ice free	2023	Borneo's rainforest wiped out Laser driven fusion energy makes progress Genetic therapy developed as a cure for deafness 50% of population now use wearable 5G permanently connected to the web Acoustic shield devices launched to protect cities from Earthquakes

	Turkey's admission status to EU expires		First neural shunt developed
2024	Dirty Bomb let off in Washington DC, thousands killed, US enter war with Iran		Robotic hands match human equivalent
	Biggest refugee crisis in history cripples Europe and causes Indo-Burma conflict		6G mobile space networks launched
	3D printing becomes mainstream	2027	Biological device released in Shantou Province, China, 712 killed, US Climate Change Activists blamed
	New prosthetics convey feeling in limbs		Hydrogen fuel cells reach 1 million vehicles
	Artificial muscles robots generate more mechanical power than human muscles		DARPA's Membrane Optical Imager for Real-Time Exploitation (MOIRE) goes into operation
	Global reserves of Indium depleted (LEDs and solar panels)		Robot servants become commonplace in most upper middle class households
	Turkish Civil War		RoBees are utilised to pollinate crops to counter declining bee population
2025	25% of cars now automated and self-driving	2028	Moon base created by International Community
	Sarin gas released by drone over Paris killing 36		50% of cars now automated, almost all commercial vehicles are self-driving
	Vertical Farms become commonplace		ISS lifetime extended
	Railguns come into use within the military		Mammoths brought back to life
	3D printed human organs for those who can afford it		Printed electronics ubiquitous
	Drone usage in agriculture becomes prevalent		Contact lenses with full smart device capability become available for purchase
2026	First Quantum Computers become commercially available as PaaS		Hypersonic missiles enter military use
	Synthetic human genome completed		Denmark becomes first country to completely eliminate physical currency
	Maldives completely flooded by storm		

2029 New Austerity

European Union fails

Human like AI becoming reality

Heavy automation of retail market

Lake Chad disappears

Ghost Wars begin between US, Russia and China

The first immortal mouse is created

Global reserves of Silver depleted (Solar Power, nanotechnology)

End of wrinkles for those that can afford it

2030 Global Unemployment rate hits 30%

Half of US shopping malls now closed

Hyper fast crime scene analysis

New desalination techniques developed

8 billion people on Earth barrier broken

Shanghai stock market overtakes Wall Street

3D housing used extensively in re-housing those arriving in cities

Artificial blood produced

New graphene smart lenses hit the market

2031 Quantum Super Computers go online

Chocolate becomes a luxury

Bangkok abandoned to flooding

DNA profiling now takes seconds

Autonomous Robotic Ethical Decision Making (ARiD) algorithmic processes allowed into robotic vehicles

GEOGRAPHY

NORTH AMERICA

The United States and Canada have fared as badly as any with climate change, with the southern states taking the brunt of extreme weather. Texas, New Mexico and Southern California are places you do not wander around now during in the day, whilst Florida has been fragmented by rising sea levels, and the entire southern and eastern coastline are annually beset by hurricanes of growing strength.

Cities have grown both in size and density, with 75% of humanity now living in these urban sprawls, primarily situated on the eastern and western coasts. The exception is Washington DC



which was evacuated after the attack in 2024, the area around it is still being decontaminated and is off limits to all except security cleared services. The set of government and all political actions are now being carried out from West Virginia.

Greenland has been massively affected by climate change with major melting of the ice sheets there exposing the bare rock beneath and causing a catastrophic effect on sea levels. Canada has been least affected by the changes but even they have not escaped unharmed. Melting of the ice sheets across the region has affected the country more than it will let on, but has also opened up the area for corporate exploitation of resources to increase.

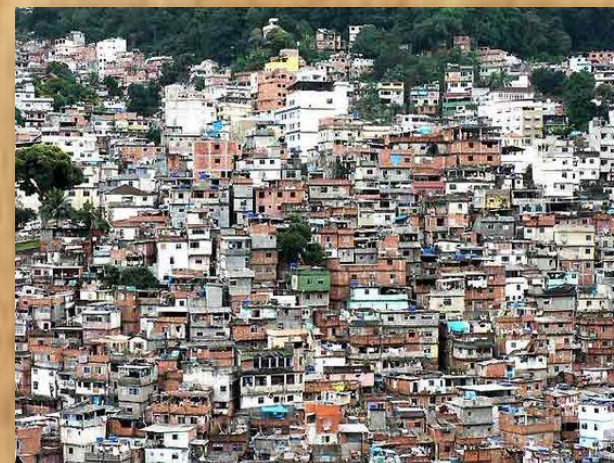
For those living in the urban areas, there is now a massive overburden on the city to provide for those people. Government funds have been slashed, and corporate interests have taken over, resulting in many cities in central zones that are heavily fortified and attuned for those with the wealth to afford it, whilst allowing the outlying suburbs to deteriorate into slums. Where they can locals have begun organising their own neighbourhoods, some even employing locals for policing, but in the vast majority of places it has become a free for all, particularly after dark.

