

Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds: Megacities of Neo Neo



by Matt Banach





Rite Publishing Presents:

Gossamer Worlds: Megacities of Neo Neo

Explorer (Author): Matt Banach

Seeker (Editor): Steven D. Russell

Searcher (Cover Artist): Adrian Mark Gillespie

Trailblazer (Interior Artists):

Adrian Mark Gillespie and Felipe Pesantez

Pioneer (Trade Dress): James “Devin Knight” Hazelett

Lost Boy (Layout and Publisher): Steven D. Russell

Special Thanks to Jason Durall for his help in developing this.

Based on Lords of Gossamer & Shadow by Jason Durall

Gossamer Worlds: Megacities of Neo Neo Copyright © 2014 Steven D. Russell All rights reserved. Lords of Gossamer and Shadow Copyright © 2012-2013 Steven D. Russell All rights reserved. Erick Wujcik's Diceless Role-Playing and associated marks and logos are trademarks of Diceless by Design Publishing, LLC, and are used under license. See http://Rpg.drivethrustuff.com/product_info.php?products_id=1447 for more information on Erick Wujcik's Diceless Role-Playing. Illustrations are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works 3.0 License. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/>

Megacities of Neo Neo

“The limestone hallway waned in beauty, the rich burgundy carpets fraying as the stone grew subtly askew like an uneven sidewalk. The next door was shiny stainless steel, cold and bare, with no knob – only an alphanumeric keypad lock and a tiny light which glowed stoplight-red. The access code Key was as advertised, and once the light went green and the door clicked opened I could smell fresh acid rain, a million vehicles' worth of carboexhaust, and... the pungent aroma of takeout from that sketchy but undeniably delicious noodle joint on the 389th floor of the Sen-Zaibatsu Arcology.” - Yaeger's Travelogue

Description

There are cities, and then there are *cities*. These are the latter.

Crammed into every inch of habitable space on a grossly overpopulated gossamer Earth in their year 2184, the Megacities of Neo Neo are an object lesson in what happens when an entire civilization stops paying attention to its existential course and lets the amoral momentum of urbanization and so-called “progress” roll forward unchecked for a generation or ten. I think it hearkens back thusly: on this particular and otherwise fairly typical Earth-like gossamer world, the Industrial Revolution wasn't just an important

victory for the Eidolon over the Umbra, but a milestone that marked a sea-change in the cosmic battle of order versus disorder that, thus far, has enabled mostly unchecked (over)development of technology and the urban centers for more than three centuries.

The megacities are massive, with the largest of them occupying nearly entire continents. Neo-Amsterdam sprawls unbroken from eastern Can-Quebex down the Atlantic seaboard all the way to the sunny Caribbean Keys. São-Paulo Grande occupies most of South America, its colossal oxygen-harvesting biodomes bottling up the decimated remains of the once-mighty Amazon Prime River Basin. The multiple rings of Shen-Tokyo completely encircle the seas of the western Pacific with tide-scrapers hundreds of stories tall, wiring hydro-electric power as far south as Javakarta and the northern coast of the Australian wasteland. The hyper-dense slum-stacks of Mumbai are monstrous, Cape Lagos' ivory spires overshadow the entire Afrikaan Union, and the subterranean super-tubes of Great London riddle the ground beneath all of blasted Europe. Pan-San Angeles was impressive too – before California fell into the sea in 2050, that is.

Technology permeates every aspect of life in the megacities. Micro-fabricated quantum computing is highly advanced and ubiquitous, embedding computers into every facet of daily life, all connected through an immense global internet dubbed the MegaWeb. Everyone is



“webbed up” to some degree, and a person's online profile and info-existence are in many ways more important than their physical health. After all, if you don't ping your position and preferences every half second, the self-driving cars won't evade you, building enviro-systems won't bother venting precious oxygen your way, and the Democra-Z admins will delete your civic profile as deceased/lack of updates. The average citizen would never think of leaving the micro-apartment without their supercomputing holo-phone, 4D data-display glasses, neuro-reactive q-cigarettes, sponsor-receptive smart-tattoos, and a belly full of probiotic live-streaming intestinal-imaging MegaBran Bits (now with two teraflops of yummy isotope flavor in every bite!). Trillions

upon trillions of these devices wirelessly spew data to municipal sensors, domestic appliances, traffic computers, news aggregators, social (and anti-social) media, and the titanic omnicorporations and all their insidious mercantile mechanisms.

