

GRAIN 1: ETHERPUNK



ETHERPUNK EXPLAINED

Central to the *Etherscope* game setting is the idea of Etherpunk. It represents the dangerous, conflicted, and changing aspects of the *Etherscope* world. As a framework, it draws upon two key concepts: the consequences of ether's discovery upon the world and the punk mentality.

The first part of the word (and concept of) "Etherpunk" is "ether," representing the forces of industry and technology that have ushered in a new world and society. Ethertech has required and created massive infrastructures to support its growth. This growth in turn created demand for ethertech that further drove industrialisation and mass production. These changes could not happen in isolation, and so ethertech altered the society around it. Progress became the driving force in society, heightening the dominance of the industrial and imperialist mindsets. Ether is an unstoppable, self-sustaining concept, and its influence will inexorably mould the world into an industrialised and conformist whole. The *Etherscope* world sees vast empires with strict social orders, sprawling megacities with towering industrial complexes devoted to production, advancement, and profit — alongside social division as the masses sustain the infrastructure that profits the elite. These are all representations of *ether*.

The second part of the word and concept, "punk," represents the rejection of and conflict with the society of the mainstream *Etherscope* world and the need to be an individual within this society. Punk represents those who do not accept the roles that society has given them and rebel, whether on a large or small scale. Punk also represents a broad range of socially unacceptable behaviours as defined by the mainstream of society and its attitude towards these "unacceptables." Attitude is a critical part of understanding the punk concept as it is the individuality of thought, behaviour, appearance, and action that defines a person as standing outside the mainstream and living on her own terms or as a unique individual within the mainstream. However, punks are part of the ether society. It shapes them, and they need and use its technology. Punk is about embracing ethertech but changing the way it is used and represented to give it meaning outside of the social norm. The unique radical fashions and music of countercultures, the embracing of cybernaughtics at all levels of society, and the tab and jack culture of *Scope* use in defiance of authority all show the punk concept active within the *Etherscope* world.

Together, the concepts of *ether* and *punk* create the whole that is *Etherpunk*. Drawing them together allows the creation of scenarios and characters that are full of complexity, motivation, and style, existing in the dark heart of the *Etherscope* world where conflict and individual choice define success, fail-

ure, and often survival. Yet the underlying ideologies driving these two concepts are opposed. Like two steam trains hurtling towards one another, a crash is inevitable. The outcome of this crash on the world will depend on the actions of those who embrace the concept of Etherpunk.



ETHERPUNK THEMES

Etherpunk-style games can be complex to run due to the broad themes the style represents and the many options available to players and GMs. **Upload: Etherpunk** aids you in this process. It concentrates upon four main themes, an overview of which appears below. It also provides ideas for players and GMs to represent the concepts discussed above.

Counterculture

Numerous countercultural groups rebel against the existing social order, from the nomad travellers of the American Midwest to the darkwave musical movement of the New Reich. Each of these groups defines itself through unique codes of behaviour, appearance, language, response to authority, lifestyle choices, music, or any combination of these. Many of these people exist off the streets at society's lowest tiers. They benefit the least from the status quo and have the most to gain from change. Setting an *Etherscope* game at street level is an excellent way to demonstrate counterculture as it affects society and to emphasise the Etherpunk nature of the world.

Cybernaughtics

This piece of ethertech is physically symbolic of the Etheric Age. It affects individual perceptions of the self, as individuals choose to replace flesh with steel for appearance as well as utility. Cybernaughtics also highlight the prevalence of ethertech and its social effects. Many diverse groups adopt cybernaughtic apps to enhance themselves and their ability to perform their self-perceived role within or against mainstream society. Likewise, cybernaughtics are employed extensively in the maintenance of social order and imperial power. Any

Etherpunk game can benefit from considering these deeper aspects of cybernaughtics.

Tab Trips

The prevalent drug culture of tab tripping highlights both the hope and despair inherent to the Etherpunk style. For many, the escape from the drudgery of their existence is through tab tripping. Countless lives have been destroyed and lost in this process, yet few care about these issues. Further, the fact that the decadent elite use safer and less addictive tabs underscores the inequalities in society. At the other end of the scale, tab jammers are often counterculture revolutionaries fighting for a better world — for themselves at worst and for everyone at best — and represent a threat to the status quo that mainstream society fights to suppress. How you present and incorporate tab trips into your game, and deal with other drugs, helps set the tone for any Etherpunk-style game.

The Scope

The Scope is the definitive Etherpunk aspect of technology in the **Etherscope** world. It represents the battleground on which the future of society and mankind will be fought. It is a new frontier of exploration and hope as well as danger and conflict. No technology is more responsible for the industrialisation and social control in the **Etherscope** world and yet provides the best hope to change the world for the better. The Scope also offers those with skill and courage a chance to change their lives — but whether selfishly or unselfishly depends on the individual. In any Etherpunk-style game, always remember the Scope and allow for its effects on characters, NPCs, and their motivations, as well as the world at large.

ETHERPUNK CHARACTERS

This book provides many new options to help develop your characters into true Etherpunk heroes. The following section looks at how the four key themes of Etherpunk apply to different characters in the **Etherscope** world.

Countercultural Characters

Whatever the particular brand of counterculture, your character can draw upon many aspects of this theme. Characters who rebel against the system are able to survive in the city on their own wits and cunning. Crime and civil disobedience will be key elements of such characters' lives, whether they are toughs or revolutionaries who fight for their beliefs, burglars stealing from the rich, or criminals involved in the various drug scenes. It is difficult to tie counterculture down to particular classes and abilities — nearly all are appropriate in different circumstances. Look rather to the attitudes of your character, considering your allegiance and value choices

to develop your countercultural influences.

Cybernaughtic Characters

Cybernaughtics are an obvious way to explore and develop an Etherpunk feel for your character. A warrior who is a skilled gunfighter could come from any roleplaying game where you find guns — but if you add a cybernaughtic eye, or attach his gun to a cybernaughtic arm, the character immediately becomes Etherpunk. Scope riders can use Scope jacks and other cybernaughtics to enhance their Scope activities. Even social characters can find added protection in a bit of cybernaughtic armour. Many cybernaughtics can be bought without significantly detracting from the focus of your character's abilities. Adding a little cybernaughtic app, particularly a visible attachment that develops the impact of your character's appearance, can provide you with an Etherpunk edge.

Tabs and Characters

Scope tabs are a good way to develop an Etherpunk edge. Any adventure that involves using the Etherscope will likely require at least some characters in the party to take a tab trip. Upload tabs are an even better way to explore this theme. Free ranks in skills benefit any character, particularly when you consider Fighting Technique uploads with their related feats and combat abilities. If you want to use Scope tabs with your character, you might also want to gain some Street influence to help you develop your dealer contacts so that you can always find the trips you need.

Scope Characters

The Etherscope captures much of the Etherpunk flavour. Whether your character is looking to explore the Scope for revolutionary interest, personal gain, or the sheer physical sensation that comes from jacking in, there is much of the Scope that can develop your Etherpunk edge. Taking levels in one of the many classes with access to Scope skills can provide you with a fully capable Scope avatar. Certain feats and cross-class skills can also help develop your character for the Scope.