This has not been helped by the deterioration of infrastructure in these urban areas. Maintenance of public services has dropped and, unless you are in possession of a renewable energy source, whole city blocks are prone to brown outs as electricity sub-stations and power lines suffer. And then there are the blackouts, caused by the ongoing global cyber conflict. Despite much hardening (to the detriment of accessibility, usability and performance) of the net-connected infrastructure, attacks are still able to get through and cause widespread and prolonged blackouts of services across the US. Even trash collection is an optional arrangement now.

If you still happen to live in a rural area, you are now one of the few. Many smaller towns have failed as jobs and money has become more concentrated in the cities, whilst automation has taken over on many

farms. Whole sections of the US are now barren with ghost towns dotting the highways like a reminder of the good ol' days, whilst those towns that do eke out a living do so primarily from the poverty line. Because of this vacuum of civilisation in rural areas crime is also on the rise, with criminal gangs now

operating freely in these areas. As a result gun laws are even laxer in many parts of the US (in the southern states automatic weapons are now permitted), and gun ownership is way up. There are now more guns than people in the US, and many own multiple firearms. Consequently gun deaths are sky-rocketing in the US; in 2031 there were a record 20,000 homicides in the US (and 30,000 suicides) that used firearms.



SOUTH AMERICA

South America never quite made it out of the third world status it has occupied for so many years. Governments have fallen, crime is rife, and only isolated pockets of civilisation remain. Wars rage over resources, backed by corporations who then steal those resources from those that survive.

The Central American states are as badly affected, Mexico is now a fully-fledged narco-state, and deals with many of the other players in the region. Although the Caribbean Islands are not doing badly financially they have been hit repeatedly for the last 5 years with Hurricanes of

category 4 or above has meant that the infrastructure of such islands are in bad repair, although many billionaires now own islands in the area and have what can only be described as Bond lairs.

Brazil is still the wealthiest state in the region but this has been reduced to pockets of existence. Foreign aid has all but dried up, so whilst Rio is still exciting, it is for very different reasons. Global corporations maintain the airport and several hotels, but the rest of Rio is in decay, with police only looking out for themselves in most instances. Huge sections of the city have degenerated into Favelas, with no public transportation, emergency services or hospitals. There is little in the way of electricity or running water, and sewer lines frequently rupture, spreading into the streets.

EUROPE

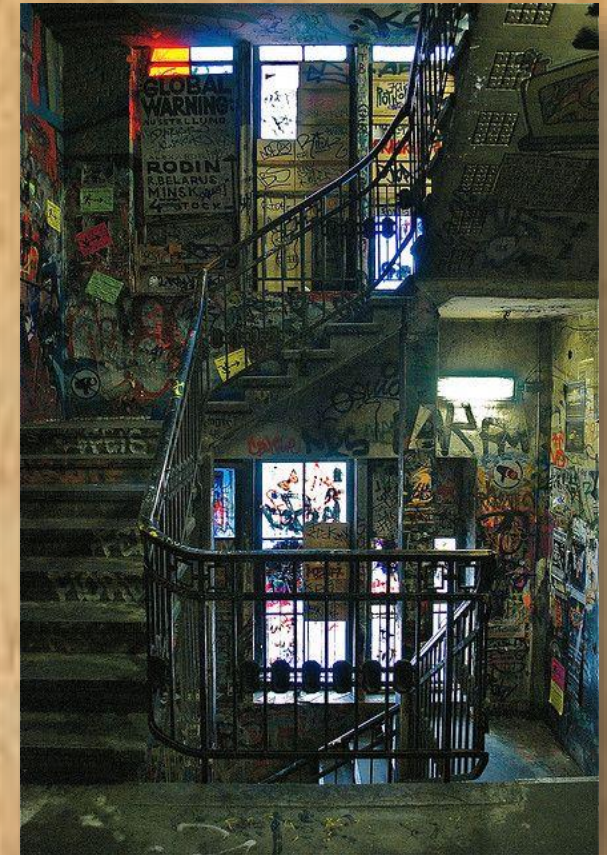
The European Union has failed. Economic instability affected those on the fringes first in places such as Greece and the UK, but slowly wormed its way into the heart of the union, sewing dissent and distrust. The worst refugee crisis in history, starting in 2024, overwhelmed much of the southern countries in the EU and, despite aid being provided by various sources, debt in Spain, Italy and eastern bloc countries began to spiral out of control. This culminated in 2029, carried on a wave of uncertainty over the outbreak of the Ghost Wars, with the Euro currency collapsing, and the remaining EU states were forced to revert to their original currencies, although by then e-currencies such as bitcoin were now also proliferating. This resulted in the withdrawing of Spain (which already had fragmented with the secession of Catalonia) and Germany, whose citizens felt it was propping up a now-failed state. All the while refugees from outside of the EU continued to flock to what they considered to be safe havens, burdening Italy, Spain, Greece and Turkey, as well as the Adriatic States.