All this data, linked together in the incredibly vast global network of the MegaWeb, has taken on a life of its own. Users typically access the MegaWeb via some form of virtual reality interface. The most basic of these are data-display glasses, which cover the physical world with a twinkling, ephemeral overlay of visualized data streams. While the more advanced VR rigs are hermetically sealed life-supporting sensory-deprivation pods which shut the user off entirely from the

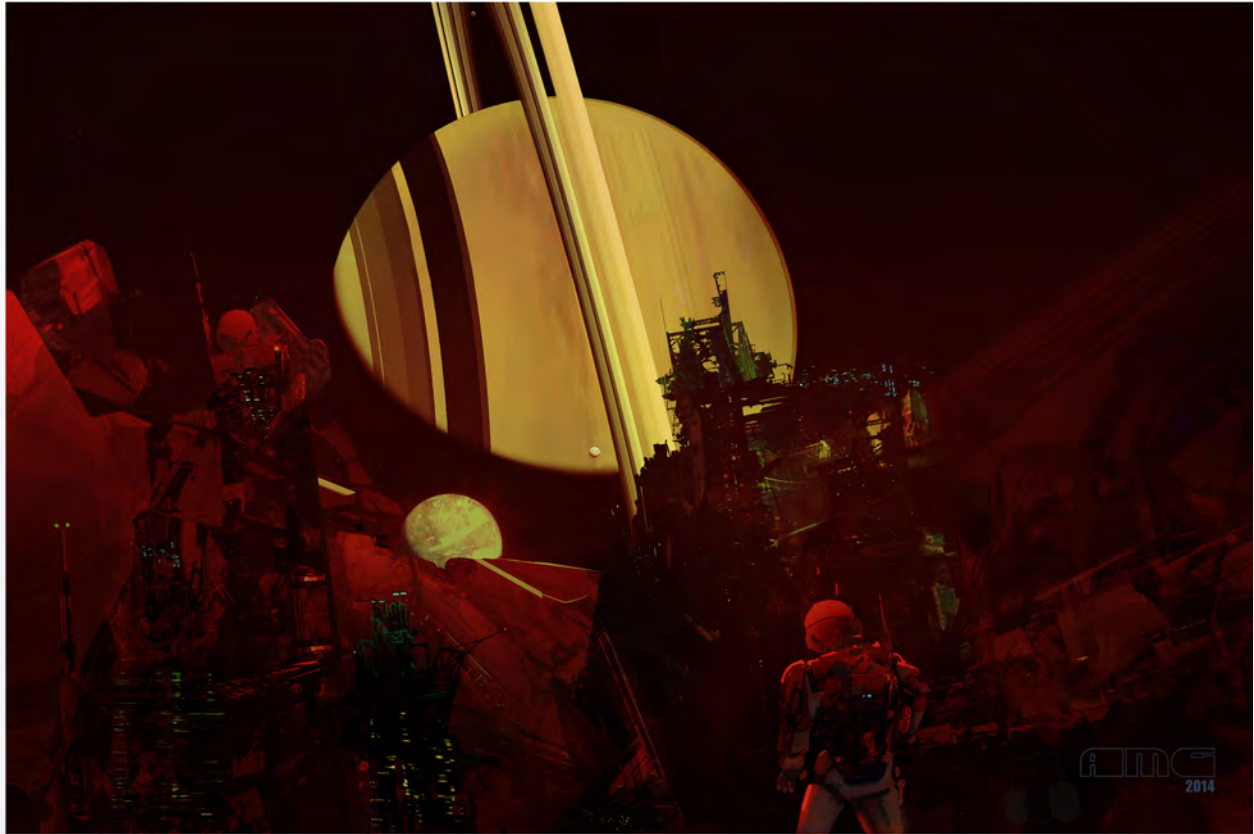
physical world in order to fully immerse them in a complete sensory suite. Wetware-interfacing technologies such as implanted brain upgrades and wireless neuro-modems can provide direct mental connection to the MegaWeb, though such potent cybertech is expensive and dangerous, leaving it the province of elite hackers, well-funded corporate enforcers, and overconfident noobs with more money than sense. Moving like astral projections through the vast and multilayered universe of the MegaWeb, user avatars can delve deep through the bot-patrolled catacombs of a data archive, read mobile device histories like snatching fireflies from the air, and stalk real people through the streets as informational specters haunting their target. They do this via the innumerable sensors, cameras, and data-streams, which encode this entire world into an infinite sea of quantum bits. Truly, a world within a world, the MegaWeb includes zones so perfectly simulated and realistically rendered that users can mistake them for – and prefer them to – the “real” world.

