



# ETHERSCOPE

## CORE RULEBOOK REVISED SECOND PRINTING

*For our families and the memory of John Henry Greenwood, loving grandfather of Nigel McClelland,  
whose support and belief have made this book possible.*

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# INTRODUCTION



## JACK

*Jack weaved his way through the red-brick warrens of Charlestown. His Hackney Cab floated gracefully through the towering city blocks like a rowing boat meandering through a canyon. High overhead the monorail sped past, carrying the wealthy out of the city to their suburban retreats. Down here in the depths the lamplight was dim and the walls blackened by soot and grime. Below, Jack's attention was drawn to a gleaming Royce Spectre, parked up by a notorious tab-house. Its owner was nearby, immaculately dressed and making a hurried deal on the doorstep. As the goods exchanged hands, the silver tracery of the finest cybernaughtics glinted on his hands in the dim light. Jack moved his cab up a couple of storeys, avoiding unnecessary glances as the young aristocrat headed back to his zepcar. He was approaching his destination, anyway.*

Jack pulled up alongside an aerial walkway, fifth floor. These lower levels were used for housing. Thousands of people crammed into a single building. Coffin flats, they were called by their inhabitants — tiny spaces fit for little other than a dead body. His whiskers twitched. It was a warning that something was wrong. The door to Kevin's flat was slightly ajar and the curtains were closed. Suspicions raised, Jack reached back into his cab and pulled his trusty crowbar from the glove box. Cautiously, he approached the door. There was a strange smell from inside — not entirely unpleasant, but certainly not fresh bread or perfume. Low lights flicked about within, but it was essentially dark. Tightening his grasp on the crowbar, he pushed the door open wide and flicked the light switch. Within a second, Jack found himself staring down the barrel of a gun. The gas lighting took a few seconds to warm up enough for Jack to make the full scene.

"What the hell are you doing in here?" said the voice behind the gun. It seemed kind of familiar. It was a gruff voice. It had the basis of a local Mancunian accent, but with enough care taken to pronounce all the consonants. By now Jack could make out the gunman. A tough delta glared down the long barrel of a customised hunting rifle though the brass and steel of a cybernaughtic eye. Deltas, also called doggers, are genetically bred for the military or manual labour, their genes spliced with canine DNA. Jack himself was a gene-bred, too. He was a gamma, a prototype for the later deltas and epsilons. The gunman growled, curling his thin lips back from his square bulldog muzzle.

"This is my flat, mate. What are you doing here?" said Jack, cockily. His mouth had often been his downfall.

The rifle swung round in front of his eyes and its butt thumped him in the side of his head. "Liar!" said the delta, "This flat belongs to my brother."

"Shit. You're Kevin's bruv? Sorry, man." Jack searched his memories of Kevin's family history. "Brutus, is it?"

"Relax, Brutus. I don't think this gamma is the corporate menace." The voice came from a well-dressed gentleman who appeared to be examining Kevin's Scope point in the far corner of the coffin flat

— a small apartment with space for little more than a bed. He was dressed in a fine, bottle-green frock coat and grey pinstriped trousers. His hands were holding a top hat and fine mahogany cane behind his back as he stared into the Scope point, leaning forward slightly.

"Sit," growled Brutus, dropping the rifle to his side.

"Tisk, tisk, Brutus. We must be civil. Please, Mister — ?"

"Baxendale," offered Jack.

"Mister Baxendale. Good. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Michael Wallacey-Stewart, gentleman and explorer. My companion, as you have guessed, is Kevin Scofield's brother, Brutus. Please take a seat and let us know what you know about Kevin and his disappearance."

Jack sank nervously into the middle of Kevin's threadbare mock-velour sofa, under the window. Brutus sat down in the mismatching armchair opposite, still glaring. The gentleman continued to examine the Scope point. "Please, Mr. Baxendale, go on," he said.

"I'm not really sure where to start," said Jack. "We were mates, good mates. He was into some Scope shit that I didn't really understand. He gave me a bell a few days ago. Said he'd found some big shit goin' on. I've not seen or heard from him since. I was a bit worried, like, so I came to find him."

Brutus softened his glare slightly, then turned back to his companion. "It's the same as he told me. He found something big on the Scope and now he's missing. I suspect whoever was trying to hide the big thing found out that Kevin had found out about their big thing. Or something."

"Excellently deduced, my dear Brutus," said Wallacey-Stewart.

"But now please, Mister Baxendale. Myself and Brutus here have spent most of the last fifteen years in Africa and have little call for the use of this technology." He waved in the vague direction of the Scope point. "I don't suppose you have any skill with operating these contraptions?"

Jack shifted himself forward and rose to his feet. "A little," he said, "but I'm no expert Scope rider like Kev. I'll give it a go."