The United Kingdom has restricted its borders, close to quarantine level, whilst the continent has continued to descend into mediocrity. Italy and Spain were the worst affected with vast numbers of refugees arriving almost daily, and this resulted in the eventual deployment of troops to prevent any

further immigration. Tensions have escalated and localised conflicts have now begun to emerge between those Mediterranean nations and those nations on the North African coast.

The Scandinavian countries have fared much better, both from geopolitical and climatic strife, although the northern regions of these countries are much more snow free than they have ever been previously. Trade has improved as a result with former EU states, however the shadow of Russia looms large over them, as well as those former Eastern bloc countries.

But there's also the Europe of the Fourth World, the Europe of the dispossessed, the people of the fringe. Half the population of the old Communist Bloc countries have been displaced by civil wars, and their numbers are swollen by refugees from the economic and ecological disasters in Africa, migrants who flock through Italy into the heart of Europe like swallows. They are uncountable, although tag and recapture methods used by UN relief teams estimate that refugees are roughly equal in number to the official population of Europe. Sometimes,



especially in summer, it seems that all of Europe is on the move, a giantess tossing restlessly but never quite waking, displacing and distorting the maps which cover her.

MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East is one of the most contrasting of regions anywhere in the world. The rich are literally unbounded by financial concerns, having milked the oil market for so long and then having branched out into property and financial acquisitions both within the Middle East but also overseas. By contrast those that do not have money in the Middle East are essentially slaves. And despite oil being the way in which the Middle East got rich, water is now the wealthiest resource in the region, and the way in which the rich control the poor. They have also made the transition to renewable, notably solar, power and sell this energy to the rest of the world for a premium. This is why the US and other power states are never far away, either through their presence in Israel or through proxy wars fought in the region.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE still holds most of the wealth in the region, and are conspiring to change much of the landscape, geo-engineering it to become more



inhabitable, even as more of the surrounding regions are suffering from

increased desertification. Iran by contrast has become a fallen state, having been overrun by the US in 2025 following the dirty bomb attack from which the radioactive material was traced back to it, and is now a lawless zone of infighting between the factions left over once the US withdrew. Israel has become increasingly isolated with guerrilla warfare with Syria, Lebanon and other Muslim countries surrounding it but without the backing of western countries is a fortified state.

AFRICA

Without the power of the UN or the wider developed western world, Africa was a prime target for eastern governments and organisations. War was fermented within many of those nations, pitting person against person, particularly where resources were scarce. Many of the refugees that flooded Europe in 2024 came from Central African origins, driven across the Mediterranean and through the Middle East

by these wars, as well as expanding desertification of the Sahara and Gobi deserts. This has resulted in a much sparser interior to the continent, but as such things go there unnoticed and uncaring by the outside world. Plagues frequent the Central African Republic and Congo that seem to spring up



out of nowhere, and yet never really move much beyond the borders into neighbouring lands.

Only South Africa, Egypt and Morocco have withstood the onslaught against the continent, given their coastal locations and money (although where do they get it from?) to build massive desalination plants and keep fields and crops hydrated enough to survive a harvest. But the world appears to have turned its back on the rest, in fact the Southern European countries have become increasingly hostile towards what they see now as an invasion.