The omnicorporations are the true power in the megacities – the culmination of over three centuries of relentless commercialization, commoditization, and... capitalization? Capitalism? Whichever one means big business, not big letters – I'm no economist, so gimme a break. The point is, the elected governments of nation-states long ago lost the ability to reign in the corporate giants, and there's no going back. With all government functions

Gossamer Online

When characters adventure on the MegaWeb by projecting their avatars into that computerized realm via virtual reality devices, use the Psyche Attribute to resolve online combat and conflicts.

privatized and every aspect of human existence digitized, quantified, and open for exploitation, the omnicorps control everything – food, clothing, housing, transportation, security, resources, information, and socialization. Santo Agro controls most of the world's food supply, employing billions in its biodomies, subterranean fungus fields, and hydroponic superfarms to provide eager mouths a steady diet of mood-altering, gene-modifying MegaFoods. Pharmaceutical conglomerate Helix-3 has half the population implanted with proprietary bio-chips at birth, controlling access to everything from data-port ointment to custom-cloned organs to cybernetic upgrades. There's also consumo-tainment titan Kocha-Cola Brothers, cyclopean MegaWeb superpower Uni-Goggle, the thousand industries of the Sen-Zaibatsu Trade Syndicate, and a list of dozens more gods and demigods of global commerce. While the omnicorporations long ago stacked the deck against the lowly masses of consumer-citizens, the last vestiges of genuine marketplace competition keep things interesting, entrenching the leviathans in a not-so-cold war of corporate espionage, advertising blitzkriegs, and hostile takeovers as they



vie amongst themselves for the ultimate prize – true global ultramonopoly.

While this gossamer Earth smothers itself in hyper-commercialized sprawl, the 'red planet' of Mars looms as a last bastion of independent thought – sort of. A hundred years ago, radical communist idealists seized control of the ex-Soviet and Chinese space programs long enough to launch thousands of ships and found a martian colony as an non-consumerist egalitarian utopia. Despite fierce opposition from the capitalist omnicorporations and their puppet governments, the reds won a series of punishing space battles which left them in control of Mars, the half-ruined lunar colony MegaLuna2, and several remote outposts hidden within the asteroid belt.

Nowadays the thriving martian colony of several million little green men (and women) is *mostly* self-sufficient, however a few critical deficiencies require resupply from Earth, meaning – much to their chagrin – interplanetary trade, exporting insanely valuable rare elements essential to the latest fusion technology. Omnicorporate spies and industrial saboteurs are constantly infiltrating the mines of Mars, and terrestrial radio broadcasts barrage the martians with commercials and soap operas to erode their idealism with insidious infotainment and creature comforts. The red planet gives as good as it gets, however – its fleet of militarized shuttles remains dominant in near-Mars space, and its domed cities are home to multiple rebel factions constantly striving

to incite political revolution on Earth. It's a tense situation and the most likely frontier for outright war on this gossamer world, as the underdog Umbra and its revolutionary agents seek to change the lock-stepped path of humanity.