Jack shuffled over to the Scope point. The main machine was a large

circular porthole, about two feet in diameter. The three-inch rim was made from a cheap but durable wood — pine, probably. This was unvarnished and had picked up a variety of stains (as had the rest of the apartment, for that matter). The workings of the Scope point were screwed into this frame: a number of small, black metal objects, all roughly square and about four inches long, overlapped the edges and were bolted down by a variety of methods. Some were painted, but flaking, revealing the black material beneath. The rim supported a large, lenslike glass window, behind which was empty blackness. To the right of the porthole was a small box that looked like an old-fashioned telephone operator's switching station. A tangle of little wires ran at random between the sockets. Wires attached a pair of gloves to the board. Jack reached forward, flicked a switch, and pulled on the gloves.

The blackness of the porthole swirled and seemed to open a hole through the wall. A variety of objects rapidly appeared, dotted around what appeared to be a slate-grey surface, as the system booted itself up. Once all was complete, a pair of floating hands appeared behind the window. They followed the movements of Jack's hands.

Jack shuffled about some of the strange objects, pulling up lists and creating new objects, seemingly out of thin air.

"It looks like someone's been in here and deleted a lot of Kevin's data," said Jack.

"That would explain the lock we found, all messed up," Brutus commented. "Is there anything left?"

"Oh yes, lots. But nothing of any use." Just then there was a tinkle of a warning bell and an envelope appeared inside the scope.

"He's just got a new Scope letter," Jack explained. He touched it with one of the ethereal fingers and the envelope opened. There was no message inside, only a picture of a strange symbol. It depicted a curved, winding shape, like a serpent or claw. "It says it's from Scope-Ninja," Jack explained. "He's a notorious Scope rider. The best in the world, some say."

"Interesting," mused Wallacey-Stewart. "I wonder why he's sent that? It looks to me to be some kind of occult symbol. I think I know just the person to ask about that kind of thing. Mr. Baxendale, I believe you have your own transportation? Would you be so kind as to take us to the John

Rylands Library? Charge your usual rates, of course."

"No charge," bargained Jack, "if you'll let me tag along. I want to find Kevin as much as you two."

## THE YEAR IS 1984. WELCOME TO THE GREAT METROPOLIS.

The Great Metropolis: the pinnacle city of empire. The Great Metropolis is not London, the glorious capital of the British Empire; it is the northern monster that has grown out of the industrial giants of Liverpool and Manchester. From its towering heights to its scum-ridden floor and stagnant waterways, her one hundred million inhabitants struggle for survival.

Our "glorious" British Empire dominates the world, and all its profits are paid out into the great industries of the North. The centre of this industry is the Great Metropolis, the world's largest city and the place that I call home.

You may ask how the Great Metropolis came to be. It is a good question to ask.

I suppose it all began with Herbert Spencer, a philosopher and friend of Darwin. Just as the world was finally abandoning Faraday's ether, the medium through which electromagnetism was believed to wave, Spencer developed a groundbreaking new theory. Spencer combined the Law of Entropy and Plato's concept of the five elements that compose the world: earth, air, fire, water, and ether. Spencer speculated that these concepts indicated the interchangeable states occupied by the fabric of the universe: energy, solids, gases, and liquids. Fire represents energy, water represents liquids, air represents gases, and earth represents solid matter. If this were the case, then ether could also be qualified as the unknown quantity: entropy.

Spencer's theory changed the direction of research into the nature of ether and renewed funding at a time when the scientific community was beginning to believe that ether was an archaic figment of a Greek imagination, and Faraday a radical for suggesting a scientific explanation.

The theory was interesting, but the scientific community would still have abandoned the idea except for one key discovery. In 1874, Harold Wallace discovered Etherspace. Through clever manipulation of magnetic forces, Wallace opened a portal into an alternative dimension of reality. This was Etherspace. Great universities and institutions soon reproduced Wallace's experiments. It is fair to say that Wallace's accomplishment is the greatest discovery of our history, and its practical implementations have changed the world.

Ether is the fifth state. It has properties that would be impossible to describe to a world that is without the boon of its discovery. Etherspace allows the development of miniaturisation on a scale vastly beyond anything silicon chips can manage. It can be vented into an energy source that is both more powerful and more controllable than any other known energy. It enables the forging of new alloys that are stronger and lighter than anything created before.

## THE PAN- EUROPEAN WAR

In 1914, Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated, and the events that followed changed the balance of power in the world. Britain, confident of her superior position, treated the war in Europe with disinterest. We did not consider the Germans a match for our navy and, after all, Kaiser Bill was a cousin of King George. We were confident that we could protect our borders and colonies from any threat. We had our new super-guns, built on ether technologies. We had taken gunship diplomacy to new levels and saw the chance to take control of France's colonies as Germany took control of the French homelands.

The conflict became known as the Pan-European War, and it was a quick affair in