North and Central Africa is now a major proxy for the ongoing conflict between the major superpowers, with wars being fought throughout the region whilst money pours in from China, Russia and the US. Rebel groups prowl the countryside, fermenting trouble and killing indiscriminately when they find people. However, there are some groups opposed to the interference of such states, and are fighting to take their countries back.

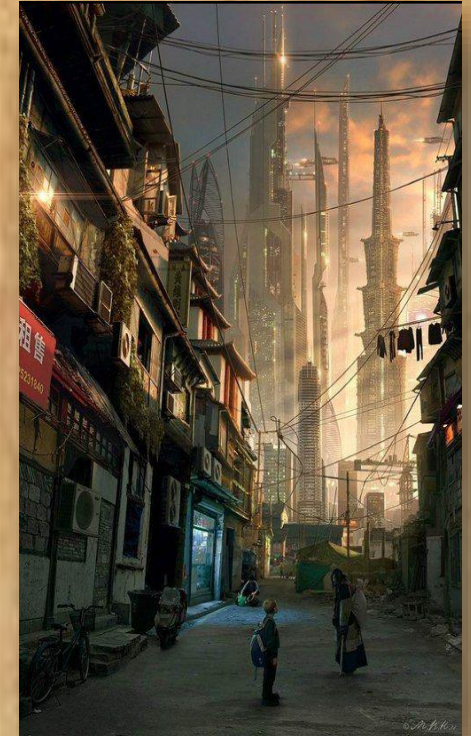
ASIA

Many of the major players exist on this continent, Russia and China foremost amongst those. But they are both less democratic than ever and more controlled by money. Russia is still ruled by Oligarchs, with Vladimir Putin still pulling the strings although he is now at an advanced age. No-one believes that he will go anytime soon though, and his power base is so consolidated that no attempts to remove or undermine him have taken place in almost 10 years. They have continued to push an expansionist policy, annexing more of the Ukraine, as well as parts of Georgia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

China on the other hand is far more introspective in its motivations and policies, ruling secretly from within. The Great Firewall still exists, and information still struggles to flow both in and out for the ordinary citizen. It is widely acknowledged however that Russia, China and the US are the major players within the ghost wars that erupted in the last two years, particularly

after the Shantou Province incident which China publicly blamed on the US government. Most recently they have pushed for expansion on the Moon, seeking to become the first nation to break free of the shackles of Earth, spear-headed by wealthy Chinese corporations pouring private money into the effort.

India by contrast has shrunk in the global stakes, with both wide over-population and conflicts with Burma, Pakistan and other neighbouring regions, once again fuelled by those in greater positions of power. A great famine now stalks this land as overseas aid has dried up, partly from the partial collapse of western nations but mostly because of the wars it has undertaken with its neighbours. However, India has also become a hotspot for illegal cyber activity, and many viruses, Trojans and other malware now seem to originate from here, although it is widely believed that India is now being used as a proxy by other powers.



AUSTRALASIA

Australia has become as isolated as the UK, but with a much larger border to patrol incursions are frequent. The interior has become drier and dustier as climate change has accelerated and few live there now beyond those running automated mining and farming ecologies. And even those

primarily reside on the coast, traveling inland only to undertake repairs and maintenance, not a job that is welcomed.

New Zealand is a last bastion of hope in the region, but its geographical isolation from the rest of the world means that it cannot invoke much change. They are one of the few countries that rapidly embraced renewable technologies, particularly thermal and wind-based energy sources, but the rise in sea levels is having a catastrophic effect on the country, particularly the northern tip of the North Island. Auckland regularly suffers flooding now and 90-mile beach is off limits due to regular tidal surges in the area.

NEAR EARTH ORBIT

A variety of satellites ring the Earth in Near Earth Orbit, some 3,000 in total.



The biggest of these are the International Space Station (although this is way past its end date), which is well past its end of life, the Chinese Space

Station Tianwe opened in 2021, and a growing number of corporate stations are now in residence. These corporate stations have been built on the super-rich tourism industry, with wealthy patrons paying to spend time in Space Hotels where no luxury (except gravity) is spared.

There are also rumours of so-called 'dark' satellites operating outside of near earth orbit, either beyond the LaGrange points or on the far side of the moon, although nothing has ever been officially released.