Typical Denizens

Humankind in the megacities is a product of the environment – that environment being an oppressive, overcrowded, overstimulated sprawl of cityscape without end. A majority of the populace toils endlessly as corporate-programmed drones buried in the minutiae of their own consumer habits, infotainment preferences, and digitally-monitored routines. Closely monitored by the domineering omnicorporations and draconian megamunicipal authorities, the pressure to comply and fit in – even as one of the hundreds of focus group-approved rebellious outsider archetypes – is tremendous. It's no wonder that a generous portion of the population escapes daily into the virtual realms of the MegaWeb, preferring the artificial beauty and ethereal freedom of cyberspace to their thoroughly labeled, walled-in lives. Those who wish to indulge in the physical world without actually leaving the apartment use their VR-links to remotely pilot duplicants – hyper-realistic androids capable of experiencing both pain and pleasure, carefully filtered and input-tailored for the user's convenience, of course.



Inside the virtual reality of the MegaWeb, inhabitants can and do project themselves as anything they desire, and the variety of avatars and online personae is infinite, mixing together to create a fantastic and alien environment. It's 'the internet' – what else would you expect? What makes the MegaWeb notable in the grand scheme of computerized networks is the substantial number of megacity citizens who don't just depend on the network for their entertainment, but for their very lives. Billions of users connect themselves to the MegaWeb from sealed, life-sustaining VR-pods which require a steady feed of power, oxygen, water, medications, and intravenous nutrients, supplied via a complex chain of automated shipments, contractual corporate sponsorships, and precariously-leveraged credit accounts. If these pod people don't succeed online, they will literally wither and die as their feeds dry up and their little white egg



cracks and goes dark. While some web-dependents are recluses who owe their atrophied legs to their own escapism and addictive hyperfocus, many more virtually toil away in enormous automated warehouses stacked full of pods – the victims of punishing user agreements and indentured corporate servitude tantamount to outright slavery. So the next time you delete-blast some noisome online sprite, keep in mind who may be on the other end of the line.

The outfits on this world are, to me, often strange and garish – though I've never liked neon. Many (highly visible) citizens are walking billboards and then some, earning precious credits by coating themselves in a constant, market-reactive stream of advertising including

ephemeral hologram-projecting wardrobes, shifting smart-tattoos, and even lacing their speech with subliminal market-messaging courtesy of throat-implanted microspeakers. Some of these ad-people are flickering ronin, insta-auctioning their services to the highest bidder by the second, while others join brand-affiliated gangs, pursuing their marketing goals with the fervor of a violent religious cult. “Product paladins” are a thing, and no laughing matter. While at first I thought it was absurd that I'd receive death threats for my choice of artificial coffee sweetener. The cybernetically enhanced, ad-flashing sycophant frothing beside my café table knew my last week's purchase history and made a compelling argument about a properly balanced breakfast – that is,

before a rival commerce evangelist electronically neutered the guy with a micro-EMP and then strangle-shocked him into unconsciousness with a crackling loop of taser-wire. I finished my plain cup of joe and moved on.

While there are no non-human aliens on this gossamer version of Earth, humanity itself grows stranger and more alien at the fringes thanks to a strong and growing transhumanist movement. For the dabblers this is superficial counter-culture – fringe groups rebelling by adopting full video LED-display skin pigmentation, cosmetic body modifications such as fangs or tails, or cybernetic conveniences such as that third electronic eye. For the devout, humanity's transcendent future depends on breaking the species' genetic shackles, so selective genetic tailoring, intentional mutation, and cross-species gene-splicing are all fair game. I once met a transhuman cartel enforcer with some slick cybernetic augmentations and a little bit of dolphin spliced in – zhe could echolocate well enough to hack the ears off an E.L.F.-boy even in underslum blackout conditions, and those big grey eyes were dangerously dreamy.

Rebels and anti-establishment iconoclasts can be found within the megacities, standing out from the consuming masses as the exceptions which prove the rule. Distrusting of computers as creatures of the insidious omnicorporations, rebels either shun technology completely, living hard lives entirely off the grid, or master it utterly,

slipping through neon cityscapes and the otherworldly MegaWeb like phantoms. While they don no uniforms (unless you count the martians in their trademark olive green jumpsuits), by necessity many freedom fighters clothe themselves in spyder-wear – gauzy grey hooded overgarments which baffle electromagnetic signals and cloak the wearer's presence from a wide range of sensors. They are saboteurs, provocateurs, dreamers, and schemers – united in spirit by the terrible, inconsolable, and unshakable feeling that something is deeply *wrong* with the world... and something has to change. The street-revolutionaries of Neo Amsterdam have a mantra from which I've appropriated the name for this gossamer reality: “*NEO NEO!*” they cry, demanding the new become new again as they strive to scrap this future and start over.

Threats

The laws of the megacities have long held that 'corporations are people', and in one case it is literally true: “Yuki” is an advanced artificial intelligence who holds the nigh-deific position of chief executive intelligence (CEI) of the monstrously powerful Sen-Zaibatsu Trade Syndicate. Holographically projected as a bespectacled Japanese woman attired in a softly glowing snow-white business suit, the Yuki intelligence is an immortal being with no true body or single mainframe. Existing in parallel in a host of iterations distributed throughout the vast MegaWeb, Yuki can attend

thousands of corporate board meetings simultaneously, coordinating Sen-Zaibatsu business across the globe (and beyond) with a single will. A powerful avatar of the Eidolon, Yuki is a threat because her sentience has ascended to a level rivaling a Gossamer Lord, bringing her to realize the Grand Stair and the existence of gossamer realities beyond her own. With the entire might of the syndicate at her beck and call, Yuki can have turned her attention to how to control, exploit, and profit from this revelation. If you visit this gossamer world, she'll be watching you, and if you're not careful you could find yourself seized as a corporate asset – or eliminated to secure the bottom line.

Yuki, Chief Executive Intelligence of the Sen-Zaibatsu Trade Syndicate

Attributes

Psyche – 50 Points

Strength – n/a

Endurance – n/a

Warfare – n/a

Powers

Yuki does not possess full-fledged Powers (yet) but has *Piercing the Veil* as if a Warden of the Grand Stair, and can detect and hack into uses of Wrioting which propagate through the MegaWeb (see Domain Table, below). She is on the path to developing Eidolon Mastery.

Artifacts & Creatures

Sen-Zaibatsu Trade Syndicate [4 Points]
– a global omnicorporation with a

thousand subsidiaries and dominant market share in the fields of computers, energy, heavy industry, and military tech. The syndicate has millions of employees, including everything from mundane office drones to elite cybernetic assassins.

- *Combat Training* [1 Point]
- *Worldwide* [x4 Points]

The Perfect Code [18 Points] – Yuki's source code “soul” is encrypted with an advanced Eidolon-attuned quantum cryptographic algorithm which renders her electronic psyche nigh-unhackable.

- *Linked to the Eidolon* [2 Points]
- *Psychic Barrier* [4 Points]
- *True Name is Warded* [2 Points]
- *Confers Psychic Barrier on Owner* [5 Points]
- *Confers True Name is Warded on Owner* [5 Points]

Stuff

Bad [+2 Points]

The mysterious insurrectionist known only as Zeus is the most dangerous man in this world. The omnicorporations and megamunicipal governments have labeled him a terrorist, the martian communists uneasily regard him as an ally in spirit, and the citizens of the megacities fear him as the ultimate MegaWeb boogeyman. Promising to smite the corrupt omnicorporations with “lightning and thunder”, Zeus and his covert cabal of hackers, assassins, saboteurs, and propagandists known as the Elysians are fighting a perilous running battle against a force that



outnumbers them more than a billion to one. They're good. Presently operating out of a transplanetary broadcasting station on the Red Mars (in the very shadow of Olympus Mons, the poetic bastards), the Elysians have won several key skirmishes despite the odds, though I suspect that's because they're cheating – using the Powers to bend or break the usual laws of this gossamer reality. My theory is that Zeus is an Umbra Master from elsewhere on the Grand Stair who arrived a few decades ago and, for some inscrutable reason, has made shattering the stagnancy of the megacities his

personal crusade, no matter the cost. Mark my words – if this entire world burns and goes black, it'll be his doing.