THE MOON

A moon base was officially established in 2028 by an international consortium, although it is essentially owned and run by a number of the largest consortiums in the world. There are currently only around 1,000 people, and mining operations have begun to extract a number of elements from the interior of the satellite. Most of these people are scientists and engineers, and they have started to become viewed as aloof of the situation on the ground. There are even rumours that they are carrying out experiments 'up there' that wouldn't be allowed on the planet, although this is vigorously denied.

BEYOND

Out beyond the moon is still strictly off limits, although a manned mission to Mars is way behind schedule, and exploration of the asteroid belt is starting to yield the potential for further mining operations.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology within the world has never been better, for those that can afford it. Computers are no longer something you would see under your desk or as a laptop, they exist primarily in the cloud, a web of interconnected servers and services that host everything from e-mail to video to virtual reality. Almost everything within the modern world is undertaken with computing technology, and automation of almost every industry has left few with jobs, leading to the most massive economic disruption the world has seen (see Economy, below).

THE INTERNET

For those that live in first world countries access is on many levels, depending on what you can afford. Corporations have won the net neutrality battle to franchise the internet, so the more you pay for (or hack), the better you get. For those with no money basic access is provided but it gives you little more than access to news feeds, spam and advertising agencies, meaning that you can find very little. Once you start paying however more premium services become available,



including access to virtual reality. Of course the other option is to use the dark web, but that is a dangerous endeavour with many pitfalls. Access the wrong places and your information can be accessed and your identity is no longer yours. Yet many people do, because they need to, to protect themselves from the prying eyes of the public, be that for freedom of speech in countries where such things are permitted, financial transactions or purchasing of things that cannot be bought legally.

Most people can now access the internet through a number of different types of devices, but the most prevalent is the eLense, either as optical or contact lenses which allow all transactions to be carried out by micro-muscle gestures through the eyes and hands (assuming you have gone through the baselining process). Cell phones are still available but these are now considered to be an outdated technology, and instead a variety of wearables are utilised instead. A few have neural cortex's built in to access data directly, granting them a much higher rate of information availability, but these are generally only available to corporations and the military.

Of course, that assumes that the internet is working. The Ghost Wars have disrupted access to this technology severely, and many sites are often brought low by everything from Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks to ZMW BGP tactical strikes.

ROBOTICS

Robots have arrived and are in control of manufacturing and agriculture; many vehicles (including pretty much all commercial vehicles, naval vessels and planes) are now self-driving. Even white collar jobs are being outsourced to Quantum Super Computers (Qubes) as accountants and middle management are now finding themselves jobless and with no skills to fall back on. Of course, this is only true within the wealthier parts of the world (or even the US), so many still find a living in such professions, but the reach of robots is ever increasing.

These Qube entities are a trillion times faster than traditional supercomputers of the c.2015 era, and have accelerated computing power yet again beyond the imaginings of humans. However due to the current cyber-political climate, most of these are currently being used by the military and other agencies to conduct the Ghost Wars against one another.

Drones are another source of technological advance which has seen explosive growth over the years. From ant-sized drone swarms to gargantuan military craft capable of shoot and kill policies, drones are everywhere. They drop off packages, deliver pizzas, and conduct security sweeps, even helping to grow crops in farming complexes. Many are hive-minded, controlled by a central processing unit (CPU) which is typically hosted in the cloud, and this in turn is managed by a human being, but some are now fully autonomous, having a life of their own and not requiring any intervention (or only very rarely) by humans. This is particularly true with the development of the Autonomous Robotic Ethical Decision Making (ARiD) processing algorithms, which are now powering self-driving vehicles and even military drones with the capability to make autonomous fire decisions without a human handler, something which has drawn a lot of angry responses from the general populace but which has been implemented.

MEDICINE

Humans are generally better off medically than ever before, with personalised medicine available to all those in first world countries, however anything beyond basic diagnosis costs. At the top end Genetic Remodelling (GR) of human embryos is now possible, particularly through the use of stem cells and CRISPR-L techniques,



again for those who can afford it, and there is even rumour of capabilities to genetically remodel fully grown adults.

Of course new problems have presented themselves, with antibiotic resistant bacteria and artificially created viruses by rogue actors and terrorists groups. Particularly within large urban areas outbreaks of super-bacteria have forced quarantines of entire neighbourhoods, harking back to the pre-industrial dark ages of medical prevention.