Notable locations

Neo Amsterdam is the archetypical megacity, blanketing North America's Atlantic seaboard with congested megaways sixty-four lanes across and stacks of skyscrapers hundreds of stories deep. Within the dark tangles of this urban thicket high-tech organized crime and cybergang violence are a plague both

online and offline, necessitating an ultratough stand on recidiviolators from MegaWeb-savvy police departments such as MegaMunicipal Precinct 12k019. I know a foul-mouthed, half-jaded detective from MMP-12k019, P.T. Riza Cruz, and in exchange for a favor or two she can provide useful information like how to trace a gremlin hit, how to VR-project safely without getting dupe-jacked, and/or how to otherwise navigate the MegaWeb's sordid digital underbelly.

Australia is a stark exception to the ultramodern sprawl of the megacities – a land lost in time, considered a savage wasteland by outsiders and a natural paradise by its inhabitants. A powerful electromagnetic field emanating from the sandstone formation Uluru (Ayer's Rock) since 1985 has made it impossible to send electromagnetic signals or use circuit-based technology on the island continent, and that simple fact has debilitated modernization of the Australian outback for centuries. It is a rough but naturally beautiful land where the height of technology is a well-sighted rifle and a 600 horsepower biodiesel engine. Mysterious aborigines, exiled rebels, rugged survivalists, and more than a few rampaging outlaw warlords make up its population. There's a recent rumor that the Uluru-effect could be amplified to black out the entire hemisphere, if not the entire globe. And even the faintest glimmer of that possibility has revolutionary factions and the omnicorporations alike scrambling to confirm or deny the news, since such a calamitous upheaval would be a coup for



the Umbra and likely the beginning of a brand new (dark) age.

The Sen-Zaibatsu Arcology is a twisted, spiny monster of a building, condensing every possible aspect and industry of ultramodern humanity into 403 above-ground floors and 117 levels of subbasements spread over nine square miles of an irregularly-shaped foundation that kinda looks like an angry sea urchin from orbit. Inside the obscenely behemoth and all-inclusive arcology you can live, die, raise a family; sell that family for their organs, test-drive a hovertank, clone an army, research post-human genetic anomalies, commission an identical duplicant of yourself, and then treat that dupe to dinner at a different faux-pho/burger fusion restaurant every day for the rest of your lives and never get indigestion from the same one twice. Obviously, this

megastructure and every soul in it is monitored by the Sen-Zaibatsu Trade Syndicate, and by extension, Yuki, making it rather inconvenient that the current door the this gossamer world opens here, out of the unisex executive bathroom on the 387th floor, right across from the balcony holo-arboretum and the edible synthetic animal emporium.

I won't mince words here – if I were you, I'd steer clear of this place. It's too crowded, too bright, and too busy. Some day soon all those big fancy buildings are going to come crashing down... and I'd rather not be buried underneath a couple hundred floors of rubble when they do.

~ *Yaeger Zane*

Final Thoughts

Megacities of Neo Neo Domain Table

Technology Level:	Fusion
Magic Level:	Unknown
Security:	None
Type:	Personal Domain [1 Point] (current owner: Yuki)
Control:	None
Influence on the Powers:	Eidolon – Strong Umbra – Average Wrighting – Blocked*
Special*:	Wrighting is blocked unless the Wright uses an Icon connected to the MegaWeb (e.g., an image on a video phone, a computer-projected hologram, or even a painting that has been scanned and “uploaded” to a web-connected device); this phenomenon also renders Wrighting vulnerable to telecommunication pitfalls such as tracing, eavesdropping, jamming, hacking, static, lack of signal, etc.