ECONOMY

The global economy is in the worst recession ever seen. The perfect storm of climate change, automation, governmental degradation and corporate hegemony has left many without a job (average unemployment is around 30%). Those that do cling to it for the few extra currency of one form or another, although there is a basic stipend that most receive, but this is barely able to cover the costs of living and requires identification and

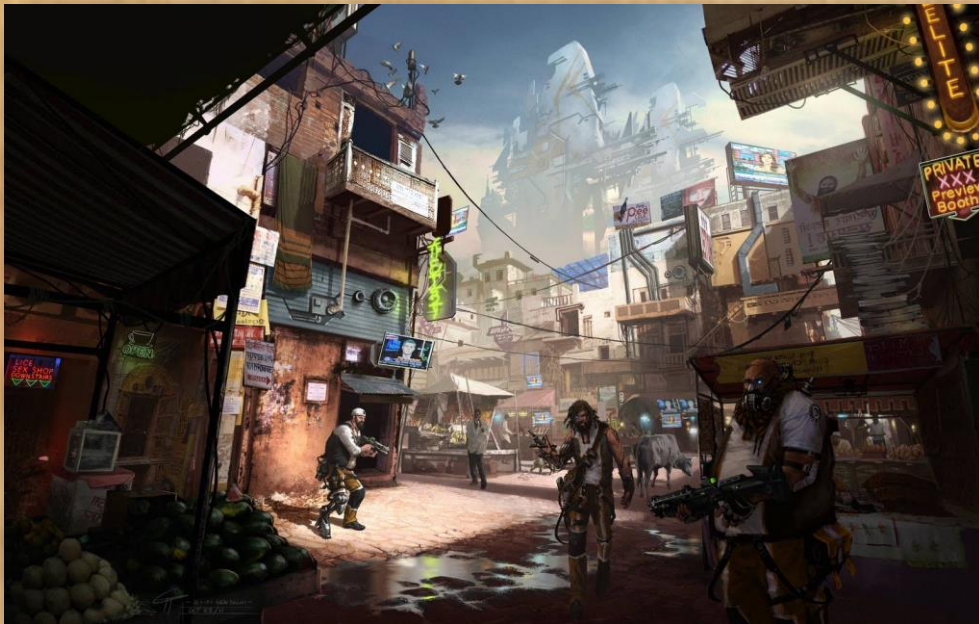


address, many of whom have neither one nor the other.

However money is still there, it simply resides with the upper 25% of the population. In first world countries many of those have little more than the others, but these are specifically in careers where a creative element to the job is required. Most wealth however resides with the upper 1%, who have more wealth than can be calculated, much of which is hidden in offshore accounts, dark web financial institutions or new cryptocurrencies that are emerging on almost a daily basis.

This has resulted in a black market economy that runs underneath the official one (particularly on the dark web), primarily using cryptocurrencies to fulfil needs, but going back to basic bartering at the street level in some cases.

SOCIETY



Depending on where you are society continues as before, although much of society now mingles online. As mentioned though the majority of wealth resides with the few, and societal divisions have largely followed these lines. For the rich, the luxuries they can afford offer them to unlimited opportunities and it generally through socialising and networking that they increase their wealth, power and influence. Social events still tend to be physical, although their VR hangouts are some of the best around. For many of these life is one long party, but there is always competition as the wariness of a rival attempting to steal your crown is ever present.

At the other end of the scale the poorest also tend to socialise together, although in more impoverished settings and generally for more empathetic reasons than the rich. And although many are criminals, whether through choice or need, there is generally a feeling of community amongst them. Again, most meetings are physical but many are also virtual hangouts, and addiction to mass media is rife.

In between these two sit the dwindling middle class, struggling to hold on to their meagre wealth whilst abhorring the rich above them for holding all the cards. They generally feel empathy, even pity, for those without money, but the same cannot be said for the poor who view them as wannabes who would take the road to wealth if it was offered to them but won't admit it.

COLLECTIVE PLAYER BACKGROUND

- PCs will all have attended the same school, the Philips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, all part of the same year, so they will all need to agree to be the same age (whatever that is)
- Their relationships at this point can be defined (see group questions in Session 0)
- They will be attending a reunion in the first session, so will be travelling to the same place for that reunion (see flyer)